A ‘CIRCLE IN A RECTANGLE’: NATIVE EVANGELICALS, TRANS-INDIGENOUS NETWORKS, AND THE NEGOTIATION BETWEEN LEGITIMATION AND EVASION

By

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To my Mom and Dad, who have always encouraged me to do the right thing, be kind, and strive to be the best me I can be. To my closest friends, who have supported me and offered much-needed respite during the toughest of times. Finally, to my wife Amanda and my daughter Matilda, who have endured and persevered along with me.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The causa sui is the best self-contradiction that has been conceived so far, it is a sort of rape and perversion of logic; but the extravagant pride of man has managed to entangle itself profoundly and frightfully with just this nonsense. The desire for “freedom of the will” in the superlative metaphysical sense, which still holds sway, unfortunately, in the minds of the half-educated; the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one’s actions oneself, and to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society involves nothing less than to be precisely this causa sui and . . . to pull oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the swamps of nothingness.

—Friedrich Nietzsche
Beyond Good and Evil

The completion of a project such as this is necessarily a collaborative process, requiring a community of thinkers and conversation partners along the way (not to mention cheerleaders). In other words, I have had no proverbial boots and, therefore, there have been no proverbial straps with which to pull myself up. Instead, I stand on a scaffold whose construction has consisted of a litany of supporters and contributors over the course of the last decade. I will do my best (and ultimately fail) to recognize them in totality here.

Zeff Bjerken, Louise Doire, Elijah Seigler, and Lee Irwin; my mentors while attending the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina between 2000 and 2005. These were the individuals who raised and nurtured me in my academic infancy. To them I owe a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.

Greg Johnson, my mentor while attending the University of Colorado Religion master’s program. His work among Native Hawaiians is inspiring. Our conversations during class and office hours have been formative. His assessments of my thinking and

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written work were honest, challenging (teaching) me to become a more nuanced and
calculated thinker. Lynn Ross Bryant craftily practiced uncanny patience and
understanding with a student (me) who, at times (often), became a bit (drastically) over
enthusiastic about his own ideas. I am thankful to you both.

To my colleagues in both the Colorado and Florida Religion Programs; our
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political years to come.

The past seven years at the University of Florida have been a mix of tragic,
rewarding, frustrating, troubling, joyous, and unsettling. Robin Wright's work on
Indigenous Christians has influenced me greatly and motivated my current work and
future aspirations in ways I did not anticipate. His steadfast dedication to helping me
develop this project, even while faced with trying setbacks, will never be forgotten. I
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meals have given me much to ponder, not only as a scholar, but also, and perhaps most importantly, as a human being.

Finally, and most certainly not least, Terry LeBlanc, Casey Church, Randy Woodley, Wendy Peterson, Matt LeBlanc, and Ray Aldred, the founding members and (some of them) acting Board Members of NAIITS, have undoubtedly contributed the most to this project as it is an academic analysis of their vital work. They have opened up their lives and given me the gift of their stories. Pondering these stories and finding ways to retell them (from a Western academic perspective) has been an absolute joy. Without their generosity (both in time allotted and meals paid for) I would not have been able to complete this project, nor would it have been as rich contextually. I am forever grateful for their willingness to engage my curiosities as well as for their input into the process.
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<td>Association of Biblical Higher Education</td>
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<td>AIM</td>
<td>American Indian Movement</td>
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<td>ATS</td>
<td>Association of Theological Schools</td>
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<td>BIA</td>
<td>Bureau of Indian Affairs</td>
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<td>CCCU</td>
<td>Council for Christian Colleges and Universities</td>
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<td>ICTs</td>
<td>Internet Communication Technologies</td>
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<td>LCBM</td>
<td>London College of Bible and Missions</td>
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<td>NAIITS</td>
<td>North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies</td>
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<td>OBC</td>
<td>Ontario Bible College</td>
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<td>WGCIP</td>
<td>World Group of Christian Indigenous Peoples</td>
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A ‘CIRCLE IN A RECTANGLE’:
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NEGOTIATION BETWEEN LEGITIMATION AND EVASION

By

Jason E. Purvis

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Chair: Robin Wright
Major: Religion

NAIITS (the North American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies) is an academic program operated by a network of Indigenous people from various parts of the United States and Canada. Originally founded in the late 90s by four Native American Evangelicals (Terry LeBlanc, Richard Twiss, Randy Woodley, and Ray Aldred), NAIITS has established key connections with mainstream Evangelical institutions throughout North America. These connections have been established in a pragmatic effort to award accredited degrees as well as achieve theological and institutional legitimation.

This project’s aim is to examine and illumine the various practices through which NAIITS theologians operate as a counter network whose purpose is to, through published theological texts and academic conferences, draw upon the legitimating power of dominant Evangelical networks while simultaneously attempting to destabilize and reprogram them. In other words, they adhere to Western structures only in so far as they intend to fundamentally reform them. Thus, with the assistance of Manuel Castells
and his theory of communication power, they are acting as a counter-network attempting to “reprogram” the dominant Evangelical network.

I attempt to explain the contents of the NAIITS counter network with the help of Homi Bhabha and Ranajit Guha. Through mockery (which manifests in the form of joking and sarcasm) and cultural inversions, NAIITS theologians bring to light the arbitrary nature of Western academic modes of knowledge production. They then, through a series of culture inversions, articulate the Anglo-Dominated, Euro-American Evangelical network, by virtue of its involvement in colonialism and theological imperialism, as that which is further away from Biblical truth, as in need of radical social and cultural reform, and, thus, as the new mission field.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, scholars and the lay public had little to say about Native converts, preferring to cast their attention toward Native Americans who seemed outside, or in opposition to, white society. Tenskwatawa the nativistic prophet, not Tekakwitha the saint; Black Elk the shaman, not Nicholas Black Elk the Catholic catechist. . . . Within such a system of thought . . . Native converts could not possess great value or gain much recognition. . . . Not worthy of study, on their own terms, they were understood to be the crushed victims of colonialism, from whom one could learn nothing very important about authentic Native cultures themselves.

—Joel Martin

Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape

Back in 2006, I spent several days traveling around northern New Mexico with a couple of fellow University of Colorado masters students and a Navajo roadman (I will call him Phil). Phil was a roadman who existed on the fringes of his community. Peyotism is highly contested among members of the NAC (Native American Church). Although the full breadth of this tension is far beyond the scope of this study, suffice it to say, one of several fault-lines centers on the issue of who gets to participate. Many “traditionalist” practitioners of Peyotism are against offering the ritual to non-indigenous peoples, considering it a deeply indigenous experience not accessible to the settler-population. Phil, however, regularly engaged non-indigenous people and offered Peyote ceremonies to a diverse range of interested parties, including communities on the East coast and in the Midwestern United States.

Termed “medicine” by practitioners and those who administer it, Peyote has a litany of potential benefits to those who choose to ingest it. Not least of which is the

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capacity to cure drug abuse and alcoholism. This is because (as devotees would argue) unlike many other detoxification methods, Peyote has the ability to reach a fundamental issue which leads to alcoholism; namely, the psychological and spiritual core of the afflicted individual, reconnecting the individual – driven apart from his or her spiritual connection by the distractions and limitations of modern society – with either the land and the spirits who inhabit it or Jesus Christ (the content and expectations are dependent upon the particular orientation of the participant and/or the administer of the ceremony).

Our purpose in making this trip, however, was not Peyotism; it was instead healing of another sort. One of our colleagues was suffering from a serious medical condition and believed sincerely that Navajo healing rituals would prove effective in her full recovery. In my position of providing morale support, I was witness to a variety of Navajo healing rituals including sand paintings and controversial “crystal gazing” ceremonies.

Perhaps the most memorable feature of this trip for me, however, was the way in which we contributed to the further development of Phil’s home and ritual compound. In order to reciprocate the welcome and generosity that he had extended to us in providing lodging (we slept in his Hogan, a traditional Navajo house) and community in-roads, we were tasked with (and happy to carry out) offering our labor. Those who have engaged Native American communities in any significant way understand fully that this is basic protocol; one must always be prepared to make themselves available as a productive member of the community. Indeed, if we are to shed the academy of its fundamentally
colonial framework, then ethnographers must do this with deep humility and genuine sincerity.

Phil wanted to build a sweat lodge on his property and needed a few eager hands willing to put in the effort. There we were, eager and willing graduate students looking for “experiences” that would function as “meaningful interactions" with “interesting people” inhabiting “worlds” previously unfamiliar” to us. So we set ourselves to the task.

In interesting fashion, the materials used to build this sweat lodge have become a source of anecdotal capital and, to my pleasant surprise, theoretical insight. As I have pondered the deeper meanings of my dissertation as well as the theological endeavors of those I now study, these materials have begun to serve as apt metaphors that speak directly to larger socio-historical realities. We built Phil’s new sweat lodge out of several fence posts, two-by-fours to serve as framing, topped off with a large, salvaged, somewhat rusty television satellite-dish frame (the large, car-sized contraptions from the seventies and eighties, not the small roof-top dishes most commonly found on apartment balconies these days). Contrary to “traditional” forms, which are usually spontaneously fashioned from tree branches and animal pelts or blankets, this installation was intended to be sturdy and permanent.² Needless to say, it was a lesson

² I have placed quotation marks around the term “tradition” in order to situate myself in the camp of scholars who view tradition, in any form (e.g., “religious tradition, “national tradition,” and the like), as an always constructed, politically charged, and emergent form of practice and discourse. Like Greg Johnson, I view tradition as a multifarious cultural practice that "draws upon multiple repertoires that may be spoken, enacted, and enlivened,” and that functions as both a mechanism of bridging and boundary-making “employed in the articulation and crafting of identities.” As such, tradition can never be perceived of as static or stable; instead it must always be considered as a contingent formation used for specific purposes at specific times, for specific reasons, in particular places. For more on this, see Johnson’s Sacred Claims: Repatriation and Living Tradition. See also those sources which influenced his thinking, including but not limited to: Eric Hobsbawm’s “The Social Function of the Past,” (1972) found in Past and
in my nascent academic career with coming to terms with Native Americans “making due” with what is immediately available to them even if it seemed, from my romanticized view, out of the ordinary.

This experience and the materials used to build what would become a crucial structure in a ritual program that was meant to cure the ills of contemporary, post-industrial, neo-colonial society have fueled my work and helped me to better understand the micro-physics of power. For in this moment Phil was exercising agency in a way that simultaneously culled from the dominant social structures while also attempting to cure the ills those very structures produce. By taking those materials – especially those prefabricated two-by-fours and that salvaged TV satellite dish – and fashioning them into a sweat lodge, Phil was, it seems to me, resisting being reduced to dominant society by developing “popular procedures [in an attempt to] manipulate the mechanisms of discipline . . . conform[ing] to them only in order to evade them.”

In a way that I did not realize in the moment (or even well into my dissertation writing phase) this experience has led me to my current understanding of NAIITS (North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies), an indigenous-run, degree awarding organization with the purpose of creating an evangelical theological tradition that is filtered through an indigenous lens. As they build transnational networks consisting of indigenous evangelicals from around the world and establish vital programmatic connections with key Evangelical institutions (i.e., colleges, universities, and seminaries) throughout the United States, Canada, the Philippines, and Australia,


NAIITS theologians engage in similar (albeit on a much more complex scale) tactics to the one’s embedded within Phil’s design of a satellite dish sweat lodge. Much like the salvaged satellite dish that Phil used to fashion the roof of his sweat lodge, NAIITS is engaged in the process of making calculated use of weathered, Western structures (e.g. systemization of theology through the production of texts, academic conferences, etc.) in order to cure the ills those structures have produced.

In my various conversations with family, friends, colleagues in separate fields, and strangers during my various interactions, travels, and research trips over the past few years I have become accustomed to a particular response to descriptions of what I study. When I tell people that I study Native (Indigenous) Christians, and more specifically Native Evangelicals, people often respond with, first, a quizzical expression on their faces. Subsequently, people often say something to the effect of, “Well that’s interesting. I wouldn’t think Indians would want to be Christian considering their own rich cultural and religious heritage, not-to-mention the tragic history of Church-to-native relations.” Several times, but not in every case, people express sorrow, indicating that from their perspective, Native Americans must have had to give something up, something very sacred, in order to become Christian. Given the power of pop-cultural articulations of native-ness and the general lack of non-academic literature refuting the noble savage trope (which has been studied extensively and will not be belabored once more in this study), I struggle to blame these people for their reactions.

Indeed, the current study has emerged from the development of my own ideas concerning indigenous peoples over the course of the past ten to twelve years. Admittedly, I once held the dichotomous notion that there was something fundamentally
different about natives; that “they” were part of a world that had been lost to most of “us.” Even as an undergrad I trafficked predominantly in my own imagination about native peoples, spurred by coursework and texts that, in many but not all cases, reified these fallacious perceptions. It wasn’t until I amassed a diverse range of practical experiences with native people that my perceptions altered significantly and allowed me to view indigenous peoples in a more grounded way. Brief stints of time in Navajo country, visiting powwows across the country, listening to native speakers at conferences, and researching Native Christians have led to, what I sincerely hope, is a more nuanced and humanizing perspective.

What I think I have learned is summed up quite well by Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn in the introduction to their edited volume *Indigenous Experience Today*. In it they argue, rightly, that “indigenous cultural practices, institutions, and politics become such in articulation with what is not considered indigenous within the particular social formation where they exist.” This means that, consequently, what indigenous peoples do; how they respond to socio-historical, political, and/or economic issues is “without guarantees;” that “Indigenism has never been,” and will never be, “a singular ideology, program, or movement, and its politics resist closure.” That indigeneity is contingent and emerges differently in different contexts means, then, that “some of [indigeneity’s] fractions are included in the dominant and the hegemonic . . ., whereas others emerge as counterhegemonic formations – and still others straddle both, or move from one to

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the other.\textsuperscript{6} In other words, Native Americans and First Nations people (as well as indigenous peoples the world over) do not always and everywhere engage in wholly subversive projects that seek to undermine and discredit the dominant powers that have been historically imposed upon them.

One could argue that the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies (which I will refer to as NAIITS going forward), the focus of this project, is an example of an indigenous group that straddles the fence between hegemony and counter-hegemony. NAIITS is an academic program started by a trans-indigenous group of Native North Americans (many of them from multi-ethnic families). Faculty and members consider themselves part of a radical new process whereby the dominant theological paradigms of the western colonial world will be, if not overturned, dramatically altered. They are conversant with and heavily invested in the sociological and anthropological understandings of world Christianity, regularly citing scholars such as Philip Jenkins, Mark Noll, Lamin Sanneh, and others. They are also aligned with a range of non-indigenous, academic theologians dedicated to the task of reimagining mission practice and missiology in a globalized world.

Developing a contextualized Indigenous theological tradition, they aver, will once and for all allow Indigenous peoples to be Christian without having to undermine their aboriginal identities. This will, in turn, pave the way for Indigenous peoples to fulfill their biblical charge, which is to complete the body of Christ through a fuller understanding of Jesus/God as the creator of all cultures and, thus, a champion of multiculturalism. Their mission statement is, therefore, “to develop and instruct from a body of theology and

\textsuperscript{6} Cadena and Starn, \textit{Indigenous Experience}, 11, 12.
biblical teaching that resonates with the culture and traditions of indigenous peoples.” In order to achieve this goal NAIITS members also simultaneously “seek to facilitate the creation of a written theological foundation for a) the visioning of new paradigms to reach Native North Americans and other Indigenous peoples with the Good News of Jesus; and, b) the contextualization of Good News in Indigenous communities.”

NAIITS is a decidedly urban movement. Most of the original board members were raised in urban contexts, some at considerable remove from the land of their ancestors. As a self-proclaimed “learning community” and aspiring academic program it is comprised of a majority Indigenous faculty hailing from various cities across North America—including, but not limited to: Portland, Oregon; Newburg, Oregon; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Montreal, Quebec, Canada; Vancouver, BC, Canada; Calgary, Alberta, Canada. NAIITS is also trans- indigenous; its members are ethnically diverse, representing many of the most well-known Native American communities of North America (e.g., Sicangu/Lakota, Mi'kmaq/Acadian, Métis, Cherokee, Navajo, Swan River Band/Cree, and Carrier Sekani to name a few). In most cases faculty members, as well as those closely associated with the program, head up their own ministries and cater to their own local clientele (e.g., Eagle Wings Ministry, Wiconi International, and My People International). These ministries and the women and men who administer them are transnational in character, often engaging in international mission and development projects. Matt Leblanc, NAIITS director Terry LeBlanc’s son, for example, heads up iEmergence whose organizational aim is to develop leadership skills among indigenous peoples of the Philippines. Matt is a full-

time resident of the Philippines, making regular trips back to Canada and the U.S. for NAIITS sponsored events.

Although its faculty is mostly indigenous and its curriculum draws upon indigenous methods, NAIITS is by no means a wholly indigenous experience. Demographically speaking, there are as many non-indigenous peoples in attendance during symposia as there are indigenous peoples. Non-indigenous missionaries hailing from Scotland, Australia, the U.S., and Canada have attended. What is more, the student body of the various NAIITS programs of study has included and continues to welcome numerous non-indigenous individuals. Enrollment in classes have consisted of Anglo-American, African-American, and Asian-American students.

A small contingent of scholars has reported on various aspects of the NAIITS phenomenon to date. Perhaps most notable is Andrea Smith’s (who is a NAIITS board member) post-colonial work. Her first monograph, Conquest, chronicled the history of policies, many of them violent in nature, issued and carried out by the United States government against Native Women. In Native Americans and the Christian Right, Smith details various aspects of Native Evangelical practice, including activities associated with Promise Keepers, and provides analysis of the discourse, which she determines is decidedly conservative in nature. Paradoxically, however, the conservative discourse typical of Native Evangelicals who are active in groups like Promise Keepers contains subtle and oblique liberatory features. Women, while subject to and often in tension with these discursive trends, nonetheless find ways to challenge the status quo. As such, Smith argues that there are qualities of decolonization embedded in even, what many consider to be, the most conservative of Evangelical circles. The NAIITS program and
certain members of its faculty (e.g., Richard Twiss, Randy Woodley, Terry LeBlanc, and others) are prominent in her analysis.

Corky Alexander’s *Native American Pentecost: Praxis, Contextualization, Transformation* is a detailed description and theological analysis of the contextualization movement. His fieldwork consisted of participant observation during NAIITS symposiums, events held by affiliated organizations, and various Native American worship services around the country. Alexander provides thorough accounts of a variety of contextualized practices including smudging, use of Native language, smudging, drums and rattles, dancing, talking and circles. As a Pentecostal and proponent of contextualized Christian forms, Alexander concludes that these practices are part of a Native Christian Praxis and as such they avoid syncretism by virtue of having been developed by “mature, Biblically informed Native leaders.”

A brief but informative study was produced in consultation with Corky Alexander. *Native American Identity, Christianity, and Critical Contextualization*, by Thomas Eric Bates, attempts to understand the relationship between both Native Identities and Christian identities as they are played out in the context of NAIITS symposiums and related events. “There is a Christian identity and an Indian identity . . . ,” Bates explains, “both are important; but for Native peoples, stronger emphasis is placed on the latter because of its historical disapproval by the Church.” In this study, Bates provides extensive ethnographic data concerning the practices of contextualized indigenous evangelicals. He argues that as indigenous peoples from around the world engage in

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NAIITS and other Native evangelical events they are part of the construction of, what he refers to as an “Indian ethnic identity.” Drawing upon scholars such as Nagel and Fixico, he brings NAIITS under the umbrella of ethnogenesis; that NAIITS is constitutive of a new ethnic formation with its own set of values and norms drawing upon culturally but ultimately politically separate from preceding formations.

My project will consider the issue of legitimacy. However, this work will not concern itself with whether or not NAIITS theologians are ‘legitimate Natives’ or even whether or not they constitute ‘legitimate Christians’; these two are assumed to have been established by virtue of self-identification. This project will, instead, focus on and analyze the mechanisms of legitimacy-making that have been developed and maintained by NAIITS theologians. More specifically, this research will illumine practices of legitimacy; the domestic networks that embolden theologies of legitimacy, ritualizations that express legitimacy, and, finally, international missionary networks that deploy these practices of legitimacy. To put it more succinctly, this project seeks to highlight and understand the various practices of legitimacy among the Native theologians who comprise the faculty of NAIITS.

In addition to legitimacy, NAIITS theologians regularly engage in discourse and practices that seek to challenge the dominant institutions of mainstream evangelicalism across North America. They make references to the failures of Western culture to deal appropriately with the natural world; its inability to sustain meaningful communities in the face of late, free-market capitalism’s hyper preoccupation with individualism. They also perform (at times controversial) Native Evangelical rituals on the campus grounds of high-profile colleges and seminaries in an effort to widen the boundaries of orthodoxy.
and orthopraxy. The movement between these two positions (legitimation and evasion) is a delicate negotiation, requiring both strategic use of the dominant structures as well as tactical deviations from them in order to evade the limitations and constraints of mainstream evangelicalism.¹⁰

The other thing that this project will not do is set up and/or promote some dichotomous or incongruent relationship between academic endeavors and indigenous persons. Throughout this project I will often refer to the differences that are highlighted and emphasized by the religious actors themselves. These discursive moments should not, however, be taken as my own underlying assumptions. The work that will be carried out here is an examination of the ways in which NAIITS theologians and faculty members are emphasizing differences in their attempts to open up moments of tension between culture and religion, allowing them to challenge the theological assumption that Western culture and “orthodox” Christian worship are synonymous.

From this position, they have developed theologically-oriented tools enabling direct challenges to the mainstream Evangelical network. The theology of Biblical Indigeneity (which is discussed in significant detail in Chapter 4) enables NAIITS theologians to render Indigenous ontologies as more in line with Biblical truth than Western or Euro-American modes of being. Through the use of forms of traditional mass communication and what Manuel Castells refers to as “mass self-communication” NAIITS theologians are attempting to reprogram the dominant evangelical network. Thus, the critique of Western ontologies (or, rather, the contents of the NAIITS counter network) is carried out through internet communication technologies and ritualizations

¹⁰ I am culling the terms “strategy” and “tactic” from De Certeau’s famous chapter “Walking in the City,” which appears in his oft-cited monograph The Practice of Everyday Life (1984).
(symposia and conferences) wherein the very legitimizing structures (Western academic modes of knowledge production) that afford NAIITS legitimacy are rendered spatially and temporally contingent. Finally, through cultural inversions, NAIITS theologians render the dominant Evangelical institutional apparatus and population as the new mission field in need of radical social and cultural reformation to bring it into further alignment with Biblical Indigeneity.

A Brief Word on Methods

This first year of this project consisted of mostly source allocation and reading. I first became aware of NAIITS through the speaking engagements and interviews by members of NAIITS posted online (primarily Terry LeBlanc and Richard Twiss) I watched and listened to everything I could get access to. In addition, I acquired each of their publications (articles and books).¹¹ It was this body of literature that led me to develop a plan for more detailed ethnographic work with NAIITS in an attempt to further understand the work of NAIITS theologians.

For a little over three years, I traveled around the United States and Canada, attending the annual NAIITS symposia and other events (i.e., Sing to the Mountain II in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina) closely associated with NAIITS. I spent a great deal of time as a participant observer, listening to paper presentations, taking part in the schedule of activities, and interacting with and getting to know speakers and fellow attendees.

My role as an ethnographer was made abundantly clear from the beginning. What is more, I was honest with NAIITS theologians and other attendees concerning my

¹¹ All of the sources I am mentioning here can be found listed in the bibliography.
own personal investment in religion. On many occasions, I explained that ‘on my best
days, I am a forgiving agnostic, but on my worst days, a bit of an angry atheist.’ NAIITS
theologians and attendees were very gracious, willing to engage in conversations about
religion, in general, and Christendom, more specifically, with a non-believer. My ability
to relate to many of them was in our mutual desires to see Native Evangelicals (and
indigenous peoples the world over) further empowered as institutionally recognized
theologians and, consequently, to see the dominant Evangelical network move further
away from its imperialistic and colonial heritage, perhaps resulting in a significant shift to
embrace a more varied expression of religiosity.

After my first trip to the annual NAIITS symposium, which was sponsored by
George Fox University (Now Portland Seminary) in Newberg, Oregon, I realized that the
ability to articulate the emergence, day-to-day operation, and future aspirations of the
NAIITS program would only be possible once I acquired more details about the founding
members. Therefore, I settled on conducting life-history interviews with as many of the
founding members and current board members as possible. This proved more difficult
than I had originally imagined, however, as many of the NAIITS theologians are very
busy frequently traveling around for speaking engagements and international work
(usually among other indigenous communities).

My preference for life-history interviews stems from other fieldwork experiences
where directed, question-driven interviews yielded choppy information. Life-history
interviews, on the other hand, allow for more of an unstructured conversation (it is more
inter-subjective), yielding a wealth of information that emerges as the interviewee details
her personal narrative. As readers will witness in Chapter 5, the narratives are rich. I
would argue, furthermore, that the patterns that emerge within the discourse between interviewees are more organic because the interviewer is not directing the narrative through questioning.

In addition to the literature review, participant observation, and series of interviews, I conducted a digital ethnography, taking stock of the ways in which NAIITS theologians constructed identity through ICTs (Internet Communication technologies). This work was a continuation of the exploratory endeavors that led to the project initially. I simply examined the “Homepaging” techniques of NAIITS founders and members. Program descriptions, descriptions of institutional affiliations, and imagery became the objects under scrutiny in this portion of the project.

All of the above methods allowed me to amass a wealth of information. In sum, then, this project is an interdisciplinary project, consisting of a variety of ethnographic strategies. The result is, I hope, an in-depth and illustrative analysis of NAIITS that will lead to their further recognition as a program of theological study and even perhaps additional ethnographic work by other scholars in the years that follow.

**Emerging Trends in the Study of Global and World Christianity**

Since the 1990s the academy has witnessed a major shift in the way that we understand Christianity. Once considered a monolithic reflection of Europe and the burgeoning United States everywhere, Christianity is now understood more precisely as a polyvocal, multi-situated tradition whose center of influence is undergoing radical change. “The problem is not that earlier historical accounts are necessarily erroneous or misleading. It is rather,” historian Mark Noll clarifies, “that they presume a core Christian narrative dominated by events, personalities, organizations, money, and cultural
expectations in Europe and North America – and then surrounded by a fringe of miscellaneous missionary phenomena scattered throughout the rest of the globe.”\(^{12}\)

Spurred by emerging trends in immigration studies and globalization, this work reimagined missionary Christianity and took more seriously the transnational and global orientation of the Christian worldview itself. Rather than viewing Christianity as a theological tradition and/or institution that is affected by and only ever responds to the processes associated with globalization, many scholars now understand Christianity as one of the key progenitors of global processes.\(^{13}\) From the perspective of this new focus on globalization, transnationalism, and migration, Christianity, by its very nature, creates global orientations and functions as a progenitor of the processes of globalization rather than merely responding. It became increasingly clear to a growing number of scholars


\(^{13}\) For example, see Ian Tyrell’s eloquent historical narrative which traces the international movements of the Leitch sisters. Initial attempts focused on missionary endeavors in order to illustrate Christianity’s global orientation and outreach. In his piece titled Reforming the World: The Creation of America’s Moral Empire, Ian Tyrell examines the global aspirations of Protestant (mainly evangelical) missionaries in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These globally-minded evangelists were spurred into action through the emergence of “internationalism,” which, in the minds of visionaries such as William T. Stead, would be led by the United States and its burgeoning exports market. This web of transnational trade networks, as Tyrell points out, would also involve the global spread of “Anglo-American influence” and with it “European moral and ethical standards” (Tyrell 2010, 13). The decidedly American flavor of internationalism was characterized by a program of moral reform that was “distinctively global in its aspirations and highly dependent on new technologies of international communication” (Tyrell 2010, 14). The American International Voluntary Associations, or, “IVAs” “differed from their European counterparts” explains Tyrell, in that they “were self-consciously cast as ‘World’ organizations” (Tyrell 2010, 24). These included groups such as the Worlds Young Women’s Christian Temperance Union, The Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor, The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, as well as many others whose “evangelical mission [was to] take the Protestant gospel to the whole world” (Tyrell 2010, 25). Emboldened by the Presbyterian Reformed Church brand of evangelicalism and New School theology which promoted good works, the Leitch sisters joined the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Affairs in 1879 and boarded a boat to Ceylon (modern day Sri Lanka). They remain there for seven years until 1886 when funding for their missionary efforts becomes increasingly difficult to procure. During their stint, Tyrell explains, the sisters act as conduits for the establishment of a variety of transnational network connections between the U.S. and parts of Southeast Asia. The Christian Endeavor movement, for example, utilizes the work done by the Leitch sisters as a foundation for involvement abroad. After their return to the United States, their influence in Ceylon did not end, furthermore, as the sisters joined the World’s Women’s Christian Temperance Union, which continued to promote temperance and Protestant ideals to Tamils overseas (Tyrell, 2010).
that “Evangelical Christianity links radical personal renewal with a universal eschatological message,” Manuel Vásquez contends, “and operates simultaneously at the local and global level through dense transnational networks of churches and the strategic use of mass media.”

Since the early 2000s, the narrative has begun to change dramatically once again, paying far more attention to the local responses to missionary endeavors, contextualized or indigenized forms of Christian worship, and the subsequent reorientation of the “mission field.” A Post-Colonial turn has facilitated a refocus on alternate voices and positionalities, especially as it relates to the production of Christian knowledge, belief, and practice emerging out of local (often indigenous) communities. In his now oft-cited monographs, (i.e., *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 2002 and *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*, 2006), which are part of his *The Future of Christianity Trilogy*, Philip Jenkins argues that “over the last century, . . . the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably away from Europe, southward, to Africa and Latin America, and eastward, toward Asia.”

Andrew Walls, historian of African missions and founder of the Centre for the Study of World Christianity, is aligned with the likes of Jenkins and others in recognizing the geographical shifts in Christian centers of power. In his article titled “Christian scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-First Century,” argues that “Christianity began the

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twentieth century as a Western, and indeed the Western religion; it ended the century as a non-Western religion, on track to become progressively more so.”

In perhaps his most well-known work, *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West*, Lamin Sanneh goes a bit further than previous assessments, arguing that, distinct from the category “global Christianity,” world Christianity is an indigenous affair. World Christianity, he offers, “is not one thing but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, but in any case without necessarily the European enlightenment frame.” Global Christianity by comparison is the “faithful replication of Christian forms and patterns developed in Europe.” Perhaps responding to the work of Noll and others, Sanneh suggests that the “global Christianity” approach consists of the assumption – from the get-go – that what it studies is a manifestation of hegemonic power. World Christianity, on the other hand, should begin with the assumption that that which it studies is an outgrowth of a local community couched in Christian terms and is, therefore, worthy of consideration on its own merits. These, he argues, are indigenized forms of Christianity with their own social and cultural coherences.

In a later piece, *Disciple of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*, Sanneh sets out to formulate continuities between the diverse range of Christian expressions worldwide. Referring to these trends, locatable in successive historical patterns, as “pillars,” Sanneh sets out to juxtapose the on-the-ground developments with the typical Euro-centric understandings of Christianity. He highlights the missionary pillar (the

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impulse among adherents to spread the faith), the pillar of empire (the tradition’s ability to adapt to and significantly alter local cultures), the comparative pillar (the tradition’s tendency to take on local customs while competing with other universally-oriented systems of though such as Islam), the colonial pillar (the tradition’s relationship with colonial endeavors, leading to drowning out of alternative voices), the primal pillar (adherent’s tendency to want to return to primitive forms of Christian worship), and the critical pillar (adherent’s tendency to rebel against dominant oppression). All of this culminates in the development of ubiquitous, counter-hegemonic Christian expressions. “Despite their role as allies of empire,” Sanneh contends, “missions also developed the vernacular that inspired sentiments of national identity and thus undercut Christianity’s identification with colonial rule. . . . the new Christians embraced social action and engagement. In time there emerged a vigorous new wave of Christian renewal trailing anticolonial sentiments.”

Other authors have offered alternative theories as it relates to overall trends in World Christianities. In his piece *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith*, Mark Noll attempts to provide an expanded picture of Christianity. He argues, from the perspective of an Americanist, that the form and function of American Christian religiosity is a reflection of broader, global Christian trends. He suggests that a distinct form of Christianity formed in the United States during the nineteenth century, which was more Biblically oriented, more pragmatic, geared more to entrepreneurs rather than aristocratic elites, much more voluntary, aligned with the middle class, and in line with free-market initiatives. “American form

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rather than American influence,” he argues “has been the most important American contribution to the recent world history of Christianity.” Noll hesitantly admits that the power dynamics invested in U.S. “money, military might, educational institutions, and missions,” played a crucial role in the spread of Evangelical Christianity worldwide. Ultimately, however, he downplays the narrative of power, suggesting instead that it was the uniquely American, ultra-democratic disposition and how that disposition became a fundamental part of the American Christian religiosity that now permeates all parts of the world.

In *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia*, Noll and Carolyn Nystrom employ an ethnographic method, examining extensively the theological trends emerging among a handful of African and Asian Christians. They touch upon several regions, being careful not to paint with wide brushes; these regions include Southern Africa, West Africa, East Africa, India, Korea, and China. They argue that becoming conversant with these voices is crucial for Christians in America because, as it stands at the opening of the twenty-first century, “there are far more active church participants in Africa than in Europe; a strong majority of the adherents to major denominational families like Pentecostals, Anglicans, and Catholics live outside of North America and Europe; more missionaries are being sent out from places like South Korea, Brazil, or Nigeria than from any European country; and it is not beyond the realm of possibility that within a few more years churchgoers in China may outnumber churchgoers in the

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The book is overtly Evangelical as the authors express a desire to see the book function as inspiration to “persevere in following Christ.” The wealth of content, however, makes it an invaluable source for students of the subfield of World Christianity.

An even later development, building upon the historiographical shifts mentioned above, emerges from questions concerning the fundamental building-blocks of the field of anthropology (i.e., “what is culture?”; “to what extent has a Christian worldview informed the creation of the field of anthropology?”; “To what extent has anthropology assumed that its objects of study are somehow frozen in time, thus reinforcing the dichotomy between modern and pre-modern?”). These pointed questions have opened up new trajectories in the field. Among these new avenues of inquiry, according to a particular group of scholars, is the anthropology of Christianity. Prior to this sub-field’s emergence, Christianity, as it was understood by most anthropologists, lacked “the degree of cultural alterity that has until quite recently been definitional of an apt disciplinary object (Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins, 2008: 1140). In other words, because Christianity was so familiar to them, anthropologists were naturally drawn away from it, preferring instead the “primitive” religiosities they so often discovered among their “exotic” subjects.

The issue of alterity is one of utmost importance in this case. As Keane and Robbins help us to recall, the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, etc) emerged out of a thoroughly Christian episteme. Nineteenth century social scientists were faced, then, with the difficult task of constructing a secular science of culture using the building

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blocks of the preceding models. Keane describes this process with some added precision.

[Nineteenth century social scientists] had to forget the sources of their core questions and concepts in a world for which Christianity was both pervasive background and specific instigation for research and theorization. The religious preoccupations of Durkheim, Freud, and Weber are self-evident; but one might recall as well the theological roots of Hegel and the young Marx. In the twentieth century, these repressed origins continue to haunt social science and cultural studies, and their kin in critical and humanistic theory. This haunting is evident in their core concerns with and ways of conceptualizing the self, objectification, agency, authority, power, and materialism.  

The emergence of the social sciences, which was concomitant to the process of secularization, entailed the devaluation of Christianity, therefore, as something all too familiar and part of our own pre-modernity. This combined with the methodological primitivism which feverishly sought to locate remnants of the “pre-modern,” “tribal,” and “non-Christian” social and cultural phenomena around the world it is no wonder why an Anthropology of Christianity has developed at such a glacial pace in the academy.

In recent decades, however, there has been a sizable shift in the way that scholars view the adoption of a Christian worldview. The work of scholars situated within this now vibrant sub-field has challenged a few of the long-established assumptions concerning Christianity and conversion. Chief among these was the assumption that for many of the converted populations around the colonized world

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22 I am reminded here of Jacob Olupona’s edited volume, Beyond Primitivism, within which a number of scholars attempt to deal with the realization that, rather than an overarching “modernity,” there are actually multiple “modernities” operating simultaneously in different cultural contexts around the world. The work of NAIITS is, arguably, a theological cousin to the secular academic discussion involving Olupona and contributors to the March 1996, “Beyond Primitivism” conference.
Christianity functioned merely as window-dressing, “a thin veneer,” Bailecki, Haynes, and Robbins explain, “laid over an enduring prior culture.” Robbins calls this the theory of “crypto-religion” and argues that, as a basic assumption of many anthropologists, it led scholars on a quest to find the “traditional” religion that was obscured by the “Christian mask.” However, as Robbins has pointed out in his study of the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea, there is something much more complex going on than the mere “appearance” of Christianity. True, the Urapmin retained the belief in the traditional nature spirits; however, God became the primary figure of religious reverence while the nature spirits were imagined to be the harbingers of sickness and death. What is more, the “traditional” ways (i.e., ritual worship of ancestors and devotional offerings to nature spirits) were mostly supplanted by Christian ones. What makes Urapmin Christianity syncretic and unique as a contextualized form of Christianity is the continued preoccupation of the nature spirits and the rituals—carried out by the Spirit women—within which specialist become possessed by the Holy spirit in order to cure sickness.

Findings such as these have engendered perhaps the most groundbreaking consequence of this new perspective—the “commitment to thinking comparatively and theoretically about similarities and differences in the shapes and histories of Christianity in various Christian populations.” Once believed to exist as a functional and substantive monolith, scholars are now encouraged to explore the various possible

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26 Robbins 2008: 1140.
manifestations of Christianity around the globe.\textsuperscript{27} This means that Christianity can look and function in radically different ways from one cultural context to another, a fact that only now seems blatantly obvious.

The current study builds upon the research agenda outlined above. As a case study focused on a group of Native Evangelical theologians operating primarily in Canada and the United States with branches in places like the Philippines, New Zealand, Australia, and parts of Latin America, its aim is to illumine a particular manifestation of this new era of Christendom. More specifically, it examines the emergence of a movement that embraces these new trends in “world Christianities,” with its shift to the global south, yet continues to amass support and achieve legitimacy amongst evangelical institutions situated in the U.S. and Canada. NAIITS, in other words, is working from within the Euro-American context yet embraces and attempts to further the sea change in Christian centers of gravity.

Finally, I have tried my best – understanding that I have likely stumbled along the way – to take the position so eloquently laid out by Joanna Brooks, who lauded what she termed the “new wave of mission history.” Because of both the ethnohistorical turn in the 70s and 80s and the socio-historical turn in the 90s, she contends, scholars have been empowered to recognize the ways in which “the materiality of religion and spiritual life . . . [demonstrate] the capacity for working out difficult political questions on its own terms, through articulation and processing of powerful feelings, through acts of

\textsuperscript{27} Several monograph sources have emerged in the last two decades dedicated to this project. See, for example, James Treat’s \textit{Native and Christian}(1996), Joel Martin’s and Mark Nichol’s edited volume \textit{Native Americans, Christianity and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape}, and Aparecida Vilaça’s and Robin Wright’s edited volume \textit{Native Christians}(2013),
exegesis, performance, and narration.»\(^{28}\) Doing so allows the researcher to take religious discourse and practice seriously as always and everywhere a political endeavor, not as something somehow elevated from the nitty-gritty of everyday life. This further enables scholars to, as accurately as possible, record and describe manifestations of Christian belief and practice in context, as contingent and emergent forms of social, cultural, and political discourse aimed at particular social, cultural, and political goals.

**Toward a Scrutiny of Terms**

**Evangelicalism**

Throughout this case study I will make repeated reference to Evangelicalism, especially as I refer to Native Evangelicalism. As a category of religious – and more specifically Christian – belief and practice, evangelicalism has been and continues to be a contested category. What is Evangelicalism? Is it a denomination with a developed doctrinal tradition? Or, is it more of a movement that permeates inter-denominationalism? Who counts as Evangelical? What do evangelicals believe? How is their form of Christianity distinct from other forms? Thus, the term requires definition in an effort toward clarity and conceptual precision.

In *Southern Cross*, Christine Heyrman argues that evangelicalism across the contemporary United States “hews to the shape it had assumed in the South by the mid-nineteenth century.»\(^{29}\) Having made its way across the Atlantic in the 1600s with the

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arrival of the first wave of British Colonists to the Mid-Atlantic and New England, evangelicalism did not enter the Southern colonies until after 1740. It was the intensification of revivalism, spurred by movements both in Europe and the Northern Colonies, that led to an influx of evangelical. The Anglican influence in the Southern Colonies was long-lasting, requiring no claim to a conversion experience or adherence to biblical dogmatism. For these and other reasons, not least of which was evangelicalism’s challenge to the gendered and racial hierarchies that undergirded patriarchy and the institution of slavery, evangelicalism was originally met with suspicion and distrust among Southern Colonists.

During the mid-eighteenth century, however, Scotch-Irish Presbyterians and German pietists (Moravians, Dunkers, Mennonites, and Schwenkfelders among them), preachers from the Northern Colonies, and missionaries from Europe flooded the Southern colonies, bringing with them the religiosity commonly associated with evangelicalism. The newcomers brought with them “the conviction that spiritual rebirth was essential to salvation and the most militant among them, the Baptists and Methodists, aimed at nothing less than” the total conversion of all Southerners to the evangelical worldview.\(^{30}\)

Evangelicals had to work diligently, however, to make accommodations toward the Anglican South. Evangelical missions to the South became more accepting of the Southern aristocracy, took on Southern patriarchal patterns that mirrored the rigidity of the Anglican model, yielded to the racial hierarchies necessary for the persistence of the institution of slavery and Indian disenfranchisement. As such, evangelicalism became

\(^{30}\) Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross*
palatable to Southern sensibilities. Although evangelicalism "has never been a static, monolithic structure of belief and . . . its adherents have never been an undifferentiated mass," Heyrman argues that it is this Southern revision of evangelicalism that "now shapes the character of conservative Protestant churches in every region of the United States."\(^31\)

Broader attempts to understand evangelicalism’s emergence and cultural relevance consist of attempts to nail down, with precision and certainty, its theological particularities. Perhaps the most widely known and accepted summation of evangelicalism is David Bebbington’s overview, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. He contends that “there are four common features that have lasted from the first half of the eighteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century.” He listed them in greater detail as follows:

\[\textit{conversionism},\ \textit{activism},\ \textit{biblicism},\ \textit{crucicentrism}\]

Based on his research, which covers over two hundred and fifty years of history and tracks the development of a variety of evangelical movements, Bebbington argues that it is precisely “this continuing set of characteristics that reveals the existence of an evangelical tradition.”\(^33\)

Attempts such as these to define evangelicalism have, however, been met with considerable resistance. Definition is rendered impossible, some scholars contend,

\(^{31}\) Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 254.


\(^{33}\) Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 3.
because of the movement’s extreme diversity as well as its tendency toward internal theological polemic. Difficulty in defining evangelicalism is, additionally, a consequence of its emergence across denominational boundaries. Protestants of all types – including Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Pentecostals – use the label “evangelical” to identify themselves. Donald Dayton, as Sweeney makes clear, suggested that the category “evangelicalism” and definitions of such categories are, at best, problematic and, at worst, utterly destructive. Because so-called evangelicals are so rarely in agreement over theological or political matters, detractors argue, the category “evangelical” has no explanatory purchase. What is more, the category and definitions of it have obscured reality due to racial, cultural, class, and theological biases. While evangelicalism has typically been associated with the beliefs and practices of figures such as Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, George Whitefield, and the others, the reality is that “white men are in the minority, few evangelicals are intellectuals, and evangelical beliefs seldom conform to a standard Calvinistic worldview.”

Dayton, thus, goes as far as to urge evangelicals to cease their continued usage of the term.

Still others argue that etic analyses should not trump emic sentiments. “Men and women on every continent count themselves as evangelicals,” Douglas Sweeney remarks, “from the very rich to the very poor, from the well-educated to the uneducated, both capitalists and socialists, democrats, monarchists, and everything in between.” Complexity notwithstanding, that the term evangelical operates in the minds of religious

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34 Sweeney, The American Evangelical Story, 22.
actors and motivates a sense of categorical belonging should not undermine its heuristic value.

To deny the existence of a thing by virtue of its complexity is, I would argue, a slippery slope. Theological contestation and philosophical disagreement are, I contend, a fundamental characteristic of every religious tradition, everywhere and always. The logical end to Dayton’s admonition would be to deny that there is such a thing as Protestantism because of the theological differentiation between denominations. Or, more broadly, to suggest that there is no such thing as Christianity on the basis that Protestants, Catholics, Coptics, and Eastern Orthodox Christians simply cannot agree on a standard Christological framework.

More moderate voices echoing the concerns of both camps are also worth mentioning. George Marsden dedicated a full-length monograph to the task of defining evangelicalism. In *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, he argues that even at its inception, Evangelicalism was diverse and lacked institutional or theological uniformity. It is more useful, then, in his estimation to think of evangelicalism as a movement among groups with common traits. \(^{36}\) “Though from differing denominations,” Marsden offers, “these people were united with each other, and with persons from other nations in their zeal to win the world for Christ.” \(^{37}\) In a later commentary, Butler, Wacker, and Balmer cast evangelicals—in similar fashion to Marsden—as a movement whose defining characteristics included a dedication to spreading the “good news” that “Christ’s death and resurrection had freed sinners from their shackles and reconciled them to

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\(^{37}\) Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 3.
God." They attempted to achieve this goal specifically through the mechanism of revivals wherein they urged attendees to rededicate themselves to the task of saving their souls, that in so doing they could “be revived to vigorous new life” through Christ. In other words, according to Marsden as well as Butler, Wacker, and Balmer, active proselytizing, personal devotion to Christ and a penchant for becoming “born again,” are all defining traits that unite evangelicals across denominational lines.

Thus, because there is a large population of people who self-identify as evangelical it also makes sense to consider the vitality of the term as a category of identification. The term itself has been in usage since the sixteenth century by commentators who used it while making reference to advocates of the Reformation. Throughout the eighteenth century the term was used variously to refer to ‘people of the gospel,’ specifically Methodists and Calvinists, or supporters of the revival movement. In 1793, however, The Evangelical Magazine touted itself as a publication “founded to cater to any denomination dedicated to the spread of the gospel.” Thus, Bebbington rightly makes the distinction between lower-case “evangelical” and upper-case “Evangelical,” the former referring to those Christians who are ‘of the gospel’ and the latter referring to movements emerging after 1730, which took on a decidedly activist tone and structure.

Rather than denying its existence comprehensively and, rather absurdly, asking an entire population of religious people to stop using the title, we might simply pluralize

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39 Butler, Wacker, and Balmer, Religion in American Life, 171.

40 Bebbington, Evangelicalism, 1.
evangelicalism and refer instead to “evangelicalisms.” This way, we maintain that there remains something to talk about while also mitigating the very real possibility of making things seem overly tidy. Furthermore, in continuing to use the term evangelical, we take seriously that there is a category of Christian religiosity with which a large number of people self-identify.

In her recent attempt to map out the relationship between Native Christians and right-wing politics in the United States, post-colonial scholar and Native evangelical, Andrea Smith defines evangelical as “Protestants who generally subscribe to the five fundamentals of faith that have served as rallying points for evangelicalism: biblical inerrancy, the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, and the second-coming of Christ.” She comes to this definition from the perspective of fundamentalism. This is a rather mechanical move and is a consequence of her focus on conservative belief and discourse among a specific group of Native Evangelicals. In order to understand the conservative discourse that facilitates, what she refers to as, “decolonization in unexpected places,” Smith must reconcile strands of evangelical conservatism – with a focus on NAIITS theologians and their association with Promise Keepers – with the strategies of resistance that she observes among female members

41 See Andrea Smith’s Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 2008). It should be noted that Andrea Smith’s claim to Native heritage has recently come under intense scrutiny by other members of the Cherokee Nation. Smith has, throughout her career as a post-colonial scholar, claimed to be of Cherokee descent. Whether or not Andrea Smith is a Cherokee Indian is of secondary concern to the discussion here. While I lament the possibility of someone achieving tenure, publishing books, and conducting academic conferences under the false pretenses of Indigenous identity and consider it a thoroughly malicious act, I cannot prove nor can I disprove Smith’s claims. She may well be Cherokee Indian and, for whatever reasons, over the course of many years, and because of the complexity of life, her family may have lost the ability to prove its connections to the Cherokee community (who have one the most comprehensive book-keeping programs among Native North Americans). This is a debate best left to the Indigenous peoples engaging it. Indigenous peoples, because of the spatial and cultural upheaval of colonialism, have long been in embroiled in debates about identity. The NAIITS board has decided to support her claims to native heritage and she continues to be, at least for the time being, a staple on the NAIITS faculty.
of Native Evangelical communities. Thus, her definition of evangelicalism is born out of a concern for the conservative discourse and impulses embedded in evangelical Christianity which emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a response to secular humanism and scientific rationality.42

Furthermore, the conservative discourse to which Smith refers is primarily focused on gender, sexuality, and family values. The individuals with whom she spoke – namely, Richard Twiss, Terry LeBlanc, and Randy Woodley – while invested in these conservative values are surely not conservative across the board. In other ways they are quite progressive. This project, for example, will discuss in detail the ways in which NAIITS progressivism pushes back on the conservative, one might say “fundamentalist,” streams of belief and practice.

Smith’s definition is, therefore, a decidedly limited portrayal of evangelicalism and, I argue, neglects one of its key features – the global dimension. From this global perspective, which takes as its central defining characteristic the concept “evangelion” (good news), many, if not most, evangelicals are led to view the worldwide spread of the “good news” fundamental to their religiosity. Worldwide mission and the promotion of it, then, is arguably an indication of an evangelical worldview.

This global perspective is brought to the fore in Richard Carwardine’s *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America 1790 – 1865*. Carwardine argues that this globally-oriented evangelical fervor grew out of a political climate that originated in the burgeoning United States of the nineteenth century. “The

42 For more on this aspect of evangelicalism, see George Marsden’s Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, which is cited in the preceding pages. In this volume, Marsden refers to Fundamentalism as a subset of Evangelicalism. More specifically, Fundamentalists are Evangelicals who become militant in their attempts to protect their belief system from, what the perceive as, the encroachment of broader social forces.
revival outburst reflected in much of its practice and theology . . . central characteristic[s] of Jacksonian society – a democratic egalitarianism resting on a faith in the common man. 43 The radical individualism of the Second Great Awakening was complimented and emboldened by “the belief that the young republic, with her growing population, vast territories, natural wealth, and developing commerce, had a special destiny that set her apart from the corrupt Old World. The evangelical believed that America – blessed with a Puritan heritage, voluntarist church structure and a vast engine of benevolent societies – had been charged by the Lord with the task of regenerating both itself and the whole world.” 44

Douglas A. Sweeney, church historian and self-proclaimed evangelical, argues that “evangelicals comprise a movement that is rooted in classical Christian orthodoxy, shaped by a largely Protestant understanding of the gospel, and distinguished from other such movements by an eighteenth century twist.” He continues, and this is key to his definition and how it differentiates evangelical Christians from others, “we are unique in our commitment to gospel witness around the world.” 45

At the center of the movement . . . lies a firm commitment to the good news (evangelion) that “a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Rom. 3:28). Most interpret this passage of Scripture in light of the Reformation doctrine that we are saved by grace alone (sola gratia) through faith alone (sola fide) in Christ alone (solus Christus). All agree that right doctrine comes from the cannon of Scripture alone (sola Scriptura). In sum, evangelicals cling to the gospel message as spelled

44 Carwardine, Transatlantic Revivalism, Kindle edition.
out in the Bible and seek to spread it as far and wide as limited resources allow.\textsuperscript{46}

In other words, what makes an evangelical an evangelical is her or his belief in the need of and, in many cases, active devotion to the ubiquitous spread of the gospel across the globe. “We are a coalition of Christians,” Sweeney further articulates, “from all sorts of backgrounds working together in pursuit of a common goal: gospel witness.”\textsuperscript{47}

Sweeney’s understanding of evangelical Christianity as a movement that is loosely based upon the characteristics laid out by Bebbington (detailed in Sweeney’s monograph), but which is fundamentally about the global gospel witness is confirmed by a growing number of anthropological and sociological studies emerging from a variety of sources. In his recent article, “Tracking Global, Evangelical Christianity,” Manual Vasquez argues that this new scholarship is representative of a radical shift in our understanding of what constitutes “evangelical.” This is nothing less, he avers, than “a shift in Christianity’s center of gravity from North to South, as transnational churches like the Brazilian neo-Pentecostal Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, with temples in England, Portugal, the United States, Mozambique, and South Africa, become the new key players.”\textsuperscript{48}

Evangelicalism, which was once primarily European and North American (decidedly Western and Anglo-) in structure and flavor, has become increasingly heterogeneous and multi-positional. Paul Freston’s work is especially relevant in this regard. He argues that – through the processes of indigenization and hybridity –

\textsuperscript{46} Sweeney, \textit{The American Evangelical Story}, 25.

\textsuperscript{47} Sweeney, \textit{The American Evangelical Story}, 24.

evangelical Christianity has taken on forms that should caution scholars not to delve too deeply into power analyses that portray subaltern Christianities as part and parcel of western imperialism. These analyses often cast non-Western evangelicals as puppets or drones who are only ever capable of reproducing dominant power structures and thereby perpetuating the colonial moment (onto themselves as well as onto those to whom they proselytize). He warns that, although US, British, and Continental evangelicalism were and continue to be a part of Western interests, “such activity cannot be assumed a priori to account for a great deal of what Third World actors actually do. The autonomy of Third World evangelicalism, or at least the autonomous appropriation of messages, should be assumed unless proved otherwise.”

This evangelical heterogeneity is evident even between mainstream evangelicalisms that have developed in different nation-states. Differences between U.S. and Canadian Evangelical Christianity are, for example, the result of long, often quarrelsome, historical developments.

When in the nineteenth century Protestant numbers in Upper Canada (later Ontario) caught up to the Catholics in Quebec, the result was a delicate negotiated balance. Canadians of all kinds . . . remained closer to French, English, Scottish, and Irish church practices than their peers in the United States. Canada’s most significant political developments from 1815 to 1914 were reactive: resisting the American invasion and incorporation during the war of 1812, rejecting armed attempts in 1837 and 1838 to turn Upper Canada and Lower Canada (Quebec) into republican imitations of the United States, and embracing confederation in 1867 as, in part, a cautionary move against the great military might displayed by the Union in the American Civil War. The prime factors of public life – ongoing French-English bilateralism, the rejection of republican revolution in favor of

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loyalty to Britain, and a persistent dialectic of attraction cum aversion to the United States – were also prime factors in shaping the churches.\textsuperscript{50} These differences in Canadian political alliances and social theories permeated the religious developments as well and lead to regional differences between Canadian and U.S. versions of Evangelical religiosity. Understanding these differences provides a more nuanced perspective concerning evangelicals in Canada.

Evangelicals in Canada are keen to differentiate themselves, for instance, from their U.S. counterparts. In a recent article written in the \textit{Vancouver Sun} reporter Douglas Todd writes that while evangelicalism in the U.S. is fragmented and made up of loose affiliations, evangelicalism in Canada is decidedly more centrally organized. “The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Ottawa-based umbrella group,” he states, “oversees more than 160 different evangelical denominations, organizations and educational institutions – from the Pentecostal Assemblies and many Baptist denominations to Jews for Jesus and the Promise Keepers.”\textsuperscript{51}

Todd adds that Canadian evangelicals are far less likely to identify themselves as fundamentalists and are typically far less militant in their religiosity.\textsuperscript{52} These differences make it difficult to make sweeping statements about evangelicals – and thus, NAIITS’s involvement with evangelical institutions in both Canada and the U.S. – in monolithic terms.

\textsuperscript{50} Mark Noll, “‘Christian America and Christian Canada’,” \textit{The Cambridge History of Christianity: World Christianities, c. 1815—1914}, eds. Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, (Cambridge, MA: ????), 373.


\textsuperscript{52} Todd, “The State of Evangelicalism,” 2011.
While NAIITS faculty, who are comprised mostly of indigenous people living in urban conditions in Canada and the United States and who live in relative financial comfort (at least compared to those communities living in and stricken by abject poverty), certainly do not constitute what Freston refers to as “Third World actors,” they nonetheless are representative of a group of people who have continually been marginalized by dominant society.

From this we might surmise, then, that NAIITS is representative of an evangelical movement that is 1) wholly invested in the global spread of the gospel, 2) engaged in indigenization through an attempt to reimagine what it means to live biblically, and 3) purposefully in direct tension with the Anglo (western), classist, and orthodox bias of the mainstream evangelical movement.

First, NAIITS faculty members are heavily invested in the worldwide spread of the gospel, especially as that proliferation relates to indigenous populations. Second, they engage in a rigorous attempt to reorient the Biblical narrative, thereby altering significantly the common understanding of Biblical inerrancy. Third, NAIITS faculty and members are part of a transnational network of tribal and denominational organizations whose purpose is to challenge the dominant paradigms of Evangelical Christianity (i.e., their claim that they are not missions-based but rather they attempt to demonstrate for indigenous peoples around the world that “there are alternative ways to express Christian faith that are not so complicit with colonialism”). It is in the second and third features that NAIITS members aggressively set themselves apart from what could be construed as “a repackaging of imperialism.” The entire NAIITS endeavor (which also

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includes the stated missions of each affiliated organization) is to undermine and significantly alter the theological and philosophical structures that support American imperialism.

**Contextualization**

Hybridity, cultural bricolage, mixing, blending, creolization, and syncretism; these are controversial topics in the academy. Often scholars find themselves firmly entrenched on either side of the theoretical battlefield where these concepts are concerned. For example, whether emboldened by the post-modern approaches of Homi Bhabha and Jan Nederveen Pieterse in favor of the concepts of hybridity and syncretism as valuable heuristics of cultural interaction or armed with the deconstructive precision of Jonathan Friedman and Russell McCutcheon in opposition to the concepts of hybridity and syncretism because of their so-called inevitable implications of competing purities, scholars continue to duke it out over the explanatory power of these terms.

What gets lost in the academic tug-of-war, however, are the religious actors who grapple with these terms in their daily lives and theological struggles. Members of NAIITS (North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies), for example, contemplate, challenge, and apply terms like syncretism to their work regularly. Richard Twiss, for example, views syncretism as a process through which Native Americans (as well as Indigenous peoples across the globe) become Christian in their own right, utilizing their particular cultural heritage effectively in the context of Christian worship. He challenges the polemical usage of the term syncretism, suggesting instead that syncretism is everywhere and always a socio-historical fact, part of a natural transition
as an individual or community comes into contact with and adjusts to new information. In doing so, Twiss challenges the disciplinary dichotomy which differentiates between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, inverting the relationship.

A large part of the academic conversation concerning Global (World) Christianities is focused on the issue of localization and the emergence of multiple Christianities. Contextualization is a hot-button issue in the world of missiology these days. Mission theology is rife with mentions of and definitions for contextualization. Missionaries and theologians working in the field struggle with the process of localization/contextualization as, from their normative perspective, much is at stake; for them it could mean the difference between successful conversion and potential perversion of the faith. This is a delicate process and no one missions thinker or theologian has developed a clear-cut formula.

According to Dan Gilliard, for example, a theologian who has published books and articles on the topic, contextualization is an approach to mission through which “insofar as it is humanly possible, an understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ, the Word, is authentically experienced in each and every human situation.” Gilliard’s position sounds somewhat open ended; it allows for the emergence of faith from the ground up, but remains cautious of human fallibility. However, the question as to whether or not a particular local manifestation of faith is “authentically experienced” seems to suggest a vetting process of some kind.

According to the NAIITS statement of faith, first published in the first volume of the annual NAIITS journal, contextualization “is conveying the truth of God’s word in the

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context of a receiving culture in a way that is relevant and makes sense to them.” This process requires three crucial steps to ensure scripturally valid combinations of cultural context and religious (Christian) material. These steps are articulated as follows: “1. Understanding the socio-cultural context of the Biblical passage; 2. Interpreting the meaning of the passage; 3. Conveying the meaning of Scripture in the context of a specific receiving culture.” The precise look and feel of contextualization as understood by NAIITS theologians is demonstrated in Figure 1-1.

The chart is illustrative of how NAIITS theologians attempt to take stock of various items and/or entities typically found in Christian worship. It also demonstrates the process whereby NAIITS theologians have created categorical distinctions between positive, neutral, and potentially harmful consequences of certain objects. Like the native drum, for example, both the piano – found often in bars where intoxicants are sold – and the human body – which can be objectified and sexualized – are capable of being used in “ungodly” ways. The implication is that, as a vernacularized form, the native drum can be used in the context of Christian worship to the same positive effect as typical Western forms. Accompanying this chart is a statement that expresses this notion succinctly.

Creation has an original intent. All things were created by Him and for Him and for His good pleasure they exist. God created all things for His glory. In developing a contextualized style of ministry we are looking to see cultural forms or creation, restored to original intent – praise and worship to Almighty God. Fallen humans use God’s creation “handiwork” in a misdirected manner for idol worship. Worship involves the use of musical instruments, dance, art, and ceremony – all human handiwork.


Original intent, then, is a useful theological mechanism through which NAIITS theologians attempt to empty objects of, what is from their evangelical perspective, cultural impurities that build up over the course of human history. As they contextualize forms, therefore, they make normative decisions about what aspects of indigenous belief and practice “make it in” and, conversely, what aspects must be discarded.

The above are a some examples of the emic, theologically based understandings of contextualization. Beyond the theological perspective, scholars invested in the academic study of religion have been debating the most appropriate way to conceptualize this phenomenon for decades. How do scholars conceptualize religious and cultural mixing without falling into the same normative assessments common among the religious actors they study?

With this concern grounding theoretical endeavors, scholars have problematized terms such as syncretism for its ties to Catholic missions and the attempt to categorize, and thus control, the local manifestations of worship emerging in the colonial periphery. From a purely theoretical perspective, scholars have tried to distance the secular academic usage of the term syncretism from its Catholic heritage, imagining syncretism as a set of beliefs and practices that emerge beyond the limits of orthodoxy. In this vein, the Church condemned syncretic forms of worship at various points throughout colonial history. Thus, scholars run the risk of becoming embroiled in sectarian polemics when employing syncretism as a heuristic category.

In its continued academic usage, some have charged, syncretism as “synchronicity” tends to obscure the inevitable and potentially divisive tensions that arise as two or more forms of religiosity become influential in one’s life. Softer applications of
the term syncretism tend, therefore, to obscure the struggle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy that syncretic practitioners face in their day to day experience. In other words, the term syncretism is often challenged on the basis that it assumes a neatly reconciled blending of two cultural systems.\(^{57}\)

Hybridity is another term that has undergone significant critique for reasons similar to those directed at syncretism. As a conceptual tool, hybridity is rife with problems, not least of which is its problematic nineteenth century history and its close association with the pseudo-scientific creation of racial categories as well as the early twentieth century’s related attempts toward social eugenics. In these contexts, the term hybridity was used to indicate a biological mix between two, previously pure organisms. The implication, therefore, is that what results from this mixing is, at best, something radically new and, at worst, impure. This notion was extended to the realms of culture and religion, carrying with it, the term’s detractors argue, the same conceptual baggage. To talk about religious hybridity, they argue, is to engage in back-door essentialism, assuming the existence of pure forms that mix and become something else.\(^{58}\)

Another issue arises with the use of the term Hybridity. If we accept the above criticism and extend its logic to suggest that there are no pure forms; that all

\(^{57}\) See Anita M. Leopold and Jeppe S. Jensen, et. al., *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005). For an in depth discussion of the etymology, historical developments, possible benefits, and obvious disadvantages of the heuristic *syncretism* see also Charles Stewart’s and Rosalind Shaw’s edited volume *Syncretism/anti-syncretism: The Politics of Synthesis* (1994). Here Stewart and Shaw aptly demonstrate how syncretism, once used by the Church to differentiate “pure” forms of religious expression from “perverted” ones, has now become celebrated among cultural anthropologists as a mainstay and inevitability for cultural actors.

manifestations of culture are necessarily hybrid, then we render the term meaningless. If hybridity can refer to all phenomena at all times and places, so the argument goes, then its heuristic value is severely undermined.

Creolization is a term introduced by Edoaurd Glissant’s study of Caribbean religions and most recently championed by Carribean scholar Mimi Sheller as well as Merinda Simmons, Russell McCutcheon and contributors to the Religion on the Edge project. It is presented as a corrective to the problematics associated with both syncretism and hybridity as heuristic concepts. Its origin is in describing the combination of African and European languages utilized by slaves in Martinique in their attempt to navigate the colonial world within which they were living. It has, though, a different set of inherent problems; not least of which are 1) colonial Protestant's use of the term to denote impure mixtures between Euro-American (Anglo) and indigenous cultural forms, and 2) Iberian colonists’ attempts to construct a thoroughly “American” identity by suggesting that mixture – both cultural and biological – resulted in a superior “creolized” race. In the latter scenario, Iberian colonists appropriated indigenous cultural forms, rendered them their own, and used them in a struggle against European Imperialism while still maintaining colonial impositions of socio-economic control of the indigenous populations in their immediate proximity. 59

Contextualization as a concept may pose some problems of its own. More precisely, its growing popularity among Evangelical scholars and missionaries creates a fuzziness around its precise meaning. In other words, it is now a part of the institutional

apparatus and, thus, in practice comes packaged with certain normative assumptions about how to achieve “contextualization.” Additionally, it assumes (or more precisely, aspires to) a unilateral relationship between the dominant tradition/institution and the local religious elements to which dominant forms come into contact. In other words, contextualization, as it is deployed by missionary efforts influenced by the sources cited above, requires an assimilative process whereby local cultural or religious forms are vetted to determine their fit within the Evangelical framework.

For this reason, when possible I will use an alternative to the term “contextualization” as a descriptive term throughout this project. In those instances where I take step back from the preferred terminology of NAIITS theologians and participants in the NAIITS movement, I will turn to Peggy Levitt’s use of the term “vernacularization.” In her attempt to view religion as a set of practices and ideas that travel with people, Levitt adopts what she refers to as a “transnational optic.” In doing so, she and other scholars are able to view religion as “just one aspect of contemporary social life that operates across borders” and helps illuminate “the actors, ideas, and technologies that are the carriers of religion” (author’s emphasis). “It calls our attention,” she continues, “to the real and imagined, past and present geographies through which religion travels and the pathways and networks that guide the elements circulating within them.”

From this “on-the-move” perspective Levitt outlines the process of vernacularization. Here she draws upon Assemblage theory developed by continental philosophers and cultural geographers (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Legg 2010; Marcus

and Saka 2006) within which the operating metaphor, the “rhizome,” allows for an understanding of religion and culture with “no fixed bounds or conceptual limits” and that also stresses multi-directionality and diversity.” This is far better, she and others contend, than the “tree” metaphor developed in prior attempts to understand religion and demographic shifts. “When parts of the rhizome break off,” she adds, “they can survive on their own, meandering and re-forming or uniting with others, but always along the lines that track back. While ‘de-territorialization’ of assemblages is a central focus, assemblages also settle, have periods of stability, and re-territorialize.”

Vernacularization occurs when a part of a rhizome breaks off, travels to a new space, and must contend with alternative traditions, beliefs, values, norms, economies, political arrangements, and day-to-day practices. Levitt posits that “there are at least three types of vernacularization: the act of building on the imaginative space, momentum, and power of particular global frames without using them directly; the act of translating global ideas so they are locally appropriate and applicable to new issues; and the act of taking core concept, articulating them in locally appropriate ways, and modeling new ways to put them into practice.”

The potential scenarios that follow these processes yield different results. It could happen, for instance, that “elements are integrated into the social field with little lasting effect . . . because they are too small or too different,” resulting in a lack of popular appropriation. Another scenario, however, seems more in line with the circumstances surrounding NAIITS. In this scenario “vernacularization occurs continuously through an

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63 Levitt, “Religion on the Move,” ???.

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unending uploading and downloading, accretion and shedding. Assemblages of all sizes and shapes are appropriated by individuals and groups. If, at first, there was an identifiable core and periphery, the periphery soon becomes a source of beliefs and practices that strongly influence the rapidly disappearing center.”64 The appropriation of NAIITS theology is evident in the growing body of theological work surrounding contextualization. Perusing the publishing house displays, a.k.a. “book show,” during an American Academy of Religion annual meeting, one is immediately aware of the emergent discourse on Global and World Christianities (often from a missiological perspective). There is a billowing up of Missiological texts espousing the value and/or appropriate methods of theological vernacularization. A few examples include (but are in no way limited to) the work of Gene Green, theologian at Wheaton College (who is, coincidentally, heavily invested in the work of the NAIITS program). His work on relevance theory, rethinking mission’s discourse, and emergent theologies takes very seriously the grassroots theological ruminations of indigenous communities across the globe. One could argue that Green’s work is a preliminary move toward the third aspect of the vernacularization process to which Levitt refers. In this scenario, “circulating culture is gradually vernacularized such that eventually the parent cannot be distinguished from the offspring.”65

I would argue that the work of NAIITS, therefore, can be understood as situated somewhere in between the second and third scenarios of vernacularization as expressed by Levitt. NAIITS theologians are certainly embroiled in the process of

64 Levitt, “Religion on the Move,” ???.
65 Levitt, “Religion on the Move,” ???
translating the universalisms of Christian theology into an indigenous framework (and vice versa). They are also attempting to bring the center into further alignment with the periphery. As it relates to the latter, their work is decidedly unfinished. They have yet to acquire official accreditation (although this is in the works and seems likely) and, as such, remain beholden to mainstream Evangelical institutions and must be careful to maintain a delicate balance between legitimate partner and evasive reformer.

Legitimacy and Legitimation

My perspective on the issue of legitimacy is derived from Bourdieu’s theory of practice outlined and amended in various books and articles throughout his long and prolific career. Drawing upon Weber’s theory of religious charisma, Bourdieu argues that the establishment of legitimacy on the part of groups and individuals is contingent upon, first, the acquisition of various forms of capital. Thus, the possibility for the establishment of legitimacy, and thus change in the religious field, resides in the labor and person of what he calls a “spiritual independent entrepreneur.” These figures are capable of producing spiritual goods that contribute “to the subversion of the established symbolic (i.e., priestly) order”; desacralizing the symbolic configurations of the religious specialist and sacralizing the constructions of the dispossessed.” This process, of legitimation, is representative of a semiotic struggle through which the independent entrepreneur engenders a religio-cultural logic that becomes autonomous form the taken-for-granted structures deployed by those who operate from the confines of the established order. This struggle, which according to Bourdieu is specific to the religious

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66 See Weber’s theory of charismatic authority in his monograph *The Sociology of Religion*. In this text, Weber differentiates between types of authority. *Charismatic* authority is a manifestation of authority that emerges from the charisma of group leader. Other types of authority include *legal* authority and *traditional* authority.
field, is a struggle for religious symbolic capital in the competition over the meaning and structure of the religious field as well as its contribution to the habitus. It is precisely this kind of “charisma” or “symbolic capital” that NAIITS theologians are attempting to quarter off and utilize.

Bourdieu’s post-Marxist attempt to broaden the meaning of the term “capital” is particularly useful in making sense of the motivations and intentions of NAIITS faculty and members. Rather than limit the term “capital” to mere money or property exchange, Bourdieu sought to include not only economic capital (money and property) but also symbolic capital (legitimation), social capital (acquaintances and networks), and cultural capital (cultural goods and services including educational credentials). In typical Marxist fashion Bourdieu understood capital as a representation of labor; labor is converted into capital and capital functions as a resource for the acquisition of other valuable resources. The manifestation of capital for Bourdieu, however, is not restricted to money and/or property (economic capital); he argued for an expanded view of capital, one in which capital can emerge as advantageous connections with powerful individuals or groups in a given social body (social capital), or as documents of validation representing one’s academic accomplishments (cultural capital), or as connections between one’s ideas and the norms and values of a given social body (symbolic capital).

To this end, Bourdieu used the term “strategy” as a way to express the idea that all human activities are “oriented towards the maximization of material or symbolic

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profit.”69 The take-away point here is that although there are actions oriented primarily toward cultural, social, or symbolic ends, this does not mean that these actions are not “interested” or aimed at the acquisition or accumulation of a form of “capital.” Indeed, these actions are as interested as those aimed at the acquisition or accumulation of economic capital. They tap into a wellspring of powerful resources that manifest as person-to-person relationships, official documentation, and/or semiotic validation. These resources, moreover, have a certain purchasing power and/or exchange value. The cultural capital invested in a prestigious degree, for example, can facilitate the acquisition of a high-paying job while also placing the individual among a network of relationships with other more politically and socially influential individuals; thus, resulting in an exchange from cultural to both economic and social forms of capital.

Some scholars have accused Bourdieu of simply repackaging economic determinism, however. In some of his later work Bourdieu stated that although cultural, social, and symbolic capital constitute autonomous forms of power, they are nonetheless subject to and dominated by economic capital. He took this position because of his observation that cultural markets had not been and likely never would be influential enough to surpass the influence of corporations or states. Corporations and Nation-states, he averred, . . .

are what they are if and only if the economic principle of stratification asserts its real dominance, which it does, in the long run, even in the relatively autonomous field of cultural production, where the divergence between specific value and market value tends to disappear in the course of time.70

Thus, because it is distributed unevenly and because its abundance or shortage either facilitates or hinders the accumulation of other forms of capital, economic capital assumes primacy in Bourdieu’s “economy of practice.” Cultural, social, and symbolic capital are, he argued in one of his most recent works, “disguised forms of economic capital.” It is precisely this perspective that has led some critics to suggest that Bourdieu’s theory amounts to nothing more than recast economic determinism.

In other work, however, Bourdieu’s framework seems more preoccupied with the accumulation and deployment of symbolic capital. In his assessment of the emergence of the state, Bourdieu argues that symbolic capital is “any property (any form of capital whether physical economic, cultural, or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value.” He further argues that “everything points to the concentration of a symbolic capital of recognized authority which, though it has been ignored by all the existing theories of the genesis of the state, appears as the condition or, at minimum, the correlate of all other forms of concentration, if they endure at all.” In this formulation, Bourdieu seems to place symbolic capital at the highest rung on his hierarchy of types of capital. Indeed, economic capital, he avers, would be meaningless without the symbolic, cultural, and social structures through which it is given meaning, value, and worth.

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73 Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 47.
The latter formulation will provide more adequate explanatory purchase for this project. For, while NAIITS faculty certainly need economic capital and work to attain it, they don’t seem to be motivated or driven solely by the desire for economic capital accumulation. The western preoccupation with economic value is one of the targeted problems to which NAIITS members have dedicated their efforts. They are engaged in a program whose aim it is to undermine these economically mediated relations (i.e., that the socio-economic might of the west in tandem with the cultural forms that it favors has systematically devalued and dominated Indigenous/Native articulations of Christian religiosity since the time of contact). What is needed, then, is a supplemental theory that will answer the question posed by Michel de Certeau who, in his monograph titled The Practice of Everyday Life, sought to unearth the subtle but subversive practices of popular consumption:

> If it is true that the grid of “discipline” is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them?74

Cast in the context of our current discussion, if it is true that the western economic and symbolic systems are so extensive and dominant, then what are the specific practices common among NAIITS members that straddle the fence between conformity and subversion? In what ways do they engage the system precisely in an effort to undermine it? NAIITS faculty seem to be in the business of exchanging or transmuting economic capital into cultural, social, and symbolic power. In other words, they utilize the economic capital that they attain through interested practices as a mechanism for

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the further accumulation of social, cultural, and symbolic capital in an attempt to achieve their political goals. It seems prudent, then, for the purposes of this study to stick more closely to Bourdieu's preoccupation with symbolic capital as fundamental and as that which allows for the signification, valuation, and/or elevation of other forms of capital; including and especially economic capital. For, what would economic capital be without the legitimizing force of symbolic capital to convince us of its value and vitality?

NAIITS – an academic program seeking accreditation – as well as its faculty who are highly educated, degree holding Indigenous people, exemplify Bourdieu's theoretical discussion of “interested action” and “capital accumulation/exchange” mentioned above. They also challenge Bourdieu’s model, however, operating from within, all the while intending to fundamentally alter, the dominant theological paradigm. What is more, they not only intend to fundamentally alter the religious field as it exists in North America, but have aspirations to and are actively engaged in the work that will, as they perceive it, enable this paradigmatic shift on a global scale. They have successfully established trans-indigenous networks that are buttressed by the transnational religious identity I refer to as Biblical Indigeneity which is additionally infused and charged with institutional and symbolic legitimacy. Hence, the work of De Certeau and his attempt to locate subversion in the practices of everyday life can function, arguably, as a corrective to Bourdieu’s fatalistic tendency to favor dominant structures (especially in the case of the concept of habitus).75 As (semi-)independent entrepreneurs, NAIITS members

75 Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, which he borrowed from Marcel Mauss, has engendered a great deal of debate among social scientists and philosophers as his theoretical models have become increasingly en vogue. Chief among many concerns is the charge that habitus, as Bourdieu developed it, harkens back to old-school structural functionalism, which in its most egregious applications cast people as drones, wholly subject to the overarching and internalized structures of their respective cultures. In this theoretical model, so the critiques go, people lack agency to the extent that it is seemingly impossible for grassroots, social change to occur.
utilize these channels of legitimacy in order to facilitate and bolster their construction of a systematic Indigenous theology while contributing also to similar projects among various Indigenous communities transnationally. Of particular interest to this study, however, is that all of these efforts are trained toward the challenging of precisely those dominant structures from which legitimacy (the accumulation of social, cultural, and symbolic capital) was originally acquired.

Pan Indigenous, Pan-Indigenisms, Ethnogenesis, or Trans-Indigenous?

Based on the concepts Pan-Indigenous and Pan-Indigenism, some scholars have made the claim that, through their emergent international work and transnational activities throughout the twentieth century, indigenous people have become embroiled in the process of ethnogenesis. The implication here is that a new global indigenous ethnicity is emerging (or has emerged) as indigenous peoples from around the world have interacted, traded cultural influences, and shared ideas.

I would caution against this line of thought; that there is a so-called pan-indian or pan-indigenism emerging in the North American context and abroad. Rather, I would argue that Indigeneity constitutes a global identity but one that simultaneously allows for and promotes a variety of expressions. Furthermore, to say that something is “pan” is to assume that it (potentially) functions as a monolith, sucking everything up into a single expression of identity. I would urge scholars to use instead the prefix “trans” as it expresses a sense of border crossing without assuming comprehensive sameness.

See, for example, Joane Nagel’s American Indian Ethnic Renewal (1996), Ronald Niezen’s The Origins of Indigenism (2003), Donald Lee Fixico’s The Urban Indian Experience in America (2000). In his edited volume titled History, Power, and Identity (), Jonathan Hill defines ethnogenesis as “a process of authentically re-making new social identities through creatively rediscovering and refashioning components of tradition, such as oral narratives, written texts, and material artefacts.”
What is occurring across the United States, Canada, and globally is a trans-ethnic phenomenon within which indigenous peoples engage one another, build coalitions, and establish networks.

To be sure, this process of coming together under the heading of “indigenous” or “indigeneity” requires a set of symbols through which disparate cultural entities can relate. The modern powwow is certainly an instance of this symbolic formulation, specifically as it relates to the North American cultural context. This, however, does not constitute the emergence or development of a single Indian ethnic identity. This is obvious to those of us who have spent considerable time among Native peoples powwow communities who engage in trans- indigenous events as attendees take care to, at the beginning of every new phase of the event, express their local ethnic identity and place that particularity in conversation with (or, sometimes in juxtaposition to) the more general expressions of Native-ness or indigeneity. Therefore, these cultural and symbolic formulations, I would argue, function more as the *lingua-franca* or, at best, a common language or standardized symbolisms of Indigeneity. From a transnational and global perspective this *lingua-franca* can vary greatly from one cultural context to another.

While North American Indigenous peoples develop a set of symbols and practices associated with their particular brand of trans- indigenous organizing, Polynesian or Latin American indigenous peoples develop a set of symbols and practices that make sense in their own cultural contexts and specific to their particular coalition-building strategies. There may even be borrowing from one cultural center to the next (are powwows becoming popularized in other parts of the world?). Still, this
borrowing entails a certain degree of cultural vernacularization resulting in regionally specific reflections of Indigeneity and, as such, should not lead scholars to assume the existence of a singular, all-encompassing, “Pan-Indian” identity to the extent that a new, global ethnicity is being formed.

Chadwick Allen’s use of the term “trans-indigenous” in his examination of the emergence of a global indigenous literature is especially useful in this regard. His work is an attempt to illumine the ways in which Indigenous artists and writers, “who often work in multiple media and who often juxtapose genres and forms.” It is from this starting point that he attempts to establish an “Indigenous literary studies that locates itself firmly in the specificity of the Indigenous local while remaining always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global.”

Allen’s fundamental goal is to develop a method for study that avoids some of the concerns I have mentioned above; not least of which is the monolithic heuristics in question. As part of this endeavor, he also champions the use of the prefix trans- as a way to accomplish the following:

acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts. Similar to terms like translation, transnational, and transform, trans-Indigenous may be able to bear the complex, contingent asymmetry and the potential risks of uneven encounters born by the preposition across. It may be able to indicate the specific agency and situated momentum carried by the preposition through. It may be able to harbor the potential of change as both transitive and intransitive verb, and as both noun and adjective.

Allen further argues that through the use of such complex and multi-idiomatic prefix, we might be empowered to better understand contemporary Indigenous work that is firmly

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entrenched in the global, reflecting a simultaneously multi-vocal and mono-vocal presence of Indigeneity today.

The utility of this method, as he plainly details, is to have the tools to interpret and better understand Native literary and artistic productions that gather together, integrate, and deploy a variety of indigenous forms. Allen cites the artwork of Maori artist Fred Graham, a multi-media sculpture, whose artistic compositions often include trans-Indigenous symbols. His work titled *Whakamutunga* (Metamorphosis), for example, incorporates both Maori and American Northwest Coast symbol systems. Using a trans-Indigenous lens, Allen argues, we can view these manifestations, not as pan-indigenous hybridities representative of something wholly novel, but as “indigenous-to-indigenous survivals and renewals” that highlight “travel, exchange, and collaborative production” in the face of neocolonial struggles.79

NAIITS theology, website composition, and various other practices are a reflections of this tension between Indigenous universalism and ethnic particularity. While indigeneity is cast as a more Biblically oriented way of being, Indigeneity is also understood to operate as an umbrella term for endless possible manifestations of cultural expression (with, of course, as set of common ontological orientations). In this light, I argue for and use throughout this project the term trans-Indigenous as a descriptor of the NAIITS theological literature and network building strategies. NAIITS theology, for example, draws upon a common set of ontological orientations increasingly recognized as inherently indigenous by members of indigenous communities around the world.

Chapter Outline

In the first section of this project I spend considerable time providing an historical setting. This purpose of this historical setting is two-fold. First, it is meant to create a sense orientation; to give the reader a sense of historical continuity between the subject matter of this research, NAIITS, and the variety of Native American experiences, movements, and intellectual traditions of the past. Second, it is meant to illustrate the history to which NAIITS theologians are responding. In other words, the historical narrative provides a trove of socio-economic, political, and philosophical circumstances to which NAIITS theologians issue forth social critique, theological rumination, and political activism.

Delving into the history of the processes of urbanization, Chapter 2 examines the effects of urban migration on Native North American communities and individual identities. In an attempt to connect the effects of Twentieth Century urbanization policies with the contemporary work of NAIITS theologians I make inter-tribal network building a central focus of the chapter.

Chapters 3 and 4 are dedicated to ideas. For centuries Native Americans across North America have been engaged in the process of reconciling their world with that of the massive influx of Euro-American immigrants. Faced with the colonial impulse that was built into the theology of Christian missionization (which, coincidently, also permeated Euro-American and United States dealings with Native Americans), Native Americans have had to engage in a complicated process of give and take, adopting some aspects of Christian/Western thinking and discarding others. This section is a re-telling of that history.
Chapter 3 is an abrogated sampling of the diverse range of ideas that emerged across North America as Native American communities attempted to reconcile Christian concepts and themes with the belief systems and life-ways of their own Pre-Columbian making. The chapter delves into the history of important figures, key movements, and specific ideas as a way to provide a Native Christian intellectual history, highlighting patterns of belief and practice that emerged in certain instances of cultural adaptation. The picture that emerges from this endeavor is of a people who were particularly skilled in adapting to new ideas, borrowing forms and contents from settlement populations and missionary efforts, repurposing them, and redeploying them to their own ends.

Chapter 4 is an attempt to highlight what are, I argue, the most salient ideas being developed and deployed by NAIITS theologians. My aim here is that readers will recognize both the continuities and departures between, by way of an example, the prophetic proclamations of the eighteenth century Delaware prophet Neolin and the contemporary written work of the late Richard Twiss.

It is important to note that in placing these two chapters before those dealing with the practices of legitimacy my intention was not to suggest the existence of a causal change wherein ideas function as prime movers, the causal element or motivating factors for action. On the contrary, many of the practices described in this project have been and were developed long before they were ever outlined in written form or discussed in theological writing. In other words, I am not committing to what some scholars have referred to as a “somatophobic” approach to religion, an approach that
neglects the significance of the material and physical body in favor of the written tomes and sacred texts so commonly associated with so-called “World Religions.”

Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to the major figures, events, and institutions directly involved in the emergence of NAIITS as a theological movement and educational program. In an attempt to articulate the connection between the individuals, organizations, and institutions I employ the theory of dominant networks, counter-networks, and communication power developed by Manuel Castells.

More specifically, Chapter 5 delves into the lives of several of the most influential members of NAIITS. Based on a series of life-history interviews, this chapter illumines the lives of the board members as they navigated their lives on the way toward developing friendships with one another and eventually creating NAIITS. What the reader will no doubt notice, and what I have tried to highlight, is the pattern of discourse between the life stories of the board members. Each describes both an initial born again experience within which Jesus is initially accepted into one’s life, and then, interestingly, a second born again experience, one of becoming Indigenous anew. Having been raised in an urban context, the NAIITS theologians were part of a second generation of young indigenous peoples who struggled with cultural integration and, thus, endeavored to achieve this later in life subsequent to their initial “rebirth” as “followers of Christ.”

80 For more on the “somatophobic” approach to the study of religion see Manuel Vásquez’s More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion. Also see Edward Slingerland’s Edward. “Who’s Afraid of Reductionism? The Study of Religion in the Age of Cognitive Science.” Journal of the American Academy of Religion, (76, no. 2: June 2008), 379. Slingerland’s primary concern regarding the underlying epistemological approach—in which scholars of religion operate—involves the difference between dualistic conceptions versus holistic conceptions of mind and body. He claims that western scholars of religion are stuck in a dualistic way of thinking about these entities within which manifestations of the mind become wholly separate from the body once passed on. In other words, discourse and text become paramount and the body, in effect, is a mere product.
Chapter 6 outlines, in as much detail as was possible, the intricacies of the social and institutional networks encompassing NAIITS. I attempt to map out the nature of the various connections, both domestic and international. Additionally, Chapter 6 investigates the use of Internet Communication Technologies as a mechanism of identity construction and networked legitimation. Using Castells as a general theoretical model and other scholars who have worked more specifically with Native communities who have employed the use of Internet Communication Technologies, I attempt to interpret the ways in which NAIITS has produced its image on the net.

Chapters 5 and 6, furthermore, are a part of the larger goal of attempting to understand the way in which contemporary Indigenous peoples attempt to carve out a space for themselves. As these chapters attest, Indigenous peoples, along with the rest of the world, have become enveloped by and fashioners of the network society. Their emergence as a viable theological community resulted from global movements of Indigenous Christian communities around the world who were having similar and related neo-colonial experiences as it relates to the Christian/theological production of knowledge. Concomitant with the rest of the globe, Indigenous communities became adept networkers, developing meaningful and productive relationships between themselves and institutions that could legitimate their work and aspirations. Finally, in concert with technologically savvy social media-ites the world over, Indigenous communities have developed a repertoire of internet communication technology (ICT) skills that enable them to 1) maintain active ties between network nodes, individuals, and onlookers, 2) put on display and deploy the legitimacy acquired through the various practices associated with mainstream institutions, and 3) disseminate that nascent body
of knowledge to a wider audience, strengthening their cause through amassing a viewership.

Chapter 7 covers the history, in abridged form, of the relationship between Native North Americans and the systems of Euro-American education. This is vital backdrop if we are to understand fully the work of NAIITS. One of the key functions of the NAIITS program, as the founders and current board members see it, is to navigate the academy (specifically in its theological incarnation), negotiating between strategies of legitimation and evasion. References to this history are made regularly during NAIITS symposiums and affiliated events as well as in their published works.

Chapter 8 examines in detail the annual NAIITS symposium. In 2016, NAIITS theologians conducted their thirteenth annual symposium at Tyndale University College and Seminary in the suburbs of Toronto. I take as my starting point here the idea that all academic symposiums, not just those conducted by NAIITS, are practices in academic legitimation. In this light, they all are dependent upon a series of practices (ritualizations) whose aim it is to confer legitimacy onto both the work presented and the presenter herself. Here, the aim is to demonstrate, what I argue, are the specific contents of the NAIITS counter-network. The driving question is: what are the practices that, first, provide NAIITS with legitimating power, but second, also provide a mechanism through which they can effectively attempt to fundamentally alter the way that the dominant networks do business? Throughout this project I have made repeated reference to Michel De Certeau’s theory of practice and the question that, in his estimation, motivates his program of study. He asks: what are the “procedures that
manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them.\[^{81}\] This section will attempt to provide an answer to this question.

Finally, in the concluding Chapter 9, I offer a brief synopsis of the project from start to finish in an attempt to connect all the dots. Following that necessary task, I provide an in-depth mapping of my analytical and theoretical perspective as it relates to the work of NAIITS. I begin with Manual Castells and his theory of communicative power, which is accumulated by counter networks in an attempt to reprogram dominant networks. I then move into what I consider are the key components, or “contents,” as I call them, of this reprogramming effort. In other words, I examine the practices developed by NAIITS whose aim it is to draw legitimating power from dominant networked institutions while simultaneously challenging them and deploying alternative programming. These practices include the theological writing, the NAIITS symposiums, and the affiliated events such as Wiconi Family Camps and Sing to the Mountain Native American Conferences. Throughout these practices there exists a reoccurring pattern; the interplay between mockery and inversion.

NAIITS theologians and affiliated members, while thoroughly invested in the Evangelical world of belief and practice, engage in a patterned mockery of the dominant institutional milieu. They point the finger at several key aspects of the dominant Evangelical worldview (i.e., the loss of connection to land, commodification of natural resources, loss of community, emergence of hyper-individualism, rigid conceptions of time and space, what constitutes legitimate knowledge, the preoccupation with written sources and the devaluation of oral transference of information, and the list goes on)

and equate that, through the theology of Biblical Indigeneity, to a displacement from
Biblical truth. From this perspective, I argue that a key feature of the NAIITS counter-
network endeavor is the development of key cultural inversions; namely, the inversion of
power dynamics, the inversion of conquest, the inversion of the assimilation narrative,
and the inversion of the diasporic condition. Through the ritualized inversions of power
dynamics and geographical conquest during symposiums camps, and conferences,
NAIITS theologians and members engage in a re-alignment of the mission field; who
has access to Biblical truth and who is in need of conversion are turned up-side down.
The concept of land, as well as community as a manifestation of intrinsic connections to
land, is central here; it allows NAIITS theologians to suggest that, due to the proximity of
Scripture to Indigenous ontology and epistemology, the Euro-American settler
population is actually that which stands at the furthest remove from living in a way that
is Biblically valid. Thus, Euro-Americans are helplessly diasporic, their displacement not
only a consequence of vast distance between their current dwelling and their indigenous
homeland but also because of the philosophical and ontological gulf between the Euro-
American way of life and the Biblical preference for cultural diversity as well as
indigenous ontologies. In this sense, Euro-Americans are the mission field; they must
be brought back to ontological and epistemological equilibrium; they must be born again
. . . again, ushered back into the Indigenous, and thus, Biblically oriented fold.
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<th>Potential Focus &amp; Meaning</th>
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Figure 1-1. NAIITS Contextualization Chart\(^1\)

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CHAPTER 2
URBANIZATION AND TRANS-INDIGENOUS NETWORKS

As discussed in Chapter 1, NAIITS is decidedly an urban movement. As a “learning community” and official academic program it is comprised of a majority Indigenous faculty hailing from various cities across North America—including, Portland, Oregon; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Montreal, Quebec, Canada; Vancouver, BC, Canada; and Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Consequently, one could argue that NAIITs is a continuation of and remains a part of processes scholars have referred to as “urbanization” and “ethnic renewal.” The former is characterized by migrations from reservations to major urban centers, often encouraged and incentivized by the federal governments BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs). The latter refers to a multi-faceted process whereby—through demographic shifts, migration, and economic gain—Native Americans have recovered or rejuvenated their cultures, communities, languages, practices, social identities, and, in some cases, tribal (or “community”) claims to sovereignty. This has been achieved, largely, through the formation of what Nagel refers to as “supra-tribal” organizations. Other scholars have termed these movements “pan-Indian” or “pan-Indianism.”

The extent to which “Pan-Indianism” exists as an emic form of Native American identity, however, has been contested. Scholars such as Fixico and Nagel have gone as far as to claim that urbanization has facilitated a new ethnic identity, the latter referring to this process as a form of “ethnogenesis.” Fixico describes this phenomenon succinctly:

Urbanization fostered pan-Indianism as a new “Indianness” to which American Indians could belong and find security within a group membership. Since the relocation experience of the 1950s and 1960s, and the development of a viable urban Indian population in the 1970s, a
modern pan-Indianness has come about. It may be that the new pan-Indianness in the cities has developed a new Indian culture that is urban oriented. In support of the Indian identity, the urban Indian movement has cut across tribal lines unaware as Indian living in cities gathered for political, social, or other needs, and for economic reasons.¹

From this perspective, pan-Indianism is not only a group identity emerging out of practical necessity, it also has engendered the development of an urban-Indian culture.

This “cosmopolitan” Indianism takes different forms, suggests Fixico, in different cities; Chicago Indians, for instance, look and behave differently than Denver Indians.

Detractors of the term, on the other hand, charge that the term is an etic descriptor, having little value for Native Americans who remain wary of its usage. While the term pan-Indian is most applicable, it is charged, to urban natives it nonetheless suggests a comprehensive acceptance. A rigorous and in-depth analysis of the claims that urban Indians constitute a “new ethnic group” or a process of “ethnogenesis” is beyond the scope of this project. I will instead promote the use of a different term; what I am calling “trans- indigenous networks.” As a contemporary “trans- indigenous network,” consisting primarily of indigenous peoples from the United States and Canada, NAIITS was made possible by the radical changes in global and national politics and economics throughout the twentieth century. These changes are most evident in the areas of labor, urban representation, and education (which will be discussed in more detail in chapter two).

What I am referring to as the development of “trans-indigenous networks” consisting of a set of cultural formulations – cultural formulations associated specifically with being “indigenous” – that speak to the common trends inherent to colonial and neo-

¹ Donald L. Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America*, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 140.
colonial experiences might also be understood from the perspective of Stuart Hall’s nuanced discussion concerning identity. He posited that identity consists of two competing or interwoven senses of identity. There is the “essential” identity; that which provides us with “stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history,” and there is the identity of becoming; that which is “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power.”2 We could perhaps add the identity emerging out of “trans-Indigenous networks” to this complex mix, a third, co-produced form of identity that allows for the discursive and practiced transition from one context to the other. So, far from the binaries of reservation versus off-reservation, urban Indian versus reservation Indian; “traditional/authentic” versus “assimilated/inauthentic,” (or even to go so far as to suggest the “ethnogenesis” of a “pan-Indian ethnicity”) we may be better served by Hall’s sense of identity accompanied by the notion of “trans-Indigenous networks.” It is from the perspective of the latter that I carry forward.3

Additionally, as will be made clear in Chapter 4, this trans-Indigenous cultural formation that emerged out of the Twentieth century experience of urbanization is operating for NAIITS in interesting ways. The lingua-franca of Indigeneity, as I have termed it, is being synthesized with scripture through the development of, what I refer to as, Biblical Indigeneity. For now, we turn to the history of Native American urbanization in the twentieth century to provide an orientation for what is to come.

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3 I outline the move toward trans-Indigenous networks in the introduction with the help of Chadwick Allen and his attempt to develop methodologies – trans-Indigenous in nature – that would allow for a richer understanding of the ways in which indigenous peoples cross ethnic boundaries, borrowing symbols, discourses, and practices from one another in an attempt to navigate the neocolonial moment.
The United States Context

The effects of colonialism on the Native population in the U.S. is well-documented. Nagel documents this historical development in stark relief in her work.

The number of North American Indians declined from an estimated 2 to 5 million at the time of European contact to fewer than 250,000 at the end of the nineteenth century. The decrease in the number of Indians was accompanied by a marked reduction in the number of native societies or ‘tribes.’ The number of distinct language and dialect communities at the time of contact were estimated at more than 1,000. This number dwindled to slightly more than 300 Indian groups or ‘entities’ officially recognized by the United States Department of Interior in the 1990s. It is this demographic reduction and the consequential scarcity of cultural expression that led to assumptions that Native Americans were becoming or had already become extinct.

The ubiquitous growth of trans-indigenous networks across North America resulted from a series of macro-level processes, federal policy reforms both in the U.S. and Canada, and the weighing of options by Native Americans themselves, often resulting in urban migration. On a global scale, one could argue that the promise of self-determination, which was expressed as a primary goal of the League of Nations at the time of its founding in 1920, engendered a renewed dedication to the lives of aboriginal peoples around the world. This well-intentioned mission of the League of Nations found little traction, however, as delegations were repeatedly deemed “unrepresented,” denying them a seat at the table. One such delegation, led by Deskaheh, chief of the Younger Bear Clan of the Cayuga Nation and spokesman of the Six Nations of the Grand River Land near Brantford, Ontario, sought to challenge his peoples’ loss of

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sovereignty under the Indian Act (first passed in 1876 and remaining in effect today). Ultimately, however, the League’s primary allegiance was to the stability of the state, issuing a statement that urged Deskaheh and his followers to fulfill their duty as minorities to “cooperate as citizens loyal to the nation.” Sovereignty, in this case, was considered a threat to the integrity of the state and the League could not afford to side with, what its members must have considered, a separatist faction. Concomitantly, the formation of the ILO (International Labor Organization) in 1921 brought with it a focus on “native” laborers specifically. Unfortunately, however, “the brutal treatment of laborers,” Neizen explains, was all too often “responded to, not as a violation of rights, freedom, or human dignity, but as unsound and unproductive colonial practice.” While these global organizations failed as effective avenues for Native grievances, they nonetheless set the stage for subsequent and more effective forums for native activism, organization, and policy reform (both nationally and internationally).

The education policies from the late 1800s to the 1960s in the United States and Canada in particular were fundamentally concerned with the process of assimilating Native Americans into mainstream society. This meant that Native children—from reservation schools to the boarding schools—were encouraged or, in many cases, forced to learn and speak English as their primary form of communication. While this certainly stymied the continued usage and survival of Native Languages, it “had the unintended consequence of supplying students from linguistically diverse tribes with a lingua franca for intertribal communication that was essential to the development of

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intertribal organizations supra-tribal, ‘Indian’ identification and activism in the twentieth century.”^6

The early part of the twentieth century was characterized by the formation of regional Indian organizations whose purpose was to secure rights at the local level. The ANB (Alaska Native Brotherhood), founded in 1912 by mostly Tingit and Haida men, became instrumental in the re-appropriation of land as well as the acquisition of voting rights during the 1920s. The Nanticoke of Delaware established the Nanticoke Indian Association in the 1920s, which became legally recognized under Delaware law. “Through their incorporation, charter, and bylaws,” Iverson explains, “the Nanticokes obtained a form of state acknowledgement of their status as Indians and established a precedent followed by other Indian groups in the Carolinas, Rhode Island, and Virginia.” Movements such as these occurring throughout the United States culminated with the further recognition of Native peoples in the Citizen Act of 1924, finally granting citizenship to all Native Americans. States, however, continued to issue local-level restrictions on voting for Native Americans.^7

The steady growth and expansion of tourism in the early twentieth century motivated the Mashpees, who were located on Cape Cod, to engage in the process of revitalization. In a coalition with other Indian groups nearby, the Mashpees formed the Wampanoag Nation in 1928. Their first powwow included a speech by Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell as well as various events demonstrating, in stark relief, Wampanoag identity. Events such as these functioned as test cases, blueprints from

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which other tribes could model their own processes of organization formation and identity assertion.\(^8\)

On the heels of the massive stock market crash of 1929, the 1930s were witness to a series of major social and political upheavals on a global scale; namely, the disintegration of the League of Nations, a growing preoccupation with poverty and its causes, the rise of fascist dictatorships (most notably in Europe and South America), and the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt to the Presidency the United States initiated its move from the previous laissez-faire socio-economic regime to one focused more on welfare and a commitment to the proliferation of government-sponsored programs aimed at the effects of the Great Depression.

The Indian Renewal Act, instigated by Lewis Miriam in the 1930s and commonly referred to as the “Indian New Deal,” allowed for an increase in official, political recognition. Subsequent legislation such as the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 facilitated improvements in land reacquisition, education, and health care. This increased recognition was established by a return to local self-government which in turn enabled the ratification of tribal constitutions, election of tribal officials, and the growth of tribal-led corporations whose profits were allocated toward reservation development. This latter development was taken up by and further confirmed by the Camaroffs who argued that indigenous “practices have been inextricably entwined with economic ‘development’ since the early 1900s,” economically-mined practices consisting of activities like craft-making and stage-performance to market the indigenous way of life.

\(^8\) Iverson, ‘We Are Still Here,’ 62-65.
Thus, for Native Americans, “culture and economy here have, from the first, been mutually constitutive.”

These activities, furthermore, were given legal weight on 1934 with the passing of the Wheeler-Howard Act, better known as the Indian Regulation Act (IRA). The Comaroff’s point to two sections in particular—10 and 17—that were instrumental in the subsequent formulations of various indigenous mega-corporations. They cite the following in an attempt to illustrate their point.

According to section 17, the secretary of interior might issue a charter to [a] tribe: Provided, that such a charter shall not become operative until ratified at a special election by a majority vote of the adult Indians living on the reservation. Such a charter may convey to the incorporated tribe the power to purchase, take by gift, or bequest, or otherwise, own, hold, manage, operate, and dispose of property of every description, real and personal, including the power to purchase restricted Indian lands and to issue in exchange therefore interests in corporate property, and such further powers as may be incidental to the conduct of corporate business, not inconsistent with law . . . (their emphasis)

Many Native tribes, therefore, have taken the form of corporations, capable of engaging in every kind of activity known to corporate America. Indigenous corporate endeavors are exemplified most notably in the Casino Gaming industry. Spear-headed by the Seminole tribe in Florida, Gaming has become a huge source of revenue as well as a mechanism through which Seminole Indian culture is repackaged and sold to the masses. This, in turn, has created a copy-cat effect as Indian-run casinos have been popping up all over the United States since the late nineteen eighties. Indeed, as the Comaroffs point out, “it appears to have been [the Seminole] enterprise . . . that brought

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9 Jean Cameroff and John Cameroff, Ethnicity Inc., (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 60.
10 Cameroff and Cameroff, Ethnicity Inc., 60.
11 See Jessica Cattelino’s High Stakes (2004), and “Florida Seminole Housing and the Social Meanings of Sovereignty” (2006).
many Indian groups “back from cultural extinction’ (357); just as, in Hainan and Yunnan, Cajun Louisiana and Maori New Zealand, Bali and Sekhunkuneland, entry into the tourist market has underwritten the Return of the Native by yielding substantial Returns on Nativeness, both material and social.”12

The social and political climate during and following the Second World War, Niezen points out, led to an exponential increase in awareness of issues of indigenous peoples. He documented four key features of political, social, and cultural thought that emerged following the war that contributed to the emergence of indigenous rights as well as indigenism as an ethnic category. He lists these in detailed fashion:

First, the struggle against fascism contributed to a greater receptiveness at the international level to measures for the protection of minorities . . . . Second, . . . [a] raised global awareness of political hegemony and the myriad forms of cultural suppression that had seemed a natural part of the “civilizing” process in earlier generations. . . . Third, assimilation policies that used formal education as a means of eliminating tribal cultures . . . [had] clearly failed in their goal in eliminating all vestiges of attachment to tradition, while unintentionally contributing to intertribal identity, broader political unity, and the training of educated leaders. . . . Finally, the rise of an indigenous “middle class” as an epiphenomenon of assimilation policies . . . [and] the rapid growth in numbers of indigenous NGOs representing indigenous interests.13

These broad socio-cultural concerns, which are also indicative of what many have deemed the radical, paradigmatic, epistemological shift from modernity to post-modernism, have enabled a loosening of the rigid policies that barred indigenous peoples from policy-making discussions of the past. While circumstances remain less than ideal in the post WWII era, Native North Americans experienced new-found

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12 Cameroffs, Ethnicty Inc., 64, 65.

advances in many causes stymied by the assimilationist policies characterized by the modernist politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the United States (and North America more broadly), World War II, as Nagel also points out, contributed to the development of intertribal communication and organization. “The war changed forever,” she avers, “American Indians’ view of themselves and their relationship to the larger society.”¹⁴ This phenomenon is easily verified in the context of powwow culture. There is, without fail, a portion of most powwows set aside for the recognition and celebration of Native war veterans. In these processions it is common to see Native Americans dressed in some combination of both their “traditional garb” and military uniforms while also carrying flags that represent both the United States and their respective tribal affiliations. The G.I. Bill and the federal Indian employment and urban relocation policies in the 50s and 60s were responsible for this increased level of political engagement.

The war offered Native Americans unprecedented access to jobs and military involvement. Natives served in every branch of the military and nearly fifty thousand found employment among the wartime industries. These developments, as Fixico has documented, “convinced bureaucrats that the Native American populace was ready to leave the reservations” and become fully integrated into the broader American economy and culture. To those ends Dillon S. Myer, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at the time, created the Branch of Placement and Relocation in 1951 with the added expectation that urbanization would provide a sharp increase in Native Americans’ standards of living. Moving from the reservation to the city, therefore, was a part of the

¹⁴ Nagel, American Indian Ethnic Renewal, 213.
desire, held among many Native Americans, to count as fundamentally “American,” a fervor that emerged and proliferated after the war. What is more, as a consequence of the anxiety associated with global armed conflict this sentiment usually emphasized capital accumulation and financial savings. “American Indians,” Fixico makes clear, “were caught up in the patriotic sweep that anything different was un-American.”

It is estimated that “from the close of World War II to the end of 1957, . . . one hundred thousand Indians had left reservations” in search of the way of life promoted by the relocation agency. Relocation was a complicated process requiring profound adjustment on the part of Native Americans. The work-week schedule, preoccupation with time and punctuality, racism and prejudice directed against Native Americans, lack of natural environments, and other features of mainstream urban-American life proved stifling to many Native American relocatees. Some returned to the reservation. Others remained in the city and struggled mightily.

Migration to urban centers and urbanization had a profound impact on the Native American community as a whole. For Fixico urbanization marked a period of rapid re-identification, requiring Indians living in urban conditions to establish “community networks” not wholly unlike those of the pre-colonial. Urban Indians, faced not only with the effects of colonial history but also the complex negotiations of city dwelling, are different from their reservation cousins, however, in that they engage in supra-tribal associations on a significantly more frequent basis; so much so that, as Fixico points out, city-specific Indian identities have emerged signaling differences between Chicago Indians and San Francisco Bay Indians or Los Angeles Indians and Denver Indians.

Since the 1960s there has been explosive growth in the number of Indian organizations and associations, newspapers, tribal colleges, and American Indian Studies programs, as well as a dramatically increased level of political action, including lobbying, litigation, and activism. . .

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15 Donald Fixico, The Urban Indian Experience in America, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 9, 10.

16 Fixico, The Urban Indian, 20-25.
[which] has served as an important catalyst for the resurgence of individual native identity reflected in the U.S. census and the renewal of tribal and urban community life marked by cultural and religious revivals, social and community development programs, historical research projects, and efforts to repatriate Indian remains and artifacts. For Nagel, of course, this resurgence was the consequence of the Red Power movement that spawned in the 1960s. The Red Power movement subsequently motivated and facilitated a diverse range of additional Indian renewal movements that have emerged since the 1960s. Red Power, her research shows, would not have been possible were it not for a series of crucial federal Indians policies.

As scholars have noted, community building and kinship ties have provided needed support for Native Americans living in urban condition. Similar to specific pre-urbanization moments throughout colonial history, the struggles and anxieties caused by urbanization motivated novel kinds of social arrangements. “Pan-Indianism” is a term that has emerged and refers to the occasional emergence of cross-tribal organizations and or social/political movements (to which I have already made reference and expressed my displeasure). To be sure, “the urbanization of American Indians that began in full force during and after World War II is probably the single most important factor in the emergence of, what Nagel refers to as, a supra-tribal 'Indian' identity.”

Native Americans living in urban conditions found ways to cope with and combat the alienation, prejudices, and complications of city living. Joining or starting local, grassroots organizations was one of the ways in which Native American adjusted to urbanization. Even prior to World War II organizations such as the NAC (Native

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American Church), Society of the American Indians, Grand Council Fire or the American Indians, National Society of Indian Women, The Wigwam Club for Native Dancing, Indian Women’s Club, and War Paint Club for Indians emerged in major urban cities across the nation as a response to policies of the BIA and in order to rejuvenate and maintain native culture (albeit in a setting that allowed for and at times required a degree of amendment and/or blending).

After the war and during the process of relocation additional forms of solidarity became necessary. Newly elected politicians retracted many of the programs initiated in the 1930s. Establishing a series of programs that are popularly known as the “termination” policies, these officials sought “to end the trust relationship between the federal government and recognized Indian tribes, to settle all outstanding land claims and treaty disputes, to train reservation Indians for wage labor jobs, to relocate trainees to urban areas, and, once and for all, to solve the ‘Indian problem.’”19 The nature of these policies mobilized Native American across the country. Urban centers such as the Phoenix center became crucial meeting places for urban Indians as they attempted to undo the termination policies.

In 1961 the first AICC (American Indian Chicago Conference) was held at which “420 Indians from 67 different tribes met.” There were several meetings held in various cities around the country prior to the Chicago conference at which members and participants pieced together a charter. This document, which was drafted by members representing at least fourteen different tribes, eventually became the Declaration of

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Indian Purpose, which was given to John F. Kennedy in the summer of 1962. As a result, and because Kennedy’s administration felt compelled to repair damages wrought by the era of termination, “an estimated forty urban Indian centers were operating as Indian-managed organizations” by the close of the 60s.

The 60s were characterized by the concomitant rise of urban centers and Indian activism, each of which became instrumental in the further development of twentieth century trans-indigenous networks. Movements such as AIM (American Indian Movement), for example, became crucial avenues for increased visibility on the national scale. Indeed, AIM was the vehicle by which Native Americans successfully challenged, at times using blunt force, the United States’s government policies toward Native Americans.

By the end of the sixties and throughout the early seventies both the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) and the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) had begun the process of funding existing Indian centers with the express purpose of meeting the needs of urban Indians. These centers, which were located in Denver, Phoenix, Omaha, and Los Angeles, were meant to provide resources and services that would supplement existing public programs; State Employment Service, public health, public education, welfare, and housing, it was hoped, would become more effective at dealing with Urban

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20 Fixico, Urban Indian, 127, 128.

21 Fixico, Urban Indian, 129.

22 There is a vast literature surrounding the emergence, important figures, political activism, and government relations of the American Indian Movement. Some sources in particular are Dennis Banks’ and Richard Erdoes’ Ojibwa Warrior (2004), Leonard Peltier’s and Harvey Arden’s Prison Writings: My Life is My Sundance (1999), and Russell Means and Marvin J. Wolf’s Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means. Other sources not following the activities of a specific individual include Peter Matthiessen’s In the Spirit of Crazy Horse (1991) and In the Blood of the Land: The Government and Corporate War against the American Indian Movement (1982), by Rex Weyler.
Indians’ issues as a result. The Native Americans Program Act, issued in 1974, supplemented these efforts and placed emphasis on Native agency by empowering urban Indians to establish their own lists of needs, prioritize those needs as they saw fit, create their own programs to meet those needs practically, and to hold the official positions within these centers. While these centers have functioned as official institutions; as conduits, moreover, through which Native Americans can achieve a series of social, political, and cultural goals, other movements have also contributed to the growth of trans- indigenous networks (i.e., “pan-Indian” or “supra-tribal” organizations) and identities.  

By 1980 approximately half of the entire Native American population in the U.S. lived in urban areas, which, according to the census, included small, off-reservation towns and major metropolitan areas. According to the 1990 census, sixty-three percent of the Native American population lived in urban areas with the largest populations settled in cities in the western portion of the country.

**The Canadian Context**

Urbanization among Inuit, Métis, and First Nations Peoples in Canada, much like other colonial nations, was a complex process often varying in context and consequence from one group to the other. For the First Nations peoples (the Inuit migrating in far lesser numbers), the utility of urbanization became unavoidable in Canada as migration to urban centers represented an improved standard of living compared to that of continuing life on the reservation. For the Métis, who have been

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federally recognized as aboriginal since 1982 (they were not counted as a distinct ethnic
grouping in the 1951, 1961, and 1971 censuses) but whose land rights remain largely
undefined as a result of their recent recognition and multiple migrations, moving to cities
was likewise seemingly more beneficial and provided more opportunities than did rural
life. Inuit peoples, on the other hand, have urbanized to a lesser degree.

“Most reserves,” Peters and Andersen contend, “were intentionally established
away from urban areas . . . to reduce contact between settlers and First Nations
peoples but also to ensure that prime land was not under the control of First Nations
governments,” thus, “under the Constitution Act, 1867, section 9(24), jurisdiction over
‘Indians and Lands reserved for Indians’ is assigned exclusively to the federal
government.” This establishment of jurisdiction meant, then, that the responsibility to
provide services for the continued physical, economic, and cultural well-being of
Aboriginal peoples fell on the federal government. Unfortunately, however, this has
been met with a series of policies which were, instead, aimed at reducing reserve lands
and the systematic underdevelopment of reserve economies,” which has led to the need
for urban migration among many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

As Peters and Andersen have also made clear, “the extension of provincial
standards in health, social assistance, and education to reserves and rural areas in the
mid-1900s supported population growth, increased contact with urban society, and
generated higher expectations. As the poor conditions on reservations and in rural Métis
communities came to public attention, policy makers looked to urbanization for at least a


25 Peters and Andersen, Aboriginal Urbanization, 22.
partial solution.” This was articulated most clearly in the Hawthorne Report, compiled between 1966-67, which was used to determine the causes and provide solutions for the failing socio-economic conditions on reservations. The Canadian government subsequently developed a relocation program designed to ease migration to urban centers.\textsuperscript{26}

Since 1951, the population of aboriginal peoples living in Canadian urban centers – namely, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Saskatoon, Ottawa/Gatineau, Montreal, Regina, and Thunder Bay – has grown by slightly more than 45 percent. Canadian cities consisted of a 6.7 percent aboriginal population in 1951. That number increased to 53 percent in 2006 meaning that a quarter of the total aboriginal population in all of Canada now resides in cities.\textsuperscript{27}

In their study, Norris, Clatworthy and Peters found that “changes in the patterns of self-identification” are as much responsible for the growth of urban aboriginals as demographic shifts themselves. This is related to the federal recognition of Métis as a distinct ethnic grouping. There has been a sharp increase of city-dwelling people who identify as Métis following the 1982 legislation.

Much like the U.S. context, urban-living Aboriginals in Canada were met with problems and adjusted to urban life by forming new communities and/or organizations, often consisting of multiple ethnic groups working together. Canadian scholars refer to this trend as the growth of “pan-aboriginal” and recognize these movements as a response to the “failure of any level of government to claim responsibility for urban

\textsuperscript{26} Peters and Andersen, Aboriginal Urbanization, 24.

Aboriginal people. The emphasis on “pan-Aboriginal” associations eventually diminished, however, as urban Aboriginal populations grew larger, leading instead to the growing popularity of “particular cultures and histories.”  

Aboriginal urbanization has not only altered the perspectives of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis migrants, but has fundamentally changed the way that the broader Canadian society understands urban Aboriginal communities. A watershed moment in the history of Aboriginal urbanization in Canada occurred in 2002 when the federal government ruled that “off-reserve Aboriginal people . . . [would count] as a group of self-organized, self-determining, and distinct communities, analogous to First Nations (i.e., reserve communities).”  

This ruling was the result of the court case *Canada v. Masquadis*. This case arose as a result of Roger Masquadis’s attempt to acquire governmental benefits from the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS), a division of the HRDC (Human Resources Development Canada), while living in Toronto. Because he was living in an urban center and had very few remaining connections to the land of his ancestors, the AHRDS did not recognize him as Aboriginal in the typical “reserve” sense and denied him access to the benefits he sought after. Subsequently, he and a few other urban Aboriginals filed suit and claimed that the “HRDC programming favored First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and denied the urban Aboriginal population equal benefits.”

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30 Belanger, “Breaching Reserve Boundaries,” 74.
Maquadis won the case and, according to Belanger, this forced the Canadian government to reassess its perspective on Aboriginal peoples living in urban conditions. Rather than a group of “progressives” who no longer have ties to land and are, thus, no longer capable of developing a sense of Aboriginal community, and who, in moving to cities, have willingly given up their claim to certain legal rights as it related to Aboriginal status, the Canadian government was forced to recognize urban Aboriginals as a distinct Indian community. Furthermore, the Canadian government altered its policies (or lack thereof) and provided an increase in legal status to Aboriginals living in urban centers.

The quest for inter-tribal unity has been a persistent and reoccurring venture throughout Colonial, Canadian, and U.S. history. The political manifestation of this trend is most often associated with the American Indian Movement and other Red Power movements of the tumultuous mid-twentieth century. However, as James Treat and others have noted, there have perhaps been equally important although less well-known movements whose character was religious and whose tone was less aggressive. The 1960s, for example, were an era in which religiosity witnessed, what Robert Ellwood referred to as, “a recovery of the more fluid, sentimental, charismatic, psychic, magical, communalistic, and righteous-prophetic style of the first decades of the Republic.” This was also true for the growth of grassroots, transnational Native American religious organizations. One could even argue that this most recent, twentieth-century return to the religiosity most common during the First and Second Great Awakenings in North American history was due, in part, to both Native Christians and Native traditionalists who called for a Native spiritual revival. Much like the revivals of the 18th and 19th
centuries, this twentieth century revival challenges the mainstream evangelical institutional church structure for being dismissive of not only indigenous religions themselves, but also indigenous manifestations of Christian worship. Perhaps most indicative of this sentiment and motivation was Vine Deloria Jr.’s proclamation (some would say prophetic in nature) that Native North Americans were part of an “Indian renaissance” which would culminate in the coming of a “religious leader to rise from among the people and lead them to total religious independence [by integrating] . . . religion with tribalism as it exists today.”

The last half of the twentieth century witnessed a growing interest in and increasing frequency of “contextualized” Evangelical practice. Referred to by Treat as “an important but overlooked dimension of native activism during the Red Power era,” the Indian Ecumenical Conference (IEC) is, as Treat would have it, the single most important catalyst for all subsequent Native Evangelical movements. The first organizational meeting was held in Winnipeg in 1969, just one month after Vine Deloria Jr. published *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Those who started the conference did so, Treat avers, with the firm belief that the “survival of native communities would hinge on transcending the antagonisms between tribal and Christian traditions . . . and they hoped to cultivate religious self-determination among native people by facilitating dialogue, understanding, and cooperation.” They were determined to turn this small, grassroots gathering into a larger, more influential event. Thus, in the summer of 1970 the first IEC was held Lutheran, Anglican/Episcopal, Methodist, and American Baptist denominations were represented alongside practitioners of traditional Native American religions.
Movements such as the Indian Ecumenical Council, “AIM and other organizations of the 1960s and 1970s emerged from Indian communities that urbanization had helped create.” These communities developed as a response to the complexities of living in a world not built for Indigenous peoples. Organizing into trans-indigenous affiliations allowed urban natives to mold their shared experience into action. Long established, these organizations have reached further, beyond the confines of the nation-state within which they originate. NAIITS is an organization, for example, that has been enabled by the contemporary processes of globalization.\textsuperscript{31} In the urban settings discussed above, Native American and First Nations actors have become increasingly global. The increased connectivity via social media, production of internet sites relevant to indigenous activism, and the emergence of trans-indigenous, trans-national organizations such as NAIITS has facilitated a new scale of interaction emerging particularly in the late twentieth, early twenty-first centuries as part of urban living.

**Chapter Conclusion**

Native American urbanization is just one of the processes (including prophet movements and the forced relocations to reservation lands) that led to new social formations determined by the colonial experience. Trans-Indigenous networks emerged as a result. Faced with myriad limitations and constraints as city-dwelling indigenous peoples, trans-Indigenous networks offered Native Americans strength in numbers and allowed for the development of a common set of symbols and practices through which the colonial experience could be expressed. Throughout the twentieth century, this trans-Indigenous network has been expanding, connecting disperate Indigenous

communities across the world. Now, Sami, Maori, and Lakota peoples regularly join in conferences and cultural exchange events that also function as highly politicized displays of global Indigenous agency. NAIITS, as a globally oriented evangelical learning program, is clearly both a reflection and propeller of this process.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I will outline both the historical precedents and contemporary work of NAIITS and the attempt by indigenous peoples to place this trans-indigenous utility into conceptual frames. I will demonstrate how early colonial Native American prophets of the Great Spirit, various Native-inspired Christian movements throughout U.S. and Canadian history, as well as NAIITS theologian in the present have, in respective ways, linked trans-indigenous idioms and practices to a religiously infused indigenous universalism I have termed Biblical Indigeneity.
CHAPTER 3
‘THOSE THAT HAVE COME BEFORE’: THEOLOGICAL VERNACULARIZATION ACROSS NATIVE NORTH AMERICA (THEN AND NOW)

We now begin to see ourselves in the church in its fullest, though [in the] culturally contextual sense. The future is brighter as a result. What’s more, the vital contribution of indigenous people in theological development and mission is being ushered into its rightful place in the Missio Dei.

—Jennifer and Terry LeBlanc

NAIITS: Contextual Mission, Indigenous Context

If a theology is to be a culturally-relevant expression of supracultural truth, the theologian must not keep looking over his shoulder to see if he is in step with Aquinas or Calvin or Barth; rather he must ‘look unto Jesus,’ the hope of glory who is present in His church.

—Richard Twiss

Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys

NAIITS theologians view themselves as part of a broader, prophetic movement; a movement consisting of the shift in global demographics characterized by the so-called rise of the global south as the emerging center of power in the Christian world. In their estimation, indigenous communities have played, and will continue to play, a crucial role in the paradigmatic shifts to come. These shifts, as they articulate it, will lend to the completion of the Body of Christ in the U.S., Canada, and perhaps, worldwide. In his book One Church Many Tribes, for example, Richard Twiss argued that “at this time in history, almighty God has raised up the First Nations people of North America,” in what

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2 Richard Twiss, Rescuing Theology from the Cowboys: An Emerging Indigenous Expression of the Jesus Way in North America, p. 103.

3 For more on the effects of shifting demographics in the study of World Christianity, see Philip Jenkins’s The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South (2006) and The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity (2011).
he refers to as a prophetic call, “as a new wave of ambassadors for the new Gospel of Christ.” “It will be teams of indigenous people,” Twiss adds, “who will break through into the Islamic nations of the world, bridging our cultures to share the good news.” As the ambassadors for Christ in “the new millennium,” Twiss places indigenous peoples at the center of a divine plan, which includes the diplomatic, church-led reparation of the relationship between Western and Middle Eastern powers.4

Similar notions are held by other members of NAIITS. Randy Woodley, for example, argues that Western Christendom has failed to establish a reciprocal relationship between its adherents and the environment. Indigenous Christians, in his estimation, are in a position to correct this inherent structural malfunction. “Only in converting Western thinkers,” he argues on his website, “who have abused the earth and all creation, towards more sacred Indigenous values and worldview can we maintain the privilege of co-sustaining this earth together.”5

These assessments, while expressing the concerns of the twenty-first century, are not entirely new. Native communities have demonstrated time and again their integrative skills, adopting Western forms to their preexisting ontological and epistemological frames, re-purposing and refocusing them to an indigenous perspective. Outspoken and charismatic indigenous community leaders have demonstrated a repeated pattern in expressing the fundamental faults of Western beliefs and practices. In what follows I will provide an overview of these patterns.

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4 These views are expressed explicitly in much of the literature associated with NAIITS, including the NAIITS Journal, Twiss’s Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys, Twiss’s One Church Many Tribes, Randy Woodley’s Eloheh website, and to some extent, the articles and contributions of Terry LeBlanc’s.

5 Woodley, website.
Native Christianities and Indigenous Theologies across the Americas

The issue of theology, what constitutes theology, and who is capable of theological consideration was of paramount concern during the colonial and subsequent independence eras in the United States and Canada. The emergent and unhewn nature of the American religious landscape rendered theology a contested space. While theological populists maintained that revelation was open to all and that theology was made possible as a result, scholastics maintained that theology “required of the theologian the ability to combine two worlds of discourse – one biblical, the other grounded in reason. Only the theologically educated,” the New England theologians averred, “had the logical and exegetical skills to maintain the balance without falling into error.”

During the revivalism of the 18th century, Old Lights and New Lights battled it out over, among other things, the extent to which revelation could be reached through ecstatic experience or primarily through biblical exegesis. In the mid-nineteenth century Josiah Willard Gibbs proclaimed that “Religion is for the people, theology is for the schools. Theology is difficult to obtain; sources are in ancient and obscure books; it treats of invisible objects; it inculcates many things ungrateful to our natural feelings.”

Much more than just theoretical and philosophical acumen, theologians worried that if populists had their way and if theology were to become “a discipline of the people” rather than “a discipline for the people,” scriptural meanings could be misconstrued and people could be led astray. Scholastic theology was, from this perspective, a moral imperative. To wield its power without proper training (extensive as it was) would be

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7 Holifield, *Theology in America*, 3.
spiritually dangerous. No wonder, then, that indigenous people’s – with a perceived fundamental connection to the natural world and lack of formal writing traditions – were (and in large part continue to be) considered non-theological in orientation.

**Theological Vernacularization: Then**

The story of Native Christianities and Indigenous theology in North America can perhaps be traced back to Francisco Vasquez de Coronado’s 1540 expedition north from Mexico and into what is current-day New Mexico. Here he, his men, and a small contingent of Franciscan friars settled among the Pueblo Indians. Charged by both the Spanish Crown and its close relationship to the Church, Coronado’s expedition sought to convert the Pueblo Indians by subverting time-honored social and cultural norms and values. Pueblo Marriage customs and economically-determined hierarchies, Gutierrez contends, were targeted specifically and undermined precisely because, from the perspective of the Friars and Conquistadors, they were deemed sinful.\(^8\)

Marriage, which for Pueblos emphasized both monogamy and polygamy, was replaced by Iberian models which stressed only monogamy. Prior to contact, the economy of gift-giving for Pueblos stressed hierarchal relationships, especially between older men and the younger men who were potential spouses for their daughters. Doweries would ensure a sense of obligation. In an attempt to change the Pueblo way of life entirely the Franciscans offered the young men cattle and other goods as payment for maintaining monogamous relationships; relationships that the Franciscans

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\(^8\) Ramon Gutierrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846*, (1991).
believed would, through day-to-day practice, engender a more Christian social body and eventually result in the complete Christianization of the Pueblo people.\(^9\)

This, however, never happened. The Pueblo acquisition of Christianity was far more contextualized and the Franciscans had little tolerance for it. Rather than adopting European Christian values and norms wholesale, Pueblos created their own set of theological formulations. Using the ontological and epistemological logics developed throughout their long history, Pueblos recast European iconography, beliefs, and practices, rendering them intelligible within a Pueblo worldview.\(^10\)

Perhaps an even more obvious case of Native theology in North America occurred among the Iroquois and their exposure to Christianity as a consequence of Jesuit missionary efforts in the Great Lakes region during the seventeenth century. Known to us through the hagiographic writings of Father Claude Chauchetière as a “Mohawk Saint,” Catherine Tekakwitha and her community’s engagement with Euro-Christian forms provides an example of how, as Allan Greer articulates it, “native cultures were not fixed and timeless edifices, ready to crumble on first exposure to Europe’s transatlantic thrust. Rather, they were historically evolving societies that had known centuries of change. . . . As in the past, Mohawks of the seventeenth century adopted products, ideas, and techniques from the outside world; they adopted human beings from neighboring nations, too; and technology, like the people, was integrated into their society.”\(^11\) Through war and conquest, in other words, Iroquois history was


rife with cultural mixing and adaptation prior to European migration to the Americas and this did not change during the colonial moment.

Referred to as “Iroquois flagellant Christianity,” Greer makes clear in his monograph the way in which the Iroquois articulated a Christian religiosity, making use of traditional Iroquoian preparations for war. As a precursor to armed conflict with rival groups, the Iroquois would engage in practices of self-mutilation to prepare for either death or capture and torture at the hands of the enemy. In addition to its function as preparation and coping, however, self-mutilation was also, according to Greer, “part of a quest for the sacred.” Unlike the Jesuits during the colonial period, the Iroquois did not conceive of a “rigid separation . . . between a human / material sphere and an extrahuman / spiritual sphere.”

The nature of this historical event, often perceived as a unilateral imposition of culture, should, then, be imagined as a complex array of give and take. Those Iroquois who “converted” to Christianity “might better be viewed,” Greer avers, “as active investigators probing the exotic myths and arcane rituals of a complex foreign religion.” What is more, “they examined the Other, necessarily from the vantage point of their own culture.”

Rather than a clash between two timeless monoliths with one (the dominant) subsuming the other (the oppressed), therefore, religio-cultural mixing during the colonial period represented mutual and “basic incommensurability in areas such as the division between the natural and the supernatural, the nature of the human self, [and/or] the concept of truth.” From this more nuanced perspective, we can begin to take

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13 Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 111.
seriously the epistemological and ontological assumptions held by the colonized.

Clearly, the missionaries believed their taxonomies of difference and assumptions about humanity to be the most reasonable, obvious, natural, and, perhaps most crucial, divinely sanctioned. The religion of the missionaries, as Greer aptly describes it in the following passage,

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grew \text{ out of and expressed metaphorically certain social arrangements – family, state, law, and so on – that were not analogous. Small wonder, then, that many French dismissed Indian religion as paganism and that most natives turned their backs on Christianity. And it is all the more remarkable that a circle of Iroquois women . . . were able to tunnel their way into some of Christianity’s mystical strongholds. The spiritual/somatic experience of using pain and discomfort to cross the line into sacred ecstasy was an area of commonality linking Indian converts at Kahnawake, nuns in Montreal, and saints in medieval Italy.}^{14}
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Far more than just passive converts, ingesting wholesale the worldview, social norms and values of their European interlocutors, Iroquois Christians engaged in a process of religious innovation and creation in ways that mirror preceding nascent Christian communities.

Focusing on the Congregationalist mission at Stockbridge, Massachusetts and the Moravian mission at Shekomeko in New York, Rachel Wheeler found that specific socio-economic, theological, and political circumstances resulted in distinct outcomes for each of these missionary efforts. The Natives at Shekomeko, especially women, for example, found certain aspects of Christian worship useful for their own set of colonial circumstances. Prior to Euro-American intrusion, for example, Mohican women were responsible for and directors of the spiritual powers associated with the mourning wars, ingesting the spiritual powers of fallen and captured enemy warriors. According to many

\[^{14}\text{Greer, } Mohawk Saint, 123, 124.\]
scholars of pre-Columbian indigenous beliefs and practices, capturing and consuming enemy combatants (and in some cases non-combatants) was a way for a tribe to increase its communal spiritual power by ingesting and/or incorporating the enemy’s power into their own bodies or community relations.\(^{15}\) In their interaction with the Moravians, whose proclivity toward blood-symbolism theologically and artistically is well-documented, Mohican women may have found a way to continue this social and spiritual role. They, as Wheeler suggests, developed the image of Jesus-as-warrior and in taking communion may have been actively constructing a distinct Mohican Christianity.\(^{16}\)

Here again Natives employ a set of culturally-determined epistemological and ontological categories in order to make sense of their interaction with Christian conceptions and imagery. Much like the Iroquois in Greer’s study, Wheeler finds that Mohicans developed a particular sense of God’s work that took very seriously flesh and blood; they placed significant emphasis on their bodies and, more generally, the body’s ability to partake in and effect spiritual outcomes.

Missionary work persisted even after the founding of the United States and into the nineteenth century; so too did native peoples’ attempts to contextualize Euro-American religion. In the 1830s, Episcopalian and Methodist missionaries used hymn singing as a mechanism of conversion among the Ojibwa. A consequence of the still healthy fur trade, the hymns were initially received casually as the Ojibwa, secure

\(^{15}\) For a more in depth understanding of pre-contact social relations between differing Native North American and Latin American indigenous groups see James F. Brooks’s *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (2002).

economically, were able to set the terms of their own culture. Between 1850-1880, however, the fur trade declined, capitalism encroached deeper into their day-to-day lives, and the U.S. government grew increasingly aggressive in its policies toward natives. Consequently, Ojibwa society experienced increases in factionalism, alcoholism, and violence. The Hymns, at this crucial moment, became a major part of the Ojibwa response to these disorienting socio-economic developments. They were used in ways that missionaries had not intended, however, focusing on community and critiquing the market’s tendency to engender social fracturing. Using the philosophical understandings at their disposal and drawing upon their own ontological, epistemological, and cosmological traditions, Ojibwa hymn singers made Christianity and hymn-singing their own.

The last half of the twentieth century witnessed a growing interest in and increasing frequency of “contextualized” Evangelical practice. According to an extensive demographic study, mainline churches were the most common and perhaps least publicized space within which Native Americans expressed Christian identities. In an extensive, yet not exhaustive, body of demographic research R. Pierce Beaver—with funds procured from World Vision International and the Mennonite Central Committee—compiled an impressive database of Native Christian churches in operation as of 1970. The numbers, while ultimately incomplete in their reach, demonstrate the extent to which Natives became agents in the development of Christianity across the United States, many taking positions as “workers” within congregations and a select group even becoming ordained.

In addition to compiling demographic data for Native Christians in 1970 specifically, he located and reported on some obscure demographic studies conducted during the early twentieth century—Red Man in the United States by G.E.E. Lindquist (1923) and Indians in Transition by G.E.E. Lindquist and E. Russell Carter (1951). He discovered that at the turn of the twentieth century there were an estimated 13,495 native Christians in 195 officially registered Protestant congregations. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century native adherents rose to 28,406 in 534 registered congregations. Conversion rates plateaued during the years between 1910 and 1925 as it is documented that “at the end of the first quarter century communicants were said to be 32,465 in 514 registered congregations.”

As an important marker of Native agency within these organizations Lindquist and Carter found that in 1901 there were, on record, 224 native individuals holding some type of official position within the churches. Deemed “workers,” it is unclear what kind of work or how much administrative power they wielded. By 1911 records show, however, that 158 men had become ordained while there was a steady growth of “workers” who increased their numbers to 312. An interesting demographic shift occurred between 1911 and 1916—perhaps due to the growing popularity of millenarian movements such as the Ghost Dance, although this is highly speculative. During this four year period the number of ordained Native pastors declined, totaling 124. However, there was again a sharp increase in Native ordination in 1925 with the record showing 263 ordinations. These pastors were accompanied by 479 “workers.”

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Through their own implementation of archival research, surveys, and interviews, Beaver’s and Marc’s findings demonstrate that, as of 1970, there were approximately 320,199 “active” Native Christians active in various denominations throughout the United States. This, they make clear, represented 43% of the total 763,594 recorded Native Americans living in the United States at the time. The breakdown is as follows:

There are 2,048 local churches, congregations, or missions belonging to 42 denominations and 13 nondenominational societies, and including 164 independent churches. The Protestant churches have a communicant or regularly attending [native] membership of 79,279 in the denominations, 1,937 in the society churches and 6,950 in the independent congregations, or a total “hardcore” active membership of 88,166. The Orthodox Church has 20,000 such members. . . . [The Roman Catholic Church] reports a baptized membership of 177,651.  

These numbers, even if the degree of error is on the magnitude of tens of thousands, demonstrate the pervasiveness of Native Christianity throughout the United States.

Referred to by James Treat as “an important but overlooked dimension of native activism during the Red Power era,” The Indian Ecumenical Conference (IEC) is, according to Treat, the single most important catalyst for all subsequent North American Native Christian movements. The first organizational meeting was held in Winnipeg in 1969.  

Those who started the conference did so with the firm belief that the “survival of native communities would hinge on transcending the antagonisms between tribal and Christian traditions . . . and they hoped to cultivate religious self-determination among native people by facilitating dialogue, understanding, and cooperation.” They were determined to turn this small, grassroots gathering into a larger, more influential event.

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20 Beaver, The Native American Christian Community, 32.

Thus, in August of 1970 the first IEC was held within which Lutheran, Anglican and Episcopal, Methodist, and American Baptist denominations were represented alongside practitioners of traditional Native American religions. The steering committee was successful in organizing seven additional meetings, each successive to the previous one. The second IEC began on July 19th in 1971. The third IEC began on August 17th in 1972. The fourth IEC commenced on July 30th in 1973. The fifth began on July 30th in 1974. The sixth and final IEC was held in July of 1975. The seventh was held in July of 1976. As time moved on and word of mouth mounted the IEC garnered both a wider variety of Native attendees, a significant non-native contingency, increased interest from news outlets and documentary filmmakers. 22

Throughout the late seventies, eighties, and nineties, Native Christians attempted to build projects that Twiss refers to as “Native self-theologizing.” In his own work, for example, Richard Twiss mentions figures such as Lloyd Commander, Adrian Jacobs, John GrosVenor, Jerry Yellowhawk, Andrew Begaye, Spencer Cody, and Bill Baldridge, whom he recognizes as influential in the growing “contextualization” movement leading eventually to the emergence of NAIITS. These individuals were instrumental in starting organizations and projects such as; the National Native Bible College in Ontario, Canada, which while ideologically and theologically “non-native,” allowed Adrian Jacobs to start a vernacularization centered program of study between 1985 and 1993; the Native Leadership Summit in 1989 sponsored by Youth with a Mission in Denver, Colorado, during which Twiss and others began to think seriously about syncretism; the Nazarene Indian Bible College in Albuquerque, New Mexico, wherein Lloyd

Commander met staunch opposition from both colleagues and students after attempting to introduce contextualized ideas and practices theologically.

Randy Woodley and his wife Edith organized the first “Christ in Culture: Missionary Influence on Plains Tribes” conference in 1991. Located in Anadarko, Oklahoma, the conference was strikingly similar to the IEC (Indian Ecumenical Conference) in that the motivating force behind its emergence was the ongoing tension between traditionalists and Native Christians throughout North America. Opposition leaders (i.e., those traditionalists who were vehemently against conversion to Christianity) were invited to attend. According to Twiss, Woodley remembers a growing tension over the theological issues surrounding powwows and sweat lodges that eventually came to a head, leading to deep rifts between members of the conference. Some traditionalists aggressively pursued moderates in an attempt to sway them toward, what traditionalists perceive to be, a more “Native” position.

The Woodley’s second conference, “Christ and Culture: Native American Peace Traditions,” convening in 1992, was organized specifically to avoid these confrontations. They settled on a smaller, more intimate conference structure wherein, rather than attempting to address tensions head on, the primary focus would be vernacularization. There were, however, tensions perhaps carried over from the previous year. Traditionalists made an effort to disrupt various events in order to “publically criticize the Woddley’s methods.”23 The Woodleys were also responsible for the organization of Powwows and Youth Camps in Anadarko, Oklahoma, introducing traditional Native cultural forms to young Natives; these cultural forms included drumming, dancing, sweat

lodge, beading, bow and arrow, storytelling, and basket-making. Randy Woodley also regularly held sweat lodge Bible studies at his personal residence.

The North American vernacularization movement took an international and transnational turn in 1994 when Twiss organized the Gathering of the Five Streams conference on the Warm Springs Indian reservation in Oregon. As Twiss remembers it, the conference was attended by seventy-five leaders from various tribal affiliations across North American, three Maori leaders from New Zealand, and two Native Hawaiian leaders. The conference addressed theological implications of a variety of indigenous issues. Specific topics included music, prayer, economic development, cultural contextualization, and leadership development. Twiss cites this event as one part of the growing contextual movement, influential specifically for its transnational character, which he refers to as “an emerging relational network of Native leaders.”

The global and transnational character of NAIITS is evident in the events occurring four years prior and lending directly to its formation. According to both Leblanc and Twiss the seminal moments, which led to the formal founding of NAIITS, were the 1996 and 1998 WCGIP (World Christian Gathering of Indigenous Peoples). The first, hosted by the Maori in Rotorua, New Zealand in 1996, clearly functioned as a motivating force for Native Evangelical leaders from North America. “More than two thousand Indigenous/tribal people from thirty-two countries attended that historic event,” Twiss explains enthusiastically, “where people shared gifts of their cultural music, dance, language, art, and stories in honor and worship to Jesus Christ.” The 1998

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24 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 101.
WGCIP was help in Rapid City and, according to many of the NAIITS faculty, proved to be very influential for the emergence of NAIITS.

There have been five additional WGCIP meetings since the first two. In 2000 the event was held in Australia; in 2002 it was held in Hawaii; in 2004 Sweden hosted the event; the Philippines was the location for the 2006 event; the group met in Jerusalem in 2008; the most recent and final occurrence of the WGCIP was, once again, held in New Zealand. Twiss and LeBlanc were in attendance at every event with the exception of the one held in Sweden.

Coming off of the momentum of the Rapid City WGCIP, Twiss explains, a significant number of First Nations leaders, who were in attendance at the Rapid City WGCIP, called a meeting in Florida. For just over two days these Native Leaders – including Katherine and Richard Twiss, Terry and Bev LeBlanc, Lynda Prince, Suuqiina, Doug and Gloria Yates, Kenny and Louise Blacksmith, and Mary Glazier – discussed ways to continue the discussions spurred by the WGCIP; their primary objective was to “keep up the momentum created by the [World Christian Gathering of Indigenous People].”

Thus, the Many Nations One Voice Celebration (MN1V) came to fruition. The first conference was held just seven months after the Rapid City WCGIP. The organizers of the MN1V celebration mentioned in the previous paragraph had their sights set on the widespread promotion of contextualization; they left the WCGIP convinced that North America was primed for an Indigenous-led era of Evangelical revival. Many of those in attendance wore traditional powwow regalia and danced. One hundred and twenty hand

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drums donning biblical images were manufactured and distributed specifically for this event. From Twiss’s perspective, this inaugural event was wildly successful as many of the attendees “went back to their local communities and churches across [North America] and convened similar gatherings,” leading also to the subsequent speaking and instructional opportunities for the founders of MN1V.

After the inaugural meeting, Wiconi International (the organization located in Portland Oregon and led by Katherine and Richard Twiss) took on the lead role in organizing future events. “From 1999 to 2007,” Twiss informs, “we convened twenty MN1V Celebrations in eighteen cities across North America. They were attended by more than ten thousand people.”²⁶ In Twiss’s view, these meetings were significant because they provided a forum, national in scope, through which Native North Americans could address the issue of contextualization head on.

The purpose and vision of these MN1V gatherings,” Twiss explains, “was to convene national gatherings where Native Theologians and spiritual leaders could present their unique perspectives to challenge colonial Christianity – and to equip Western/ American Christians with a broader understanding of Biblical notions of Christ’s Kingdom and its relationship to the life of a diverse church.”²⁷

Twiss claims that in his deliberations with attendees who were experiencing criticism on the reservation by staunch “traditionalists” people expressed feelings of affirmation and empowerment and in some cases, individuals expressed that they now felt “‘called’ to pursue the contextualization of the Gospel in their unique local cultural contexts.”²⁸

²⁶ Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 85.
²⁷ Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 86.
²⁸ Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 86.
Much like the IEC (Indian Ecumenical Conference) before it, the MN1V Celebration functioned as a source of inter-tribal dialogue. “Leaders representing over forty different tribes and twenty-eight [Native Christian] organizations spoke at the event.” Unlike the IEC, however, these events were attended primarily by Native Christians, avoiding the divisive issue of Christianity versus traditionalism and allowing perhaps for a more focused discussion.

**Community Leaders and Prophetic Figures**

Native American history is rife with the accomplishments of influential leaders who made use of foreign ideas to further their cause. Demonstrations of native theology can be found, moreover, in the work of some of the most well-known Native leaders during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. In the mid-eighteenth century, for example, the Delaware prophet Neolin took on the monotheistic religiosity of his colonial opponents and formed a Native American monotheism that informed his political agenda. The Lenape culture of the Delaware region, prior to Neolin’s religious innovations, was characterized by a belief in a spiritual world that was “open to all through dreams and visions,” though shamans “experienced visions of ‘extraordinary potency,’” affording them the ability to shape shift into various animals or travel through space and time as spirits themselves.

Neolin was part of the Delaware refugee community known as Tuscarawas Town located in Ohio territory. Here, the community attempted to create a new identity that emerged from and could respond to the colonial condition. Neolin’s perspective, found in the reports of Indian agents beginning in 1762, drew upon the beliefs and practices of

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his cultural heritage and “reflected both an intensified anger against whites . . . and a commitment . . . to a new concept of Indian solidarity that unified old antagonisms and created a new racial identity.” Neolin recounted a vision in which he interacted with the Creator, whom Neolin referred to as the Master of Life. After a series of trials, the Creator explained to Neolin that he disapproved of “his Indian children and that the sufferings that plagued them were the result of their transgressions”; including their addiction to alcohol, their practices of polygamy, sexual promiscuity, and their belief in witchcraft. The Creator had thus removed the animals from the hunting grounds as a punishment. Should the Indians return to the Creator’s favor by obeying his wishes he would restore the animals to the forest for sustenance. The Creator commanded Neolin to lead his people into war against the European invaders, whom he disliked and to whom he remained unknown. Neolin’s people were to pray only to the Master Life from that time forward and “abandon their practice of calling upon other deities and spirit-protectors” because they are evil.30

Neolin took this message back to his people and out of it emerged the development of a belief system and ritual program that “reflected a Native American . . . understanding of the relationship of human beings and spiritual forces.” Adherence to these divine commands would, Neolin assured his people, allow access to the spiritual power that could literally remove Euro-American settlers and federal officials from the land.31


31 Cave, Prophets of the Great Spirit, 23.
The political maneuverings and theological understanding of the Shawnee prophet Lalawethika, born in the Shawnee town of Old Piqua in western Ohio in 1775, were likewise integrative. Historically allied with the Delaware situated in Ohio territory, the Shawnee were much less welcoming of Euro-American interactions. Influenced by Neolin and other prophets of the Delaware, Lalawethika had a vision that also consisted of displeasure on the part of the Creator over matters of alcoholism and unhealthy acceptance of Euro-American ways of life.

Based on his vision with the Master of Life, Lalawethika issued severe warnings to his people. Theologically speaking, he reasoned that Indians must make sweeping cultural and economic changes, eliminating the trappings of Euro-American ways of operating in the world. Indians, he proclaimed, must rid themselves of all material dependencies; including clothing style, the domestication of animals, eating domesticated animals, consuming bread, and any form of commerce with Euro-Americans. He further advocated for the support of the sick and elderly, something he perceived of as a dire failure on the part of Euro-American communities. He called for a ban on alcohol within the community. He issued a ban on intermarriage between his people and whites, a form of Indigenous eugenics, in order to recreate the purity of the Indian bloodline. Whites were an abomination, created by a Great Serpent, over whom the Master of Life had no dominion. White men were sent by this serpent to destroy the world and eliminate the “real people.” Medicine bags were to be destroyed and the songs and dances associated with them removed from the practice of daily life. Instead, Lalawethika developed the Dance of the Lakes wherein members of the community
would confess their sins aloud to the community and to the Great Spirit and subsequently ask for forgiveness.  

Much like Neolin before him, Lalawethika developed a repurposed system of beliefs and practices “that borrowed some Christian ideas alien to Shawnee tradition, including belief in an omnipotent and omnipresent Creator, in heaven and in hell, in sexual repression, and in patriarchy. But he also affirmed the traditional belief in the importance of ritual as the means of assessing sacred power.”

Tenskwatawa, like those who predated him, also attempted to assemble a pan-Indian community at Ft. Greenville in Ohio in the early nineteenth century. His message, according to historian Alfred Cave, consisted of three major concerns: “the revitalization of Native American communal life . . . through elimination of practices offensive to the Great Spirit and through the institution of new rituals to win his favor; the establishment of a new, separatist sacred community free of corruption; and the forging of a pan-Indian alliance to preserve Indian lands from further white encroachments.” He called for a radical reformation of Indian life, centered on monotheism. For Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee were to discontinue their traditional understanding of the Great Spirit as one who could not master creation alone, relying on the Sun, the Four Winds, the Earth Mother, Corn Woman, Thuderbirds and Star people who were accessible to humans through the use of tobacco, fire, the sky, plants, and medicine bundles. All took part in the maintenance of the cosmos. Instead, Tenskwatawa demanded, the Shawnee should recognize the sovereignty of the Great Spirit and his ultimate power over all of

32 Cave, Prophets of the Great Spirit, 66.
33 Cave, Prophets of the Great Spirit, 69.
34 Cave, Prophets of the Great Spirit, 70.
creation and pray only to him, no longer recognizing the role of the other spirit entities or the ritual implements with which they were traditionally associated.\textsuperscript{35}

In the early nineteenth century, Tenskwatawa’s brother Tecumseh traveled to Alabama during this period in an effort to enlist additional native followers and in his deliberations, according to Cave, came into contact with the Muskogee Creek warriors that would become known as the Red Sticks. “While the spiritual leaders of the Red Sticks were familiar with Tecumseh’s message,” however, as Cave points out, “their teachings were shaped by their own religious traditions and immediate historical circumstances.”\textsuperscript{36} Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Creek Indians had taken on many Anglo-American life ways. They were accomplished cattle-herders, farmers, and merchants. They were even fully ensconced in the slave economy of the South. They reorganized social life, mimicking Anglo-American gender roles and establishing Anglo forms of community governance.\textsuperscript{37} As Cave points out, rather than abandoning their traditional Creek beliefs and ritual programs, the Red Stick prophets merely added the new rituals (the and theological positions introduced by Tecumseh as an additional source of power. Thus, they remained “traditional Muskogee sorcerer-shamans.”\textsuperscript{38}

Also at the turn of the century, the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake experienced visions and claimed to have been appointed “an emissary to inform the people of the

\textsuperscript{35} Cave, \textit{Prophets of the Great Spirit}, 70.
\textsuperscript{36} Cave, \textit{Prophets of the Great Spirit}, 46.
\textsuperscript{37} Cave, \textit{Prophets of the Great Spirit}, 58, 159.
\textsuperscript{38} Cave, \textit{Prophets of the Great Spirit}, 167
wishes of the Creator.” Handsome Lake was a sickly man, prone to heavy drinking, and bouts of paranoia. His career as a spiritual leader was influenced by his experience first in the Revolutionary war fighting for the British and then by a series of migrations, which culminated in finally settling in a Allegheny Seneca Village, called Burnt House, occupied by pro-American Iroquois natives. It was in this village that Handsome Lake was given the name Ganiodiao, which, according to Anthony Wallace was “the title of a hereditary chieftainship.”

One day in 1799 well into his sixties Handsome Lake fainted and fell into trance. That same day, recounted this experience to a Quaker missionary who had come to the community in 1798 offering assistance in agriculture and other artisanal skills. Handsome Lake told the missionary of a vision; it consisted most notably of his interaction with the Great Spirit who expressed admonition toward Handsome Lake’s proclivity for heavy drinking and condemned the consumption of alcohol for all of the Iroquois. He also condemned those natives who retained the practice of witchcraft.

After the vision, Handsome Lake’s health greatly improved and he embarked upon a preaching career that led him to various locations. His message became increasingly codified through repeated oral dissemination and has been maintained into the present. The intense moralistic code that emerged from his visions of the Great

39 Cave, Prophets of the Great Spirit, 192.
41 According to Wallace, these Quaker missionaries were welcomed into the community because, unlike the traders and government officials with which the Allegheny Seneca had become so familiar, the missionaries offered assistance without attempts to purchase land or convert them. The only thing the missionaries demanded was the cessation of drinking among the native population. This preoccupation with alcohol consumption is clearly taken up by Handsome Lake as he develops his moral code based on dreams and visions.
Spirit condemned the preoccupation with worldly goods, which, if coveted, would lead to a barrier to heaven. Those who drank alcohol would be forced to swallow white hot metal that would scorch their throats until death. Those who continued the practice of “witchcraft” would be dunked repeatedly into a boiling cauldron until their body disintegrates and their bones are dust. The Great Spirit will then reanimate their bones by placing them in another body and repeat the process as punishment for their adherence to demonic practices.\textsuperscript{42}

The work of the Quakers among the Seneca, as Wallace aptly points out, can only be described as an ingenious, almost subliminal manipulation. By focusing on alcohol consumption and the implementation of industrious endeavors, the Quakers were able to convince the Seneca to alter their behaviors while subtly taking on Protestant ethics of hard work, temptation avoidance, and methodological individualism.

By guiding the Seneca into an economic system which stressed private property and the profit motive, they confidently expected their ultimate acceptance of an ethical and moral, and eventually religious, code which emphasized the voice of conscience, sobriety, cleanliness, industry, and marital stability; in a word, a Protestant type of religion.\textsuperscript{43}

Reeling from the effects of colonialism and, consequently, stifled by the introduction of alcohol and self-loathing, the Seneca people and Handsome Lake became, from the Quakers’ perspective, a ripe mission field. Similar in fashion to many other Native communities throughout North America during the colonial period, some among the Seneca saw their condition as a cosmic punishment for their ways of life. Protestant witness (especially in its proclivity toward intense self-reflexivity) augmented these

\textsuperscript{42} Wallace, “Handsome Lake,” 153-155.

\textsuperscript{43} Wallace, “Handsome Lake,” 153-155.
sentiments and arguably led many to embrace, at the very least, some degree of Handsome Lake’s infusion of Christian themes into their worldview.

While they emerged at different times and in different places, there was a common thread running through each of these prophetic movements. Each movement, to some degree, “blended a Christian emphasis on repentance with the belief in world renewal that underlay much of the ritual life of Native Americans.” Because of their distinct cultural worldviews and socio-historical circumstances, the styles, methods, and future expectations took different forms. For example, Handsome Lake’s message was heavily self-critical, admonishing Native Americans for their use of alcohol, their practice of shamanism and witchcraft, their use of poisons, and their regular practice of herbal-induced abortions. These features of Native culture were to be discarded, Handsome Lake warned, or the Great Spirit would not “accept them as his own.” While some of the prophetic movements called for war with and eventual removal of the whites, others like Kenekuk’s proclamation “to ‘throw their tomahawks’ into ‘the bad place’ . . . and live soberly and industriously” were conformist. Still, each of the figures and the movements they inspired were, as he puts it, “products of encounters, confrontations, or accommodations with the agents and the culture of a powerful and disruptive people.” They were, he continues, “influenced by alien ideas conveyed to them by missionaries and other spokesmen of the Christian religion” and “they all borrowed from its teachings,” engaging all-the-while in “syncretic religious movements that blended traditional and borrowed spiritual concepts.”

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44 Cave, Prophets of the Great Spirit, 245
In a remarkably intimate retelling of Samson Occom’s struggle with alcoholism, Joanna Brooks references a series of contextualized Native Christian rituals that speak to the capacity for theological development among Native communities during colonialism. An itinerant Presbyterian minister and co-founder of the Native Christian Brotherton (a trans-Indigenous network consisting of members from several Southern New England tribes), Occom championed the development of Native Christian leadership and self-determination, which, he believed could lead to more amicable relations between settler populations and Native Americans.

Brooks tells the story of Occom’s slippage into old habits; namely drinking heavily. This was common among New England natives during the 18th century. Euro-American Christians were surrounded with material indices of their colonial successes; obvious indications that they reside in God’s favor, thus, leading to a feeling of being “anchored” in faith. Native Christians, on the other hand, were “buffeted on all sides, their land bases eroding, their resources pillaged, sacred places disturbed, their traditional governments infiltrated, their sons and daughters leaving home in search of wages, the impacts of colonialism registering across the scale form tribal to the individual.”45 As Brooks points out, this led Occom and other Mohegans to develop their own theologically sophisticated systems of reconciliation relating to the troubles of colonialism.

Occom’s distinctive style of Native New Light Christianity led to what Brooks called “theological innovations” on the part of the New England pan-tribal, Native community. “They redeveloped orthodox Calvinist theologies,” she explains, in order “to

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foster a greater sense of assurance for besieged native communities of their connection to God. These native Christian theologies embraced cycles of backsliding and repentance as fundamental to the religious life; they redefined assurance as entailing cycles of declension and return rather than as a pretense to certainty. Moreover, separatist Native Christian communities in Southern New England created distinctive rituals of public confession and collective reconciliation that united them even in their disappointments and discouragements. Occom experienced his own failings within this theologically innovative southern Native New Light context.⁴⁶

As discussed in the chapter on Native Americans and Education in North America, Missionary ministry and missionary education policies—which were subsidized by the federal government after General Grant’s “Peace Plan” of 1868—influenced Native thinkers in profound ways, giving rise to repurposed forms of religiosity. The so-called millenarian movements of the late nineteenth century exemplify this trend.

The Ghost Dance was perhaps one of the more notable examples of a trans-indigenous movement that incorporated both Native American beliefs and practice with those of Christianity. The Prophetic leader of the movement, Jack Wilson or “Wovoka,” a Paiute Indian trained in Christian theology and Bible studies, combined Christian apocalypticism and resurrection theology with traditional round dance ceremonies. He taught that the round dance would facilitate both the return of dead ancestors and the removal of the settler population, restoring North America to its pre-colonial state. This movement surged twice during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; “the

first Ghost Dance movement involved a number of Great Basin and West Coast tribes, and the second, larger Ghost Dance movement spread east to include many Plains tribes.\textsuperscript{47}

Peyote religion, a pre-Columbian native practice popularized in North America by Quanah Parker, also emerged in the late 1800s and, among many adherents, combined Christian beliefs and practices with traditional native beliefs and practices. In assessing the consequences of colonialism many natives came to the conclusion that the ways of their elders had failed and that Native Americans, no matter the tribal affiliation, were in need of reformation. Peyote religion is a so-called “hybrid” or “syncretistic” movement, applying Christian ideas where traditional ones seemed ineffective and retaining traditional beliefs and practices where Christians ones seemed ineffective. The NAC (Native American Church) was formed in the late 1880s and officially recognized by the federal government in 1918 as the Native American Church of the United States—at which time Congress tried to determine the legality of peyote usage—representing the institutionalization of the movement. Due to disagreement over whether or not non-Natives could participate in the peyote ceremonies, a group calling themselves the Native American Church of North America split off in 1950 in an effort to bar non-Natives from participation.

The NAC’s use of the terms “church” and “sacrament” is not only indicative of the Christian orientation held by many of its members, but is also representative of a political strategy to add cultural and symbolic weight to its beliefs and practices. Ingesting peyote was and continues to be described as a “sacrament” for members of

the NAC. Theologically, peyote is understood to function as a conduit through which one can come into contact and commune with the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, has the potential to increase one’s ability to live well on a day-to-day basis. “Today’s members of the NAC living in cities have made peyote a part of the urban Indian life. Crossing tribal barriers, the NAC members worship as a “trans-tribal network, connected by the common threads provided by Christianity, “that utilizes peyote as their sacrament.”\textsuperscript{48}

Twentieth century authors and activists have provided additional groundwork contributing to the potential for NAIITS’s emergence. Perhaps the most well-known and most cited authors of the Twentieth century is Vine Deloria Jr. Vine Jr. was born in 1933 near the Pine Ridge reservation to Barbara and Vine Victor Deloria. His father was an Episcopalian archdeacon and missionary on the Standing Rock reservation and eventually transferred the family membership to the Standing Rock Sioux tribal community. Vine Jr. graduated high school in 1951, served as a Marine from 1954 to 1956, and received a Bachelor’s degree in general science from Iowa State in 1958. He attended Law School at the University of Colorado and received a law degree by the year 1970. It was during his career as a law student that Vine Jr. wrote his first full-length monograph titled \textit{Custer Died for Your Sins}, within which he produced a scathing critique of the field of Anthropology and arguably changed forever the relationship between Western scholarship and Native American communities, challenging the accuracy and practical value of the former for the latter.

This book was both a reflection of and contributor to the Red Power Movement of the 1960s and subsequent Native-led political movements since. Vine Jr. was part of \textsuperscript{48} Donald L. Fixico, \textit{The Urban Indian Experience in America}, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 125.
what some scholars have referred to as the “Native American Renaissance,” a period of increased literary production on the part of indigenous authors, scholars, poets, and political commentators. This period, according to those who recognize its importance for Native peoples of North America, was characterized by three main components: the renewed commitment to a reclamation of Native heritage; a re-evaluation of earlier Native works; and a rigorous process of cultural revitalization.49

Perhaps his most notable work, especially as it relates to the issue of theologies emerging out of indigenous contexts, is *God is Red*. In it Vine Jr. provided what would become, arguably, his most salient contribution to Native Christian communities; spelling out, in perhaps greater detail than ever before, the fundamental differences between Euro-American and Native American worldviews. Some of the key points, whose influence will become readily obvious in subsequent chapters, include different perceptions of spatial relations and the natural world, the significance and procession of time, and the understanding of non-human entities. His break-down of the different perceptions of creation (seen in Table 4-1) show the fundamental epistemological differences between the Western philosophical and theological tradition and Indigenous worldviews, leading to, in his estimation, wildly different treatments of both the land, non-human species, and other people.

George Tinker, Osage/Cherokee Indian, Lutheran minister, and scholar of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado, has a long career of considering the relationship between Euro-American Christianity and Native communities across North America. His work has proven highly

influential and, arguably, can be considered a precursor to the work of NAIITS theologians. Tinker’s use of Gustavo Gutierrez’s Liberation Theology to build a model of how to do Native American theology has proven highly effective for NAIITS theologians. His assessment that “Native American theology must argue out of Native American spiritual experience and praxis that God reveals God’s self in creation, in space or place and not in time,” for instance, has undermined the Western assumption that Euro-American voices hold primacy simply because they came first. Additionally, Tinker articulates the key differences between Euro-American and Native American dualism, arguing that while the former’s perception is inherently oppositional, the latter’s understanding is centered on reciprocity. Tinker also refers to symbol systems of indigenous people as distinct and potentially epistemologically innovative as it relates to the development of Theology among Native American thinkers. The circle, from his own tribal belief system, is a symbol, he avers, that contains a wide variety of meanings fundamental to the individual and her or his relationship to land, community, and non-human community. Unlike the hierarchical list wherein things are listed in order of their perceived importance, the circle is an inclusive symbol that places the individual in spatial balance with all entities surrounding her. It is from these perspectives that Tinker, at the end of his discussion on liberation Theology and how it can contribute to a contextualized Theology, expresses the view that, like the Native American spiritualties that predated contact with Europeans, Theology by and for indigenous peoples will be rooted in a perspective that people “are participants” in the “whole of existence,” contributing directly with the Creator “to help maintain harmony and balance.”

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Ultimately, both Deloria Jr. and Tinker have provided powerful tools for the continued building up of a Theological tradition emerging out of the diverse range of indigenous worldviews across North America.

In his polyvocal edited volume, *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Indigenous Identity in the United States and Canada*, accomplished scholar of religion and Muskogee Creek member James Treat demonstrates the tensions within the Native community as it relates to being Native and Christian. Thinkers such as Steve Charleston and organizations such as the Native American Theological Association, he avers, have called for the emergence of a “Native Christian Theology,” a Christian expression of faith grounded in the worldviews of Native Peoples and with the structural support to “promote leadership development among native Christians in mainline Protestant churches through education, research, and self-determination.” On the other hand, figures such as James West, Rosemary McCombs Maxey, and Stan McKay are weary of “Theology” on the basis of a few key concerns: First, West contends that “theology,” as it is typically understood, is a fundamentally non-indigenous enterprise. Second, McKay warns that in engaging in this non-indigenous endeavor, indigenous peoples render themselves part of the colonial apparatus; “When Indians theologize,” he warns, “they must place one foot into the Euro-American culture; and if they are not careful they will soon have both feet outside of their own culture.” Part of this self-induced imperialism, as it is presented in Treat’s edited volume, would result in the Western enterprise of theology and its tendency to speak as a unified, orthodox voice, which brings us to the third major concern these indigenous thinkers have as it relates

to a “Native Christian Theology”; as Maxey rightly points out, indigenous communities are so diverse that it would be impossible to present a Native Christian Theology without producing a false sense native intellectual homogeneity in a theological context.

Treat’s assessment of the various works compiled in his edited volume speaks directly to the work of NAIITS. He states very eloquently that,

after generations of struggle with church hierarchies over spirituality, liturgical traditions, ordination, congregational finances, community life, morality, biblical interpretation, and doctrine, Native Christians are increasingly putting their admonitions in writing. They are engaging the North American religious establishment at the discursive level, articulating their demands for religious self-determination and a form a style comprehensible to those who still exercise some measure of institutional control over native Christians and their churches.51

Their practical knowledge of the Christian worldview and acumen as theologians, in other words, have led to the emergence of potentially transformative, Native-led theological movements. He continues:

Their writing, like many other types of contemporary native literature, cross cultural boundaries in order to facilitate intercultural understanding and respect and to effect structural change; they are cross-cultural epistles to the cross culture. . . . In general, contemporary native Christian literature is apologetic (in the theological sense, meaning defensive or demonstrative) rather than evangelistic. This apologetic literature is also self-consciously contextual and particular; native Christian writers are not proposing just another ‘universal’ theological master narrative.52

Treat’s understanding and analysis of this trans-Indigenous theological literature that is emerging increasingly in the context of official institutional forms anticipates the work of NAIITS theologians. In fact, NAIITS faculty members have mentioned Treat’s work as a cousin to their more praxis-centered, theologically-oriented endeavors. What is more,


NAIITS theologians are keenly aware of these tensions within the Native Christian community as a whole and often address these concerns explicitly in their written work and presentations. They fit Treat’s mold, in particular, as it relates to their attempt to reluctantly articulate their theological concerns in a manner that is “comprehensible” to authoritative and official members of the dominant Evangelical institutions. In so doing, NAIITS theologians produce a literature that indeed crosses “cultural boundaries in order to facilitate intercultural understanding and . . . to effect structural change.” Much like the groups and individuals on display in Treats edited volume, NAIITS draws upon the dominant structures and redeploys those structures in order to alter them.

NAIITS is, however, different from the groups and individuals described by Treat in two key ways. At first glance, the work of NAIITS often takes an apologetic tone, defending Native expressions of evangelical worship from critics. The apologetics are, however, not directed at non-Native theologians as much as they are an attempt to win over other Native Christians. This process, from their perspective, is one of convincing Native Christians, still under the yoke of Western institutional thinking, that they, as indigenous peoples, have a more Biblically valid worldview. What is more, this apologetic tone is overshadowed by an additional process: an aggressive challenge to Western forms of Christian thinking and religiosity that, at times, takes the form of re-missionization. In other words, NAIITS theologians routinely engage in (in both their oral and written works) rigorous critique of the Western cultural influences deeply-embedded in the beliefs and practices associated with Christian worship. They then champion Indigenous cultural influences as more-in-line with Biblical truth. This leads, then, to two forms of a rather explicit NAIITS brand of evangelism, which 1) seeks to alter the hearts
and minds of Western, settler-population theologians and 2) seeks to convince other
Native communities that their “traditional” Native life-ways are actually more in tune with
scripture and should be vigorously revitalized. As contemporaries, NAIITS theologians
and Treat are working concomitantly and both represent, albeit influenced and driven by
their respective institutional contexts, two sides of the same coin.

In this way, NAIITS theologians are akin to and are arguably a continuation of the
various Native American revitalization movements that have emerged at various
moments throughout U.S. and Canadian history. In much the same way that their
predecessors have, NAIITS theologians carry on the long tradition of incorporating
Euro-American Christian ideas and concepts into their indigenous epistemological,
tonological, and cosmological frames as well as targeting aspects of Native belief and
practice deemed too unsuitable for following the Jesus Way (i.e., animism or the
consumption of certain substances). They have developed these methods in order to
evade their oppressors while simultaneously offering their own communities narrative
structures for the retrieval and revitalization of indigenous ways in the face of theological
colonialism.
CHAPTER 4
THEOLOGIZING SYNCRETISM: NATIVE EVANGELICALS, BIBLICAL INDIGENEITY, AND THEOLOGICAL NATIONALISM

Globally, contemporary definitions and concerns about syncretism must be rescued from ‘the Cowboys,’ or ‘Western cultural captivity’[;] . . . . what is desperately needed is to relocate the discourse about syncretism from its Western epistemological hegemony to an indigenous worldview framework.

—Richard Twiss
Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys

In their now thirteen years of journal publication, NAIITS theologians have covered a litany of theological issues. From missiology to Christology, NAIITS theologians are writing and debating on the crucial aspects of the Western theological tradition. The NAIITS journal, which is the annual publication wherein the papers presented at each annual symposium are made available, is representative of this theological acumen and versatility. Throughout this theological corpus, which has become robust over the course of the years, there is, I argue, a reoccurring discussion that is of particular concern for this project. I am referring to the process of theologizing syncretism and/or contextualization.

In what follows I will provide an analysis of some of the theological framings expressed by members of NAIITS. In so doing, I will show as a part of their attempt to theologize syncretism and/or contextualization, NAIITS members create a typology of syncretism which allows for moral evaluation of “types” or “expressions” of syncretism. This initial evaluative process then leads to an evaluation of the appropriate way of expressing national identity and a critique of Euro-American forms of “theological

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nationalism.” Finally, I will show how these theological formulations are informed and legitimized by a theology of Biblical indigeneity. The outcome is three-fold; first, the strategic use of the categorical distinction between “religion” and “culture,” second, the extension of the indigenous diasporic disposition and third, the inversion of local-global scales in an effort to challenge Western culture from a Biblical standpoint and, conversely, legitimize indigenous culture from a Biblical perspective. All of this leads to a linkage between a trans-indigenous lingua-franca and scripture.

**The Theology of Normative Syncretism**

Before his untimely passing, Professor Richard Twiss was a prolific writer and perhaps an even more prolific speaker. A Google search for Dr. Twiss produces an abundance of links leading to various speaking engagements at colleges and seminaries across the country. Equally accessible are spoken and written oppositions to Twiss theological work. He was not oblivious to this fact and spilled considerable ink addressing his detractors. Contextualization – the use of native objects, rituals, songs, languages – is chief among the concerns expressed by those who find Twiss’ theological approach to be problematic.² “When it comes to western systematic theology,” he explains, “syncretism is not seen as positive, but rather as antithetical to ‘sound doctrine,’ the result of the mix.”³ Twiss argues, however, that this is not an objective point of view but one that is fundamentally western, reductionist, and monolithic; a view that more often than not predisposes western theologians to view

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² There are numerous examples of conservative-thinking, indigenous and non-indigenous evangelicals who are engaged in attempts to discredit NAIITS theologians and their attempt to normalize and systematize contextual Christian worship across North America and abroad.

syncretism as heretical. Twiss and other members of NAIITS, in their attempt to implement indigenous methods into Christian theology, see things differently.

First and, perhaps, foremost is the notion that, as Twiss understands it, “syncretism is normative. Yes normal! It is part of a person’s spiritual and sociocultural transformation. It might even be thought of as ‘transformational’ syncretism or a syncretistic process of transformation.” Twiss explains this process more succinctly in the following:

People move in and out of syncretism as they embrace, reject, modify, learn, and grow toward spiritual maturity as sociocultural persons following Jesus. Syncretism is not a fixed, end state, although it could be. Our current evangelical definitions have tended to view syncretism through a dualistic hermeneutical framework—in terms of being a final product or fixed end-state. It is considered the result of people mixing good/evil, right/wrong, correct/false, biblical/heretical, godly/demonic, enlightened/deceived beliefs or practices resulting in falsehood, heresy, or ultimate deception. This cultural ‘deception’ is identified by contrasting it to the theological standards for the ‘true faith’ which is firmly embedded in a Western polemic.4

Twiss, then, views syncretism as an inevitable, organic, fluid, and fundamentally human process. A crucial step in indigenizing the conversation surrounding syncretism is removing it from the Western dualistic framings that pigeon-hole syncretism as an all or nothing dichotomy; that there is either syncretism or there is not. Twiss wants to suggest that syncretism simply never ceases to be a vital aspect of every human endeavor. Humans are always combining, mixing, and synchronizing a variety of ideas and experiences, attempting to achieve practical and/or conceptual equilibrium in the world.

4 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 31.
For Twiss, therefore, syncretism is inevitable, a natural human process and fundamental to human behavior; it is in a persistent state of flux, and manifests in a multitude of forms. What is more, syncretism, he asserts, is Biblical. “Jesus told His early disciples,” Twiss reminds his reader, “that after new seeds were planted and weeds began to grow up alongside them, they couldn’t distinguish the difference between the weeds and the wheat growing in the field. So he advised them not to pull up the weeds because they’d be pulling up the wheat too (Matt 13:24-30).”

He and other members of NAIITS theologians are cautious, however, avoiding an anything goes approach to syncretistic forms. Twiss, for example, developed a theological hierarchy or an evaluative typology consisting of the categories “transitional syncretism” and “counteractive syncretism.” Transitional syncretism is, according to Twiss, syncretism that occurs naturally as one transitions from one portion of their life into another (having been exposed to new information). “As human beings,” he avers, “we have nothing but syncretism in the church, and rightly so, since the Gospel always gets inside culture. . . .We mix music, ceremony, language, art, symbols, vocabulary, fashion, ideologies, nationalism, and cultural metaphors constantly.” More importantly, transitional syncretism is part and parcel to conversion from Twiss’ perspective.

True conversion—becoming transformed, and over a lifetime conformed to the person of Jesus—is a gradual and erratic process of sociocultural change or acculturation. It is not regulated or predictable, it is not an evenly-paced process of change and transformation . . . It is uneven, variable, messy, irregular, and fluctuating. It is an organic process of spiritual transformation as one engages the sacred ways of our Creator, bound by the limitations of our existence as finite human beings.

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5 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 33.
6 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 35-41.
7 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 34.
So the very act of becoming Christian is a syncretistic one, consisting of a “normative ambiguity” as to what, precisely, a Christian should look or sound like. The crucial aspects of conversion (and by necessity “transitional syncretism”) are: 1) that this process does not result in anything that would subtract from the authority of scripture or orthodoxy, and 2) that it produces loving and mature followers who exhibit “goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

“Counteractive syncretism,” on the other hand, is “a kind of mixing of core religious beliefs that ultimately diminish, fully resist, or finally stop . . . one’s personal faith journey as a follower of Jesus and His ways.” He explains in more detail that:

Counteractive syncretism might be experienced as an uncritical, open-ended, or naïve embrace of religious pluralism. In addition, there might not be any acknowledgement of evil, darkness, or malevolent forces at work on the earth that frequently find expression religiously. Counteractive syncretism would direct one’s “primary allegiance” to someone/something other than Jesus by reason of a person’s participation in a new religious system.

A similar understanding is also articulated in an earlier document which functions as an expression of the NAIITS’ organization’s articles of faith. Composed by Adrian Jacobs, Richard Twiss and Terry LeBlanc this piece is titled “Culture, Christian Faith and Error.” In it they argue that:

Traditionalism is the valuing and process of passing on ideas, ways, and values of the past to the succeeding generation. It is looking to the past for the ideal. Tradition is not inherently evil or wrong. Jesus said the

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8 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 34.
9 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 35.
10 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 36.
Pharisees nullified the word of God by their tradition. This kind of tradition that goes against God’s word is the kind that is wrong.\footnote{Jacobs, Adrian, Terry LeBlanc, and Richard Twiss. 2003. “Culture, Christian Faith and Error.” NAIITS Journal, Vol. 1, (2003): ??} Syncretism without boundaries, then, is problematic. At the level of practice, counteractive syncretism represents an inappropriate and/or unhealthy shift in commitment (what Twiss refers to as “one’s allegiance”). Ultimately one must be engaged in belief systems and practices within which the commitment must be directed toward Jesus Christ. To do otherwise constitutes, according to Twiss, a novel or non-Christian orientation. Citing Ray Aldred, Twiss stresses the sovereignty of God that must remain the sole operative feature of one’s syncretistic religiosity: “Syncretism is not good when it takes away from the real message of communion—the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ which produces life from above, liberating all of human and non-human creation to find and experience the beauty of Creator’s love.” The lynch-pin, then, is the issue of work. Who is it that is actively “producing” redemptive power on one’s life? Any commitment that would place redemptive agency in any entity other than Christ/God (either the animistic spirits or the human actors themselves) would constitute a counteractive and potentially dangerous form of syncretism. Casey Church, the newly appointed leader of Wiconi International, articulates the issue succinctly:

The Challenge we have is teaching the more receptive that we are not adapting new forms to the old ways to worshipping the old spirits or gods, but giving new meaning to the old practices to give glory to God. When we don’t teach these concepts, new believers from traditional ways often continue their old practices, but substitute Christian symbols in place of
traditional ones and new adaptation of forms, however, are still associated with the old meaning then we run into creating syncretism and heresy. NAIITS members often express this distinction between “form” and “content.” “Forms” – the ritual programs, objects, instruments, languages, musical styles, and protocols typical of Native American religiosity—are considered innocuous mechanisms in and of themselves. The “contents,” or beliefs and orientations, that are invested in the use, production, implementation and practice of these forms is the key to critical contextualization. Thus, “true believers,” Twiss reminds us, “should break completely with all animistic practices.”

This focus on redemptive work is then extended to the process of transitional syncretism and the broader contextualization movement. Through the work, practice, or worship of the “true believer” Native implements such as “drums, rattles, and other sacred paraphernalia formerly used in animistic worship can be ‘redeemed’ for Christian worship.” Therefore, “true believer”—one who has achieved the appropriate commitment and understands that the source of redemptive power is top-down, from Christ/God to humans—is a conduit whereby God/Christ redeems Indigenous objects for use in a Christian context.

On a more abstract level, Twiss and other members of NAIITS suggest that an acceptance of syncretism must be accompanied by a modicum of scrutiny (no doubt utilizing the above typology and moral associations). The alternative, which should be avoided, is an unchecked cultural relativism, the “uncritical . . . embrace of religious

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13 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 14.

14 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 14.
pluralism” that Twiss mentioned in the quotation above. As a nod to their theological opponents, NAIITS members stress that syncretism cannot be celebrated for its own sake. In other words, Native Evangelicals must not and cannot become part of the wider society’s tendency to accept a wide variety of religious expression in an effort to celebrate diversity. This, they warn, would move syncretism from the realm of God’s sovereignty and place it within the context of a human-centered, secularism. The implication here is that the latter celebrates humanity as the creator of culture, undermining God’s sovereignty. In their scrutiny of the term syncretism, therefore, NAIITS theologians promote a Native Evangelicalism that celebrates God’s work through culture, highlighting culture as a sign of God’s sovereignty.

The theology of normative syncretism and its accompanying moral typology allows for other theological strategies from the perspective of indigenous methods. What I am referring to as the theology of Biblical Indigeneity, for example, depends upon and reinforces the theology of normative syncretism. Additionally, normative syncretism creates a position from which members of NAIITS can both locate and critique other instances of syncretism (keeping in mind that, from their position, cultural syncretism is all that is ever possible). In each case, the concept of “nationhood” is used in a theological context in order to link indigeneity to scripture, establishing a Biblical mode of being that stands in juxtaposition to colonial entities. These theological formulations will be examined in more detail in the following sections.

**The Theology of Biblical Indigeneity**

The emphasis on syncretism and contextualization leads, then, to the sanctification of indigeneity through, what I am referring to as, the theology of Biblical indigeneity, which is expressed in different ways, at times drawing upon creationism,
drawing upon the gospel stories themselves, and through a native evangelical
Christology. Like many natives who also identify as Christian, NAIITS theologians look
to scripture to make sense of what it means to be “indigenous.” Twiss employs a dose
of literary criticism, utilizing an analysis of Latin translations and their suggested socio-
historical meanings in order to draw correlations between biblical imagery and
indigenous identity.

Genesis 2:7 says that “God formed the man [adam, meaning ‘image of
God’] from the dust of the ground [adama, meaning ‘red soil’] and
breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. . . .” So when God was
preparing to make human beings, He first gathered together a pile of dirt—
red dirt—and began to form a shape. (Remember, God said it was good
dirt).

So you can see from the Word of God that the first human beings created,
Adam and Eve, may have been in fact red-skinned people! One might
even say they were the first Indians. (Twiss 2000, 63) [original italics]

Linking indigeneity with the Garden of Eden, Twiss not only makes indigenous peoples
more relevant to Biblical narrative, he places them front-and-center, as God’s intended
creation. The theological implications are profound when one considers the hierarchy
that then emerges between pre- and post-fall ontological states.

LeBlanc echoes Twiss’ reorientation of theological approaches to the book of
Genesis. He argues that “theology must move its place of departure out of Genesis
chapter three, the depravity of humanity and the fall of creation, into Genesis chapter
one and two—the plan of God.”15 This orientation, according to both LeBlanc and Twiss,
effectively recovers what is a scripturally defined indigeneity that has been lost as a
consequence of colonialism and the hegemonic status of the West. “We have,” LeBlanc

15 Terry and Jennifer LeBlanc, “NAIITS,” 93.
avers, “a valid spiritual history that predates European contact! The recovery of the Missio Dei in the Native World has meant we are no longer an afterthought—we have always been fully in the heart and mind of God.”

NAIITS members articulate biblical indigeneity in relation to the person of Jesus as well. During various public speaking engagements and interviews Twiss makes reference to Jesus as a dark-skinned, tribal person. In a 2008 web-based Sojotube production, titled “Indigenous Theologians Discuss Christianity from a Native Perspective,” Twiss and others explain the details of the contextualization movement and the necessity for natives who are also Christians to actively separate, from their perspective, what is fundamentally Christian (i.e., biblical) from what is culturally European. For his part, Twiss highlights the person of Jesus as being fundamentally un-European ethnically and culturally, stressing once more the contingent and flimsy relationship between European culture and Biblical truth.

When Jesus walked among the people he really walked as an indigenous, as a tribal man. And so in that context, Jesus never was a white man, he never was a European. And the gospel story never reflected the values as being [pause] sort of sacro-sanct, the ways of Europe became so imbued with Christian thought that they actually became Christian in and of themselves, sacro-sanct. They were just the cultural ways of the people that happened to come here. And so our challenge as native people is, ok, how do we sort out the culture from the gospel? How do we really follow Jesus without being forced to accept cultural ways as being part of what that means?

Twiss continued his discussion of the person of Jesus—what has arguably become his Christology—again in a talk delivered at Gordon College in 2013. Here he not only links

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17 See: Twiss in “Indigenous Theologians Discuss Christianity from a Native Perspective,” Youtube video, 9:35. Published by Sojotube on November 26, 2008.
Jesus’s birth to Indigenism but also makes reference to the community and other important biblical figures and events within the context of indigeneity:

So this whole story, it begins in a native community. This little Indian community called Bethlehem. And the scripture says that the word of God became flesh and blood . . . he moved into the neighborhood. Whose hood did God move into? This little Indian village among a tribal people, tribal nation called the Hebrew nation and a sub-tribe called the tribe of Judah. So God chose to reveal [him]self in humanly form of this native boy, born in this village, among a tribe of people. So this Jesus had black hair, black eyes, and very dark skin, and as an aboriginal, indigenous, native, first-nations boy. And he grew up and he spoke the language of his people. He followed [the] customs of his tribe and of his nation. And when the time came for him to go into public service he goes to the wilderness and there’s a medicine man out there wearing camel fur and eating locusts and wild honey and this medicine man, John the Baptizer, says: “This is the one I’ve been telling you about!” So when Jesus comes out of the Jordan River after being Baptized . . . he’s not ashamed of his ethnicity, he’s not ashamed of his skin-color, and his hair and his eyes, his tribal background. Because he receives the affirmation of the father’s love within the cultural context of this human being as an indigenous boy. ¹⁸

For Twiss, then, indigeneity is the ideal mode of being according to his assessment of Biblical truth. What is more, Jesus, as a First-Nations person, was a part of a particular cultural milieu that was spatially and temporally contingent. In Twiss’s estimation, this cultural particularity is part and parcel to the revelation of God’s plan in the person of Jesus. The various physical and socio-historical features of Jesus the person are, for Twiss, as important as any of the claims being made about him theologically in the Gospel stories.

In an interview with blogger Cindy Brandt in April of 2015, Randy Woodley expressed, in explicit detail, precisely this problem, the idea that indigeneity, from an ontological perspective, is more closely related to Biblical truth. He stated:

First Nations, and generally Indigenous peoples around the world, have values that come much closer to the teachings of Jesus than do most Euro-American settler-colonial societies. Settler-colonialism often openly espouses the values of Christ and an allegiance to Christ but it does not deliver those values. The American and British empires certainly claimed to be Christian at the time of their colonizing. They promised stability, prosperity, security, civilization and salvation— all of which sound like God’s shalom intentions. But instead they delivered national and even global imbalance, oppression, violence, greed, and destruction. What is needed is shalom or, said in an Indigenous way, harmony. This very shalom-esque construct was already present among most of our First Nations but the Euro-Americans could not imagine the fact that we already had a society more Christ-like than they did.19

In typical fashion, the connection to the environment and systems of kinship are markers for Woodley, pointing to the key differences between Western culture and Indigenous ways of life prior to Western influence. Shalom, which from a theological perspective is variously understood to mean “peace,” “wholeness,” “well-being,” “perfection of God’s creation,” is then re-oriented, associated more closely with pre-contact indigenous ways of life and then turned back onto Western culture as a moral standard to which it has not lived up.20 He takes this line of thought further and points to specific characteristics in the following statement.

A number of fundamental flaws exist within Western societies that westerners cannot easily identify themselves. It’s perhaps easier for First Nations to see them as we are looking in from the outside, especially after 500 years of observation. Some of the problems include: Physical Dualisms; Moral Dualism; Extrinsic Categorization; Hierarchies; Utopianism; Homogeneity; Anthropocentrism; Triumphalism; Selfishness; Patriarchy and Individualism. All of these, I argue, are in contrast to Christ’s teachings and yet are embedded within the Western psyche, including within Western Christianity and its theology. Mirroring invasion, their theology also wreaks havoc on others, creating discord and imbalance. The Western theological landscape cannot see beyond its own


20 For a more thorough understanding of the theology of shalom, see Randy Woodley’s dissertation, titled “The Harmony Way:” Integrating Indigenous Values Within Native North American Theology and Mission.
shadow. How will they learn if they don’t listen? Who better to teach the Lawyer than the Samaritan? Who better to teach the White man than the American Indian? We have been waiting over a half a millennium for them to listen...perhaps that time is coming sooner than later.\textsuperscript{21}

According to Woodley, fundamental cultural assumptions operate in the minds of Westerners, contaminating all that they do. He makes the additional point that, from the indigenous evangelical perspective, this contamination is never more obvious than in the way that theology and mission are carried out by Westerners. The very term “mission” is militaristic and has become a source of great debate among NAIITS theologians and non-indigenous theologians closely aligned with them.\textsuperscript{22}

This approach to indigeneity and Biblical truth is also expressed in the context of the NAIITS 2014 academic symposium held at George Fox University near Portland, Oregon. Interesting here is the heterogeneous expression of indigeneity. Non-native speakers exert similar pressures onto Euro-centric creationism. In her presentation Anne M. Dilenschneider told her story of self discovery:

\begin{quote}
I live between two worlds. Although I am a Christian pastor and a counselor, I am also a member of the confederation of tribes in which Jesus grew up. On my mother’s side I am descended from the tribe of Levi, one of the 12 tribes of Israel. I didn't know this until I was already a pastor. Due to the discrimination they had faced, my mother and her family never spoke about their history. . . . Yet this news explained so many things: Why the photographs of my ancestors had high cheekbones, dark hair, and dark beards. Why my grandfather told me, when I was a small, tow-haired child, to keep my hair blond throughout my life and not let it go dark. Why I had dreams of concentration camps.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{21} Brandt, “Interview with Randy Woodley,” 2015.

\textsuperscript{22} For an example of literature by a non-indigenous theologian who is interested in challenging the meaning and practice of Christian mission, see David J. Bosch's \textit{Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission} (1991) and for an indigenous take on the subject see George Tinker's \textit{Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide} (1993).

\textsuperscript{23} Anne M. Dilenschneider, "Walking the road of Forgiveness: The Restoration of Love, Justice, and Power," paper presented at the 11\textsuperscript{th} Annual Symposium on Indigenous Mission and Theology sponsored by NAIITS and George Fox University, 1.
Once again, Indigeneity is tied to the person of Jesus and then projected back to his ancestors as well as the wider community into which he was born; having Jewish heritage is having indigenous identity. What is more, this pre-Christian, non-Euro-American, indigenous identity is something that is perceived to be closer to Biblical truth, one that is distinct efficacious spiritually. Learning of this lost portion of her identity motivated Dr. Dilenschneider to attempt to recover her genealogical connections.

That started an adventure – an adventure many of you [Native Americans] know so well. I learned my tribe’s language: Hebrew. I spent 9 years in bilingual Torah and Talmud study. I was able to reconnect with my own tribal community and learn, first hand, about that part of who I am. And, to the delight of my Christian parishioners, that deepened and enriched our understanding of Jesus and the Jesus Way, because I was able to talk about him in his own tribal context[,] . . . he became more more challenging to us, inviting us into a far more community-based understanding and practice of faith than that offered by the surrounding Euro-American culture.\textsuperscript{24}

In these formulations there is a direct correlation between one’s proximity to indigenous identity and one’s proximity to Biblical alignment. Recovering her indigenous roots, then, increased her ability to comprehend and relate to Jesus. Understanding Jesus on a more intimate level through the auspices of Indigenous frames and methods, furthermore, led, in her estimation, to a more accurate Christian ontology.

In his work on the concomitant emergence of the concepts of Indigenism and human rights, Ronald Niezen explains that Indigenous nationalist formulations are often characterized by the inversion of colonial ontological hierarchies,

\textsuperscript{24} Dilenschneider, “Walking the road of Forgiveness,” 1.
nature, an answer to the cold empiricism of science and the rapacity of industry, a message that is ignored to humanity’s peril.\textsuperscript{25}

In other words, Western culture, contrary to its claims to civilizing capability and superiority, is actually a fundamentally negative force. Pre-contact, Indigenous culture, on the other hand, provides a more sustainable approach to nature as well as a more communal and thus more holistic approach to sociality. In a kind of “biblical primitivism,” the claim to Indigeneity as a manifestation of divinely-sanctioned nationhood as well as a Biblically-oriented ontology devalues modern, industrialized, nation-states and/or “Anglos living in diaspora” as a consequence of colonialism. NAIITS theologians often express a profound sense of frustration and even anger directed toward Euro-American, settler society for \textit{its} arrogance and the West’s unwillingness to shed its sense of exceptionalism even in the face of its obvious failures; from the perspective of NAIITS members, leading to the continuation of the colonial mindset (neo-colonialism). These developments have worked together, they aver, to produce a very large population of people – “whites” “the settler population,” or “Euro-Americans” – who have in effect become estranged from their indigenous roots, thereby estranged from God’s intended ontological status or mode of being. Thus, ironically, an indigenous exceptionalism emerges from the perspective of Biblical Indigeneity, perhaps developed and deployed in an effort to fight fire with fire.

\textbf{Theological Nationalism}

The theology of Biblical Indigeneity enables comparison. With Indigeneity placed firmly within the framework of Biblical history, syncretism/contextualization rendered

normative, NAIITS theologians proceed to evaluate manifestations of contextualization. Biblical Indigeneity becomes the litmus test, allowing NAIITS theologians to challenge cultural forms (namely, Western culture) from the appropriate vantage point. Because scripture and Christ are now thought to be intrinsically Indigenous, NAIITS theologians can effectively target with precision those elements of non-indigenous culture that, as they understand it, cut across the Biblical grain.

For NAIITS theologians, the concept of nationhood figures prominently into their biblically determined schema. The term “First Nations,” Twiss makes clear, “captures the essence of our biblical identity as a people created in the image of God and not in the image of European culture. The name speaks of independence, sovereignty, and self-determination, identifying us as equal in terms of worth and value, not as dependents who find their identity in the approval or patronage of others.”

“First Nations,” because it designates an indigenous identity, is considered in light of Biblical Indigeneity. If God created all nations, then “First Nations” and “tribal nations” are equally valid manifestations of divine intention, so their argument goes, and should never have been subjected to hierarchical devaluation in the first place.

Assuming cultural superiority, especially from the perspective of national identity can, however, become a hindrance in one’s spiritual growth. Claims to exclusivity from a socio-political or cultural perspective leads to, as NAIITS theologians make clear, the degradation of true Biblical understanding. Twiss, in his later work, emphasized the kind of culture/religious combination that can become detrimental to God’s redemptive work through culture. Should the connection between nation and religiosity become so

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naturalized that the difference between them no longer remain distinct in the minds of believers, the nation can become a powerfully negative force bordering on idolatry. Twiss warns his readers, arguing that,

openly displaying the American Flag (sic) alongside the “Christian flag” on each side of the stage or pulpit is an example of counteractive syncretism, it is blending the ideology of nationhood and the Christian religion. It presupposes an idealized national exceptionalism of God’s chosenness (sic), blessing, and approval of America. The result is a unique Americanized version of Christianity that directs attention away from identity in Christ and the Kingdom. It redirects allegiance to a kind of “Christian patriotism” which demands a deep-seated loyalty, reverence, trust, and faith in political, military, and economic might. It inspires national pride and the assumptions of Creator’s divine favor. The mixing of Euro-American culture with the Gospel—from Plato to Andrew Jackson to Ronald Reagan—is considered permissible and orthodox.27

Thus, while the nation is necessary as a spatial vessel for cultural and spiritual development on a societal scale, the discourse of nationhood as a source of ideological influence can have profoundly negative effects on one’s personal spiritual perspective. Hence, the concept of “counteractive syncretism.” In concert with Twiss, NAIITS members and supporters of contextualization (McLaren: 2010) point to this kind of nationally inspired religiosity, describing it as a form of syncretism that has become so naturalized and taken-for-granted that it is no longer thought of as syncretistic (if it ever was).

Not all of the NAIITS theological community agrees on the issue of syncretism. In the foreword to Twiss’s recent book, Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys, which was his doctoral dissertation and became published following his death, Terry LeBlanc, Randy Woodley, Adrian Jacobs, and Ray Aldred critiqued Twiss’s attempt to reimagine the term syncretism. “Just before his passing,” they admit, “an argument raged over

27 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 17.
Richard’s attempt to nuance the definition of syncretism. . . . He used the descriptor counteractive to modify the word syncretism, attempting a new definition with this two-word phrase: counteractive syncretism. We told him it was needless confusion – this hybrid phrase just didn’t correspond to the simple definition of syncretism.”

Later, in an interview, LeBlanc explained to me that the source of this disagreement and critique was the sense that the appropriate definition of syncretism is “the blending of two religious systems so that the produced system is neither of the contributors, but something different, but is clearly born from the two contributors. It has nothing to do with the engagement with culture and the use of cultural forms and artifacts and principles and ideas. That’s some form of contextualization, sometimes in a good way, sometimes not. So, as the American church has embraced the idea of economic prosperity to the extent that it has and created the Prosperity Gospel, that’s [contextualization] in that it is embracing a cultural ideology of success and prosperity and baptizing it in a Christian frame. But that’s a cultural form, it’s a cultural ideology, it’s not a religious system per se.

The disagreement, then, is centered on the extent to which the term syncretism can be expanded and used synonymously with contextualization or not. LeBlanc, Woodley, Jacobs, and Aldred would argue that it cannot. Twiss, on the other hand, obviously viewed the term syncretism as a form of contextualization and was attempting to undermine Euro-centric claims about Christian religiosity, thereby defusing the term of its typical colonial connotations where it was typically deployed to discredit peripheral or “heretical” expressions of faith. This disagreement notwithstanding, NAIITS theologians, whether they use the term syncretism or prefer the term contextualization, remain parallel on the issue of Biblical Indigeneity and its moral and ethical efficacy over that of Western culture.

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29 Terry LeBlanc, Interview with Jason E Purvis, Tyndale University College and Seminary, 6-05-2016.
NAIITS theologians express concern for the combination of Euro-centric and Christian forms regularly in their work, often expressing concerns similar to those of Twiss in different terms. In the NAIITS statement of faith, originally written by Adrian Jacobs, Richard Twiss and Terry LeBlanc, which has been published and re-printed in multiple volumes of the NAIITS journal, concerns about syncretism are addressed explicitly. Herein, perhaps, lay the difficulty with Twiss’s attempt to rethink syncretism. “We are strongly opposed to syncretism in any form,” they wrote, “especially when cultural practice in any way begins to encroach on the authority of God’s Word and in particular, the work of the cross. Our aim is to provide a theological framework for defining syncretism.”

Clearly Twiss’s ideas about syncretism and how syncretism relates to processes of cultural contextualization had changed since his co-production of the NAIITS statement of faith. Twiss’s understanding of syncretism and contextualization began to blend together.

The NAIITS community has developed a theological tradition of separating the cultural from the religious and making claims from that position. The statement of faith, in addition, contains critiques of legalism and mind-body dualism as Euro-centric, potentially heretical expressions of Christianity. Gnosticism, which NAIITS theologians argue became, and remains, heavily influential in Western theology, “brings or produces legalism, fear, bondage, and rules as a way of distancing itself from the physical/natural world. . . . In Colossians exclusiveness and harsh legalism are said to be very damaging to Christian freedom and disrespectful to the human body as indwelt by the Holy

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Spirit.”31 This modular approach – consisting of contingent “forms” and stable “contents” – function as a way for NAIITS theologians to measure the scriptural validity of a particular taken-for-granted assumption concerning religiosity.

The compartmentalizations of time and the self, which have emerged in the Western imagination, is similarly challenged by the NAIITS statement of faith.

As Christians we would all benefit by seeing our Christianity as central to everything that we do. We would stop viewing our employment situations as secular ‘non-religious’ work, and Sunday mornings as our spiritual activity. Jesus has called us to be His followers twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We are spiritual beings living in this physical world. 32

NAIITS theologians are clear that combining Western cultural understandings of time and space have undermined the individual’s ability to live out his or her call to follow Jesus effectively. As it relates to perceptions of the self, they contend that “the North American Native view is actually much closer to the classic un-synthesized Hebraic-Christian view of life than is the contemporary western evangelical’s segregated view.” Pointing to the spherical mapping of human interaction, Jacobs, et al take issue with the way in which “Western people especially have a deep-seated inclination to make radical distinction between the sacred and the secular, neatly dividing their concerns and activities into these airtight compartments.”33

This critique of religio-cultural combinations/syncretism/contextualization is raised further in the context of systems of governance. Jennifer and Terry LeBlanc, for example, discusses this phenomenon in a recent article arguing that

the traditions and teachings of the wider church . . . [are] often presented as if culturally neutral and philosophically neutral, . . . [however they are actually] rooted more in the cultural and philosophical ethos of the secular West than in the text of Scripture and the traditions of Jesus. . . . Democracy is not resident in the text and teaching of Scripture—yet it is fully and deeply ensconced in church polity as if ‘secular’ governments have it right.34

Ultimately, the critiques concerning the combination of national discourse and religion issued forth by NAIITS are part of a process. This process, as I have made clear, amounts to the categorical separation between what constitutes cultural content and what constitutes religious content. This, as I have stated, allows for the demarcation between what is fundamentally Western or “Euro-centric” and what is indigenous. The distinction between “Western” and “Indigenous” was illustrated most explicitly by Mark Levassuer, a Métis Native and new appointee to the NAIITS board of directors, during his presentation in the 2015 Symposium. His presentation was centered on the fundamental cultural differences that inform Western and Indigenous forms of Christianity and was accompanied by the table 4-1.

Levassuer’s sentiments are not new. Indeed, in many ways, they mirror many of the concerns raised by his predecessors. Defining works such as Vine Deloria’s God is Red and George Tinker’s A Native Theology have become mainstays in Native American and First Nations communities by making many of the same distinctions between Native cultures and Western culture, articulating the latter as fundamentally more sustainable, reciprocal, and communally-based.

This critique of Western culture is taken even further on Eagle’s Wings Ministry’s website. There, Randy Woodley discusses the theological value of an indigenous

worldview, suggesting that it is not only preferable to Western forms, but also that it can and should be adopted by non-indigenous peoples.

Only in converting Western thinkers, who have abused the earth and all creation, towards more sacred Indigenous values and worldview can we maintain the privilege of co-sustaining this earth together. Many European-Americans still have to learn these lessons, some are beginning to learn. Unfortunately, we wished they would have listened 500 years ago before so much pain was experienced by Indigenous peoples, but perhaps it is not too late. What about the damage done to our people and cultures? The presupposition of forgiveness does not exclude long overdue acts of restorative justice. In fact, in the Bible God demands restitution for wrongs done.\(^{35}\)

Converting settler populations to an indigenous worldview, then, would move them closer to a Biblical life-style. The very act of repairing relations with its Indigenous population would start the redemptive process, according to Woodley. Indeed this potential, ubiquitously understood, for the recovery of indigeneity is implied in all that NAIITS does.

All is not lost for North America, however. There are aspects of North American nationality that function in precisely the way God intended. Twiss, for example, expresses a version of U.S. exceptionalism, emphasizing syncretism as a fundamental aspect of the United States’ unique status in the world. Here, the values of both America as an exceptional case and the theology of normative syncretism are combined.

Cultural syncretism is a fact of life. America is the epitome of cultural syncretism. Our nation is called the melting pot of the world because its culture is a blend or mixture of the cultural expression of the peoples of the earth. Nearly the entire population of North America is made up of immigrants from other countries, and its culture is a unique blend of languages, music, dance, arts, economic systems, political structures,

technology and sciences of its citizens. Culturally speaking, the United States of America is a syncretistic nation.\textsuperscript{36}

The United States is, however, an incomplete project whose transgressions against its native population have resulted in what Twiss refers to as a fractured “Body of Christ.” “When the heart is flooded with racial, cultural, ideological, or denominational strife,” he avers, “there is little room in the heart to hold honor, respect, and admiration for those who are different.”\textsuperscript{37} The United States, while exhibiting an exceptional level of syncretism, remains, in his theological estimation, an incomplete multicultural entity. Thus, the United States (and North America more broadly) have not lived up to their divinely inspired multicultural imperative.

In his early work Twiss expressed his belief that the United States and Canada are currently embroiled in a crucial point in history, one in which Anglo and indigenous Christians have been called by God to become integrated and complete the Body of Christ. “The Christian Native community,” Twiss tells us, “must be recognized as a vital and integral part of the God-given destiny of America.”\textsuperscript{38} More specifically, he contends that:

\begin{quote}
The native condition is not merely a social issue; it is also deeply spiritual. It has strong ties to the past and has great bearing on the future fulfillment of God’s intended purpose for our nation. The Body of Christ in North America cannot remain functionally healthy so long as it contains a detached, unattended appendage. We all suffer as a result.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{36} Twiss, \textit{One Church Many Tribes}, 131.

\textsuperscript{37} Twiss, \textit{One Church Many Tribes}, 49.

\textsuperscript{38} Twiss, \textit{One Church Many Tribes}, 52.

\textsuperscript{39} Twiss, \textit{One Church Many Tribes}, 61.
The United States, its history, and its destiny are all crucial elements of Twiss’ perception of the church in the United States. Clearly, then, an American exceptionalism plays heavily in Twiss’ desire to see Native Americans perform, what he believes is, their prophetic task—to integrate the Body of Christ in America.

NAIITS members and faculty also articulate the nation more broadly in discussions about their theological understanding of multiculturalism. It is precisely that the church everywhere is Anglo-dominated and favors Euro-centric cultural forms that prevents the realization of God’s plan. For Twiss, then, it is the full fruition of multiculturalism that will have profound implications for the nation and, by extension, the Body of Christ. There is a teleological expectation in Twiss’ perception of multiculturalism. Citing the work of John Calvin and expanding upon it, Twiss argues that “God is the creator of nations and the author of the flow of history—the first multiculturalist. . . . The very idea of culture began with God.”

Even before European migration and colonialism God created the many cultures that dot the landscape. These “first nations,” according to Twiss, were God’s intended design. Culture, nations, history and multiculturalism are, thus, fundamental to God’s plan on earth. Nations, in this schema, are God’s greenhouses, the geographical and temporal spaces within which cultures germinate and grow. NAIITS director, Terry LeBlanc, described the goings-on at the first WCGIP (World Christian Gathering on Indigenous People) as an effect of the Holy Spirit, commenting that,

the dry bones of their people were being fashioned into living beings and, not without clear Native symbolism apparent, the wind of the Spirit was blowing from the four directions to animate them to life. . . . Babel was not simply if at all a curse; diversity of language and culture were a legitimate,

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40 Twiss, One Church Many Tribes, 62.
many would affirm essential, way to experience the redemptive creativity of God. . . . ‘Pentecost lit the flame of cultural diversity, the Jerusalem Council fanned that flame and the WCGIP provided it with a contemporary vessel.' In fact, for most within the WCGIP, unity was a moot point without diversity. The same Creator who enjoyed the many-splendored realm of the rest of creation also enjoyed human variety in worship.⁴¹

Multiculturalism made manifest or fully realized means the total integration of the Body of Christ and, therefore, the completion of the divinely-sanctioned national imperative. Native Christians, furthermore, play a pivotal role in this God-directed, divinely sanctioned integration. “God,” Twiss explained, “is going to use Native people in a unique way to accomplish His sovereign purposes for our nation.”⁴² While the United States can function as an example of divinely sanctioned multiculturalism, its monoculturalist citizenry are a foil, preventing God’s plan from becoming fully realized.

In sum, the articulation of syncretism/contextualization as normative and subsequent critique of religio-cultural syncretism leads to the juxtaposition of western versus indigenous, which, then, leads to a third process; namely, the creation and theological justification of a trans-indigenous, trans-national identity – Biblical Indigeneity – formation that is infused and charged with theological significance in the form of Biblical justification.

**The Particular and the Universal**

The theologies of normative syncretism, Biblical indigeneity, and theological nationalism offer insight into the way that NAIITS members and theologians navigate the scales of local and global. They have built a transnational indigenous identity that is, they argue, more grounded in scripture than are Western forms. This claim concerning

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⁴² Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, 30.
the synonymous relationship between indigeneity and Christian universalism, however, has interesting implications for indigenous identity as it relates to locality. Scholars such as Niezen and Clifford, also recognizing the difficult negotiation between claims to locality and the global reality that is indigeneity, has aptly pointed out, indigenous peoples are part and parcel to various processes of globalization and continue to develop strategies that facilitate their successful navigation of the network society.

A particular strategy seems to be in play as NAIITS theologians debate the differences between Indigenous and Western ontologies. Being indigenous is predicated on being non-colonial, situated in a particular place prior to the arrival of settler populations. This, as Niezen also observed, constitutes a global, geo-political identity that responds to the consequences of colonialism everywhere. What is more, I contend that it would be a mistake to assume that, as they engage in overseas missionary work, Native Evangelicals repackage and redeploy American (or that of any other Western entity) imperialism.43 This kind of assessment depends upon and promotes a unilateral, center-periphery perception of power. As such, it assumes that indigenous actors are dupes or drones, passive agents, empty receptacles, thoroughly subservient to a dominant paradigm and incapable of thought independent from the dominant ideological frames.

NAIITS, affiliated organizations, and the theologies emerging therein are, I argue, constitutive of transnational religious identities. The theology of Biblical Indigeneity is

43 Among contemporary sociologists who study Global Christianities, this is becoming an increasingly popular charge. Nina Glick-Schiller’s article “Transnational Social Fields and Imperialism: Bringing a Theory of Power to Transnational Studies,” published in the 2005 issue of Anthropological Theory, is a prime example of this ongoing academic trend. While it certainly has its merits, it seems to me that this line or argumentation obfuscates the complexity and nuance of particular missionary endeavors. If the punch line of every possible case is that it constitutes a repackaging of imperialism, then what precisely is there that remains worthy of mention?
highly effective as a counter-hegemonic theology because it taps into two universalisms; one present in Evangelical Christianity, wherein all those who inhabit the earth are thought to be God’s children and therefore capable of salvation, and the other a global indigenous identity which, as Niezen has aptly iterated, emerged concomitantly with the emergent era of spatially compressed and temporally accelerated globalization, especially as that process relates to the proliferation of human rights discourse.44

This is precisely what makes Biblical Indigeneity such a powerful theological tool. It provides a conceptual space, which allows religious actors to move between scales, from the universal or global to the particular or local. What is more, it not only bridges Evangelical and Indigenous, but renders Indigeneity fundamental to the Evangelical (and Biblical, more broadly) theological frame. The theologies of normative syncretism and Biblical Indigeneity arise out of the context of a post-colonial discourse wherein indigenous peoples feel compelled to differentiate themselves from the dominant, settler-population. They are responding to a theological tradition that, ever since the moment of contact, has, in their rendering, claimed universality and pan-contextual applicability.

In his work focusing on the implementation and subversion of power in networks society, Manuel Castells argued that “the sources of social power in our world – violence and discourse, coercion and persuasion, political domination and cultural framing – have not changed fundamentally from our historical experience, as theorized by some of the leading thinkers on power.” Dominant social entities, then, remain

conversant in and employ the effective use of all of the typical ways of maintaining dominance over those with less access to the means of production of symbolic and cultural capital.

It is, for Castells, the conceptual space that has shifted significantly. One of the key ways in which the terrain of power implementation has shifted, he avers, is that it is now situated within the articulation of between global and local. More specifically, power manifests and is deployed in the network through a particular strategy; by placing everything of ultimate value in the global category while devaluing certain things by deeming them overly or fundamentally local. While the category of global is associated with movement, cosmopolitanism, and progress, the local is associated with stasis, spatial entrenchment, and potential regression. “There are citizens of the world, living in the space of flows, versus the locals, living in the space of local places.” NAIITS theologians are engaging in precisely this process. In their merging of trans-Indigenous ontologies with Biblical themes and consequent casting of Western hegemony as fundamentally local, they are placing ultimate value in the originative and, ultimately, more universal ontology, which I have termed Biblical Indigeneity.

Castells adds that a key aspect of the implementation of power in the network society is exclusion. “Because the key, strategic networks are global there is one form of exclusion – thus, of power – that is pervasive in a world of networks: to include everything valuable in the global while excluding the devalued local.” Western theology and missiology, according to NAIITS theologians, has been presumptuously certain as

46 Castells, Communication Power, 50.
47 Castells, Communication Power, 50.
to the nature of God, anthropocentric, transactional, oriented toward acquisition, individual, and linear. This, they argue, has led to a Christianity that has become too culturally exclusive, overly local in its tone; favoring the Western cultural context to the extent that it is assumed synonymous with the Gospel.

Again, NAIITS theologians argue to the contrary; that this assumed organic relationship between Christianity and Western culture is at best, an illusion and, at worst a political manipulation of the faith. They argue, from the position of Biblical Indigeneity that being indigenous is both more universal (because it functions as a global, transnational form of locality) and more in line with biblical truth (by virtue of the indigenized Christology referenced earlier in the chapter).

What is occurring, I argue, as NAIITS theologians engage in this process of differentiation from and de-legitimation of Western forms is an inversion of the global-local scales. Biblical indigeneity is a merging of trans-Indigenous literatures, concepts, beliefs, and practices with Scripture. It is articulated as the “real” or more “fundamental” universal ontological reality. This process of scalar inversion (which is invested with moral and ethical implication as well) constitutes an overturning of West and its claims to universal applicability and normativity. As Davidson, et. al. argue in their assessment of Thomas King’s comic literature, “shifting the terms of homogenous narratives can unsettle their seeming ‘normality,’ at the same time that it can create a space, as de Certeau has noted, for interrogating and re-imag(in)ing their production.”48 This is carried out through a practice of Biblical interpretation and theology which categorized indigenous ontologies as adhering more to the fundamentals of scripture. “Western,” on

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48 Arnold E. Davidson, Priscilla L. Walton, and Jennifer Courtney Elizabeth Andrews, Border Crossings: Thomas King’s Cultural Inversions, (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 49.
the other hand, is categorized as a hyper-locality that is merely feigning universality. This scrutiny is substantiated through historical reference; the tragedies of colonization, missionary history, history treaty breaking, methods of land acquisition, and implementation of assimilative boarding schools. These are utilized in an effort to delegitimize long-standing, mainstream Western theological frames. NAIITS theologians, in a way that invites Bourdieu’s theoretical framing, are operating as independent entrepreneurs, creating religious goods that contribute to the subversion of the established symbolic order. In effect, they are “desacralizing the symbolic configurations of the religious specialists and sacralizing the symbolic constructions of the dispossessed.”

It is from this inverted position, moreover, that NAIITS theologians attempt to invert the power dynamics common to mission in North America, to render the settler population the new mission field, those who are in need of a radical reform; or, as Woodley put it, to convert the “Western thinkers, who have abused the earth and all creation, towards more sacred Indigenous values and worldview.”

Chapter Conclusion

Rather than engage in the vibrant academic back-and-forth preoccupied with the heuristic purchase of terms such as syncretism, hybridity, bricolage, mixing, or blending, this chapter’s aim has been an attempt to illumine the way in which Native Evangelicals understand and apply the terms syncretism and contextualization in the context of indigenous theological systemization. As Castells has pointed out, “the ability to exercise control over others depends on two basic mechanisms: 1) the ability to

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constitute network(s), and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network; and 2) the ability to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources, while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation."\textsuperscript{50}

NAIITS theologians – in their debates over syncretism/contextualization, their development of Biblical Indigeneity, and their critique of Theological Nationalism – engage in a noteworthy form of evasion; namely, the inversion of local and global scales. In this formulation, locality (as it relates to autochthonous claims) is extended beyond the specific geographical locations to which indigenous communities orient themselves and rendered globally relevant. Western culture and hegemonic theology is, on the other hand, (especially its claim to global relevance) is rendered destructively local, hyper specific to a Euro-American cultural context.

In recent work James Clifford has discussed contemporary Indigenous life from precisely this angle, making the crucial point that “across the current range of indigenous experiences, identifications are seldom exclusively local or inward looking but, rather, work at multiple scales of interaction.”\textsuperscript{51} NAIITS theologians, faculty, and members demonstrate precisely this type of scalar maneuverability. With some slight additions Clifford’s approach may help to explain the work of NAIITS theologians from the perspective of the complexity of the tensions between local-global scales as it relates specifically to contemporary indigenous peoples living in urban conditions.

\textsuperscript{50} Castells, \textit{Communication Power}, 45.

Relations of kinship with country can, in practice, be sustained,” Clifford avers, “even when the land is legally owned by non-Aboriginals. Of course there are struggles over multiple ‘uses’ and access is not always negotiable (the same goes for hunting, fishing, and gathering rights in North America). But the essential fact of pragmatic, if not legally recognized, sovereignty is that concrete ties to ancestral places have not been severed.\(^{52}\)

The articulations and practices of this multi-scalar connection to homeland are as diverse as the variety of Native experiences themselves. As Clifford points out,

for all those who identify as ‘native,’ ‘tribal,’ or ‘indigenous’ a feeling of connectedness to a homeland and to kin, a feeling of grounded peoplehood, is basic. How this feeling is practiced, in discursive, embodied, emplaced ways, can be quite varied. Urban populations may or may not return to rural places for family gatherings, ceremonial events, dance festivals, subsistence activities, pow wows, and so forth. For some it is a matter of frequent visits; others go once a year, for summer or midwinter social activities; some return rarely or never.\(^{53}\)

The take-away point here is that, much like those communities typically understood as diasporic, having an immediate physical connection with homeland is not entirely necessary for there to be profound feelings of locality and belonging among North American Indigenous peoples. It is, furthermore, possible to express these feelings of attachment to a homeland that is no longer in close proximity as counterpoints to the norms and values associated with dominant structures.

This is why Clifford has called for the use of diaspora as a heuristic tool to further understand the complexities of modern indigenous life. For in the diasporic disposition “the search for somewhere to belong that is outside the imagined community of the dominant nation-state” persists. And the complexity of maintaining connections to a homeland that remains within close proximity yet is inhabited by or in some ways, at the

\(^{52}\) Clifford, “Varieties of Indigenous Experience,” 203.

very least, tainted by a settler-population leads to the sense that “the home is found in another imagined place (simultaneously past and future, lost and desired) as well as in concrete social networks of linked places.” NAIITS theologians express place in both ways – either as a real intimate connection with land, or as a temporally distant, pre-contact space of imagined belonging.

Diaspora discourse is not without its problems, however. Dissimilar to those transmigrants who are typically categorized as diasporic because of the great distances and passages of time between them and their ancestral homelands, many Indigenous peoples “currently dwell ether on reduced parcels of their former territory or nearby. The feeling that one has never left one’s deep ancestral home is strong, both as a lived reality and as a redemptive political myth.” Thus they “are not so much displaced from a homeland as extensions of it.” This is extension of home is made manifest through processes of co-production, Clifford avers, during communal activities. “The tribal home – its animals, plants, social gatherings, shared foods, ancestors, and spiritual powers – is not imagined from a distance. It is activated, ‘practiced’ (De Certeau 1984), made meaningful in a range of sites by seasonal rituals, social gatherings, visits, and subsistence activities.” For NAIITS theologians, this imagining is made all the more meaningful as it is placed within a Biblical framing, extracting the tropes of “tribalism” and “nationhood” from the Old Testament and inscribing them onto the pre-Columbian, North American continent.

There is also an additional set of tactics that NAIITS theologians deploy effectively.\textsuperscript{57} This diasporic disposition is further extended beyond ethnic ties and made available to all. Indigeneity, in the way that NAIITS theologians promote it, seems more a cultural choice than an ethnic particularity. From the perspective of Biblical Indigeneity, for example, locality takes on a decidedly different tone, becoming more than merely my place of reference. Place and locality are ontological frameworks, cognitive dispositions that can be extracted from geographical space, achievable not only by the ethnically indigenous, but by all who have a Bible and are capable of interpreting it from the perspective of Biblical Indigeneity. In a sense, we are all diasporic and can (or must) recapture our indigenous pasts in order to live more fully and in alignment with scripture. From this perspective, typical understandings of the local and the global are inverted. The typical harbingers of the global – global capitalism, enlightenment rationality, Western theology, and the like – are rendered hyper-local, emerging out of a particular place at a particular time, for a particular set of purposes. On the other hand, the local – being tied to a particular geographical space, and having deep relations in a particular community – is rendered global, something that all peoples everywhere, at one point in their history, experienced. The NAIITS theologians themselves, then, function as extensions of their homeland. As Clifford states, they function as extensions of place-belonging operating in spaces (Urban, modern, capitalist, Western, and Euro-Christian) that have, as they understand it, become devoid of place-belonging. What is more, in their dissemination and promotion

\textsuperscript{57} Both de Certeau’s theory of movement in the city and his useful strategy/tactic framing allow scholars of religion to track the discursive and material maneuverings of those they research. For the purposes of better understanding indigenous claims to Christian meaning-making, de Certeau’s theoretical framework brings to focus the way in which tactics afford a limited mobility.
of this Native Evangelical perspective, they fashion themselves also as exemplars, harbingers of the universal, yet in most cases lost, ontological possibility that is Biblical Indigeneity.

The material in this chapter provides insight into an instance of what Castells refers to as “network programming” or “reprogramming of the dominant network.” The process of reprogramming is accomplished through the creation of new data (theological work) that can be uploaded to the dominant network (mainstream Evangelical institutions). This new data then has the potential to alter the inner-workings of the dominant network. In this chapter, I have attempted to illumine the specific data that is deployed in this network-altering effort on the part of NAIITS theologians. The contents of that data are, I argue, what Clifford refers to as a distinct indigenous diasporic disposition. From the perspective of this diasporic disposition, NAIITS theologians cast the settler population as that which is in need of restoration. Having lost their ties to a more indigenous and thus more Biblical way of life and thereby all but effectively destroying Indigenous people’s ties to these ways of life, Western settler populations are also fundamentally diasporic; they exist at a remove from a more fundamental and Biblically aligned way of life. From the perspective of the theology of Biblical Indigeneity, moreover, this becomes a very poignant moment of inversion. Having successfully recovered the Indigenous ontological capacity to “live in a good way” and, thus move into further alignment with Biblical truth, NAIITS theologians frame themselves as the ones who have moved further into alignment with Biblical truth.

In sum, the theologies of normative syncretism and biblical indigeneity engenders a process whereby indigenous theology is legitimized; a legitimation that
depends upon 1) the de-legitimization of certain foundational Western theological frames through a re-orientation of the certain Biblical stories and 2) the subsequent presentation and publication of these theological maneuvers in conferences, NAIITS symposiums, the NAIITS journal, and outside peer-review journals. This, one could argue, is representative of an attempt to reprogram the goals, norms, and values of the Evangelical network as a whole; to indigenize the tradition.\(^{58}\) This de-legitimization of Western theological frames is then constitutive of NAIITS members’ ability to (or attempt to) “ensure the cooperation between” indigenous networks by “sharing common goals and combining” discursive “resources” in an attempt to fend off “competition from” the dominant Evangelical network “by setting up strategic cooperation.”\(^{59}\)

The processes of cultural and scalar inversion (e.g., rendering Western, Euro-centric Christianity hyper local, contextualized into the post-industrial, capitalist milieu, and lauding Indigenous culture as originative and, thus, more Biblically oriented) are the contents (the discursive resources and practices) of this attempt to reprogram the dominant network. Biblical Indigeneity allows for 1) the scalar inversion of Western and Indigenous, flipping the diaspora around and framing the Euro-American population as displaced and without a connection to land; 2) the rendering of indigeneity as a cultural choice rather than an ethnic particularity – people can choose to live more biblically and since the bible is an indigenous story, indigeneity is an epistemological and ontological

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\(^{58}\) This argument is made all the more relevant as one considers the material presented in other chapters as further examples of the potential programming and reprogramming of the Evangelical theological network. Terry LeBlanc’s work with Tyndale University as he works to train non-indigenous teachers-in-training how to develop pedagogical strategies that incorporate indigenous methods and themes is one such example.

\(^{59}\) Castells, *Communication Power*, 45.
possibility for all people.\textsuperscript{60} This last point will be demonstrated and explained in more detail in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{60} Here again I am using Ranajit Guha’s perspective on \textit{cultural inversion}. For a more in-depth discussion of Guha’s term inversion see Guha’s \textit{Elementary Forms of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India} (1999) in which he discusses the way in which rebels engaged in a process of negation, relegating the symbols of hegemonic power to a lower position morally and ethically than that of their own.
Table 4-1. Visual accompaniment to Mark Levasseur’s 2015 NAIITS Symposium presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Christianity</th>
<th>First Nations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Know God</td>
<td>Great Mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropocentrism</td>
<td>Cosmocentrism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Need to be Saved</td>
<td>All the Cosmos needs reconciliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Transactional)</td>
<td>(Relational)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriented on future gain</td>
<td>Guided on the past, lived in the present, consideration for the future. (7 generations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquisition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual culpability, 'I sin'</td>
<td>Collective culpability (shame), 'We broke harmony'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear Process</td>
<td>Circular process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CHAPTER 5  
NAIITS FOUNDERS AND OTHER IMPORTANT FIGURES

The emergence of NAIITS, like many organizations of its kind, resulted from the not-so-random encounter of several like-minded individuals. Terry Leblanc, Ray Aldred, Richard Twiss, and Randy Woodley, were the original founders of NAIITS. Since its inception, NAIITS has expanded and contracted, taking on new board members while others moved on to other projects. Wendy Peterson and Casey Church, for example, were later additions to the NAIITS board, but have taken on very important roles in the last few years, acting as community leaders and speaking on behalf of NAIITS at church gatherings and academic conferences across North America. Matt LeBlanc, director of iEmergence and Terry LeBlanc’s son, is a regular symposium attendee and is instrumental in promoting the NAIITS model in the Philippines and other parts of the world.

In this chapter, I will provide brief historical sketches of some of the important figures with whom I have interacted over the past three years as I have regularly attended symposiums and other related events. This is not an exhaustive list. Many other people could be included on the list of important figures as it relates to the development of and work with NAIITS. University administrators at Tyndale University, George Fox University, Providence, William Carey, Asbury Theological Seminary, and other affiliated institutions could easily be included. Non-indigenous missionaries and their ministries who are regular symposium attendees could be included. NAIITS is undergoing radical shifts as this project is being compiled. New leadership is emerging as older, founding members step down. With new membership and as the board of directors diversifies, policy, interests, pedagogy, and logistical implementation will
inevitably evolve. Should the movement survive these ebbs and flows, more work will be necessary to ensure an ongoing understanding of the work of NAIITS. What I have tried to do is provide a glimpse, a window into a particular moment of NAIITS. In so doing I have supplied readers with life-stories; oral histories, based on interviews and supplemental materials, of certain figures instrumental in the day to day operations of NAIITS.

**Terry LeBlanc**

“I was born at a young age,” Terry LeBlanc once remarked at the outset of our conversation one evening on the campus of Tyndale University College and Seminary. He was born in Toronto and lived there for the first few years of his life. His family moved to the Listuguj reserve in Quebec and Campbellton, New Brunswick, Canada for a period, at which time he was taught traditional Mi’kmaq lifeways. His family then moved back to Toronto just as Terry reached teenage years. Thus, he spent his junior and senior high school years in the city. He graduated from high school and subsequently migrated to western Canada, Manitoba. It was in western Canada that Terry met his wife Bev (who have been married now for forty five years). Terry and Beverly conceived and raised three children – Jennifer, Jeanine, and Matt – while living in Manitoba.¹

It was during the early part of his daughters’ lives that Terry’s wife Bev “came to experience a personal expression through Christ.” Terry describes this transition as one that was not ethereal or transgressive in any way; “It wasn’t a supplanting of . . . it wasn’t a replacement of, but it was a taking us to where we were meant to go but we

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¹ Terry LeBLanc, (NAIITS Director, Indigenous Pathways Director, educator) interview with Jason Purvis, Tyndale University, June 5, 2016.
couldn’t get there.” This transition consisted of specific requirements for Terry and Bev; “we followed the trail of those who had been in the faith and or course . . . their Euro-Canadian, Euro-American understanding of the faith was very circumscribed by Western culture. And [our Anglo-American fellow-worshipers] confused the two. And so as we stepped into that, we stepped into Western culture. And we labored under the assumption that we had been given both implicitly and explicitly, that Western culture was Christian and ours (Mi’kmaq) wasn’t.”

After a period of time operating under these limitations and constraints, Terry was invited to work with young people through the Ministry of Youth for Christ, an organization with connections to Billy Graham. The motto of this organization in its early incarnation, as Terry recalls it, was that the ministry “should be geared to the times and anchored to the rock.” This statement created in Terry a kind of existential crisis. After having worked for this organization for several years he began to realize that he was engaging in the process of “trying to convert our young boys and girls, our young indian men and women, into good Europeans so that they could become Christian.” His crisis emerged as he attempted to reconcile his actions with the motto. He ultimately came to the realization that these young Indian men and women “should be geared to THEIR times, THEIR cultural times, but anchored to the rock.”

“So I smacked myself up against the head and my wife did it with me and we said: ‘you know, we’ve got to change this, you know, because we are becoming missionary oppressors of our own people, as my brother Randy Woodley would say.”

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2 Terry LeBlanc, interview with Jason Purvis, June 5, 2016.

3 Terry LeBlanc, interview with Jason Purvis, June 5, 2016.
This led Terry, his wife Bev, and his children on a quest toward their family’s native cultural revitalization. They were motivated by the conviction that learning the Mi’kmaq culture became, at this juncture, absolutely crucial if they were to avoid the kind of cultural oppression typical of the Western missions paradigm. “We had to learn to live as followers of Jesus in our own skin again.”

At first, the LeBlancs assumed that this was a fairly unique decision, that there were few people who had come to this realization and then actually set out to resolve it through cultural retrieval. This process led them to various places – conferences, gatherings, events – where contextualization was the major concern. It was in these places that the LeBlancs met people like Richard Twiss, Randy Woodley, Cheryl Bear, Ray Aldred, and Wendy Peterson and realized that there was a vibrant, albeit loosely connected, community out there consisting of like-minded Native Evangelicals.

The LeBlancs and their new friends decided that working together would be far more effective. So they created organizations like Wiconi and My People International in an attempt to assist Native communities with various issues centered on healthy living, influenced by the spirit of Jesus.

NAIITS, on the other hand, emerged for different reasons. The Native community, according to LeBlanc, said that “you have to choose to be Christian or Native, you can’t be an Indian Christian. By which they meant that you can’t engage your culture and be Christian.” Additionally, LeBlanc and his new group of friends were accused by the mainstream Evangelical community that they did not have “the theological or biblical acumen to discern those things appropriately or effectively. So we

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4 Terry LeBlanc, interview with Jason Purvis, June 5, 2016.
said: ‘ok, so we’ll do it.’ So we created NAIITS to help . . . to explore in a profoundly
diligent theological, biblical, missiological, and anthropological way what [being Native
and Christian] looked like, to create an answer for our detractors.”

Leading up to the official creation of NAIITS, however, literature seemed to be, in
the founders’ minds, the crucial issue barring Native Christians from being considered
legitimate producers of Christian theological and biblical literature. In an effort to fill this
gap and provide some remedy for this dearth of Native-inspired Christian literature,
Terry LeBlanc organized writers groups in Canada. The first was attended by
approximately thirty people and the second thirty six or thirty seven people. These
meetings invited writers to write from within a Christian frame as Indigenous peoples
without divorcing the two.

This project (as well as a similar project involving Twiss was operating in the
States) became the target of a series of documents that began to circulate condemning
the contextualization work that LeBlanc and Twiss were doing. The Native District of
the Christian and Missionary Alliance: USA, Christian Hope Indian Eskimo Fellowship,
and the Native American Fellowship each composed documents targeting emergent
Native Evangelical practices. For example, *Boundary Lines*, the document produced by
members of the Native District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance “sketched out
strict cultural parameters, articulating . . . concerns with material culture and the
specters of syncretism.” LeBlanc and Twiss, in an effort to deal head-on with the

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5 Terry LeBlanc, interview with Jason Purvis, June 5, 2016.

6 Jeanine LeBlanc Lowe and Terry LeBlanc, “Mission and Primal Religion: Case Study on Contextual
Mission, Indigenous Context,” *Witnessing to Christi in a Pluralistic Age: Christian Mission among Other
Faiths*, eds. Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jørgensen, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishing,
2011), 232. As Terry and his Daughter Jeanine point out, Native Christians across North America had
already begun the processes of contextualization on their own since the time of contact. By the time these
concerns of these organizations, invited the writers of these three documents to join them in a discussion in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada in December of 2001 which was centered on the use of Native culture in the context of Christian worship. None of the three authors of the documents condemning LeBlanc's and Twiss' work attended. Evangelical theologians from Viola, Asbury and Fuller Seminaries did attend however; these included Corky Hawn from Mission America, Rawley Washington from Promise Keepers, theologian Leonard Brasher, missiologist Chuck Kraft, and anthropologist Paul Heibert. It was in this setting, in discussing the documents written by their detractors that LeBlanc, Twiss, and others created the proto-NAIITS framework wherein half the presentations come from within Indigenous communities and the other half come from the Evangelical mainstream represented by members hailing from the above-mentioned seminaries. Consequently, this event launched LeBlanc's and Twiss’ efforts to organize an ongoing, annual discussion on a variety of topics (not just focused on detracting documents).

**Randy Woodley**

Randy Woodley is Keetoowah Cherokee. He was born in Alabama. His mother's family was a poor coal mining family. His father's family consisted primarily of farmers and were also of meager financial means. His father was in the Navy during World War Two. His parents were both mixed-blood; late in life, his father found out that he was the descendant of a Cherokee chief. They always knew that they were Indian. His father's family, however, denied this heritage, preferring instead to claim Spanish heritage.

documents surfaced, many Native Christians, evangelical or otherwise, were also already turned-off by Euro-American claims to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. NAIITS was there attempt to supply an opportunity for that Native position to be heard in an institutional setting and toward systematic compilation.
Thus, in the early years of Randy’s life, there was the sense of Indian heritage, but no direct, deeply felt connections to the culture.

At six months of age, Randy’s parents moved the family to Ypsilanti, Michigan in the neighborhood known as Willow Run. “I was raised,” he explained, “in a pocket of the South.” Riding the last waves of the Great Migration, Randy’s family migrated to the Midwest during the automobile industry boom. “They could make in a month [in the auto industry] what they were making in a year [down South].” The community was extremely multicultural as he explains it, “maybe 45 percent black, 45 percent white, 10 percent other.”

Randy’s recognizes the 1960s as his most formative years. He graduated from high school and dropped out of Eastern Michigan University in the early 1970s. He became “a follower of Christ” at age 19 (on October 3, 1975). He was a crystal meth addict at the time.

By the time he had reached his twenties Randy had fully embraced his Cherokee Indian identity, even becoming an activist. “I fancied myself a radical, a member of A.I.M.,” he recalls, “I had posters all over my room, you know . . . Red Cloud. I subscribed to the Akwesasne Notes, which was the Mohawk radical newspaper back then.” The expression of this identity caused tensions between Randy and the American Baptist church in which he had grown up, which was attended by a large number of Southern Baptist, “mixed-blood” transplants. “They considered themselves white, but they were proud of their Indian heritage,” Woodley explained. They urged him to forget

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7 Randy Woodley, interview by Jason E Purvis, Skype online conferencing software, July 20, 2016.
about his Indian heritage; to continue to look, speak, and act like a “normal Christian.” This boiled down to, he noted, “assimilate and be quiet.”\(^8\)

Randy made a concerted effort to follow the instructions of his Baptist brethren. He toned down on the Indian identity and began a career of fervent mainstream preaching; “preaching on the streets at three in the morning, in downtown areas to pimps and prostitutes; preaching at Jesus festivals and all kinds of stuff.”\(^9\) Randy attended the PTL (Praise the Lord) club, which was an organization founded by Jimmy Baker in North Carolina. He won the evangelism achievement award for his prolific preaching style. He graduated with a certificate in ministry.

Aside from his success as a minister and preacher, Randy describes this period as being accompanied by a lingering sense of discomfort. There was something amiss, at first an indescribable imbalance to everything he was doing. After a period of introspection and prayer he determined that two things were plaguing him; namely, 1) that he was unable to express his Indian identity, which 2) created a barrier between himself and, what he referred to as, “a holistic gospel.”\(^10\)

During this time Randy entered into his first marriage to a Puerto Rican woman with whom he moved to Denver, Colorado. There they had their first child. Shortly after, he attended Rocky Mountain Bible College, a liberal arts Christian college located in the Denver metro area, and received a degree. From there, Randy and his new family moved to Alaska where he worked with Inuit youth. This, as he describes it, was the

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\(^8\) Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.

\(^9\) Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.

\(^10\) Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.
fulfillment of a life-long goal (first emerging during his high school years) to become a social worker and help Native Americans living on reservations.

Although his time in Alaska represented the fulfillment of one of his dreams as a young person, again something felt out of step. Randy came to the realization that he was acting as part of a “missionary oppressor system.” “I had to figure out some way to be able to understand the gospel in light of who I am as a Native person.” Randy began attending Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (now called Palmer). His mentors and theological genealogy while studying at seminary consisted of Tony Campolo, Ron Snyder, and Samuel Escobar, heavy hitters in the progressive Evangelical theological world. He wrote a thesis on the little-known Baptist missionary work of Evan Jones and Jesse Bushyhead (Cherokee name: Unaduti), who ministered to Cherokee Indians and, as Randy expressed it, “did things differently.” This allowed Randy to imagine a non-oppressive way of doing missionary work, one that would allow Indigenous life-ways and worldviews to remain intact through the process of Christianization.

From there, and while going through a divorce, Randy moved to Anadarko, Oklahoma. He was a single dad. Due to his divorce, he was unable to secure a position as pastor within his church. He became the coordinator of the Oklahoma Indian American Baptist Churches and executive director of the Anadarko Indian Christian Center. It was during this time that Woodley began to train ministers in cultural contextual ministry, the model for which he developed out of his dissertation work.

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11 Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.
Youth culture camps, powwows, and sweat lodge were all a part of this emerging ministry tradition.

Meanwhile, Woodley met his second wife to be, Edith, and Eastern Shoshone from Wyoming. They were married on December 23, 1989. They had three children together. Their ministry work had begun to cause ripples, often leading to accusations of devil worship among hardliners. Woodley was being counseled by community elders, receiving approval before implementing Indigenous practices into ministry work. According to Woodley, even the Indian traditionalists approved of what he was doing. The poorer churches, sans missionary support, were, he recalls, eager to partake in his ministry style. Those churches with resident missionary personnel, however, looked on with scorn and judgment.

Although there are no reservations, Anadarko was very much like a reservation. The socio-economic conditions in Anadarko mirrored reservation towns during this period. “Three percent of the workforce,” Woodley describes, “was Indian, but the population was fifty-seven percent Indian. So [the Native population] was filling the jails, prisons, and unemployment offices.” In an attempt to curb these trends, the Woodleys started Christians for Justice, an organization providing support for the Indigenous population of Anadarko. Woodley, perhaps because of his social work or because of his ministry style, began to receive death threats. “The police hated me, the ‘good ole’ boy’ network hated me” he recalled, “and people would follow me at night with their headlights off; cause we were empowering Native people.” Rather than risk his life and
the potential for his children to grow up without a father, the Woodleys chose to move on and remove themselves from the toxic and potentially life-threatening situation.\textsuperscript{12}

All the while, Bacon Indian College, in Muskogee, Oklahoma, had been contacting Randy about taking on a position as Dean of Students. He took the position once the death threats became too frequent and had reached a pitch he could not ignore. At Bacon he and another Cherokee educator became senior administrators. He spent a considerable amount of time connecting with Cherokee culture during this period; counseling with community elders, learning the language, and taking part in community events. Because of his political views and tendency to raise the issue of systemic racism, specifically as it relates to the Church and systems of education, he was removed from his position and publically asked to leave the college. This situation was especially troubling considering Bacon consisted of more than a 50\% Indian student population; however, there was no Indian Studies program and only one, full-time Native faculty member. With a chuckle, Randy declares, “I made myself persona non grata there too . . .”

From 1994 to 2000, the Woodleys lived in Carson City, Nevada, pastoring a Church. “Richard [Twiss] spoke all the time,” Randy explained, “and people would ask him: Where is (sic) what you are talking about exist? Richard would tell them: Randy and Edith Woodley in Carson City, Nevada run a very successful Indian Church that’s run in a traditional Indian way.” Most of the Carson City congregation, he added, were traditional people who wanted to follow Jesus while keeping their traditional way of life

\textsuperscript{12} Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.
intact. The Woodleys encouraged this mode of practice and worship. “We were like an Indian Mega-Church,” he proclaimed with a smirk, “we had sixty, seventy people.”

The Carson City endeavor led to a speaking career. People wanted to know more about the particulars of the Woodley’s approach to ministry. After six years, they had to renovate the Church grounds, refashioning the bell-tower into a bedroom and build a bunkhouse so that they could accommodate the people who wanted to stay, “for a week, two weeks, three weeks, and just find out what we were doing.” Additionally, during this time, the Woodleys started Eagles Wings Ministries and Eloheh farm, a sustainable farming project connected to the ministry endeavors. This took them around the country and Canada on a tour mentoring people in their ministry style.

Randy had a dream to create a center for cultural renewal, sustainable farming techniques, an economic development incubator, and a school. Their work was catching on nationally and internationally. Asbury Seminary, located in Wilmore, Kentucky, offered Randy and his colleagues, Terry LeBlanc, Richard Twiss, and Adrian Jacobs, whom he had been in correspondence with for about a year and whom he had met for the first time face to face during the second WCGIP (World Christian Gathering of Indigenous People), scholarships and additional forms of funding for doctoral degrees. Woodley and Twiss turned them down the first year. Terry and Ray, on the other hand, accepted and began their doctoral careers.

At first, as part of the initial agreement with Asbury, the Woodleys, Aldreds, LeBlancs, and Twisses were to be offered a parcel of land. “They’re in Cherokee

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13 Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.
country,” he said with a chuckle, “so the land they are on is stolen anyway.”

But that didn’t come to fruition. Instead, Asbury offered them 10,000 dollars per year for three years on top of scholarships for the doctoral program. The 10,000 dollars per year was meant to fund the purchase of land to start Randy’s dreamed about Eloheh center. They purchased fifty acres and built up a compound consisting of livestock, farmland, living quarters, an economic incubator, and a school.

Richard, Terry, and Ray would make regular visits to the center, staying with Randy and Edith for seven to eight days at a time. They were together a lot. They endured the hardships of this risky venture together, developing deep connections to one another throughout the process. It was during this period that they began to consider the idea of developing a Master’s level program based on the Eloheh model, implementing, in comprehensively practical fashion, indigenous values into an education framework. After developing a model, they inquired into Asbury’s interest in adopting it as an official program of study. Due to what Woodley referred to as “leadership turnover,” however, Asbury declined to incorporate the program into their seminary offerings. They also pitched the program to Sioux Falls Seminary to no avail.

The school had grown rapidly, which required additional structures for housing. During one of their trips to get city approval for construction, they were met with protestors. Approximately forty of Eloheh’s neighbors had begun to take issue with what was happening at close proximity. After a time, the Eloheh project became the target of a local group of, what Woodley describes as, white supremacists. The group of supremacists set up a fifty caliber machine gun just outside the Eloheh property line and

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14 Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.
began to fire it daily along the property line. Fear proved an effective deterrent, the gun shots caused a sharp decline in Eloheh’s student body. The local people, the State’s Attorney General, the Justice Department, and Fair Housing, all declined to step in and resolve the issue. Finally, they were forced to sell Eloheh during the economic downturn for half of its original value and leave behind all they had built. They had just enough money to make it to Oregon where Richard Twiss had been living and where George Fox University, located in Newberg, Oregon, had offered Woodley an adjunct position. He taught part-time for three years until he was offered a full-time position. Woodley just received tenure and is about to take his first sabbatical.\textsuperscript{15}

In 2011, Randy and his wife Edith bought a dilapidated farm house on some property near Newberg. Since then they have been fixing it up. Their ministry fizzled out after so much focus had been dedicated to developing the Eloheh project and then its unfortunate closing. Moving across the country to Oregon, the Woodleys suffered from severed connections and a loss of their support base. They have converted the garage into a bunkhouse. Their intention is to emulate the Eloheh project originally conceived back in Kentucky. They want students to learn indigenous methods of food production, spiritual connections with the land, permaculture, bio mimicry, traditional indigenous knowledge, missiology.

Sometime during midyear, 2016, Randy tendered his resignation with NAIITS. His decision to do so stemmed from a letter, sent by the NAIITS governing body, asking the board members for an increase in commitment as well as financial contributions. The letter also requested that board members attend NAIITS symposiums and affiliated

\textsuperscript{15} Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.
events more regularly. “And if not,” Woodley recalled the letter stating, “thank you for fifteen years of service.” Woodley considered this his opportunity to step down as an acting board member due to the distance required of travel to events and his increased level of activity in his local community. He continues to function as a liaison between NAIITS and George Fox University (now, Portland Seminary), which sponsors the NAIITS master’s in Intercultural Studies track. He also continues to teach as an adjunct instructor for NAIITS.

Woodley foresees a complete shift in the NAIITS board with the exception of Terry LeBlanc and Wendy Peterson. “Perhaps this is how it’s supposed to be,” he says. The Woodleys have not attended a Church in around six years, as Randy recalls. They started out as Evangelical, but now they’re not even sure they’re Christian (in the Euro-American, institutional sense of the term). They consider their project in Oregon a community rather than a church. He still speaks at churches when invited; one month he might speak in a covenant church, one month he might speak in a Unitarian Universalist Church. “I guess this takes the NAIITS movement in a different place,” Woodley explained.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Richard Twiss}

Richard Twiss was born June 11, 1954 on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. His mother was Winona LaPointe from the Sicangu Lakota band. She was a student at St. Francis Indian Mission School. Twiss’s father, Franklin Twiss, was a member of the Pine Ridge Oglala Lakota tribe also in South Dakota and also attended

\textsuperscript{16} Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.

\textsuperscript{17} Randy Woodley, interview with Jason E Purvis, July 20, 2016.
a Catholic boarding school. Franklin was ranked Sergeant First Class in the U.S. Army and a veteran.

Both of Twiss’s parents were, as he explains it, eyeska, or “mixed blood.” “Twiss” he informs his readers, “is a common name from England, and my mother’s maiden name, Larvie, is French. His mother’s maiden name was McLain. I am technically five-eighths Lakota with French, English, and Scottish blood.”¹⁸ He barely knew his father, meeting him for the first time after becoming an adult. Thus, Twiss had very little connection to the Twiss side of his lineage.

Twiss remembers growing up on the Rosebud reservation fondly; he recalls his group of elementary-age friends, roaming around town, finding themselves at the center of various mischievous endeavors, swimming in the local reservoir, and other such activities. He regularly attended community powwows, referring to them as occasions “of strengthening family relationships with . . . cousins and relatives, as well as participating in and observing the cultural activities of the tribe.”¹⁹ They did not, however, maintain “traditional” Lakota ways in the home because his mother was, as he puts it, a “staunch Catholic.” Instead, he and his siblings listened to their mother’s stories, which often consisted of the Lakota spirits, but in a way that implied that they were sources of potential danger.²⁰

His mother’s conviction to remove her children from the alcoholism, drug addiction, violence, and poverty so prevalent on the reservation led her to move the

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¹⁹ Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 98.

²⁰ Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 99.
family off-reservation. A short stint in Denver, Colorado, then another brief stay in Klamath Falls, Oregon led eventually to settling in Silverton, Oregon in 1962 when young Richard was around eight years old. This endeavor was part of the Federal relocation policies of the 50s and 60s and led to the cessation of Native language being used in Richard's home. His mother worked as a full-time nurse and she refused to make use of programs like food stamps and welfare. Her second husband was physically abusive and after a divorce when Richard was about nine or ten, she never remarried. This period of time, which was spent at a remove from the powwows and cultural connections that he had experienced previously, had consequences for Richard's sense of identity.

We did not keep Native religious or ceremonial practices in the home, in large part because my Mom was a faithful and staunch Catholic. We did listen to her many stories of growing up on the reservation that told of ghosts of the deceased appearing, the habitation of ghosts in homes, wild animals behaving in extraordinary ways, and various "paranormal" experiences that she. Friends and family regularly experienced. We just called them "spook" stories and loved listening to her tell them to us. This led us to believe that spirits were a normal part of life, though frighteningly so.  

So, while Twiss grew up experiencing both on- and off-reservation life, his experiences off-reservation were formative. "I grew up," he makes clear, "always acknowledging being Native. I did not completely self-identify as Native until I left my nearly all-white high school and small town social networks and returned to the reservation at the age of eighteen." Having returned to the place of his birth, Twiss began studies at Sinte Gliska (Spotted Tail) College in 1972.

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21 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 99.

22 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 100
That same year Twiss joined AIM (American Indian Movement) and was involved in the forced occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington D.C. For eight days Twiss and other members of AIM occupied the building, preparing for the worst, fashioning weapons, expecting to be gassed, and planning, in a last-ditch effort to express their displeasure with U.S. Indian policies and the repeated breaking of treaties, to burn the building down themselves. Fortunately, the most tragic and catastrophic outcomes were avoided. And while this act of civil disobedience led to, what Twiss referred to as a “renewed faith and intensity” for many Native causes across North America, for him life became increasingly complicated. He cites his disappointment with the behaviors and abusive tendencies of AIM higher-ups as the catalyst for his own struggle with drug and alcohol abuse in the years following AIM’s glory days.

I left the reservation and traveled back to the Pacific Northwest to hook up with my old drinking and partying buds in Oregon. In November of 1973, while living out of my hippie/Indian van in a small lumber town, I had a brush with the law, resulting in a few days in jail for possession of marijuana and alcohol abuse. Because my alcohol content was so high when I was arrested, the judge concluded that I must have (sic) a severe drinking problem and decided to send me to a drug rehabilitation program as part of my release. But instead, I talked a friend into moving to Maui, Hawaii with me.

Still searching, I was drawn into Eastern religions: Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism. I practiced Yoga, prayed mantric prayers and sought enlightenment. I traveled throughout the island of Maui and spent many nights praying and sleeping under the stars. The combination of hallucinogenic drugs, Eastern religions, my Catholic upbringing and Native spirituality only led to more confusion. This troubled me. I knew there had to be more meaning in life than what I was experiencing.

While I was hitchhiking to the other side of Maui on afternoon, a couple of guys picked me up. They began to talk to me about God, about Jesus Christ and his plan for my life. I thought hey were narrow-minded, self-righteous, Jesus freaks and Bible thumpers, and after giving them a piece of my mind I got out of the car. I had read about and understood the
negative impact Christianity had worked among many of our Indian tribes historically. I saw it as nothing but the destructive religion of the white man. The last thing I wanted was to be a Christian.

There is this place on the coast of Maui called the Seven Sacred Pools where a small river cascades down a valley in a series of waterfalls. In a nearby meadow, psilocybin mushrooms (a very strong hallucinogenic) grew in great numbers. Often many of us spiritual seekers could be found there picking and eating them and “tripping out.” One of these days I had eaten numerous “magic mushrooms,” and at two-thirty in the morning I found myself completely engulfed in paranoia and the fear of dying or losing my mind. I tried my Eastern meditations and prayers for relief, but to no avail. All I could imagine was going crazy and running down the beach with the men in white uniforms chasing me to lok me up. It was a horrible moment spiritually and psychologically.

At last, fearing the worst, I literally yelled at the tip of my lungs, “Jesus, if you’re real and you can do what those people said you could, then I want you to come into my heart and life and forgive me for the wrong I’ve done.” At that moment an incredible thing happened: The effect of the drugs left, the fear disappeared, and a most awesome sensation of peace literally flooded my being from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. I felt clean, forgiven and filled joy. It was there on that beach that the Creator revealed himself to me – in the person of Jesus Christ – and I became a follower of the Jesus Way.23

Twiss’s born-again experience led him to a concerted effort to live a Christian life. This was, however, also fraught with complication and confusion. Twiss was repeatedly told by pastoral leaders that being Christian meant becoming increasingly white and, therefore, less Native both in thought and action. So, having a sense of obligation to that entity which had rescued him from a life of drug and alcohol abuse and trusting that these pastoral authorities had his best interests in mind, Twiss made every effort to live a life that had been “culturally molded for [him] by non-Native friends and Christian brethren” for twelve years.24

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23 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 102, 103.
24 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 104.
Meanwhile, Twiss had moved from Hawaii to Alaska to join up with an old friend. He was living in a Christian training center near Anchorage. It was here that he began to wonder about the relationship between his Native heritage and his newfound faith in Christ. Could they be conjoined in some way, he wondered. He also engaged in other life pursuits while in Alaska and in 1976, Twiss fell in love with and married his wife Katherine whom he had met while engaging in regular Bible study at the Christian training center where he was staying. She was of Welsh and Norwegian descent and, like Richard, had a strong commitment to her Christian faith.\textsuperscript{25}

The newly minted Twiss family then moved from Alaska to Vancouver, Washington in 1981 so that Richard could begin his career in ministry. He began by serving as pastor at a “predominantly white charismatic church . . . from 1982 – 1995.”

In 1987 he made a trip back to Rosebud to attend the funeral of one of his aunts. It was during this time that he began to explore, in more depth, the tension he was sensing between his Indian heritage and his Christian convictions.

There had been a growing unrest in my soul about the dualistic gap Christianity had created for me. While on Rosebud, I prayed that Creator would show me a sign about my future regarding my personal engagement with my Native culture. Creator gave me a sign: I met a man who was doing what had asked to find. That was the point when I began some serious self-reflection and exploring of Native spirituality and its relationship to a biblical faith. I began to consciously choose the path of discovery as a Lakota man committed to following Jesus. . . . I was starting down the road of an internal, personal decolonization process and the deconstruction of my conservative evangelical introduction to biblical faith.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25} Twiss, \textit{Rescuing the Gospel}, 104.

\textsuperscript{26} Twiss, \textit{Rescuing the Gospel}, p. 104, 105.
Twiss, then, describes a second epiphanic moment, another layer of becoming born-again. The first, a move away from all previous spiritual experimentation into a fully committed evangelical relationship with Christ; the second, a move away from previous cultural accoutrements into a fully committed retrieval of Native heritage (albeit “responsibly contextualized”). For Twiss, as for the other members of NAIITS, the second born-again moment – becoming born-again indigenous – is essential for a complete transition or metamorphosis into becoming “a follower of the Jesus Way.” “During this time,” Twiss makes clear, “I became a Northern Traditional powwow dancer, participating in ‘sweat lodge ceremonies,’ praying while burning sage, sweet grass, tobacco, and cedar, and attending various Native religion ceremonies – all things I had taken part in before to follow Christ, but not for the next twenty, from 1974 to 1994.”27 Referencing his childhood, Twiss compares the religiosity he experienced as a young person living on the reservation, under the tutelage of his mother, living as Lakota people and practicing Lakota Catholicism. His born-again experience led to, conversely, a hard line between being “Native” and “Christian.” Realizing this, he began to advocate more and more for vernacularization from within an evangelical framework.

This led Twiss, additionally, to a series of efforts to indigenize Evangelical Christianity. He worked with the International Bible Society. Here he was instrumental in developing a version of the NIV that was not only bound by a cover with illustrations oriented toward Native imagery, but also contained commentary by and for Native peoples. Twiss started attending the WCGIP (World Christian Gathering of Indigenous Peoples) in the 1990s. The year prior to the aforementioned, life-changing WCGIP In

27 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, p. 105.
1997 Richard and Katherine founded Wiconi International. Wiconi was Twiss’s avenue for international travel and cultural exchange. Through his vision, groups like the Dance Our Prayers team traveled to various parts of the world (China, Peru, New Zealand, and Pakistan to name a few), demonstrating the North American vernacularization movement. It was also during this time – the nineties – that Twiss became close friends and colleagues with the other original founders of NAIITS.

Richard Twiss died tragically and suddenly on February 9, 2013 at the young age of 58. His passing was the result of complications brought on by a heart attack suffered on February 6, 2013. At the time, he was in Washington D.C. attending a function. The loss reverberates throughout NAIITS still. LeBlanc, Peterson, Aldred, and others make regular reference to Richard during symposiums, telling stories of his exploits and applying his theological reflections as their relevance deems necessary (and they often do). Richard’s wife Katherine and two sons have done what they can to maintain Wiconi’s continued relevance, most notably handing the organization’s directorship over to the capable hands of Casey Church.

Leonard “Casey” Church

Casey Church was born April 2, 1957 in the farming community known as Allegan, Michigan, the fourth born among seven children. His parents, Leonard and Mary Church were highly-respected members of the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi native community. Casey’s Indian name, Ankwawango, means “hole in the clouds.” At the time of his birth his parents were members of the Salem Indian United Methodist

Church’s involvement with the contextualization movement and subsequently with NAIITS was motivated by tensions between his family and his home church. As members of the local United Methodist Church in his home state of Michigan, Casey and his family, including his mother, had spent time oscillating between church on Sundays and Native festivals and local powwows for years. His mother, Mary Church, was a well-respected member of the community, famous for her contributions to these community events, usually in the form of supplying corn soup, her signature dish.29

This religious simultaneity that his family had put into practice had not posed a problem for many years and then, as Church explains it, “a new guy who was educated in Seminary training, ready to work with the Native Church,” approached Church’s mother and “said that: ‘If you go that [powwow], don’t bother coming back [to this church].’”30 His mother, rather than divorce herself from the community to which she felt so connected, decided to leave the United Methodist congregation. This event had an impact on his family that continues today.

This experience disturbed Church deeply. People go to community festivals all the time. Italian Catholics attend festivals that commemorate Italian culture; Irish Catholics have festivals that celebrate Irish culture; for Church, something was amiss. “[I] couldn’t understand what was going on. Why would that mentality even be there?”

28 Casey Church, “A Warrior Brave Enough to Face the Challenge,” Indian Life: News from Across Native North America, Jan-Feb 2015, p. 10.


30 Casey Church, interview by Jason Purvis, Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center, June 27, 2015.
How could you think that? . . . . That’s like saying: ‘I don’t know what heritage you are, whatever it is – if you’re going to a festival, don’t bother coming back [to this church].’ What’s wrong with that? I just couldn’t imagine it.”

Church attended high school in Allegan, Michigan. Several years after graduating high school Church joined the U.S. Marines and served from 1980 to 1986, achieving the rank of Sargent E-5. He has held a series of jobs throughout his life; including motorcycle and automobile mechanic, die-casting machine builder, jack-of-all-trades, tinkerer, and pastor. Church is also a certified Tai Bo fitness instructor and credits Tai Bo and triathlon running for the successful maintenance of his military-level physical fitness.

In 1988 Church attended an Indian Workers Conference, an event consisting of members from the Ten Indian United Methodist Church in Michigan. It was here that Church dedicated his life to ministry. “Following this decision,” Church details, “I made plans, as the disciples did, to ‘leave my nets and follow Jesus.’ This meant quitting my job, selling my home, and seeking out a Bible college to prepare myself.”

The memory of his mother’s tension with her Methodist congregation and his life experience led Church to develop his own Native ministry. “My personal background,” he explains, “was God’s way of preparing me to develop a culturally-relevant evangelism approach that can reach the unreached Native Americans among us.” As a Methodist, this required training so, with financial assistance from the Potawatomi tribe, he started a master’s program at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California while

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31 Casey Church, interview with Jason E Purvis, June 27, 2015.
33 Church, “A Warrior Brave Enough,” 10,11.
continuing to live and work in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was during this time that Church, through the guidance of Native elders such as the late Rev. Jim McKinney, a Prairie Band Potawatomi from Kansas and ordained elder of the United Methodist Church, developed the pipe ceremony so commonly present at NAIITS Symposiums these days.

In 2003 Terry LeBlanc and Richard Twiss contacted Church and asked if he would like to become a board member of NAIITS. LeBlanc and Twiss had caught wind of Church’s work and felt that he would be a valuable addition to the crew. Church agreed and attended the 2004 NAIITS Symposium held at the Salvation Army headquarters in Los Angeles, California where he presented a paper on the need for scholastically-trained Native theologians. Prior to his attendance, he asked LeBlanc if he should bring his pipe and bundle in order to provide ceremony during the meeting. LeBlanc responded: ‘No, they’re not ready for that there yet.’ After arriving, however, the situation had changed, the community in Los Angeles seemed more receptive to contextualized practices than LeBlanc and Twiss had originally anticipated. “So we improvised,” Church explains, “[We] went down to the local smoke shop and bought a traditional men’s pipe. You know, the little one that hangs in your mouth? And, not a corn cob and then I did the pipe ceremony with that and just showed them the way it would be done with no long stem on it.”34

Church recalls that at this time he and one other person (presumably he means LeBlanc) were the only two individuals with higher degrees. While Twiss, LeBlanc, Woodley, and Peterson sought to secure degrees through an emerging relationship with

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34 Casey Church, interview with Jason E Purvis, June 27, 2015.
Asbury Theological Seminary, Church remained committed to Fuller and transitioned to the PhD program at approximately this time.

Things took a turn, however, as the economy worsened in 2007. Church lost his job as a local carpenter. “It was a classic case of a family going through economic bad times. Nine months behind on a house payment, foreclosure notices, trying to feed five kids, car payments, all of these things.” Church had to put his doctoral work on hold and dis-enrolled in the program at Fuller in 2008. “We managed in that time,” he explained, “I had been involved in a PhD program at Fuller. Got admitted, got a mentor and that world fell apart too and I dis-enrolled. . . . And then I picked it up again after, our world finally came back.”

Once he and his family were more secure financially, Church applied to the Doctor of Missiology program at Fuller and was accepted. He began his work with his mentors Judith and Sherwood Lingenfelter. Sherwood is provost emeritus and senior professor of anthropology. Sherwood’s career includes a BA from Wheaton College and a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh. Sherwood joined Fuller in 1999, hired as the dean of what was originally called the School of World Mission (renamed the School of Intercultural Studies). Their focus is on cross-cultural ministry.

Shortly thereafter, Church was invited to the seventh annual NAIITS symposium sponsored by and located at Asbury Theological Seminary. “If [the board members of NAIITS] wanted to,” Church informed, “they could have let me go. If you miss three meetings, you could be [voted] out. So they never did.” Time went by and Church’s

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35 Casey Church, interview with Jason E Purvis, June 27, 2015.

36 Casey Church, interview with Jason E Purvis, June 27, 2015.
situation greatly improved. His own ministry in Albuquerque flourished, his work at Fuller was progressing, and his involvement with NAIITS was increasing. Then, in 2014, almost two years since Richard Twiss’s sudden passing, Catherine Twiss and her sons asked Church to become the next director of Wiconi, to continue Twiss’s work and keep his ideals and mission alive.\(^{37}\)

Church accepted the position and has been the director of Wiconi International ever since. Wiconi holds the Wiconi Family Camp and Powwow each year. Church held his first camp as director in 2015, making the focus suicide among Native youth. Another part of Church’s work with Wiconi includes an immersion project on the Rosebud Reservation each year in association with Doug Anderson, who works as a psychiatric counselor at Sioux Falls Seminary in South Dakota. With the help and expertise of J.R. Lilly (Navajo), Church and Anderson chaperone groups of students each year, exposing them to life on the Rosebud Reservation.

Church continues his dedication to the spread of contextualized ministry, especially to those communities who have been derided for and deprived of their Native culture by rigid Euro-centric church leadership. Part of this effort entails the creation of a mobile sweat lodge apparatus. Built with non-traditional materials, Church carries this sweat lodge with him as he travels with his family in their ministry van. Like an itinerant minister in a revival tent, Church has erected his portable sweat lodge for communities across the U.S., conducting “redeemed,” contextualized sweats for various indigenous communities during his travels.

\(^{37}\) Casey Church, interview with Jason E Purvis, June 27, 2015.
Matt LeBLanc (Director of iEmergence)

Matt LeBlanc is not a board member of NAIITS; although he is a regular attendee and functions as a mentor to NAIITS students while also engaging the NAIITS community by presenting reports and analysis of his own work overseas. He is the third child of Terry and Beverly LeBlanc. He has two twin sisters, Jeanine and Jennifer. As a teenager, Matt worked as a lifeguard and swim instructor for Bible Camps and community pools in and around Manitoba.

Although he has held jobs outside of ministry; including a period within which he started his own residential construction and renovation company between 2006 and 2007, Matt has dedicated himself as a mentor to young indigenous people across the globe. Matt’s interest in youth ministry emerged as a consequence of his attendance at the WCGIP (World Christian Gathering on Indigenous People) beginning in the late 90s. It was among this moment of concentrated indigenous expression of evangelical religiosity that Matt became inspired to engage in international ministry.

Since this epiphanic moment brought on by the WCGIP, Matt has endeavored to help indigenous communities across the globe develop systems of leadership that would lead to further socio-economic and political empowerment. In 2000, Matt joined YWAM (Youth With A Mission), an organization dedicated to the multi-cultural expressions of faith and revival based in Auckland, New Zealand. There, he studied and completed a DTS (Discipleship Training Program) “focused on Indigenous models of Christian living and understanding.”

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In 2003 he was brought on as a DTS staff member with Island Breeze, a division of YWAM located in Sydney, Australia. He served at this time as the leader of over twenty youth members from various parts of the world. To pay the bills while youth mentoring young people, Matt moonlighted as sound and light technician with IWT (Impact World Tour), an Evangelistic outreach program whose aim is to “present the Gospel in 21st Century relevant ways using elements of the culture itself to deliver the message of Jesus.”

Wendy Peterson

Peterson is Red River Métis whose genealogical tree reaches back to, as she understands it, a member of Louis Riel’s council. The Petersons currently lives in Steinbach, MB, with her husband Ed. She and her husband have three children and twelve grandchildren. According to her compiled family history, the earliest paternal ancestor is George Taylor, a British fur trader working for the Hudson’s Bay Company, her French ancestry can be traced back to 1630, and her Cree ancestry can be traced back through her grandmother to a “country-wife” of Sir George Simpson, the Governor-in-chief of the Hudson’s Bay Company from 1820-1860. Governor Simpson gifted his Cree country wife and the two male children to a Métis trader. “Among their children,” she explained, was her great-grandfather “whose daughter married into the Métis Beauchemin family,” Peterson’s maiden name.

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40 For more on Louis Reil, see Jennifer Reid’s Louis Reil and the Creation of Modern Canada: Mythic Discourse and the Postcolonial State (2009).

Peterson’s academic career began when she earned a BA while attending Winnipeg Bible College. Her MA in Theology is from Providence Theological Seminary. She is currently a doctoral candidate at Asbury Theological Seminary. She is also one of two women (the other being Cheryl Bear) who is a founding board member of NAIITS. In the early nineties, Peterson was invited by Terry Leblanc to take an active role in the founding and continued development of the NAIITS program. She currently serves as the sole editor of the annually, self-published NAIITS journal.

She has engaged in important work promoting the rights and cultural centrality of First Nations peoples across Canada. Her position as chair of the Aboriginal Ministries Council of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is but one example of her dedication to provide ministry service.

Wendy Peterson has enjoyed an expansive teaching career, taking positions in various countries around the world. She travels extensively in an effort to experience the world more fully. She has published articles in several of the NAIITS journals as well as other academic, theologically-oriented journals.

The Defining Moment

To the last one, NAIITS board members look to a particular moment as the watershed experience, motivating them to become community leaders, acquire higher education degrees, and develop an organization that would, they envisioned, propel indigenous people in the U.S. and Canada (and eventually abroad as well) toward theological validity. NAIITS, then, from the very start grew out of a global and transnational consciousness fostered by events occurring four years prior to its formation. These watershed moments, which motivated Twiss, LeBlanc, Woodley, and Aldred to create NAIITS, were the 1996 and 1998 WCGIP (World Christian Gathering of
Indigenous Peoples). The first, hosted by the Maori in Rotorua, New Zealand in 1996, clearly functioned as a motivating force for Native Evangelical leaders from North America. “More than two thousand Indigenous/tribal people from thirty-two countries attended that historic event,” Twiss explains enthusiastically, “where people shared gifts of their cultural music, dance, language, art, and stories in honor and worship to Jesus Christ.” The 1998 WGCIP was held in Rapid City and proved to be very influential for the emergence of NAIITS.

There have been five additional WGCIP meetings since the first two. In 2000 the event was held in Australia; in 2002 it was held in Hawaii; in 2004 Sweden hosted the event; the Philippines was the location for the 2006 event; the group met in Jerusalem in 2008; the most recent and final occurrence of the WGCIP was, once again, held in New Zealand. Twiss and LeBlanc were in attendance at every event with the exception of the one held in Sweden.

Coming off of the momentum of the Rapid City WGCIP, Twiss explains, “twenty First Nations leaders called a meeting in Florida. For more than two days these Native Leaders – including but not limited to Katherine and Richard Twiss, Terry and Bev LeBlanc, Lynda Prince, Suuqiina, Doug and Gloria Yates, Kenny and Louise Blacksmith, and Mary Glazier – discussed ways in which they could continue the momentum of the WCGIP.” This was, as it is often described, the moment of NAIITS’ birth.

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42 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, p. 84.
Chapter Conclusion

The purpose of including these brief individual vignettes is two-fold. First and foremost, it conveys to the reader the congealing and emergence of what would eventually become a trans-indigenous, trans-national evangelical network of Native evangelicals. Second, their stories (with the exemption of Matt LeBlanc’s) demonstrate the multiple scales of becoming born-again typically expressed by NAIITS theologians. In other words, becoming evangelical in the context of NAIITS means, not only becoming born-again in Christ, but also becoming born-again into the indigenous worldview which had hitherto been threatened by a Euro-centric Christian ontology. They describe a process of coming to Christ twice over; once through an initial acceptance of the basic evangelical understandings of turning one’s self over to “living through/for Christ; and once again through a recovery of one’s Native heritage, which consequently brings one into closer alignment with scripture. Recovering one’s Native heritage, as the testimonies demonstrate, is a vital part of the transition from a converted “Native pretending to be Euro-Christian” to a “Native Christian” operating in their natural state, immersed in the God-given cultural forms specific to his or her particular community.
CHAPTER 6
TRANS-INDIGENOUS NETWORKS AND MODES OF CYBER-IDENTITY

Studying religion in motion through a networks approach requires that one take stock of “the circulation of religious elites[,] . . . the locales and institutions in which they are trained, invested with legitimate authority as they incorporate a particular orthodox habitus.” We must also, however, take seriously the extent to which these same religious actors “adapt doctrines and ritual practices to particular localities and how locals creatively appropriate the teachings, opening the way for . . . religious innovation.”¹

Social networks, because they often consist of nodes (people, groups, and organizations) that are situated in different and sometimes distant locations, require constant maintenance if they are to remain useful and vital to the communities to which they are in service. Certain modern technological advancements – namely, information-communication technologies, or ICTs – have increased the currents of information flow and connectivity between groups and individuals existing in religious networks. ²

NAIITS faculty and members have developed a number of strategies the aim of which is to sustain the connections between groups, organizations, and individuals. Outside of the extensive travel itineraries, NAIITS faculty and members tap into a diverse range of media in order to create a sort of constant flow of information, linking far-flung communities together via social media and other sources. Internet websites, a strong presence on social media outlets, and a host of Youtube and Vimeo videos;

these formats, termed by some media scholars as information communication technologies (ICTs), increase NAIITS’ exposure and also keep supporters tapped in and informed about what is going on.

This, however, is not their only (or even their crucial) function. These outlets are also varied and offer NAIITS theologians opportunities to express themselves in a multitude of ways, altering slightly the tone and/or content of that expression from one instance to the next, depending on the context. This process, enacted by NAIITS members, is an example of the emergence of what Manuel Castells refers to as “mass self-communication.” This is the process whereby individuals and small groups can engage in both the construction and deployment of self-identification on a scale unavailable to them before the rise of new forms of communication technologies in the twenty-first century. Social media outlets such as Facebook, Youtube, and Google+, for example, have enabled individuals and small groups an unprecedented media mechanism through which to disseminate information. What is more, the information is transmitted at speeds previously technologically impossible. According to Castells, this is and will continue to be the most significant source of social change as the so-called networked society continues to proliferate.

As it relates specifically to indigenous communities around the world, arguably, we may be witnessing what Landzelius referred to as “the deployment of cyberspace not only as a staging ground, but also as a virtual battlefield for sovereignty in the name of ethnicity.” This “digital networking and broadcasting” may, she continued, “empower indigenous rights movements to carve out a decidedly indigenous public sphere, albeit one mediated electronically and hence suffused with the advantages and disadvantages
Thus, cyberspace is space (albeit virtual) where practices of legitimacy are developed and deployed. It is, more precisely, a space within which NAIITS draws upon the dominant structures in order to simultaneously benefit from their legitimating capital while also challenging their dominant status.

In what follows I will examine the roles of networking and the display of those networked relations through online media (Internet communication technologies, or “ICTs”) as a practice of legitimation carried out by NAIITS and affiliated organizations. Methodologically speaking, I have engaged in what some have referred to as “digital ethnography.” While the previous chapter looked specifically at the history of NAIITS’s connections to evangelical institutions through its founding members, this chapter is concerned with precisely how those connections are articulated or represented through the use of ICTs. What aspects of each institutional connection are highlighted? How is the relationship between the institution and the mission of NAIITS represented?

This examination will extend to the individual work of NAIITS theologians beyond the confines of the NAIITS program itself. In other words, in what type of ministry endeavors are each of the NAIITS theologians involved and how are these endeavors articulated through the use of ICTs and the construction of ministry homepages?

The use of “homepaging” organizational websites, Youtube and Vimeo, as well as social media outlets are part of a process whereby NAIITS theologians and other contributors 1) create a precise picture of the web of relationships that make up the NAIITS network; 2) articulate these networked affiliations in an attempt to demonstrate institutional legitimacy; and 3) rely on the potential of mass self-communication to

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communicate these connections to a broader audience. In this way, the use of ICTs is a way to validate and augment its claim to legitimacy in the context of systematizing indigenous theologies and, thus, reprogramming the dominant institutional structures inhabited by mainstream evangelical seminaries both in the U.S. and Canada.

**NAIITS-Affiliated, Mission-Oriented, Native-Led Organizations**

Technically and legally speaking, NAIITS is actually one of four organizational arms extending out from Indigenous Pathways along with My People International, iEmergence, and (recently added) Wiconi. In the following, I provide brief descriptions of the makeup and affiliations between these cooperative organizations (an attempt to illustrate these various connections can be found in Figure 6-1). I have placed Indigenous Pathways, My People International, and Wiconi into the first section. iEmergence, on the other hand, by virtue of it being located in the Philippines has been placed in the section focusing on the transnational outreach of NAIITS theologians and members.

**Indigenous Pathways**

The umbrella organization, known as “Indigenous Pathways,” (IP), is a non-profit charitable organization whose Board of Directors includes: Cheryl Bear (Carrier Sekani), Cornelius Buller (German CDN), Casey Church (Pottawatomi), Adrian Jacobs (Cayuga), Wendy Peterson (Metis), Shari Russell (Salteaux), Andrea Smith (Cherokee), and Randy Woodley (Keetoowah). Additional staff members includes Ray and Elaine Aldred (Cree), Tom and Karen Bursma (Euro-American), Laurie Conway (Euro-American), Celine and Hector Bastien Genest (Huron/French Canadian), Wes and Summer Graham (Euro-American), Matt LeBlanc (Mi’kmaq/Acadian), Terry and Bev LeBlanc (Mi’kmaq/Acadian), Dan and Jeanine Lowe LeBlanc (Irish/Mi’kmaq), Rick and Linda
Martin (Cree), Michelle Nieviadomy (Cree), Tim and Yin Mooi Stime (Norwegian/Malaysian), Karen and Jeff Ward (Euro-Canadian), Deborah Faith Dimaano (Filipina), Gabs Sagaral (Filipina), Jeremy Simons (Euro-American), and Kharla Acosta (Filipina). According to the website, it is a “community of organizations with unique identities and skills that have chosen to live together within one corporate legal entity to more effectively work alongside Indigenous peoples around the world.”

My People International

My People International, founded by Terry LeBlanc, is, according to its mission statement, “a non-sectarian organization dedicated to working together with the Indigenous community in the development of the full leadership capacity of Native North Americans and other Indigenous peoples.” The mission statement also explains, “staff and volunteers focus their efforts on trauma healing workshops, community-based work, and capacity-building workshops and conferences with indigenous and non-indigenous people.” Through leadership training and other strategies, My People International emphasizes, what it calls, “the process of development.” Its specific tasks include mentoring to males, healing circles directed at coping with abuse, “capacity building” aimed at developing leadership skills, suicide prevention and intervention strategies, speaking and teaching engagements, development training, and contextualized dancing.

Wiconi (Previously known as “Wiconi International”)

Richard and Katherine Twiss founded Wiconi International in 1997. During Richard’s tenure as founder and director of Wiconi, the organization was globally

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oriented, functioning as a bridge building mechanism between Indigenous Christian communities across the world. The community building was primarily in the service of creating a global network of contextualized Christian communities. Richard designed a system of outreach taking the form of a dance troop. The Dancing Our Prayers team, as it is termed under the organizational purview, made regular trips to various parts of the world, performing contextualized prayer dances. According to Twiss, this team of dancers is an extension of the Native American and First Nations neo-colonial experience. “In the world today,” a quotation from Twiss placed on the Dancing Our Prayers webpage states, “no other people is so uniquely positioned for telling Creator’s story of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation, as First Nations people are today.”

Twiss’s dedication to international network building was manifest in the many trips he embarked upon across the world. These efforts to connect with other indigenous communities began with a trip to Mongolia in 1993. In the following year he traveled to Israel to attend an international conference attended by representatives from 146 different countries. Together they discussed the socio-economic conditions and political positions of indigenous communities around the world.

Since Twiss’ untimely passing, Wiconi has undergone has experienced some programmatic shifts. Casey Church is now acting director and under his leadership Wiconi is taking on a role that is decidedly more community development oriented. The focus is now on improving living conditions among Native American and First Nations peoples across North America. “Wiconi’s primary mission,” the organization’s website states,

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is to empower and serve Native people to experience a desired quality of life and a hope-filled future through authentic relationships and culturally supported programs. We seek to live and walk among all people in a good way, as we follow the ways of Jesus – affirming, respecting and embracing the God-given cultural realities of Native American and Indigenous people, not rejecting or demonizing these sacred cultural ways.\(^6\)

Contextualized ministry remains the backbone of Wiconi.

Wiconi, originally the sole responsibility of the Twisses and organizationally (at least officially) autonomous, has now been brought under the umbrella of Indigenous Pathways along with iEmergence, My People International, and NAIITS. Although this has not been expressed explicitly, this seems to be an effort to keep the organization alive subsequent to Richard’s passing. His departure, which meant a significant loss of fund-raising through public speaking appearance, placed a significant amount of pressure on the remaining staff to keep the organization afloat. What is more, newly appointed director Casey Church had a long list of responsibilities of his own before agreeing to take over. Church is active in his own community of Albuquerque, New Mexico, heading up his own ministry efforts, traveling around the country on behalf of those endeavors, finishing up his dissertation at Fuller Seminary, and caring for his family. The addition of all of the activities associated with Wiconi’s upkeep and continued relevance for people’s lives has added a significant amount of work for Church, whose commitment to ministry and outreach is awe-inspiring. He is struggling, as he puts it, to “maintain a balance” in his life “between family and ministry.”\(^7\)

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\(^7\) These sentiments were expressed during several conversations with Casey Church over the past few years. Additional references to the effects of this new position on his life can be found in “A Warrior Brave Enough to Face the Challenge,” Indian Life: News from Across Native North America, Jan-Feb 2015.
The staff and board of Wiconi organize, every July, what they call the Wiconi “Living Waters” Family Camp and Powwow. This event, which is themed differently from year to year, consists of a series of workshops focused on community outreach through the auspices of contextualized ministry. Native American and First Nations people from all over North America come together to address serious issues such as suicide rates among Indigenous youth, alcoholism, depression, political oppression, and poverty.

Another one of Wiconi’s major projects, which takes place annually, is a cultural immersion program. This program was initiated under Richard Twiss’ direction and is, so far, continuing and growing under Casey Church’s tenure. Every year Casey Church (Director of Wiconi) and Doug Anderson (a counselor at Sioux Falls seminary in South Dakota) take a group of students to the Rosebud Reservation where they stay for a couple of weeks learning about the living conditions and life-ways of the Lakota Indians who live there.

In addition to these regularly scheduled, annual events Casey Church spends considerable time traveling around the country, engaging Indigenous communities, providing demonstrations of contextualized ministry, giving talks, and fund raising. Part of his work is reminiscent of nineteenth century, second great awakening, and itinerant preaching. He carries with him a portable sweat lodge structure consisting of PVC pipe and blankets. Where ever he goes, if the conditions and sentiments of the people are ripe for it, he sets the lodge up and shows Native Christians how to do contextualized sweats.

The structural stability and centralized functioning of Indigenous Pathways will hopefully provide the institutional and financial support needed to sustain Wiconi into
the future. The pressure on Church and administrators is real, however, but the organization’s survival is now more likely. Katherine Twiss and her sons remain close friends to the IP family, although the aim of the organization has shifted as a result of this pressure and the retraction from Twiss’ “worldwide” or global networking focus (which Casey Church sees as a core function of NAIITS and, thus, redundant in the context of Wiconi’s continued mission). This re-focus could render the business of Wiconi more sustainable over the long term.

**Mainstream Evangelical Institutions (United States and Canada)**

**Websites and Homepaging: Articulating Institutional Legitimacy**

The NAIITS website not only effectively demonstrates the organization’s mission, outlines its curriculum, and supplies visitors with structural details (i.e., faculty members and their titles), it also is a place where the institutional legitimacy of NAIITS is constantly on display. I want to suggest that in considering many of the components that make up the NAIITS website, we can piece together what appears to be an attempt to construct and legitimize organizational identity.

The discursive and symbolic representation of institutional legitimacy with regards to NAIITS is nowhere more obvious than on the official website. Here, as one clicks on the “partners” link, which is located in the “about” drop-down menu on the site’s main page, one finds a list of Colleges and Seminaries who directly support and are acting partners with the NAIITS program. Logos and descriptions of Tyndale University College and Seminary, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Acadia Divinity
College, and Providence are posted. These are representative of the institutional backbone of the NAIITS program.

Association with each of these theological institutions is expressed through a description and mission statement. The descriptions themselves, one could argue, are an attempt to link the goals and intentions of NAIITS theologians with that of the specific institution each description references. In each case, demographic information is provided, presumably, to show the strength and vitality of its position competitively among North American faith-based universities.

These associations are made more explicit in the degree track descriptions. Because NAIITS Faculty are employed at different institutions and live in a variety of urban locales across North America, most of the tracks are hybrid in nature, consisting of a predominantly online pedagogy with a three-week, intensive face-to-face session in the summer which usually coincides with the annual NAIITS symposium. Each degree track is sponsored by a host institution, which provides resources, especially in the form of additional instructors. In each case, the mission statement of NAIITS as trans-indigenous network of Indigenous evangelicals is woven together with the mission of the host institution. Each description includes a statement concerning the make-up of the faculty. In most cases it is simply stated that the program is led by and facilitated by a majority indigenous faculty. In the description of the PhD in Intercultural studies,

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8 Recently, one of the original members of the NAIITS institutional network has cut ties. William Carey International University’s institutional description was also oriented toward the international. The description as it once existed moved away from missionary discourse, however, and instead expressed a move toward development initiatives as well as close association with non-governmental organizations that were aimed at community development. Missions discourse was avoided and instead replaced by references to the “international development” work of “non-governmental agencies” around the world. The focus, therefore, became community development rather than missionization and conversion.
however, a specific number is used – eighty-five percent – perhaps because the weight of the degree requires a more precise number.\(^9\)

**Asbury**

Asbury Theological Seminary has played an integral role in the creation and institutional legitimation of NAIITS. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Asbury was the institution that accepted their proposal and offered LeBlanc, Twiss, Aldred, and Woodley the necessary funding to work toward and eventually receive their respective doctoral degrees as well as provided an annual stipend to support the Eloheh project. Once LeBlanc, Twiss, Woodley, Aldred, and others had decided to pursue the creation of a degree-awarding program predominantly run and developed by indigenous scholars, they shopped their idea to a variety of institutions. It was in 2003 that Asbury responded favorably, making available an endowment that would allow up to five applicants to attend and receive graduate degrees fully funded. LeBlanc, Twiss, Aldred, and Woodley accepted the offer and began the process of acquiring PhD degrees at that time.

Asbury, which has campuses in Kentucky (Wilmore), Florida (Orlando), and Tennessee (Memphis), has continued its close and constructive relationship with NAIITS. As Jeanine LeBlanc points out, in the years following the official agreement between the them, Asbury “has continuously offered scholarships to Native North

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American students . . . with the hopes of graduating a number of students with graduate and doctoral degrees in order to further the goals of NAIITS.”^10

**Tyndale**

Tyndale University College and Seminary is located in the suburbs of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Housed in what was formerly the Jesuit convent which was previously called Sisters of Saint Joseph, Tyndale has a long and storied history. Founded under the name The Toronto Bible Training School in 1894, classes were originally held in a church building. The school underwent several iterations, changing its name to Toronto Bible College in 1912 and relocating to a few different locations until settling in 1928 and becoming the first permanent Canadian Bible school of its kind.

Prior to its most recent incarnation as Tyndale University College and Seminary, the school was part of a North American (including both Canada and the U.S.) network of evangelical institutions. In 1968, for example, The Toronto Bible College merged with the London College of Bible and Missions (LCBM) to form the Ontario Bible College (OBC). The founder of LCBM (founded in 1935), J. Wilmot Mahood, was trained in the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois. In fact, LCBM had more ties to evangelicalism in the United States than it did with its Canadian counterpart. “Most of the faculty throughout the history of [LCBM] had earned at least one degree in the United States, and the vast majority of these came from one of two schools, either Wheaton College in Illinois or Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas.”^11

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^11 Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to its Character, p. 122
Thus, there was an intellectual history and theological framework functioning as the tissue connecting various nodes in a North American Evangelical network.

The Toronto Bible College was also part of this North American network of evangelicalism. The President at the time of the merger with LCBM was Stewart L. Boehmer, who graduated from the Moody Bible Institute.

Currently, Tyndale is the degree-awardng institution for the NAIITS Master’s in Theological Studies track. Like the other degree-awardng theological institutions. Tyndale’s ICT institutional description also begins by engaging in a global discourse, expressing a decidedly evangelical message. Tyndale positions itself as “multi-denominational,” yet “evangelical.” This implies that, while there may be room for slight theological wiggle-room, global evangelicalism – the imperative to be an agent for the global spread of the gospel – plays a foundational role in the goals and aspirations of Tyndale.

Tyndale is a multi-denominational, evangelical university college and seminary that prepares leaders for the ministry, marketplace and global mission of the church. Tyndale offers a variety of degree programs in a wide range of disciplines and fully accredited programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Currently, there are over 1,200 students and 9,000 alumni. Founded in 1894, Tyndale is strategically positioned in a quiet residential enclave in north Toronto with easy access to the downtown. Toronto is Canada’s most diverse city, and this diversity is reflected at Tyndale. We have more than 30 different ethnic groups represented and over 40 different denominations.12

In typical fashion, Tyndale’s description highlights the student population. Of particular interest, however, is the explicit mention of Tyndale’s geographical position, being situated near the urban core of Toronto. Thus, as the description states, the multicultural character of the city-center has become manifest in the student-body of

Tyndale, an important association for NAIITS and its theological positioning (discussed in chapter eight) on the issue of multiculturalism.

The master’s degree in Theology is sponsored and endowed by Tyndale University College and Seminary near Toronto, Canada. The degree’s description links NAIITS and its claims to a majority Indigenous leadership and curriculum with the institution of Tyndale.

As one of a growing community of Indigenous scholars [students] will work and study with an expanding community of leaders connected to the NAIITS learning community. . . The NAIITS/Tyndale Masters in Theological Studies/Indigenous is uniquely designed to equip [students] for a contribution to the Indigenous world . . . on the Rez, the urban core—or somewhere in between!13

Tyndale’s sponsored master’s degree, as the description details, emphasizes training that will lead to work with indigenous communities wherever they may be situated. The language is not precise, however, and it is unclear exactly what “a contribution to the Indigenous world” means.

Recently, NAIITS and Tyndale have built upon their relationship in interesting ways. During the 2016 NAIITS Symposium, current Tyndale President, Gary Nelson, outlined the B.E.D. Program of Teacher Preparation. Those involved refer to this program as an attempt to fit “a people’s heartbeat into the curriculum.”14 Administrators at Tyndale decided, in consultation with Terry LeBlanc, that instead of merely offering a single class that would cover Indigenous expressions of Christian worship, they would design an entire curriculum that was “infused with Indigenous threads.”


George Fox (now Portland Seminary)

George Fox University (now Portland Seminary) was founded by Quaker pioneers in Newberg Oregon in 1885 with the purpose of catering to the Quaker population. The school was originally called Friends Pacific Academy. In 1891, having officially achieved its status as a college, that name changed to Friends College.

In June of 2012, NAIITS signed a memorandum of agreement with George Fox University and Seminary located in Newberg, Oregon. Randy Woodley, a board member of NAIITS, was subsequently hired as an associate professor of faith and culture. He continues his teaching career there and is now also the director of Intercultural and Indigenous Studies. In his work, Twiss comments that “the majority of the courses are written or edited, that is, contextualized, by First Nations scholars,” and that, additionally, “the program is creatively delivered through a variety of methods considerate of Native students’ concerns of wanting to remain ‘living in community.’”¹⁵ GFU is currently accredited by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU).

George Fox Evangelical Seminary’s description begins by reassuring its prospective students that they will be backed by an institution with close personal attention as well as opportunities that span the globe. The bulk of the description, however, focuses on institutional achievements.

George Fox is Oregon’s nationally recognized Christian university, providing students with personal attention, global opportunities to learn and serve, and a supportive community that encourages academic rigor and spiritual growth. We offer bachelor’s degrees in more than 40 majors.

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adult degree programs, five seminary degrees, and 12 master’s and doctoral degrees. George Fox is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. The school consistently earns third-party recognition from publications such as Forbes and U.S. News & World Report, which annually rank it among the nation's top Christian colleges.\(^\text{16}\)

Institutional legitimacy is articulated through explicit reference to accreditation. Additionally, social and cultural legitimacy is established through reference to public recognition of institutional accomplishments as it relates to the work of resident scholars and theologians. Forbes and U.S. News and World are publications that carry a significant amount of social and cultural capital, lending further legitimacy to the institution as a nationally recognized, top-ranked university.

The description of the Master of Arts degree in Intercultural Studies, offered in their partnership with George Fox Evangelical Seminary, moves into interesting territory.

Many people believe Native North Americans and other Indigenous peoples are a pivot point in the next expansion of ministry moving us closer to fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission. So does NAIITS! Programs like the MA in Intercultural Studies offered in partnership with George Fox University are intended to position us fully in this new time.\(^\text{17}\)

Here we are introduced to what is perhaps the most radical position taken by one of the partnering institutions. Similar to Twiss’s Biblically framed descriptions of demographic shifts and the ways in which these are contributing to a decentering of theological power, George Fox’s position (at least as it is expressed in the degree description on the NAIITS website) is that indigenous peoples are emerging as an instrumental, even central, aspect of the fulfillment of the Great Commission. George Fox views its connection to NAIITS as a prophetic one; wherein George Fox will situate itself on the

\(^{16}\) “Partners,” www.NAIITS.com.

\(^{17}\) “Academics,” www.NAIITS.com
right side of Biblical history, helping indigenous communities develop the kinds of
theological knowledge that will engender a new era.

Shifts in the make-up of NAIITS threaten to end the relationship between George
Fox and NAIITS. Randy Woodley has submitted his formal resignation from NAIITS,
citing the complication of traveling long distances in order to attend NAIITS
Symposiums and growing philosophical differences as the primary reasons.

Acadia

From the start, Acadia’s ICT description highlights the institution’s global agenda.
The institution’s dedication to the scriptures is stated more than once, relating to the
reader a very fundamental aspect of the Protestant/Evangelical worldview – that the
scriptures are of primary concern.

The mission of Acadia Divinity College is to equip Christian leaders for full-
time and volunteer ministry in Canada and the world. At Acadia we have a
high view of the scriptures and view them as foundational to all we do in
life and ministry. Therefore, we require all students to take courses in
Biblical Studies and Theology during their program. We believe that study
of the scriptures at a very high level is an essential foundation for Christian
leadership. ¹⁸

The emphasis on scriptural focus as a fundamental aspect of Acadia’s curriculum, one
could argue, functions as something of a statement of faith placed (albeit, in short form)
directly into the institutional abstract. One wonders if this proclaimed scriptural basis as
it relates to training in full-time and voluntary ministry is meant to express an emphasis
on missionary work while hedging direct association with the long tradition.

The program description for the Master of Arts in Community Development, offered in conjunction with Acadia is more detailed, decidedly more practical, and emphasizes theological production out of cultural context as its primary goal.

The Master of Arts in Community Development program focuses on the concept of a mutual learning exchange between cultures within and beyond North America. The program is multidisciplinary and strives to develop each participant’s heart and mind through the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, asset-based philosophy and development methods, as well as theology, ethics, and spiritual formation. The program is holistic in scope, seeking to create opportunities for participants to gain both knowledge and experience appropriate for the 21st century. . . . [it] is dedicated to equipping men and women for meaningful engagement within their own communities, other local cultural contexts as well as globally. The [Master of Arts in Community Development] has been designed and tailored for Indigenous people, those serving in Indigenous communities, and others simply interested in a non-Western approach to community development education. Indigenous leaders – academics and community practitioners alike, have developed it. In fact, the majority of instructors for the MACD are Indigenous North Americans. Our unique program provides teaching from alternative epistemologies and pedagogies (anthropologies), as well as practitioner skills that assist co-learners in the creation of informed paradigms for community development beyond traditional western models.  

So, Acadia’s engagement with NAIITS is articulated as being centered on multidisciplinary, locally-relevant, vernacularized approach to theological training.

Furthermore, Acadia’s program through NAIITS utilizes culturally specific worldviews (what the site refers to as “alternative epistemologies”) as lenses through which to create development programs that will avoid the pitfalls of Western missionary efforts to date. This last part seems to be the crux of Acadia’s connection to NAIITS: that it seeks to provide an alternative to purely Western modes of community development. In this light, them, Acadia’s relationship is imagined as a corrective against colonial evangelicalism. Thus, in reading between the lines, one could argue that through its

focus on vernacularization and alternative methods, Acadia’s sponsorship of NAIITS graduates is an attempt to, in concert with NAIITS theologians, decolonize the theological and missionary enterprise.

**Providence**

On the institutional description page of the NAIITS website the blurb about Providence offers very little information concerning its institutional goals outside of a vague reference to its pedagogical goals. There is no explicit mention of the precise nature of the relation between Providence and the NAIITS program. Of particular interest, however, is the institution’s corporate governing body, which is framed as a decision-making body that is detached from the religious mission (outside of its nondenominational mandate) of the school. It reads as follows:

Providence offers Christ-centered undergraduate and graduate education through three different institutions: Providence University College, Providence Theological Seminary and Mile Two Discipleship School. With 300 undergraduate students, 175 graduate students, and 27 regular faculty members, Providence is the largest self-standing Christian educational institution in Manitoba. As an interdenominational institution, Providence is governed by a Board of Governors, elected from a Corporation that represents the supporters of the institution. All three Providence institutions stimulate over $17 million annually in economic activity in Manitoba.²⁰

Providence’s description focuses primarily on numbers associated with both its student/faculty population and the economic value that the institution represents for the surrounding community. This is perhaps, as I have speculated, a consequence of Providence’s “interdenominational” character. Steering the institutional description toward practical matters, economic benefit to the community, and market value rather

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than potentially charged, dogmatic statements may be motivated by the desire to avoid statements that could potentially lead to a self-imposed conceptual or theological constraint.

The description of the Bachelor’s degree in Community Development offered in conjunction with Providence, on the other hand, weaves together NAIITS’s mission with the mission of Providence more precisely. It states:

The program focuses on the concept of a mutual learning exchange between cultures within and beyond North America. The program is multidisciplinary and strives to develop each co-learner’s heart and mind through the disciplines of Biblical studies (and emerging theologies), social theories, anthropology, missiology, church history, contextualized leadership, and spiritual formation. The program is holistic in scope, seeking to create opportunities for co-learners to gain both knowledge and experience appropriate for the 21st Century. This program maintains the heart of Providence’s mission, the study of the Bible at the core of each academic program.

NAIITS faculty in partnership with Providence faculty is dedicated to equipping men and women for meaningful engagement within cultural diversity, including global and local cultural contexts. The majority of instructors for the BACD are Indigenous North Americans.21

Unlike its institutional description page, Providence’s program page offers explicit reference to the relationship that the school has with NAIITS. There is mention, for example, of “emerging theologies,” providing a nod to the innovative work being done by NAIITS theologians. This also implies that, in sponsoring a NAIITS degree, Providence is willing to accept that the Western theological tradition is not the last word, that the continued vernacularization of Christian thought and practice may yet provide new insights theologically speaking.

None of these descriptions are particularly interesting in and of themselves. In fact, they are typical examples of the way in which North American, faith-based universities attempt to market themselves. But if we consider their placement on the NAIITS website and the additional linkages that are made in each of the degree-track descriptions certain things begin to emerge. For example, why is it that in the Acadia description we are reminded that Acadia is characterized by a "high view of the scriptures" and that they are considered “fundamental” to everything that a student at Acadia will be expected to do? What do we make of William Carey's move away from missions language in favor of the language of development? How are we to assess George Fox's appeal to social and cultural capital through expressions of institutional success and public recognition in major U.S. publications? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how do these descriptions both fashion and become fashioned by the work of NAIITS?

Of note, I argue, is the way in which each institution either eludes to or explicitly states its relation to the historical and contemporary missionary imperative. Only one of the institutions in question – Tyndale University – explicitly states that “mission” is one of its goals in training ministers. The other institutions all refer to ideas such as “global ministry,” “global opportunities” for “spiritual growth,” and “international development” through “faith-based non-governmental organizations.” These are important qualifications for NAIITS theologians who have delved deeply into the history of missions across North America, challenging the militaristic terminology of conquest and ethnocentrism inherent to the tradition dating back to the colonial period and still operating in many missions organizations today.
That these descriptions were fashioned and then placed on the NAIITS website is worth scrutiny. I would argue that they are representative of a strategic maneuver in an effort to link (in the case of the “partners” page), and in some cases fully merge the ideals of NAIITS with the missions and goals of each institution. In so doing, the identity of NAIITS as an academic program taps into the well of symbolic and cultural capital associated with these institutions of higher learning. NAIITS, then, takes on or appropriates, to at least some degree, the identities of the schools. NAIITS is (pulling together some of the descriptors used in the institutional descriptions) a “Christ-centered” program with a “high view of the scriptures” that will require “the study of scriptures at a high level;” providing students with “global opportunities” and a “supportive community that supports academic rigor and spiritual growth.” NAIITS is additionally a “multi-denominational,” “evangelical” program that “prepares leaders for the ministry, marketplace and global mission of the church,” and who will “discover and address the roots of human problems around the world.”

These aspects of NAIITS’s official website are, I contend, part of an attempt to create the identity of NAIITS as an academic program, challenging the typical ways of doing Evangelical theology while also challenging traditional forms of theological training. The website is representative, however, of the delicate process whereby NAIITS theologians/faculty draw upon the symbolic and cultural capital of Evangelical institutions while simultaneously attempting to alter them. They effectively link NAIITS, whose goals include a very specific attempt to empower indigenous peoples within the context of Christian theology, to the broader goals and intents of private, evangelical, institutions of higher learning. In this way NAIITS constructs and legitimizes its identity.
On the other hand, the very nature of their project (and this is no secret, as they state these goals explicitly) seeks to alter these Evangelical institutions by developing and injecting new programming (to use Castells) into the Evangelical theological network.

Of course, the dark side of these ICT mediated articulations of institutional identity is worth a moment of reflection. To what extent, for example, is NAIITS aligning itself with what some scholars have referred to as the “repackaging of American imperialism”? When Tyndale speaks of “contributions to Indigenous world,” or when William Carey describes its intentions to “see Jesus transform lives and societies,” for instance, what are the implications? To what extent are these statements part and parcel of the same missionary endeavors that characterized the relationship between colonial missionary efforts and Native communities of the past? Furthermore, to what extent are these colonial holdovers still operating in the contemporary work of NAIITS? I attempt to offer some answers to these questions in the final chapter (conclusion) of this project.

**ATS and ABHE: A Case for the “Dominant Evangelical Network”**

The schools mentioned above are not only a part of a long intellectual history – consisting of a network of institutions and individuals – that has influenced large portions of the North American continent. They are also connected through mechanisms of accreditation; namely, ATS and ABHE. These too function as conduits of legitimacy, not only for the schools that benefit from their conferred status, but also for the NAIITS

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22 For more on the “repackaging of American imperialism” see Nina Glick-Schiller’s 2005 article published in *Anthropological Theory* titled “Transnational Social Fields and Imperialism: Bringing a Theory of Power to Transnational Studies.” In this piece Glick-Schiller considers the legion of converted missionaries that operate in the contemporary world.
project as it depends upon these institutions of Biblical higher learning as sponsors of the degrees that NAIITS awards.

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) serves more than two hundred and seventy institutions in both the United States and Canada. The headquarters of ATS are located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. “ATS membership is open to schools in the Christian and Jewish faiths. The current membership represents the full range of Christian denominations, including schools in mainline and evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, as well as multidenominational and nondenominational schools. Schools representing other faiths and other organizations interested in theological education may become Affiliates of ATS.”23 Tyndale University College and Seminary, Providence University College, Portland Seminary (previously George Fox), and Acadia Divinity College are all members of ATS. The President of the ATS board is Janet Clark who, coincidentally, also happens to be the acting senior vice president of academics and dean at Tyndale University College and Seminary. The ATS website expresses what appear to be progressive values as it relates to the expectations of its member schools. “ATS values the different expressions of faith,” the website reads, “and seeks to respect the varying understandings of theology, polity, religious leadership, and social commitments.”24 In this light, the member schools who support and provide degree sponsorship to NAIITS are in compliance as they embrace the vernacularized theologies and practices therein.

23 Alliance of Theological Schools website, accessed 6-5-2016, [http://www.ats.edu/]
24 “About ATS: Four Core Values,” ats.edu, accessed 3-31-2017, [http://www.ats.edu/about]
Additionally, Tyndale University College and Seminary as well as Providence University College are members of the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE). ABHE headquarters are located in Orlando, Florida. The mission statement of ABHE lends itself to the work of these contextually conscious institutions and, consequently, the work of NAIITS. For example, the ABHE website emphasizes that it provides accreditation to schools who foster “intercultural study opportunities that help students to discover their unique, God-given gifts,” as well as a commitment to “history’s destiny: the day when all peoples have heard the Good News and the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God.”\(^{25}\) A nod to cultural contextualization may be implied in the reference to and associations between the terms “intercultural” and “unique God-given gifts.” Clearly, the evangelical imperative to global mission is explicitly stated in the statement concerning “history’s destiny,” linking conceptually as well as in vision the accredited institutions and NAIITS.

These accreditation organizations are vital elements to understanding the contours of the NAIITS network. They function as founts of legitimacy, pumping legitimating power to the key institutions in the NAIITS vertical arms of influence. What is more, they provide license for the kinds of ministry training that constitute acceptable forms. As I pointed out, the key values expressed by these overarching affiliates are diversity of theological interpretation and global orientation. As noted, the institutions foster these values by sponsoring the work of NAIITS. NAIITS exemplifies these values as they build coalition with indigenous Christians across the globe and empower indigenous leaders to establish similar institutional relationships for their communities.

\(^{25}\) “About ABHE,” abhe.org, accessed 3-31-2017, [https://www.abhe.org/].
NAIITS Ventures beyond The U.S. and Canada

Australia

Ray Minniecon, an Australian Aborigine hailing from Melbourne, presented at the 2016 NAIITS symposium. During his presentation, he alluded to several interesting ideas emerging out the Australian cultural context. He highlighted Australian Aboriginal contextualized theology and its emphasis on creation. Australian indigenous communities are striving, he wrote, to “recognize the activity of God’s Spirit in Aboriginal cultures and societies from the beginning, the continuing activity of the Spirit today,” as well as the willingness to “discover God in Christ and his message in [aboriginal] beginnings, [aboriginal] way[s] of life., [aboriginal] relationships with land and people, [aboriginal] ceremonies, [and aboriginal] teachings and laws.” After all, as he ardently added during the presentation, “the Bible is tribal.” 26

Additionally, Minniecon emphasized the work that he and Terry LeBlanc are currently doing to bring a NAIITS-like program to the Australian context. “Dr. Terry LaBlanc,” he made clear, “has visited many times to discuss with Elders, leaders and institutions.” 27 They are attempting to establish concrete institutional ties with Universities and colleges in Australia in order to create a NAIITS-like program that would service Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. Working with Mark Britz, Minniecon and LeBlanc hope to establish institutional ties to Charles Stuart University.


27 Ray Minniecon, “Indigenous Theology Australian Context.”
Working with other, unmentioned, individuals, Minniecon and LeBlanc are also making inroads into institutional ties with Melbourne University and the University of Divinity.

All of this work is in an effort to create, what Minniecon referred to as (perhaps jokingly, but with a healthy degree of seriousness), “NAIITS Down Under.” These inroads are absolutely necessary, he stressed, if Aboriginal peoples of Australia are to acquire legitimacy as theologians in their own right and become shapers, rather than “the shaped,” of their Christian worship. In so doing, Australian Aboriginal Evangelicals endeavor to “develop their own understanding and expressions of liturgy and worship.” Part of this process, as Minniecon understands it, is a realignment or reorientation of the educational process. It is in this area that indigenous peoples across the world, not just Aboriginals in Australia, can shake off the Western models and recover their traditional ways, albeit through Christ. One example of this reorientation is in the spatial understanding of education. For the West, he reminded the audience, the space of education (which molds behavior and thought in separate individuals from the natural world) is the classroom. For Aboriginals, on the other hand, the educational context is the land.

The Philippines

iEmergence is one part of the four main bodies that make up Indigenous Pathways. It’s function, however, situates it in the international outreach category. Founded by a group of young indigenous people, is a division of Indigenous Pathways and bills itself as a “non-profit/non-stock organization focusing on holistic community and leadership development in indigenous and tribal communities.”

According to the organization’s website, iEmergence was the result of a significant outpouring of Indigenous culture during and flowing out of the World Christian Gathering on Indigenous People (WCGIP) in 1996. It wasn’t until 2008, however, that iEmergence became an official organization on the heels of the seventh WCGIP in Jerusalem. Formed with international work in mind (in large part due to the international nature of the WCGIP) Matt LeBlanc perceives iEmergence as a way of “reaching out to other indigenous peoples . . . [in order] to harness, develop, and equip emerging indigenous leaders for the next generation in their own contexts.”

iEmergence seeks to achieve its goals through three specific methodologies: “gatherings,” which employ networking strategies utilized as a way to encourage the maintained interaction between individuals and their respective Indigenous communities; “osmosis,” which is articulated as a program that attempts to “reconnect youth with elders and other community leaders for the purpose of passing on the skills and knowledge needed to understand an Indigenous community’s history, culture, and contemporary context”; and “economic development,” which foster’s the development of “fully integrated, culturally enriched, and locally specific economic” systems (e.g., cultural tourism, arts and crafts, import and export of said arts and crafts, and sustainable food practices at the local and international level).

iEmergence is the youth movement of this conglomeration of Native Evangelical organizations. Matt LeBlanc and co-founders view themselves as agents of change among “their generation” and generations going forward. iEmergence’s offices and


headquarters are currently located in Davao City in the Philippines. They are currently working on a project in the Philippines called the Bangsamoro Cultural Advocacy Project which is focused on developing effective leadership in the efforts by the Indigenous peoples of the Philippines to empower themselves.

In a very real and practical way, iEmergence is distributing the NAIITS model, assisting indigenous communities in the Philippines develop NAIITS-style initiatives in an effort to gain ground politically, especially within the theological community.

iEmergence, in partnership with Tribal Mission Foundation International Inc., organized its first Indigenous Theological Symposium in the Philippines. The symposium, attended by over a hundred participants,

had eighteen local people groups and four foreign people groups taking part in the conversations on the impact of Christian mission on culture, Indigenous leadership, and living faith out and community. The evenings were times of cultural celebration where participants shared the uniqueness of their Creator-given culture. We are looking forward to continuing these conversations in the years to come and hosting more conversations around the Philippines.\(^{31}\)

Here the model present in the NAIITS symposium is being developed by iEmergence agents in concert with local communities in an effort to create a discourse centered on the relationship between culture and religiosity.\(^{32}\)


\(^{32}\) Although not enough data has been collected on the subject as of the writing of this project, NAIITS also has ties to indigenous communities and institutions in New Zealand. In fact, it was the World Christian Gathering of Indigenous Peoples (WCGIP), attended by Twiss, LeBlanc, and others, that spurred to creation of NAIITS.
NAIITS on the Net: Displaying Legitimacy and Institutional Identity

Youtube and Vimeo: Images of Biblical Indigeneity

Other forms of media representation, while utilizing some of the same strategies and containing some of the same contents, function in subtly distinct ways. “Open source digital publishing,” Castells informs us, “has been critical in facilitating the capacity to generate and distribute information in different formats without needing to go through the mainstream media.” In other words, these new and constantly emerging forms of communication have offered and continue to offer alternate forms of communication that operate beyond the confines of traditional mass-media, allowing for an increase in the dissemination of counter-hegemonic discourses. Castells continues,

The ability to upload videos on Youtube and other social spaces on the internet, or the possibility of setting up links to the movement on popular websites, such as Myspace or Facebook, have amplified the uses of mass self-communication as the expression of new values and new projects. Alternative media are at the core of alternative social movement action.  

NAIITS theologians’ use of social media and broadcasting media is extensive. One can easily find performances, interviews, and public speaking engagements on Youtube or Vimeo featuring Terry LeBlanc, Casey Church, Ray Aldred, Cheryl Bear, Wendy Peterson, or the late Richard Twiss. Some of these videos are free-flowing, out there on Youtube but not connected directly with any of the websites previously mentioned. Others, however, have been linked directly to the NAIITS or affiliated organization websites.

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33 Castells, Communication Power, 343. See also, as cited by Castells, Coyer et. Al., 2007 and Costanza-Chock, forthcoming a).

34 Richard Twiss is clearly the winner in this area. His presence on Youtube and Vimeo is impressive. There are numerous public speaking engagements, interviews, and church functions available for viewing featuring Twiss.
Through the use of brief documentary vignettes and recorded events such as academic talks and WCGIP gatherings, NAIITS and affiliated organizations promote contextualization (e.g., indigenous expressions of Christian religiosity) on the web. Some of these audio-visual representations are posted on the NAIITS website. Others have been posted on social network sites such as Facebook. In this section, I will analyze two videos; one posted on the official NAIITS website and another depicting the 2008 WCGIP in Jerusalem, which was at one time posted on Wiconi International’s Youtube page. In so doing I hope to provide further understanding of the way in which NAIITS uses these media outlets to promote and legitimize their indigenous Christian identities.

Several of these are interviews focusing on NAIITS director Terry LeBlanc as he provides details about the NAIITS program specifically and Native Christians more broadly. Two of the videos are of a segment from 2011 within which the popular Canadian TV show, 100 Huntley Street, covered NAIITS. The video, titled “My People International,” was published on March 15th, 2012. 100 Huntley Street is a Canadian Christian talk show. On its own Youtube page 100 Huntley claims to be “Canada’s longest running daily television show and the sixth longest running daily television show in the world.” Self-promotion aside, 100 Huntley Street’s Youtube page has 29,437 subscribers and has been viewed 32,563, 636 times. The video in question has been viewed 1,447 times.

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36 Terry LeBlanc, interview by Moira Brown.
The video begins with a series of Native words fading in and out of view against a black backdrop, each one a different tribal way of saying “my people.” Native singing and drumming accompanies this imagery until finally images of powwow dancers emerge, a man donning full powwow regalia fades in and out. These images then transition into commentary by, director of NAIITS, Terry LeBlanc. He states that “ninety plus percent of our native peope who die, perish without Christ. And we as Native Christians need to re-examine our methods and our approach among native people so as to be more culturally relevant and more spiritually impacting so that those statistics can be turned around.” Subsequently, a passage from Acts emerges, once again against a black backdrop. The passage is Acts 7:34 and states “I've seen the agony of my people . . . I've heard their groans. I've come to help them.”

The interview then begins with the interviewer expressing her fascination with (and also professed envy of) LeBlanc’s knowledge of his genealogical tree. She asks him enthusiastically to recount, as far back as he can, his genealogical tree. LeBlanc responded, citing his uncle who had taken on the referencing historical documents stretching back to the 16th century; these were missionary accounts describing the French and Indian political alliances that led to intermarriage and mixed race offspring among the Mi’kmaq/Acadian people. The compilation, LeBlanc mentions, “really helps [our people] understand our rootedness in the land.” As the interviewer once again expresses her fascination with this genealogy, LeBlanc takes the opportunity, as he often does (LeBlanc is a pedagogue through and through, often identifying and utilizing effectively crucial teaching moments), to express a fundamental difference between indigenous and western forms of legitimation. “It isn’t as though the written word is
critical for that, the oral traditions and stories of my father and grandfather and others
have handed down, limited as they were, uh, have helped to root us in our place and
identity. We’ve handed them down to our kids.”

Difference is again highlighted and emphasized as the interviewer asks LeBlanc
to recount his “coming to Christ.” He explains that his transformation was a difficult one,
fraught with tension. His wife came to a Christian conviction about four years into his
marriage. Initially, he tells the interviewer, he felt a sense of betrayal, wondering why his
wife would align herself with “the enemy.” “I put her through misery, he says, “I know
that I did.” Over time, however, “the one who makes all things well remade me in the
name of his son Jesus.”

The interviewer then rattles off a list of LeBlanc’s ministry endeavors: “an
internship at Youth for Christ, studies at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, . . . you
would go on to be manager of Aboriginal Programs for World Vision Canada . . . and
now you have a ministry that isn’t one, it’s three.” These programs were started, he
explains, as a way to help indigenous peoples, whose missions were shutting down for
economic reasons. His ministries would help those communities “live more fully, more
completely, more holistically, and in a more healthy way, and that certainly included
wrapping life around a relationship with God through Jesus.” LeBlanc’s transformation
was not complete, however, even though his Christian conviction had manifested
pragmatically.

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37 Terry LeBlanc, interview by Moira Brown.
38 Terry LeBlanc, interview by Moira Brown.
39 Terry LeBlanc, interview by Moira Brown.
40 Terry LeBlanc, interview by Moira Brown.
Putting this conviction into practice led to another, unintended outcome, however. He and a group of like-minded individuals were motivated to “get some handles on what it meant to be a Native follower of Jesus. Because you see for many years, and in fact for some, it’s still presented as you have to either be Indian or Christian.” He explains that there was an expectation that Native men and women, at a deep cultural level, needed to leave their cultural identity “completely alone, set them aside, and become, essentially, brown-skinned white people.” Hastily the interviewer proclaims “and you have never done that.” To which LeBlanc promptly responds:

Well no, I did. When Bev and I came to faith there was this implicit, and in some cases very explicit, expectation that we would become like the folks that we began to associate with who were also followers of Jesus, and because they followed Jesus longer than us they new all they ways to do it right and we had fallen in love with Jesus, it was natural for us, it seemed, to do what they did. And they made it clear that that was what we should do. And so I cut my hair and got rid of everything that wasn’t clearly ‘Christian.’ I bought myself a Christian uniform – three piece suit, silk power tie, and wing-tip shoes, as my good friend Richard likes to say – and went ahead and became an authentic follower of Jesus. And it was when I was with Youth for Christ that I realized something was amiss.

He realized that he was doing the work of contextualizing the gospel to the youth subculture. This led him to the question: “if youth cultures are appropriate in a Christian context, why not Native cultures?” Hence, he explains, the necessity for NAIITS. He and “the group of Native Christians” decided that “if [they] didn’t engage the issue of theology and Biblical studies and mission studies from a Native perspective [they] would be . . . continue to be trapped in this . . . in this place where [they] couldn’t see how to move beyond the European expression of Christian faith into one that was authentically

41 Terry LeBlanc, interview by Moira Brown.
42 Terry LeBlanc, interview by Moira Brown.
43 Terry LeBlanc, interview by Moira Brown.
Native. And so [they] developed the North American Institute twelve years ago to pursue that.⁴⁴

This video and the others like it readily available on the official website are all pieces to the proverbial puzzle, each contributing to the identity of the organization that is NAIITS. According to the video, NAIITS is an indigenous effort to reverse engineer European Christianity and use those components to build an indigenous Christian religiosity that is more scripturally sound. From this perspective, it emphasizes difference through distinct cultural and ontological frames. Those components are then built into the descriptions of the institutional partners and degree-tracks which emphasize commonality through referencing a focus on scriptural alignment and global development concerns. Those components are the very stuff of symbolic and cultural capital – specifically from the western position – that add an institutional (as well as methodological) weight and legitimacy to NAIITS. That legitimacy is then extended to and infused with the claim to a re-claimed but fundamentally indigenous ontological framework. Thus, NAIITS faculty, are agents capable of both authentic indigenous ways-of-being and authentic Christian theological and missionary praxis.

The other example of media representation that I want to discuss, also published on Youtube, is a video depiction of the 2008 annual WCGIP (World Christian Gathering of Indigenous Peoples). The 2008 WCGIP was a significant event. The timing was of no consequence; it was twelve years since the WCGIP’s inaugural event in 1996 in New Zealand. It was instead the location that was the highlight of the gathering in 2008 as it was held in Jerusalem. The significance was not lost on members of NAIITS and they

⁴⁴ Terry LeBlanc, interview by Moira Brown.
capitalized on (in the Bourdieuan sense) that significance through multimedia expressions.

This particular video, because it consists of indigenous peoples from around the world engaging in their specific Native cultural expressions in Jerusalem, perhaps the most important pilgrimage site for Christians the world over, brings together, in stark relief, all of the things we have been talking about so far. What is more, key members of NAIITS were instrumental in its design:

This is a collaborative work that brought together two songs, one written by Hannah Haiu, the other by Richard Twiss and a video produced by Matt LeBlanc. The video footage includes an enactment of the song performed by the youth contingent of the World Christian Gathering on Indigenous Peoples (Israel 2008), featuring Jade Hohaia and Daniel Twiss.45

The video is a collection of images set to music. In a couple of instances the music fades and the sounds of the images themselves, often indigenous people dancing and singing in their own languages, come to the fore. Maori, Sami, Native Hawai’ians, Lakota, and other indigenous peoples are shown in “traditional” garb, dancing traditional dances, and singing traditional songs in the fore, while in the background the viewer gazes upon the skyline of Jerusalem. No doubt choosing this location for the performance of Native Christianity was a matter of conscious choice. As one can see in objects 7-1 and 7-2, the intended affect is immediately clear.

Object 7-1. Link to the “Creator's Masterpiece” Youtube video (image in question, 0:39)

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Object 7-2. Link to the “Creator’s Masterpiece” Youtube video (image in question, 3:04)

This video is a cultural artifact that is at a remove from the more academically-oriented character that is typical to the descriptions and videos found on the NAIITS official website. Thus, this video, and others like it, take a different tone. Rather than difference and juxtaposition, it is a demonstration that the cultural symbols of the West (more specifically Euro-American Christianity) can effectively be circumvented and a full expression of indigenous Christianity can be had. Arguably, the setting is of crucial significance, because these performances take place in the Holy Land they articulate a direct link between indigeneity and the geographical source – the wellspring – of the Judeo-Christian world.

The diasporic disposition that is part of indigenous identity is manifold and becomes increasingly complex in these images. Indigenous peoples from Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, Africa, South America], and North America are home at two different scales in these depictions. They are home – through the expressions of indigenous dress, dance, and speech – in their Native lands. Simultaneously, as Christians on pilgrimage, they are at home in the Holy Land. This is layered even further if we consider the theology of Biblical indigeneity presented by Twiss, LeBlanc, and other NAIITS theologians, taken up in significant detail in the eighth chapter. They are also at home as indigenous peoples in Jerusalem because, as the NAIITS theological re-orientation of creationism goes, “Jesus walked among the people he really walked as an indigenous, as a tribal man.”

See: Twiss in “Indigenous Theologians Discuss Christianity from a Native Perspective,” Youtube video, 9:35. Published by Sojotube on November 26, 2008.
Landzelius speaks to these issues directly in her research focused on Indigenous peoples and internet communication technologies: “Home and identity – always already in play through local-global articulations – become newly inflected by virtual flows of images and ideas; newly refracted, in the mediated politics of representation and (dis)information; and newly reflective, even meta-reflective, as subjectivities are traversed by mediascapes and other cosmopolitan influences.”47 Because for NAIITS theologians the Bible is an indigenous text – a history of tribal communities, tribal individuals, and a God whose preference is for tribal ways of life – the expression of a locality that is at a remove from its land-based specificity poses no problem. During this trip to Jerusalem, and consequently in the video produced on that trip’s behalf, NAIITS theologians and indigenous Christians from other parts of the world are not merely engaged in “cultural exchange.” They are not only powerful images, but also moments of theological argumentation, that indigenous expressions of Christian worship are so valid that they can be performed in the Holy Land and, through the affective responses of attendees and participants, can be deemed to have God’s approval. Additionally, the backdrop, Jerusalem, becomes a signifier of indigeneity; the Holy Land is articulated as an indigenous space. As such, NAIITS theologians and other indigenous peoples make the claim that Jerusalem, or the Holy Land, can be effectively dissociated with the West and instead function as a symbol of multiplicity and that the diverse range of indigenous cultures are reflections of that originative indigeneity.

Affiliated Ministry and NGO Homepaging

Many of the theologians that have worked or who continue working in the NAIITS program have their own ministry projects. In many cases, these ministries are closely associated with NAIITS and its pedagogical mission. In other cases, the affiliation is merely a matter of consequence (as in the case of Woodley’s Eloheh). The latter still deserve consideration because of 1) the extent to which those individuals have influenced NAIITS and 2) the resultant continuity of ideas between them.

In any networks analysis the connections between organizational nodes can be numerous, making exhaustive and comprehensive treatments nearly impossible. In an effort to curtail this problem and render the material more manageable, then, I have highlighted three of the more relevant websites created by members (and one former member) of NAIITS.

The homepage of iEmergence, the organization headed by Matt LeBlanc, deserves consideration as it is representative of how the NAIITS network is extending globally. With its headquarters in the Philippines, iEmergence’s aim is to assist in the development of NAIITS-like practices among the Ata people in Paquibato, Davao City in their effort to garner more institutional and political power.

The first thing that one notices on the iEmergence homepage is the gradual procession of images just beneath the organization’s logo. The first image is of a Philippine male of indigenous descent. His eyes are fixated on the viewer and his expression is serious. To the left of this visage is what looks to be the tip of a spear. The next image is of a Native American headdress, one reminiscent of the one gifted to Terry LeBlanc by a member of the Blackfoot tribe. Following that is an image of Matt LeBlanc, Terry LeBlanc, Daniel Twiss, fourth man, and a young Philippine boy. They
are all dressed in Native regalia and are walking side by side down a busy Davao City street. In his right hand, Matt LeBlanc carries a flag (SYMBOL UNKNOWN). Terry LeBlanc seems to be wearing the headdress prominent in the previous image. The boy all the way to the right (perhaps the same individual in the first image) is carrying a spear. Immediately following is an image of young Ata males helping each other to apply ceremonial paint on their faces and ceremonial ornaments to their hair and other parts of their bodies. The next image is of a man, whose back is turned to the camera, playing the flute while gazing out into a valley of lush greenery met in the distance by steep mountain slopes. Sticking with the geographical features, the next image is of a sunset on the ocean’s horizon, bookended by rocky cliffs. The two images emphasizing geographical spaces are strikingly beautiful and reminiscent of something one might expect to find on a postcard. Finally, the last image is of ceremonial objects; a drum, sage (or, what looks like sage) bundle, and what looks like a ritual object adorned with pig bristles (a common material used in Ata ornamentation).

Taken together, these images are jam-packed with meaning. One could argue that the procession of images are a weaving together of the Ata way of life, the NAIITS (Indigenous Pathways) program, and the land; the home of the original inhabitants (believed to be the Ata) of what is now called the Philippines. Images of Ata individuals engaging in the cultural heritage of their people accompanied by images of the people and symbols specific to NAIITS (Indigenous Pathways) would suggest to the viewer that the agendas of these two groups of people are aligned, that they view themselves as part of a global, synonymous, and concomitant struggle for recognition.
The Wiconi homepage is one that consists of a host of interesting imagery as well. The first thing that one sees when pulling up Wiconi’s website is a welcome page consisting of an image of Richard Twiss dressed in full regalia, singing, and dancing with eagle feathers. To the right of him is a line of thirteen Native American children. And to the right of the children is a Native American woman powwow dancer, mid-spin with tassels extending out from her wardrobe due to the velocity of her movement. They are all superimposed onto an image of a wide open field (reminiscent of the planes of North America) and a single tree situated in the middle. There is a slightly transparent image of a face; perhaps Toi, or Maori artwork.

Object 7-3, Link to Wiconi’s portal page
The images on the welcome page are accompanied by the proclamation “Creating a preferred future for Native People,” suggesting that the future offered to them by the various arms of Euro-American colonization has and will continue to fail to meet the needs of the indigenous peoples of North America. The precise meaning of the above image (including the message) is made more explicit once one reaches the homepage. The main page is dominated by the heading “Life,” which is in all caps and followed by a translation immediately below; it reads: “‘wee-cho-nee’ Lakota/Sioux language meaning ‘Life’.” Each letter is filled with images of geographical features; plants, water, and the sun are prominent here.

Object 7-4, Link to Wiconi website (image appears at top of homepage)
All of this is followed by a very powerful message reiterating the organization’s focus on a “preferred future.” Wiconi’s ministry objectives are described as follows: “We seek to
live and walk among all people in a good way as we follow the ways of Jesus—affirming, respecting, and embracing the God-given cultural realities of Native American and Indigenous people, not demonizing or rejecting these sacred cultural ways." This is immediately followed by a Bible passage from the book of John and then a bit of commentary, connecting the work of Wiconi to the Biblical passage. “The thief comes,” it reads, “to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” The commentary then reads: “These words of the Creator do not bring religion, legalism, shame, oppression or paternalism, though sadly, Christianity often does. Our prayer is that people will experience life in abundance for their spirit, soul and body!” Life then seems to be equated with culture. The condition of alcoholism and psychological despair felt by Native communities across North America, according to NAIITS theologians, are direct derivatives of the loss of culture. Cultural revitalization through Christ, they argue, will breathe life back into the Indigenous communities and afford them the strength to assuage their ills. This is made all the more relevant set beside Twiss’s written work, in which he states that “the very idea of culture began with God” and that “native cultures, as do all the cultures of man, reflect to some degree the attributes of our Creator.” For Twiss, and indeed all NAIITS theologians, one’s culture, the unique way in which God originally created you, is central to one’s relationship with Jesus Christ. The Wiconi website highlights this aspect of its organizational imperative.

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49 Passage found on Wiconi’s website homepage

As a ministerial arm of Indigenous Pathways and, thus, through its connection to NAIITS, Wiconi is, like iEmergence and other organizations, out in the world doing the work that is being systematized theologically and legitimized institutionally through the work of NAIITS theologians and other academically-trained contributors.

Randy Woodley’s newest incarnation of the Eloheh project is prominently displayed on the related homepage. What one notices immediately on the Woodley’s Eagle’s Wings Ministry/Eloheh webpage is a descriptive list of the organization’s six main functions and objectives; these include teaching and mentoring (on the part of Dr. Woodley and his wife Edith); a Farm, School and Community; training center for Indigenous leadership; access to teachings, books, and other writings; and, finally, local opportunities for service and activism.51

Then there are a series of images and captions, which put on display for the viewer the functions previously described. Below a picture of Dr. Woodley and a young indigenous woman, the caption reads:

mentoring opportunities are available in various forms. If you are indigenous and searching for help in these areas, one of these . . . might fit your needs. There are also opportunities for non-indigenous people. Eloheh Village for Indigenous leadership attempts to find a place for anyone willing to learn and live in a good way.52

Next to that is an image of a group of people, including NAIITS students, who have come together for, what the caption describes as, “spiritual refreshing through ceremony, teaching and fellowship.” The event seems very informal and intimate; one person is flipping meat on an open bit fireplace grill while others seem to be in the

process of simply having conversation and standing around. Below all of that are a series of images (on display below). These are less informal and are more directed at creating a sense of the space through symbolic means.

Object 7-5, Link to Eagle Wing’s Ministry/Eloheh website (images on homepage)

A fire pit, a sweat lodge, and eagle feathers highlight the authenticity of the Eagle Wings Ministry/Eloheh project. Indigenous visitors see familiar images meant to express indigenous practice (sweat lodge) and symbols of power (eagle’s feathers). Similarly, non-indigenous visitors are exposed to recognizable symbols of indigenous culture.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Woodley’s homepagging strategy are the sections of text below the introductory material I have discussed above. Here, Dr. Woodley pulls no punches and addresses in stark detail how Eagle’s Wings Ministry is different from the typical evangelical ministry. The heading, first of all, is striking and seems to function as an attention grabber; it reads: “Jesus vs. Christianity.” In all that follows, the Woodleys espouse their theological position as it relates to the Church, Western Culture, missions history and colonization, cultural expressions of Christian faith, as well as the advantages of Indigenous ways of life over that of Western ways of life.

The history of Christianity among Native Americans, for the most part, is nothing short of evil. . . . The tension is cause primarily by the events that occurred when Christianity aligned itself with the Roman Empire, then European Empires, and now the American Empire. Unfortunately, Christianity has never recovered from straying far from Jesus. . . . [We] have found many traditional Indigenous people who are not Christians, but have walked with and learned from Jesus. After all, he is Spirit. And, his medicine is powerful. And, his wisdom and values are traditionally Indigenous. Problem is, many Christians don’t believe their own Bible.
In numerous places in the Scriptures, writers in John, Colossians, Corinthians and Hebrews, name Jesus as Creator. Our Indigenous people have been praying to Creator for millennia. So, who have Indigenous people been praying to? The one whom Scripture calls Jesus, the Creator, though he is called by many names among many peoples.  

This passage is packed full of meaning. In a concise and poignant way, the Eloheh homepage confronts its viewers with the categorical decoupling of cultural forms and religious content right away, separating Jesus from the institutional church and suggesting that the institution has strayed from its mandate. Western culture is implicated in this process as Dr. Woodley lists the succession of colonial history to the present, neo-colonial moment under what he refers to as “American Empire.” Biblical Indigeneity is invoked as Dr. Woodley casts the person of Jesus Christ to the early/first inhabitants of the North American landscape.

As I have mentioned, Dr. Woodley has recently tendered his resignation from the NAIITS Board of Directors. The future relationship between NAIITS and George Fox has, consequently, been thrown into question. It is no doubt, however, that the work of NAIITS and the Woodley’s continue to be inextricably woven together. Indeed, there may be some subtle philosophical differences emerging as people grow older and develop converging ideas about various topics, but the first incarnation of Eloheh provided the blueprint for the NAIITS Learning Community. Now, as Eloheh 2.0 takes form some of what NAIITS became over the course of the last thirteen years is undoubtedly embedded within it.

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Chapter Conclusion

The media representations produced by members of NAIITS function, I argue, in key ways; 1) they create a precise picture of the web of relationships that make up the NAIITS organizational network; 2) the portrayal of these networked affiliations are an attempt to demonstrate Evangelical institutional legitimacy; and, finally, 3) the very use of mass self-communication to communicate these connections to a broader audience is a way to validate and augment its claim to legitimacy in the context of systematizing indigenous theologies.

While these objectives are aspired to, the homepages also address a number of key themes that relate to the various other practices common among NAIITS theologians. First, they make a case for Native ways of life and often juxtapose those to Euro-American or Anglo forms. Second, they emphasize the importance of land and how it is central to one’s identity and cultural heritage. Third, they emphasize the need for young indigenous peoples to be trained and become leaders of their communities. Fourth, they highlight the need for diverse, inclusive community, a place where people from different denominations and/or indigenous communities can feel accepted.

On the one hand, NAIITS faculty, members, and contributors are tapping into what Castell’s referred to as “traditional mass-communication” outlets in their production, publication, and dissemination of indigenous theological texts the production of which is sponsored by the mainstream Evangelical institutions across North America. On the other, NAIITS faculty, members, and contributors have also developed a large repertoire of what Castell’s calls “mass self-communication,” a form of communication that extends beyond the constraints of traditional mass communication. Through its own website, videos posted on Youtube and Vimeo, and a strong social media presence,
NAIITS is engaged in an ongoing process of producing and disseminating its image as a multi-ethnic (trans- indigenous), transnational, evangelical network that is at once institutionally legitimated, internationally oriented, and Biblically justified.

Drawing upon the likes of Castells, Glynn and Couples I argue that, broadly, “media are central to the practices of imagination in the contemporary world and therefore core to the processes whereby societies today,” and more precisely in our case, Indigenous communities brought together under the auspices of Christian faith, “may struggle to reimagine their futures along different trajectories.” The broader influence of indigenous peoples in the political and socio-economic centers can be viewed in specific examples. The Seminole Indian Tribe’s rise to economic power through the gaming industry, recent purchase of Hard Rock Café, and even more recent purchase of naming rights to the home stadium of the Miami Dolphins is one example. The 2006 election of Evo Morales, an indigenous (Aymara) man, in Bolivia is another example. It is from this perspective that we can begin to imagine the power of indigenous media representations “in amplifying and broadening the revivification, assertion, and extended circulation of relational, non-modern ontologies and in helping to connect . . . indigenous media networks and movements across the Americas” and, indeed, the entire world.

To return to the discussion concerning mechanisms of communication and the power they wield, Castells avers that mass self-communication functions as mass communication by virtue of its being capable of reaching, with minimal restrictions (e.g.,

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institutional oversight, peer-review submission, etc.), a global audience (i.e., posting on Youtube, Vimeo, Facebook, RSS links or mass email). It is also self-communication, however, because “the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-directed.”

Thus, the attempt to establish themselves in the realm of mass communication partly through their development of effective mass self-communication representations on the part of NAIITS is exemplary of Castells' reference to “a composite, interactive, digital hyper-text that includes, mixes, and recombines in their diversity the whole range of cultural expressions conveyed by human interaction.”

Glenn and Couples remind their readers that “although the concept of the local is often activated in terms of its difference from the global, it is important to recognize that the latter is constituted and becomes effective within local material and discourse. It is therefore crucial to avoid a reified conception of nested scales (wherein the global is seen naturally to ‘contain’ the national, which in turn naturally ‘contains’ the regional, etc.) to grasp the ways in which the global exists within locales rather than merely containing them.”

The various homepage expressions of indigenous identity, from iEmergence to Wiconi, articulate local in an interesting way. There are the specific groups and their connection to a particular geographical space (e.g., the Ata people of the Philippines and the images of the Philippino landscape, or Twiss’s Lakota connections to the North American plains). On the other hand, there is a more meta,


57 Castells, Communication Power, 55.

58 Castells, Communication Power, 103.
global articulation operating when these expressions are taken together; the notion that land and people in the indigenous world are inextricably linked and that this is fundamental to the indigenous way of life.

This allows for a radically different perspective from the “primordializing and romanticizing view that asserts that the local must be defended from the intrusion of the global.”

NAIITS media representations – especially as it relates to the Youtube and Vimeo video productions – oscillate between the local and global in highly provocative foregrounded expressions of indigeneity. Simultaneously, Jerusalem provides backdrop, operating as a symbol of originative indigeneity. This articulation is rendered global, not only as a Christian universalism, but also as a diverse range of indigenous communities (Canadian First Nations, Maori, Australian Aboriginais, Native Americans, Scandinavian Sami peoples, and a slew of others) offer region specific expressions of Christian worship through “dancing [their] prayers.” “Contemporary indigeneity is thus,” Glenn and Couples argue, “constituted at once by both intense forms of a politicized, place-based localism and an ever growing set of globally mediated networks.”

The NAIITS development and utilization of ICTs “can thus be seen as part of a struggle toward [indigenous] self-re-creation, a struggle to produce meaningful bridges not only with other peoples and generations but also with other times and other possible new self-identifications and identities.” Outside of the creation of written or “systematic” theologies, which are a crucial step in achieving legitimate status in the Western academic tradition, NAIITS and affiliated organizational media representations

59 Castells, Communication Power, 103.
60 Castells, Communication Power, p. 104.
“illustrate some of the ways in which indigenous media practices entail the creation not just of texts but of often renewed, reworked, and distinctive modes of sociality.”62 The media representations, even more so than the written theologies, offer observers explicit articulations of the various connections, missions, and demographic makeup of each organization, providing roadmaps, blueprints, personal stories, as well as confirmation concerning organizational ties to reputable and legitimate partners.

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Figure 6-1. NAIITS Network Diagram
CHAPTER 7
NATIVE AMERICANS AND THE STRUCTURES OF EDUCATION: A TROUBLED PAST

One aspect of NAIITS events that is immediately obvious is the intense focus that NAIITS faculty, affiliated organizations, and attendees place on the “political” system that is education. This is demonstrated with repeated reference to the history of colonial education and Indian boarding schools throughout North America. This history is targeted, and rightly so, as that which NAIITS is in direct contradistinction. NAIITS faculty view themselves as emerging out of and working directly against this history. In this light, before one can view NAIITS as an indigenous attempt to empower indigenous peoples in the context of education and the production of knowledge, it is first necessary to illustrate the history of education and Native North Americans.

To be sure, Native Americans, as well as indigenous peoples the world over, have had a contentious relationship with western systems of education. Native American programs of study, Tribal Colleges, and programs such as NAIITS, therefore, constitute strategic moves aimed toward, not only the empowerment of Native individuals, but community control over the knowledge that is produced about Native history and cultures. These strategies involve the simultaneous appropriation and subversion of non-Native models. To put it more succinctly, these strategies are representative of “procedures [that] manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them[.]”¹

¹ De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, xiv.
Education Pre- and Post-Contact

In North America, pre-contact forms of child-rearing were as varied as the tribes themselves. Nonetheless, certain features, common across tribal specificity have been demonstrated. According to Szasz, Native Americans exhibited three general areas of childhood education. Basic survival skills, cultural heritage, and spiritual awareness were each crucial aspects of a Native child’s upbringing. These aspects of Native education were entwined, braded together in a series of methods which included physical trials, rituals, storytelling, feasts, and festivals. For examples, Reyhner and Eder point out that in many cases there were “tribal stories that described how children who went outside the bounds of tribal custom were severely punished by supernatural powers.”

In their regular and day-to-day engagements with these aspects of Native culture (which were as much about keeping the adults enveloped by their cultures as they were about educating the Native youth), Native children eventually became full-fledged members of society. Disciplinary strategies were part of the education process. Rather than physical punishment, which was typical of settler society, Native Americans achieved obedience “through teasing, ostracism, and peer pressure.”

These forms of child-rearing were, however, severely undermined as settlers, government officials, and missionaries determined that Western forms of education would “help” Native North Americans become more “self-sufficient,” “literate,” “economically resourceful,” and “civilized.”

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4 Eder and Reyhner, American Indian Education, 15.
Prior to the eighteenth century, colonial education, unlike its European counterpart, was fluid and often lacked strong central formality. While schools existed, they were diverse in their curriculum and often people chose other methods of educating their children. As Szasz points out, “the intrinsic fascination with colonial schooling . . . does not lie in its general abundance nor in its universal significance, for in these dimensions it failed to rival either home or church.”\(^5\) In rural areas education was carried out primarily in the home and to some extent by the local clergy. The Bible was used as a pedagogical tool to promote reading (as well as piety); almanacs, pamphlets, school texts, and Christian how-to manuals constituted the “most popular literature for colonial readers,” and rounded out the curriculum for colonial students.\(^6\)

Substantial growth in populations during the 1700s brought with it changes in the modes of education. In urban centers such as Philadelphia, Boston, Newport, and New York, where there was an abundance of institutional growth and bureaucratic complexity, education was a reflection of these larger processes. In these highly populated colonial cities “family economic training paled beside the bewildering array of opportunities available to the boy willing to apprentice himself.”\(^7\) Apprenticeship was a mode of education, then, that took the place of the family unit in urban centers, providing crucial training in specialized skills necessary for survival in an urban environment.

The exception to this rule, wherein family and church dominated educational strategies, were the Puritans. They perceived rigorous education as a necessary


\(^7\) Szasz, *Indian Education*, 32.
condition for one’s salvation. Likewise, because they viewed the New World as a vast wasteland that, like the individual, was in need of refinement and discipline, brick and mortar (or, more precisely, board and nail) schools represented the literal civilizing of the land.

All this is to illustrate the enormous complexity that characterized education even among European settler populations migrating and adapting to their new environments during the colonial moment. Necessarily, attempts to school the indigenous population on the part of Euro-Americans were also varied and wrought with complications.

Many missionaries were enthusiastic about the prospect of converting Native Americans and travelled to the Americas for that express purpose. Anglican minister John Wesley, for example, travelled with his brother and a contingent of Moravians to Savannah, Georgia in hopes of missionizing the Native populations of that area. Wesley’s aspirations were dashed, however, when he was instructed by the governor to minister exclusively to English settlers. Other missionaries were more successful, however, and quickly established

**Native Schooling during the Colonial Period**

Indian education in seventeenth century Virginia, for example, was complicated by several factors; not least of which was the colonists ethnocentrism. Their own inadequacies as uninvited guests were made increasingly problematic, however, by the previous century’s visitors to the region. Spaniards and Italians, Jesuit missionaries and slave traders both made land fall throughout the sixteenth century. The Powhatan confederacy, therefore, developed a sense of what Europeans were up to prior to the subsequent European migration. By the time English immigrants arrived in 1607, then, natives had already had their fill of European advances on their land.
Powhatan and English settlers were at war between 1609 and 1614. When the dust finally settled and once the English settlers established their dominance over the natives and demonstrated their willingness to exert their will through violence, the task of “civilizing” the natives became paramount to the colonial enterprise. “In early Stuart England,” Szasz explains, “Christianization and civilization (or civility) were mutually interdependent, and when these concepts were applied to the Indians they often came under the rubric of ‘education.’” Education was comprehensive and targeted the adult members of the community. It was this model that prevailed throughout the colonies and in the early United States until the late nineteenth century.

Puritan missionaries, who entered the Massachusetts Bay region between 1620 and 1630, were convinced that indigenous peoples living in close proximity existed, in the Hobbesian sense, in a complete state of nature. John Eliot, for example, concluded that natives had no system of values nor the intellectual capacity with which to develop such values. Worse yet, Cotton Mather considered the indigenous population a kind of demonic front line, hedging the continent from the spread of the gospel.  

The New England Company (eventually changing its name to the Massachusetts Bay Company), financially and politically empowered by the English Crown, was the body responsible for the development of educational policies directed toward indigenous peoples who lived within the borders of “their” domain. The political tumult of the Algonquian speaking tribes, the introduction of diseases, and the Pequot War of 1637 presented a gloomy picture for many indigenous peoples in the region. Thus, many were willing to test the efficaciousness of western alternatives and so they sought

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8 Szasz, *Indian Education*, 106.
out education from their colonial neighbors. The Massachusett, Pawkunnakut, Nipmuc, and Montauk Indians were those most involved with the New England Company.

The 1650s and 1660s witnessed the opening of various types of schools aimed at educating the indigenous populations; some schools were located among Indian communities, others were part of “praying villages. Specific strategies varied according to individual philosophies and socio-historical realities. John Eliot, for instance, developed “praying towns,” which were essentially western civilization immersion projects wherein natives were expected to fully engender – in their daily activities, general behavior, and religious practices – a thoroughly Western way of being. Thomas Mayhew, on the other hand, focused on the opening of schools. His first foray into schooling Native Americans occurred in 1652, enrolling thirty Indian children in Martha’s Vineyard. Indian parents would attend “Lecture days” held every two weeks. He believed that teaching the native populations to read and write would necessarily lead to exposure and inevitable conversion to Christianity (and by “natural” extension, Western civilization). Their behavior and comportment, he believed, would alter organically once their minds and souls had been altered first.  

Due to the social, economic, and political struggles brought about by border disputes among colonial powers, the institution of slavery, the deer hide trade, and persistence of warfare, the Southeast (including the Carolinas and Georgia) supplied very little schooling to non-European communities. Among the many European migrants, Georgia in particular was populated primarily by English Anglicans, Scottish

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9 Szasz, Indian Education, 120-125.
Presbyterians, German Lutherans and Moravians, French Huguenots, along with Dutch, Portuguese, and Italians of various stripes, and, finally, a small contingent of Jews.

Georgia was settled through the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). James Oglethorpe, a member of the Board of Trustees, became the colony’s first governmental leader. In 1735, John Wesley was appointed an SPG missionary to Georgia and made the arduous journey across the Atlantic with his brother Charles, schoolmaster Rev. Benjamin Ingham, James Oglethorpe (who returned to England in an effort to recruit able missionaries for his young colony, and several Creek Indians (including notable figures Tomochichi, Sinaukey, and Toonahowi).

While Wesley was preoccupied with his own religious conviction and Oglethorpe the spiritual health of the European colonists, it was Ingham who remained stalwart in his ambitions to school the Native populations of Georgia. Initially, however, they were the students. Mary Musgrove a Yamacraw Creek Indian woman agreed to instruct Ingham in Muskogean. Subsequently, Ingham taught Wesley and some Moravians how to speak Muskogean. In September 1736, Ingham built a small schoolhouse that he named “Irene” less than half a mile from Tomochichi’s village. The school opened in October of 1736. Ingham operated the school for approximately five months, teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic in particular to three Yamacraw boys that he referenced in letters, until he was summoned back to England by SPG officials. Peter and Catherine Rose tried to remain there with the support of Count Zinzendorf. Ultimately, however, growing tensions with the Spanish to the South led to unrest in the colony, resulting in the neglect of the school and its purposes. The Yamacraw migrated south in an attempt to assist in native-led attempts to stave off Spanish advances northward into
Florida. Peter and Catherine Rose were recalled by the Moravians and by summer of 1737, the school was all but abandoned.

There is a dearth of source material, Szasz points out, that could point to and illumine the process of Indian schooling in the colonial southeast. What can be accessed paints a hazy picture at best. Szasz observed that . . .

schooling for Georgia’s southeastern Indians in the eighteenth century was intensive, narrowly focused, and extraordinarily brief, with all of it taking place within a single decade. Ingham and the Moravians Peter and Catherine Rose made only a slight impact on one village of lower Creek-Yamasee. In South Carolina, Ross Reynolds and Benjamin Dennis instructed a handful of Yamasee and other Indian groups in the colony. In North Carolina, fleeting references suggest a similar degree of individual instruction. . . . These few attempts may have encouraged a small number of Indians to become cultural brokers, dealing in that cultural frontier dividing the Indian from the colonial. ¹⁰

Thus, at best, we can speculate that those Indian individuals who were influenced by the sparse attempts on the part of SPG missionaries to educate the Indians must have had some impact on their respective communities.

The Moravians were wildly more successful among the Mahicans, Shawnee, Wyandot, Chippewa, Ottawa, Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga as they became influential in the missionary work in the areas of New York and Pennsylvania during the so-called “Great Awakening.” Moravians included schools in each of their mission-to-the-Indian settlements and believed they could make manifest their conception of civilization through this strategy. They were convinced that Indians would benefit most from a complete cultural alteration, becoming not only Christian, but also European in every way. “Upon Baptism,” Szasz demonstrates, “all Indians acquired a Christian name. They were taught to respect the sanctity of monogamous marriage; they learned

¹⁰ Szasz, Indian Education, 170.
not to labor on the Sabbath; they were to shun any rum or strong drink and to avoid ‘heathenish’ dances or festivals; and they were to be ‘obedient’ . . .“11 This approach was part of the Moravian missionary work along the Delaware River from the 1740s to the post-revolutionary era.

**Residential Boarding Schools**

Native schooling took a sharp turn during the concluding chapter of the nineteenth century. According to Fear-Segal, Fort Marion in St. Augustine Florida is representative of a paradigmatic shift in Indian education policies that occurred around 1875. “Home” to Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and Comanche Indian adults who had been incarcerated following the Red River War and headed by Captain Richard Henry Pratt, Fort Marion became a model for future policies, including the proliferation of the Indian boarding school system.

Education had been intrinsic to Indian-white relations since the days of first contact and also inseparable from native subjugation and dispossession. So the prison venture at Fort Marion fell into a long-established tradition. Yet it also displayed a range of important new elements that would shape the Indian school Pratt went on to establish in Pennsylvania and influence, too, the future trajectory of Indian schooling in the United States.12

Natives in Pratt’s prison school were encouraged to produce drawings depicting their experience during the migration from reservation land to their current abode, a fortress on the east coast of Florida. Using implements foreign to them, including ledger books, the Native prisoners also adapted their depictions to western temporal and spatial

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11 Szasz, _Indian Education_, 202-205.

12 Jacqueline Fear-Segal, _White Man’s Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation_, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 1.
frameworks. Many of their sketches were “laid out . . . in a linear pattern that read from left to right, rather than in the traditional spiral or circle.”

This development supplied Pratt, he thought, with the necessary evidence to conclude that complete separation from the source of their cultural heritage was crucial to the Native’s transition from “savage” to “citizen.” While Christianity certainly facilitated this transition it was rather strict military discipline and a focus on language training that, in his estimation, would bring about the most comprehensive change. The literature concerning Indian boarding schools in the United States and Canada is vast and continues to grow rapidly. Due to recent developments – most notably Canada’s recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools held in 2015 – boarding schools and the irreparable harm they have caused indigenous communities have become common knowledge. This process has become ubiquitous as various nations (i.e., the United States, New Zealand, and Australia to name a few) have been backed into a corner and forced to face the history of Indian boarding schools. An exhaustive re-telling of this history is far beyond the scope of this project. However, I will point to a few examples in an attempt to provide further cohesion to this outline of Natives and education in North America.

Boarding school policies emerged concomitantly with the nation-building strategies implemented following independence (true also in Canada and other creole nations). Haig-Brown, in her influential work, observed during her participation in the “World Conference of Indigenous People’s Education” held in 1987, that “the similarities

13 Fear-Segal, White Man’s Club, 9.
14 Fear-Segal, White Man’s Club, 2.
between modern life among [indigenous peoples around the world] and among North American Native people were eerie; alcoholism, suicide, lack of economic self-sufficiency, racism, dependency” were, she now understood, patterned byproducts of colonial boarding school policies throughout the colonial period; it was and continues to be a global phenomenon.\footnote{Celia Haig-Brown, \textit{Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School}, (Vancouver, B.C., Arsenal Pulp Press: 1988), 15.}

In the U.S. context, the boarding schools grew out of an often-overlooked close-knit relationship between the founding principles of the nascent republic's federal government, which were derivatives of both the enlightenment and Protestant values. Presidents Washington, Jefferson, and Monroe were instrumental in the development of these policies in the United States. First Peoples, in each of their minds, required complete incorporation into the body politic. Thus, in 1819, Congress initiated the Civilization Fund, which would distribute money to missionary organizations and fuel their attempts to bring First Americans into the fold.

In her work Jaqueline Fear-Segal offers a well-articulated explanation of how this seemingly paradoxical approach to Indigenous peoples operated. How could this new nation, so preoccupied with the separation between church and state; embroiled in the ongoing process of disestablishment state by state, systematically allow Christian organizations to become the key functionaries in the process of assimilating Native Americans? She demonstrates that,

\begin{quote}
the ardent anti-ecclesiasticism that accompanied intellectual debate in the Salons of Paris did not cross the Atlantic. In the New World, there was no oppressive established church to oppose. More importantly, Enlightenment ideas . . . incorporated unequivocal beliefs about the universal qualities pressed by all men. The republic’s founding documents
\end{quote}
enshrined Enlightenment’s central precept, the essential uniformity of human nature, and this was a principle that echoed Christianity’s doctrine of the ‘family of man.’ The confluence of these two positive and universalist doctrines meant that, despite the Enlightenment commitment to scientific enquiry and the preeminence of empirical materialist knowledge, for the purpose of civilizing Indians, republicanism and Christianity did not appear contradictory. America’s new secular ideology of national universalism could, in the short term, run smoothly in parallel with the Christian doctrine of the unity of mankind.\(^\text{16}\)

Fear-Segal suggests further that the situation was made increasingly problematic with the development of pseudo-scientific theories of race, which were spearheaded in the United States. In 1839 Samuel George Morton published *Crania Americana*; a study of brain size and associated cognitive capability. He concluded, based on his measurements of 144 Native American brains and in comparing them to Caucasian brains, that Native Americans were less capable of intellectual pursuits than were white people and that in the hierarchy of races that made up the United States, white men came first, Native Americans second, and African Americans were at the bottom. Thus, the Christian understanding of a wide-reaching human capacity for salvation and Enlightenment universalism were in constant tension and at times succumbed to racial discourse in the United States and Canada.\(^\text{17}\)

Much like the strategies to educate Native Americans during the colonial period, the schools that emerged as a result of this agreement between the United States government and missions organizations varied greatly in structure and composition. There were smaller schools built within close proximity to Native American communities; some of the smaller schools were abandoned in favor of larger boarding schools.

\(^{16}\) Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, 67, 68.

\(^{17}\) Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, 69.
situated near or on lands held by the federal government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Eventually the mission structure came to be understood as overly fragmented, requiring centralization and uniformity. In 1889, Thomas Jefferson Morgan, newly appointed commissioner of Indian affairs, developed a plan to integrate Indian schools into a system wherein “curriculum, methods of instruction, and textbooks as well as goals would be identical in every Indian school across the United States.”

Richard Henry Pratt gave no credence to those pseudo-scientific theories of race that suggested indigenous peoples were incapable of intellectual pursuits similar to those so often accomplished by whites. When he, in 1879, inherited the defunct, post-Civil War barracks buildings in Carlisle, Pennsylvania and repurposed them into the Carlisle Indian School, he did so with the universalist conviction that Native Americans were fully capable and, in the same manner in which Irish and Italian immigrants assimilated to the life-ways and democratic values of the United States, Natives too could be assimilated and thereby fashioned into informed, active citizens of the nation.

This outlook came with certain other ideals, however, that should warn the reader against attributing saintly status to Pratt. The school functioned simultaneously as a disciplining of bodies and an exhibit of Native American supposed new-found civil capabilities. Pratt’s militaristic background played heavily in the procedures and policies that were directed toward the students living there. As Fear-Segal observes, “the message communicated to those living on the campus was different from the one conveyed to those visiting. Students, who were ostensibly being trained to step out as equals, experienced . . . surveillance and a militaristic rule that unremittingly asserted

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18 Fear-Segal, White Man’s Club, 73.
the patterns of white power that would attend their absorption into white society.” The strict code of conduct and the propaganda emanating from the institution meant that white visitors could be impressed upon, convincing them that Native Americans could be incorporated without fear that the fabric and core values of the United States would in any way be undermined.  

Following the passing of the Indian Act of 1876 the Canadian government sent agents to the United States in hopes of producing a report that would assess the effectiveness of Indian education. Upon their completion, the resultant reports urged the establishment of a residential school system across the Canadian landscape. Much like their U.S. neighbors, Canadian officials began to view adult Indians as a lost cause, incapable of fully assimilating into white civilization. Their stubbornness proved frustrating to the Canadian government, especially as it complicated the process of procuring land and resources. Thus, in order to accomplish the desired incorporation of Native peoples into the Canadian way of life, children would have to be forcibly removed from the influence of their unruly parents and entered into a rigorous civilizing mechanism. This led, Haig-Brown informs us, to the establishment of Kamloops Residential School in British Columbia as well as many other residential schools throughout Canada.

In Canada boarding schools were funded through the Indian Affairs and Northern Development program. Much like the mission school project initiated in the United States prior to the transition to the federally funded centralized system, the Canadians created a system whereby residential schools would be largely administered by

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19 Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*, p. 186.
religious organizations; Catholics, Anglicans, and other Protestants were given the special task of civilizing Canadian First Nations peoples. From 1876 until the late twentieth century it is estimated that roughly 150,000 Native North American children were taken to Canadian residential schools.

Kamloops became the home of many children culled from the people known as the Secwepemc, or Shuswap. They were seasonal travelers, following the ebbs and flows of food sources in the harsh Kamloops region of British Columbia. Their initial contact with Europeans occurred through trade and eventually Montreal’s North West Company, specializing in fur trade from 1779 to 1821, began to build outposts closer to Secwepemc territory. Missionary efforts were relatively successful as Secwepemc peoples found some correlations between their traditional religious worldview and Catholicism.

Opened in 1893, Kamloops was an attempt to instill in the Indian children a sense of toil, which would be impossible if they were allowed to remain in close proximity to and under the tutelage of their parents. Canadian officials were convinced that laziness and a lack of obedience would be the inevitable outcome should Native children be allowed constant contact with their elders. “If anything is to be done with the Indian,” one report asserted, “we must catch him very young.” In 1920, the Canadian government made school attendance mandatory for Indian children. Forced removal, then, became the official policy of the state.

Like many of its kind across North America Kamloop’s pedagogy went beyond reading, writing, arithmetic, manners, and religious instruction. A sense of obedience

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was emphasized and carried out often through corporeal punishment. Haig-Brown, herself a survivor of Kamloops, wrote that the children’s failures to “abandon their cultures and to comply with regulations” often seemed “unnecessarily severe,” and that “little could be done about them” because “students were in residence eleven months out of the year” and “letters written home were always censored.” Many children, indeed, felt betrayed by their parents for having allowed them to be taken away in the first place, making straining familial interactions and creating ambiguous feelings about the prospect of visiting home during breaks.21 Kamloops Residential Indian School was finally closed in 1977.

Unlike the United States, Canada has taken steps politically and financially to address the history of residential schools. In 2006 the Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was enacted, which made available two million dollars in reparations funds. This money was divided up and distributed to the 80,000 survivors who qualified to receive it. Since then, the Canadian government created and continues to sponsor the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC allows individuals who have been affected by residential school policies to provide testimony and make their stories heard in an official capacity.22

**After Boarding Schools**

The U.S. government’s approach to Native education underwent extensive reform in the mid- to late twentieth century. With the continued migration to cities during the 1970s, many of the boarding schools began to close. Robert and Ted Kennedy

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22 For more on this, see Ronald Niezen’s 2013 publication, *Truth and Indignation: Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools*. See also Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club*.
issued a scathing report of the nation’s Indian education policies in 1969, deeming it “a failure of major proportions.” As a consequence, the seventies witnessed “enhanced funding of public schools on reservations, the development of community or contract schools, the founding of tribally operated community colleges, and the growth of enrollment and graduation of Indian college students.”

The Indian Education Act of 1972, the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, and the Education Amendments of 1978 provided funding to urban and on-reservation communities for schooling, facilitated native leadership in the area of education, and created revenue streams for public schools for Indian assistance, respectively. These legislative reforms were enabled by and helped to continue the development of Native-led education throughout the United States. Because of the exponential increase in federal concern for Indian education, various Native communities around the country attempted to form native-administered schools. Referred to as “contract schools,” these institutions (i.e., Rough Rock Demonstration School, Ramah Navajo School, Busby School of Northern Cheyenne) not only offered Indian students an education consisting of a native inspired curriculum, but additionally “opened the door to more Native superintendents, principles, and teachers.”

Higher Education

Higher education was also a part of the aforementioned shift in Federal policy toward Indian education. Since the 1970s “American Indians and tribes have exerted an

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23 Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience*, ???.

24 Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience*, ???.

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ownership over their intellectualism and traditional knowledge in the development of writings, courses taught, programs, tribal colleges, and tribal museums.”

What was true of political organization was also true of education (indeed, the two should not be thought of as mutually exclusive). Grassroots movements popped up all over North America in the 1960s. African-Americans, Women, and Native Americans emerged as alternative voices, challenging mainstream U.S. society to throw the critical gaze upon itself.

Activism forced many Americans to consider the role of Native Americans in the context of education, economics, and politics and empowered Native American individuals to position themselves well in these social spheres in order to provide a foundation for future generations. “The American Indian conference held in Chicago in 1961, rise of the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), Indian fish-ins in Washington State, beginning in 1964, the founding of the American Indian Movement in 1968, Red Power, and the Alcatraz takeover in 1969 ushered in a new era of Native American deconstruction and reaction to begin a burgeoning generation of Native American studies and Indian self-determination.”

Literature was both a reflection of and progenitor of these cultural shifts that allowed for the empowerment of alternative voices. Fixico highlights what he considers to be three key works of literature. In 1968 Vine Deloria Jr. published Custer Died for


Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto, N. Scott Momaday published *House Made of Dawn* the same year, and in 1971 Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* was made available for purchase. “These three books,” Fixico urges his reader to consider, “represented native points of view and informed the public profoundly that Indians were people too and that they had thoughts of their own, and ideas, dreams, and ambitions.”

This new-found interest in and respect for Indians in North America led to two important institutional shifts: namely, the opening of Native American Studies programs and the establishment of Native American colleges and universities.

The first Native American studies program was established in 1968 at San Francisco State University. Similar programs then emerged at the University of Minnesota, the University of California, Berkeley, and at the University of California, Los Angeles. These provided the blueprint for all subsequent programs across North America. This development also took hold in Canada. In 1969, Trent University in Ontario developed its own native studies program; the first of its kind in Canada. “By 1985,” Fixico points out, “107 colleges and Universities had either a program or department of American Indian studies.”

While these programs initially functioned as sub-disciplines and were couched in ethnic studies and/or anthropology programs, they eventually gained autonomy and by 1995 several of them were offering higher degrees in the specific area of Native American Studies. This has been demonstrated most extensively by Arizona State

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University, which formed the first doctoral program in American Indian Studies consisting of a core faculty made up of Native Americans scholars. These institutional developments led also to a sharp increase in the number of higher education degrees awarded to Native Americans.

Concomitant to the development of American Indian Studies programs at many of North America’s already-established colleges and universities, were several successful attempts to establish Native-led colleges and universities. According to a 1999 AIHEC (American Indian Higher Education Consortium) report, Tribal Colleges, while differing in curriculum and enrollment numbers, have a common set of features; they are usually less than 40 years old, they have small, predominantly indigenous enrollments, they are located on reservations and are often isolated, many are chartered by more than one tribe but maintain autonomy from any specific ties to tribal governments, they have open admissions policies, they all began as two-year programs, most are accredited. These colleges operate in much the same way as mainstream community colleges. However, two features set them apart; these are 1) their drive to “rebuild, reinforce, and explore traditional tribal cultures using uniquely designed curricula and institutional settings,” while also 2) engaging in “Western models of learning by providing traditional disciplinary courses.”29

Navajo Community College – the first of the “tribal colleges” – was founded in 1968; it combined the standard U.S. curriculum with a heavy emphasis on Navajo history, language and culture. As an example of a highly effective and long-lasting institution of higher learning (still operating and now officially called Dine College),

Navajo Community College facilitated the passing of the Navajo Community College Act of 1971 which combined federal, tribal, and private funds in an effort to ensure continued success.\(^3\)

Tribal Colleges are both similar to and distinct from typical U.S. and Canadian universities. These similarities and distinctions are measured, however, and tell something about Native Americans and their attempts to become increasingly empowered as educators. According to the AIHC report:

Classes are taught by tribal elders and other non-traditional faculty members. Faculty have developed innovative curricula and teaching methodologies, and the colleges have become centers of Indian research and scholarship. Tribal Colleges also work to instill appreciation of tribal culture on non-Indian faculty members through such programs as Diné College’s new Office for Diné Education Philosophy, which is developing a methodology that will apply Navajo philosophy to the management of the school.\(^4\)

Additionally, Tribal Colleges have become storehouses of Native American culture and history. The majority of the institutions have libraries, which have been active in collection the documents and records that used to be held primarily be non-Native institutions. What is more, oral histories have been collected and are available only through Tribal College libraries.

Since their emergence, Tribal Colleges have experienced a steady increase in the amount of Native student enrollments. Records show that there were roughly 2,100 enrolled native students in 1982. By 1996 there were approximately 24,363 undergraduate students and 260 graduate students. From 1990 to 1996 there was a

\(^3\) Fixico, *The American Indian Mind*, 146. See also Fixico’s *The Urban Indian Experience*.

sixty-two percent increase in Native students at Tribal Colleges compared to a mere thirty-six percent increase of Native students in mainstream institutions.

Tribal Colleges are dependent on the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act of 1978 (TCCUAA), which is a branch of the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs). Thus, because they are categorized under the federal trust and received federal funding directly, Tribal Colleges do not receive financial support from State governments in the same way that mainstream colleges and universities do. In 1994 Tribal Colleges were awarded land-grant status, which increases funding, but perhaps more importantly, places them in closer institutional proximity with mainstream institutions, allowing for an increase on collaborative work. Other sources of funding include the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act; Title III under the Higher Education Act (Aid for Institutional Development program); block grant programs for adult education; the Minority Science Improvement Program; and Environmental Management Grants; and, to a lesser degree and in an inconstant manner, the various tribal gaming industries.

In 1996, in an attempt to bring Tribal Colleges into further alignment with other federal programs and recognize their crucial role in the lives of those living on reservations, President Clinton signed the White House Executive Order on Tribal Colleges and Universities (No. 13021). This order mandated a reallocation and, thereby, an increase in the amount of funding given to Tribal Colleges by all of the previously mentioned federal programs.

The lack of State-level funding and their geographic isolation pose a series of problems. First, tribal colleges experience a high rate of turnover. While many Tribal
Colleges favor the hiring of Native instructors, demographically this is a difficult goal as there are a disproportionate number of non-Native Ph.D.s on the market. The funding issues mean that the average salary of faculty is significantly lower than at mainstream institutions. In 1999 the AIHEC recorded that the average salary for Tribal College faculty was $23,964, while the average salary at state-subsidized, four-year public institutions was $49,855 and $43,730 at state-subsidized, two-year institutions. Tribal Colleges are also housed in “decentralized, ad hoc campuses” that are typically constituted by “abandoned or donated buildings.”

These characteristics lead to a series of strategies, which are an attempt to compensate for the consequent limitations. In an attempt to increase participation and student retention, Tribal Colleges have been on the cutting edge of emergent pedagogical technologies. Classes are often offered at various satellite locations and they also conduct classes in formats such as tele-distance, online, and distance learning.

All of the colleges participate in a network that allows them to increase the number of courses they offer by using satellite technology to downlink them from other sites. In addition, several colleges offer courses from state universities through teledistance. For example, Crownpoint Institute of Technology is becoming the hub for the Navajo Nation Area-Wide Network, and is developing plans for interactive distance learning in cooperation with Northern Arizona University. Sitting Bull College has installed an interactive tele-communications network that allows students to take classes at colleges and universities in North Dakota via two-way video.

These reports were compiled in 1999 and while the technologies are now obsolete compared to the technologies in existence in 2015, they are nonetheless representative.

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of Native North American strategies to draw upon pre-existing models, amend them, and build upon them in an effort to become increasingly autonomous in the context of education. These efforts have also been carried out in an attempt to increase the vitality and relevance of indigenous cultural frameworks as they relate to the dominant role that western culture has played in the fields of education and, in the case of NAIITS, the production of systematic theologies. NAIITS, then, emerges out of and carries forward this significant historical development and is breaking new ground as its faculty and members actively install indigenous theologies into some of the more well-known and globally established evangelical institutions in North America.

Chapter Conclusion

It is this history – the histories of colonial Indian education and industrial/boarding/residential schools – to which NAIITS is responding. NAIITS is part of the contemporary indigenous (Native North American) resistance and renewal movement as it relates to the process of education and the production of knowledge. And perhaps more importantly, in the same way that nation-builders from the colonial period, throughout the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth century both targeted the religious life-ways of the Native in order to “civilize” him/her and presenting Christianity to Indian children as a vehicle to those ends, NAIITS is targeting what its members perceive to be the ills of western civilization and attempting to decouple those cultural and socio-historical ills from Christian theology. In this way, one could argue, that NAIITS is attempting to decolonize the colonizer.
CHAPTER 8
NAIITS AND THE RITUAL NEGOTIATION BETWEEN LEGITIMATION AND EVASION

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted is simply the fact that it does not weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression.

—Michel Foucault
*Interview on Truth and Power*¹

I want to suggest in this chapter that the various events held at the annual NAIITS symposium in combination with the various rituals conducted by board members – such as those performed by Casey Church – who engage in conferences and events beyond the scope of NAIITS itself, are part of or constitute a growing ritual network. This ritual network, like the various organizations themselves, is part of the dialectical relationship between mainstream Evangelical institutions and NAIITS. The ritualizations, moreover, that occur both in the context of NAIITS and in affiliated conferences, camps, powwows, and revivals are each part of the interplay between exercising practical knowledge and challenging that knowledge through symbolic inversion; they are at once calculated attempts to cull from the structures of dominance while simultaneously attempting to turn them on their head.

More specifically, the symposium, which is representative of the process of theological systematization, activates the symbolic and cultural capital necessary for the production and legitimation of knowledge from the western, academic perspective. As Castells notes, in a society that is constituted by networks, power is accumulated by

“activating networks of association between events and mental images via communication processes” such as the mainstream media and effective use of ICTs. These mechanisms – of which the level of influence is derived from its correlate level of cultural resonance – constitute the “frames” that shape the minds (cognitive dispositions) of viewers and/or citizens. While his theoretical model in thorough in its coverage of the framings of news media and internet communication technologies, it falls short in the consideration of other, pre-internet age mechanisms of information dissemination and framing; namely, texts (not only their contents but the objects themselves) and rituals. In this chapter, I will attempt to expand Castells’ understanding of the reprogramming dominant networks to include texts and rituals as relevant mechanisms in the functioning of counter-networks.

As Casey Church, for example, embarks on his efforts to disseminate contextualized Christian forms through his individual ministry (as well as his now significantly increased role with Wiconi International) he carries with him the cultural and symbolic capital – the legitimating force – generated by and drawn from the NAIITS symposia. As a trained theologian he is an extension of the scholastic tradition, tied intricately to the power of textual production. These are moments of religious practice that draw upon the cultural resonance associated with texts, their production, and the authority with which they are invested. Conversely, the symposium is legitimated from

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3 Castells, Communication Power, 158. Here, Castells is pulling from both George Lakoff and Robert M. Entman. Lakoff argues that frames are constructed through images and words that, in turn, motivate action and thought. The most effective frames, he adds, are those that appeal directly to pre-existing frames, building upon an already accepted set of thoughts and actions. Entman argues that the most successful framings draw upon “the most culturally resonant terms,” utilizing a set of terminology that is already “noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged.”
the other direction (e.g., as an authentic expression of native-ness) as Church performs sunrise ceremonies and draws upon older, more established Native elders who have both taught him and validated the use of pipe in a Christian context. Thus, the symposium is made into, not only a western form of theological or academic practice, but also an indigenous or native North American practice.

**Ritualization**

In her renowned monograph *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Catherine Bell challenged Western academic understandings of ritual. She demonstrated that typical theories about ritual were influenced by a tendency to assume a clear distinction between thought and action. Ritual, associated with action, became for theorists that which stands in opposition to thought, or, in other words, intellectual pursuits such as theology. The term “ritual” has been, therefore, utilized by scholars as a mechanism of explaining but also, unwittingly, maintaining this distinction.4

In an attempt to nuance the academic understanding of rituals Bell offered the term “ritualization,” which, she avers, indicates practice and process rather than categorical specificity or rigid definition. While “ritual,” because of its cultural and philosophical baggage, has been representative of pure action separate from thought, “ritualization” is indicative of a process, so the argument goes, which entails sophisticated thought; thought applied not only to develop rituals, but also to move through and participate in them.5

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5 Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 99. Bell’s timely thoughts anticipated what is perhaps one of the most heated debates among scholars of religion in the present moment. For the past decade, the academic study of religion has been embroiled in a debate over the nature of the relationship between “belief” and “practice.” The debate is so extensive and traverses so many sub-fields that a comprehensive treatment of it here is impractical. Suffice it to say that proponents of the practice approach to religion charge that the academy
Approaching ritualizations in this way, especially in the context of NAIITS, will achieve two crucial goals. First, we will avoid the typical pitfall of viewing ritualization as something that is wholly distinct from the mechanisms and processes of theology. In other words, we will avoid placing rituals/ritualizations into the fallacious dichotomy between action and thought – allowing us to view them instead as coeval and interrelated processes. Second, by dissolving the action/thought dichotomy we will be able to view practices that have typically been categorized as pure thought (i.e., writing, publishing, conferences, systematizations of theology) as constitutive of ritualizations themselves. In other words, academic endeavors can now be taken as a series of actions that produce practiced bodies and certain ways of thinking about the nature of knowledge production. Conferences, publishing articles, peer review processes, and the like are all actions, I would argue “ritualizations,” that give rise to the institution of academia which then functions as a producer of “legitimate knowledge.”

has for too long been preoccupied with beliefs, which are most often located in or thought to become manifest as texts; the implication being that the singular source of knowledge is the written word and that action is an epiphenomenon of writing. These scholars argue further that to focus on texts is to limit one’s scope, only ever understanding religion from the perspective of elite members of a given socio-historical context. They suggest, therefore, that the focus should shift from a preoccupation with texts (and this includes the hermeneutic wherein researchers interpret actions/rituals as texts whose symbolic gestures and programmatic movements produce meaning that can be read) to a more practice-oriented, “embodied” approach. Through the “embodied” approach, its ardent supporters suggest, we can understand that religion is not only about belief, but is also (or predominantly) oriented toward the physical world. See also Jason E. Purvis’, “Dealing with the Brain in Social Science: Rethinking the Cognitive Approach to Religion through the work of Boyer, Whitehouse and Sørensen,” Religious Studies Review. I value the work that has emerged as a result of this push toward “embodiment.” Indeed, my own work has trafficked in the discourse on and debates over “embodiment,” especially as they relate to value of cognitive theories of religion. I, however, lament what I consider to be a crucial oversight. During a recent talk, given by Sam Gill at the University of Florida on the virtue of theories of movement, my intuitions concerning this flaw were confirmed. Dr. Gill argued that the prefix “em” in the phrase “embodied” assumed a prior state of non-embodiment. As proponents of the embodied approach, therefore, construct their polemic against time-honored theories and methods, he averred, they reify the binaries between text and practice, mind and body, intellectual and lived. Texts and beliefs in the formulation of “embodiment” remain things that are wholly different from rituals and/or practices.
Using the annual NAIITS (North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies) Symposium as a case study, I will argue that the process of text production undertaken by NAIITS is itself a bodied practice. This is evident in the way that Indigenous theologians associated with NAIITS articulate their understanding of the structure and function of the symposium. Most notably, it is common for NAIITS faculty to make explicit comments regarding their discomfort and disorientation in the western academic format that is ubiquitously utilized in theological institutions across the globe.\(^6\) Strict adherence to the clock, stuffy paper readings, high-brow intellectualism, “scientific” certainty, and, last but not least, the arbitrary nature of it all; each of these features of western academia are regularly commented on, ridiculed, and playfully discredited several times each day throughout the duration of a NAIITS Symposium. NAIITS faculty know full well that their engagement in western academic policies, procedures, and structures is partial and fraught with tension. Randy Woodley argues for example, that “in the Indian world we experience; in the Euro-American world we gather facts about it. Someone has said that Native Americans would rather participate in a ceremony while Euro-Americans would generally rather read a book about it.”\(^7\) During the 2016 NAIITS Symposium, Terry LeBlanc likened the meeting to that of “a circle in a rectangle,” a metaphor meant to express the way in which NAIITS typically

\(^6\) This is actually a common occurrence. Native Americans often reference their discomfort with Western conceptions and expectations as they are related to time, especially in the context of academic conferences and paper presentations. Native presentations often begin with a light-hearted but very poignant juxtaposition of Western and Indigenous perceptions of time. Indigenous protocol is also differentiated from Western academic protocols (during which tribal elders are articulated as valid sources rather than continental philosophers or early twentieth century anthropologists common in Western academic circles).

finds itself attempting to carry out its purpose enveloped by and catering to Western structures, complicating the dissemination of a purely indigenous methodological approach to theology. It is this complex negotiation to which this chapter is dedicated. How is this tension expressed both discursively and through practice? What are the outcomes and/or consequences of these discourses and practices?

I argue that the NAIITS symposium functions in three key ways. First, it functions as a ritualization or practice of textualization and as such draws upon the symbolic and cultural capital of mainstream Evangelical institutions. This is a process of legitimation. Second, it functions as a mechanism to transcend the typical uneven power dynamics invested in the former by challenging the taken-for-granted nature of Western rituals that lead to the production of knowledge. Using humor and strategic juxtaposition, NAIITS symposiums offer opportunities for an examination of Western structures that fly under the radar as “given” and/or “natural.” In other words, in the same way that a secular academic conference functions as a ritual of scientific/academic legitimacy through publication, peer-review, and research dissemination, the NAIITS symposium provides a forum within which indigenous theology becomes linked, not only to the institutions where the symposium takes place, but also the enterprise of Western theology more broadly.

One of the key features of the symposium is that it functions as a space of articulated difference. NAIITS faculty and scholars/theologians whose papers are accepted to be presented routinely engage in the deconstruction of Western ontological and epistemological assumptions. This process allows for the separation of “pure religion” and cultural context. From this, NAIITS faculty and other theologians are then
able to suggest alternative indigenous ontological frameworks that can take the place of Euro-centric ones, resulting in, as they understand it, the elevation of community-based, environmentally sound, anti-colonial indigenous forms over those that have typically resulted in the harmful effects of methodological individualism, environmental degradation via anthropocentrism, and subjugation of non-European indigenous communities.

In this chapter I have taken Bell’s definition of ritualization to heart. Rather than demarcate a specific moment wherein religious actors have developed a series of activities that they articulate as “ritual,” I will look at larger processes and speak of them as comprehensive ritualizations. The NAIITS Symposium has been understood, for example, as a comprehensive ritualization, consisting of a series of modular functions (i.e., conference-style presentations, break-away sessions, native gospel songs, drumming sessions, sunrise ceremonies, and concluding ceremonies) that, together, constitute the ritualization of indigenous theological text production. Likewise, the affiliated events such as Wiconi Family Camp and Native American Conference discussed in the latter part of this chapter are represented as ritualizations, multi-day events wherein almost every moment is packed with meaning and some sense of ritual propriety.

**NAIITS Symposium: the Utility of Mockery and Juxtaposition**

The NAIITS Symposium has become an amalgamation of ritualizations; it entails Western academic rituals (e.g., commencement, paper presentations) meant to confer/inscribe legitimacy onto research and researchers, Evangelical rituals (i.e., prayer, gospel singing) meant to praise God for the good works endeavored there, and Indigenous rituals, vernacularized or “redeemed,” as NAIITS theologians might put it,
through Christ. Indigenous and non-indigenous people come together to be witness to the systematization of Indigenous theology. It consists of a series of scripted and prescribed events that are meant to validate and legitimize Indigenous expressions of Christian theology. Demographically, the NAIITS Symposium is a transnational affair. Indigenous attendees come from various parts of the world; most notably, Canada, the U.S., the Philippines, New Zealand, South Africa, and parts of Scandinavia. What is more, non-indigenous missionaries, often from these same areas, attend the annual symposium hoping to learn strategies and/or adopt the language of contextualization in and attempt to become more effective in their own missionary work abroad.

The Symposium, at once a ritual of textualization as well as a repository of various Indigenous practices, is a very robust ritual phenomenon in its own right. The event is characterized by a persistent oscillation between integration and juxtaposition. In other words, the symposium consists of both moments when being Native and being Christian are articulated as fully integrated and synonymous. At other times, however, the distinction between being Native and being Christian is expressed explicitly. This process of juxtaposition usually occurs during moments in which Indigenous people in attendance actively attempt to differentiate between Western and non-Western ontological ways of being. In these instances Christianity is often lumped with being “Western.” On the other hand, “the Jesus Path” or “following the Jesus way” is used as a way to express Indigenous life-ways that are Biblically informed.

During songs, dances, sunrise ceremonies, prayers, and other standard ritual moments, however, Native and Christian are fully integrated. In these moments the distinctions are subsumed, they become nonexistent; they “retreat,” I would argue, into
integrative acceptance. Hymns are sung in Native languages, drums are played, smudgings occur, Native flutes are played, Native dances ensue; all in the service of Christian worship; all intended as indigenous expressions of the Jesus Way. As is often articulated during discursive explications, these dances, songs, smudgings, and the like are a celebration of God’s creation manifest in the form of global multiculturalism.\(^8\) In what follows I will describe, in detail, the structure and typical schedule of the Symposium.

The Symposium is typically held at the end of June, beginning on a Thursday evening with a commencement ceremony accompanied by dinner and ending the following Saturday night. The Symposium always begins with a song. The song is always accompanied by drumming and is also always sung in Native Language. Terry LeBlanc, Matt LeBlanc, Ray Aldred, Randy Woodley, and other board members usually stand at the front of the lecture hall or auditorium and face the attendees while singing. Shortly after the song, the director of NAIITS, Terry LeBlanc, sets the itinerary by going through the schedule and explaining the basic structure of the days to come. This is a way of orienting all attendees to the structure of the event, but also functions as a tutorial for those who have never been to a NAIITS symposium before. The opening ceremonies and itinerary discussion is followed by dinner after which everyone retires to their rooms.

One of the ways in which the difference between Western and Indigenous ontologies is played out is through a jovial playfulness which manifests in light-hearted

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\(^8\) Return to chapter four for a more in-depth description of the theology of Biblical Indigeneity and Richard Twiss's reorientation of creationism wherein God is, by virtue of his creation of many different cultures throughout time and space, the original multiculturist.
ridicule between faculty members. It functions as much-needed comedy relief during moments when discussion can become heated and/or focused on troubling historical events (such as Canadian and U.S. boarding school policies and the systematic disenfranchisement of Native peoples throughout North American history). Not having been present during NAIITS board meetings I speculate here, but it seems to be the case that the jokes and jabs are a way to air disputes (perhaps both philosophical and logistic) that arise between faculty members. Cheryl Bear, for example, is often ridiculed for her “unwillingness” to get up early in the morning. Terry, on the other hand, is repeatedly called out for never being in exactly the place he is supposed to be at the precise moment that he is needed. Attendees will regularly hear members at the podium beg the question “Where is Terry now?” when it is time either for a transition between speakers or explanation of the coming events.

While the structure and itinerary of the symposium is generally followed, there is a consistent attempt at flexibility which is often referred to as “Native time.” These moments become instructive in their own right, allowing for the consideration and analysis of the differences between Western conceptions of time and Indigenous conceptions of time. Western time is articulated in these moments as too rigid, linear, and based on consumerist mentality while “Native time” is articulated as less rigid, cyclical, and based on a people’s organic life rhythms. Often, after breaks (including breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and small group sessions) the conference will reconvene late. Additionally, and as a consequence of the schedule transgressions, events will be amended or even canceled as necessary. This is never met with negativity or lament, but is generally held as one way in which the symposium demonstrates an Indigenous
methodology. These sentiments, again, are always made explicit and tend to reoccur throughout the weekend.

Sunrise Ceremony

The next day’s events are inaugurated by the “sunrise ceremony.” In fact each full day of talks and events is ushered in by a sunrise ceremony. The sunrise ceremony, developed and typically performed by Casey Church, consists of both a series of performative movements and verbal, instructive descriptions. The sunrise ceremonies usually inaugurate each full day events during the symposium and other affiliated events and is said to be a vital welcoming of the day and orients participants toward a connection with the Earth through Christ and the Holy Spirit. They are held early in the morning – usually approximately 6:30am – and take about an hour to complete.

Church starts with a description of both the structure of the ritual as well as a description of the implements. Church describes the ritual as a derivative of a variety of Indigenous practices throughout North America. He begins by putting on display the ritual implements themselves; these include the pipe, tobacco, a sea shell which is used as a ceremonial tobacco distribution dish, a Bic lighter, and a sage bundle. He describes the contextualized significance of and prays over each object, explaining that these implements are used as culturally specific representations of spiritual worship. From this perspective, they can be used in a variety of contexts. More importantly, because they are merely cultural expressions, they can be “redeemed,” as he puts it, for

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9 During the past two and a half years I have participated in and observed several sunrise ceremonies. The symposium typically includes two to three sunrise ceremonies, one for each full day of talks and events.
Christian worship. In other words, they can be prayed over and used for devotion to and worship of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

The pipe, fashioned by Church himself utilizing his skills as a trained carpenter, consists of a spiral-grooved shaft and a sturdy, detachable bowl. He makes a point to inform his participants that these objects can be fashioned and/or procured using a variety of methods and from a variety of sources. The tobacco, for example, was a well-known brand, packaged commercially, and purchased from Wal-Mart. Many of them are used as much for convenience as they are for spiritual significance. The Bic lighter, the name of which he jokingly claims is an acronym that stands for “Brethren in Christ,” is used by virtue of its convenience. He states that while some prefer the more traditional objects (e.g., homegrown tobacco versus store-bought or natural pipe-lighting implement versus a Bic lighter), what renders these objects spiritually significant and therefore oriented toward a Christian purpose is the redeeming power of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Thus, whether they are fashioned through one’s own efforts or simply purchased at Wal-Mart is ultimately inconsequential. In that spirit, before each of these objects is used, Church prays over them, eliciting the power of the Holy Spirit to “cleanse” and “purify” them.

He begins by lighting the sage bundle explaining that the Bible is rife with examples of burnt offerings to God. After fanning the sage Church runs each implement through the now constant stream of fragrant smoke. As he does this he explains that this is a “symbolic cleansing.” This designation, “symbolic,” is vital as it refers to typical concerns by mainstream Christianity about syncretized forms. Paradoxically, however,
Church also explains that, as a pleasing aroma to God, the Holy Spirit is called upon to redeem the objects in the moment.

Properly cleansed and redeemed in the name of Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit, then, the sunrise ceremony can commence. At this point Church asks for a volunteer to take the sea shell, now holding a handful of tobacco, and have each participant take a pinch. Church asks participants to pray over their respective pinches of tobacco and at some point (completely at the discretion of the individual, ideally when the spirit compels them) to sprinkle the tobacco on the ground or into a body of water as an offering to God’s creation. The tobacco, prayed over and redeemed in Christ through the prayers of each participant, is thought to have become infused with the power of those prayers and thus empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Church then places a pinch of tobacco in the bowl of the pipe. Subsequently lights the tobacco with the brilliantly christened “Brethren in Christ” (BIC) lighter. Stoking the flames, he uses his free hand to wisp smoke over himself. Church is very careful here to engage in critical contextualization. He explains that while traditional smudging was believed to represent the power of the spirit world to engender healing and/or cleansing effects for the individual being bathed in smoke, his version is rationalized within a Christian context. It is, he urges his onlookers to consider, the prayers that they themselves deployed, which then enlist the power of God, the Holy Spirit, that gives the smoke its potential to effect change.

At this point, Church points the pipe in each of the six directions; North, South, East, West, Up (to the heavens), and Down (to the Earth). In each direction, Church takes in a mouth full of smoke, points the pipe decisively in that direction, and blows the
smoke out toward that direction. He explains that this act is a prayer to each direction, asking the Holy Spirit to continue doing work there. Finally, once the directions are each prayed over, Church gets on his knees and prays aloud. Prayers usually consist of praise to God for allowing Indigenous people to engage in contextualized ministry with and for one another, for ensuring everyone's safety in traveling to these events, and requests to keep everyone safe and to continue to show favor on those who engage in contextual ministry.

The Sunrise Ceremony ends as Church asks everyone still holding tobacco to reverently sprinkle it on the ground or in a body of water if one happens to be nearby. In each of the sunrise ceremonies I have attended, Church brings the ceremony to a close by reiterating the theological significance of the objects and actions that have taken place. His emphasis here is on the tension that often arises when mainstream Christian groups – non-indigenous and indigenous – folks view these as dangerous forms of syncretism at best and worse, outright un-Christian heresy. He urges participants to consider the relationship between culture and Christianity, suggesting that God, as a multiculturalist, created Native culture and therefore does not consider it demonic or heretical. Humans (and here he is referring to pre-contact, non-indigenous peoples) have used cultural forms, he argues, in a variety of ways; some of them appropriate some of them inappropriate.

Perhaps as important as the specific materials, movements, and ideas presented during the Sunrise Ceremony, is its persistence as a regular fixture during Symposia. Now that it has been allowed to occur on campus grounds by the various administrative bodies at George Fox, Wheaton, Tyndale, and other institutions that regularly sponsor
NAIITS symposiums, NAIITS faculty have made it a mainstay. This is significant because it bookends the conference proceedings, beginning very early in the morning (at sunrise of course) prior to meetings each day. Symbolically, then, one might argue, that the Sunrise Ceremony indigenizes the space and events occurring therein. Through it, Indigenous theologians lay claim to the conference in a way that perhaps they were incapable of prior to its acceptance. Therefore, it not only expresses the Indigenous identity of the individuals involved, but also extends that identity, infusing the whole subsequent academic processes with Indigenous identity. This is not uncommon as the same kind of function can be observed at the commencement of American sporting events, which are always preceded by the National Anthem. These are repetitive acts that function to “Americanize” the space of the stadium rendering all activity therein fundamentally “American.” Likewise, the Sunrise Ceremony renders, or at least attempts to render, the NAIITS symposium events and activities fundamentally indigenous – indigenous within the context of, it must be clearly noted, what constitutes typical Christian practice. Conducting the Sunrise Ceremony on Seminary grounds is similar to other NAIITS practices in that it draws upon the legitimacy produced by the institution while also challenging the assumptions of what constitutes mainstream Christian practice. They are, one might say, mainstreaming the Indigenous at the same time that they are Indigenizing the mainstream.

**NAIITS Paper Presentations: Differences Make a Difference**

This is the place where, to sum up something J.Z. Smith once said, difference makes a difference. The annual NAIITS Symposium usually consists of two full days (Friday and Saturday) of paper presentations with the exception of the first night (Thursday). Following registration on Thursday, there is an opening paper given which
is meant to set the tone of the symposium. This was especially effective during the 2015 symposium, which was titled “Les Savages and Les Sophistiques,” wherein Adrian Jacobs presented the opening paper. His paper attempted to explain the reason for the continued subjugation of Native peoples across the North American continent. Drawing upon scholarship examining the historical use and contemporary euphemistic continuation of the “savage” trope, Jacobs insisted that there is a fundamental and irreparable rift between western and indigenous worldviews precisely because the west cannot transcend its dichotomous perspective concerning indigenous peoples. Evidence that this trope continues to emerge as persistent and fully operative at the institutional level can be seen, he argues, in statistics indicating Native American poverty levels, suicide rates, and incarceration statistics (he also alluded to the same problematics as it relates to African American and Latino communities in the U.S. and Canada).

After the sunrise ceremony carried out each morning, attendees make their way to the location at which the conference will take place. This is usually a large lecture hall, auditorium, or conference center. The papers are presented in typical academic fashion with a podium overlooking rows of seated onlookers. The first Symposium I attended in 2014 was held in a small auditorium or lecture hall. The second, in 2015, was held in an auditorium/gymnasium, fitted with basketball hoops and bleachers. In 2016, my third venture into the NAIITS symposium world, the meeting took place in a chapel. Needless to say, by virtue of Western spatial models manifest in a variety of ways, NAIITS theologians and other symposium attendees have had to contend with spatial awkwardness.
As often described by NAIITS director Terry LeBlanc, the symposium is characterized by multi-positionality. In other words, there are paper presentations by both indigenous people as well as non-indigenous people. Indigenous presenters present papers that are predominantly centered on the deconstruction of Western theological models; missiology, creationism, cultural baggage that stands in as Christian knowledge are some examples of the topics one will encounter from the Indigenous perspective. Non-indigenous scholars too engage in this process. Dr. Gene Green, a theologian and educator from Wheaton College, for example, wrote a paper that called for a complete overhaul and reform of Evangelical theology mission, suggesting, as many have, that the language of “mission” is a holdover from the militancy that characterized colonial powers’ dissemination of the gospel to the colonized populations, or “mission fields” of the “New World.” To eradicate missiology of its conquest roots, a complete theological re-articulation of missions is, in his estimation, necessary and far overdue.

During the 2016 Symposium, Syracuse graduate student and Navajo, Kelsey Dale John, presented a paper examining the relationship between Western philosophy and Christian theology. “Western philosophy has sustained,” she eloquently argued, “a hegemonic hold over theology, science, and philosophy.” In so doing, she continued, Christian theology has consisted of a resultant “set of separations referred to as dualisms.” The mind/body dualism, in her estimation, is perhaps the one most often targeted by Indigenous thinkers as it led the entire Westernizing project, through science, philosophy, technological advancement, capitalistic expansion and the like, to devalue the living world within which humans are subsumed, leading to, as Johns aptly
puts it, “succeeding generations of scientists to treat an obviously living universe as if it were an inert object” to be poked, prodded, studied, and dissected.\textsuperscript{10}

As is the case in most academic conferences, the paper presentations are buttressed by question-and-answer sessions. Because the topics of discussion are so fraught with the consequences (both philosophical and practical) of uneven power dynamics, there are often moments of heightened tension during these sessions. This is also part of what the NAIITS faculty refer to as the “relational” model of the symposium wherein different perspectives are brought together to cross fertilize and exist in (as Terry LeBlanc frequently remarks) productive tension. At the 2014 conference, for example, a non-indigenous man stood up during a question and answer and explained that he also felt oppressed by multi-national corporations and the U.S. government. This was met almost immediately with several responses, challenging the validity of this man’s feelings of oppression. One respondent, a Chinese-Indigenous-American male and NAIITS student named Danny, urged the man to reconsider his position as he was unaware perhaps of the white privilege that afforded him more access to social and economic resources; resources not available to many minorities across North America.

There are moments of contention between Indigenous people as well. One indigenous woman, who attended both symposiums (2014 and 2015) I attended, has openly critiqued NAIITS faculty and the general mission of the Symposium during question and answer sessions. In 2014 she was critical of what she perceived to be a lack of focus on the Sovereignty of Christ in the events unfolding during the Symposium. She felt also that too much emphasis was being placed on the work of the NAIITS

theologians and faculty, that they were taking too much credit and giving too much credit to the movement as a whole concerning the growth popularization of contextualized ministry. She responded with a degree of certainty, that if there were work to do, it would be done by Christ and not the individuals currently in the room. She reminded them, in an emotionally charged but carefully worded verbal outpouring, that Christ should be their focus; that praise should be directed toward Jesus. Then, as tears rolled down both cheeks, she prayed for the faculty, that they continue to receive divine favor and that their egos remain in check.

During the 2015 symposium, the same woman stood up, once again during a question and answer session, and offered a constructive but hard-hitting critique of NAIITS. She expressed her desire to see an increase in the number of Indigenous presenters during the event as this was her primary motivation for attending from year to year. She lamented, what she perceived to be, the continued distortion of Native voices during NAIITS symposiums because they are set side by side with non-indigenous voices. She offered that faculty should consider altering the format of the conference in such a way that indigenous and non-indigenous presentations would be separated into different comments so as to avoid this in the future. It was unclear if anyone else (indigenous or non-indigenous) felt similarly as no one seemed to speak up in support of her critique. Terry LeBlanc, however, responded by thanking her for her contribution but reiterating that the mission of NAIITS symposiums was always to offer a forum wherein indigenous and non-indigenous could come together to consider the nature of Western theology and what that intellectual history has meant for indigenous people. He warned also that separating indigenous from non-indigenous would further
another problem; namely, the ghettoization of Native theology. Combing indigenous and non-indigenous, he made clear, brings indigenous theology to bear on Western theology, challenging its hegemonic position. This, he hopes, forces Western theologians to consider this challenge in the moment.

**The NAIITS Journal: A Practice of Difference**

It should be noted that the composition, organization, and editing of the annual NAIITS journal, which houses most (if not all) of the papers presented during symposia each year, is itself a practice of difference and part of the ritualization of textualization embarked upon by NAIITS theologians. Its contents and arrangements are representative of the fundamental function of NAIITS as a trans-indigenous organization that oscillates between legitimacy and evasion.

Wendy Peterson made this abundantly clear in the preamble to the sixth volume, which was published in 2008. In it, she begged the question: “in what way . . . does an academic journal reflect indigeneity?” She explained further that the NAIITS journal is an adoption and adaptation of the long-standing academic format, amended in specific ways in an effort to infuse it with indigenous values. “You will notice,” she commented, “that there are no titles or credentials attached to peoples’ names” and that an attempt to emphasize relationship is highlighted “by placing authors’ names before their articles on the Contents page.”

Wendy’s statements are merely a recapitulation of Terry LeBlanc’s original articulation of the social and political functions of the editorial and organizational makeup of the NAIITS journal from volume two. Here, just four years prior in the 2004

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issue, LeBlanc had to make good on an editorial mistake. In that issue, one of the author’s names had been inadvertently buttressed by his professional title, “PhD.”

In most journals, of course, this would be quite appropriate. NAIITS had, however, determined in advance that we would not use titles or credentials in any part of the journal. This decision was not taken because we sought to detract from the earned right of hard-working individuals to bear the letters and own their credentials. Not at all. We had simply determined, in keeping with indigenous tradition, that the insights offered and the arguments made by an individual carried in the journal should rise or fall on the basis of their content, clarity, and veracity, not the credentials of the presenter. And so we agreed that we would use no titles or references that would assign perceived weight to any wisdom offered or argument made save the person’s name and life experience.¹²

In this sense, the journal itself can be counted among the various ritualizations that draw upon the dominant Western structures of which the function is to confer legitimacy. Simultaneously, however, the editing and organizational processes, which make strategic use of the dominant structures and at the same time engage in pointed, tactical deviations from those same structures in order to evade them.¹³

**Small Group Sessions**

At specific intervals, usually between presentations and meals, the conference will be broken up into smaller discussion groups. These groups are usually led by either faculty members or NAIITS students. During the 2014 Symposium held in Newberg, Oregon, for example, I was assigned to a group that was led by Matt Leblanc (who is neither a faculty member nor a NAIITS student, but has taken on an active leadership role among the youth by virtue of his work with iEmergence). During the 2015 Symposium I was assigned to a group led by a female NAIITS student.

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¹³ I am culling the terms “strategy” and “tactic” from De Certeau’s famous chapter “Walking in the City,” which appears in his oft-cited monograph *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 
These sessions function as a way to allow attendees to articulate thoughts and/or concerns related to the paper presentations. They provide a more intimate setting, where each person is given the opportunity to comment on certain aspects of the symposium, providing more opportunities for community interaction. As such, these smaller sessions seem to be a way for NAIITS faculty to express – through the structure of the event – another key difference between typical Western models and indigenous forms. They are less formal and aside from the occasional interjection of the moderator to help flesh out issues and elicit further inquiry, the discussions take on a life of their own. The break-away sessions that I have attended have taken place both outdoors as well as in smaller, classroom settings. Setting and structure are, however, dependent upon the preferences of the moderator.

The structure of the small-group sessions is also at the discretion of the leader. My experience with Matt LeBlanc, for example, was more free-form and conversational. Individuals were free to engage at any moment, responding to previous comments or raising new but still relevant issues. The mediator during the small-group session at the 2015 Symposium in Wheaton, Illinois provided a bit more structure. She introduced a marble-like object, which she explained had been gifted to her by a close friend. Having significant sentimental value, she asked that it be used like the conch shell in Lord of the Flies; each individual holding the marble, in this case, would have the undivided attention of the rest of the group. This system worked quite well. There were no interruptions (To my surprise, I was even able to keep my mouth shut until I possessed the marble). Passing the marble on to the next person indicated the conclusion of one’s statements.
The comments and discussions vary depending on the central topic of the symposium for a given year as well as the specific group and its members. In 2014, for example, my group discussed the issue of race, race reconciliation, and the difficulties that mixed-race indigenous people face both in urban contexts and on the reservation. We talked about white-privilege and the fear of an emerging “myth of racial democracy.”

During the 2015 session, my group discussed action; how to put into practice an overturning of Euro-centric and hegemonic models. A white, Irish missionary mentioned her work among indigenous Christians in Papua New Guinea and how colonialism and the violent subjugation of indigenous peoples continues in many parts of the world. I discussed developing a syllabus that took the idea of cultural contextualization as its central operating theme.

During many academic symposia there are gaps between sessions. Attendees usually use this time to go get coffee, engage in conversations with like-minded scholars, or get a drink with old colleagues from grad-school. At the NAIITS symposium, however, these gaps are filled with these small break-away sessions; structured, focused, community-building mechanisms. Papers are presented in more intimate settings and, unlike the more rigidly scheduled primary presentations in the main sessions, these are opportunities for presenters to receive immediate feedback form audience members.

**Concluding Ceremonies**

As with all other portions of the NAIITS symposium, the closing ceremonies are made up of variations in discourse each year depending on the overall topic and social/political happenings throughout the year. There are, however, stylistic continuities from year to year.
Each of the NAIITS symposia to which I have been a party has concluded with some show of organizational continuity. In each case, the concluding ceremony expresses a passing-on of the work and mission of NAIITS to students and younger members. Typically, the elder members of NAIITS request that the younger members of the community join them on stage or at the front of the auditorium. Verbal expression is the expectation that this new generation, represented by those individuals who presented themselves to the elder members, carry on the mission of NAIITS. This process entails both a laying on of hands as well as a smudging.

In 2014, for example, the symposium ended with the first NAIITS graduation ceremony, awarding two students with Masters degrees in intercultural studies. The most salient features of this finale were three-fold; first, NAIITS faculty and graduate students donned specially-crafted gowns that incorporated both Western and indigenous styles and symbols; second, the accompanying discursive framings of this event which entailed a series of articulated distinctions between typical Western forms of graduation/degree awarding ceremonies and emerging indigenous-inspired versions; and third, articulated distinction between NAIITS policies of hiring and promotion versus its Western counterparts.

One could argue that NAIITS symposia are the locus of 1) the production of texts/knowledge through the mimicry of western academic forms and 2) the mockery of those forms through discourse and practices that both challenge them and provide spatial and temporal alternatives to them, and 3) the cultural inversions of both power dynamics, the diasporic disposition, and the conquest narrative. The legitimacy that is established through proximity to mainstream evangelical institutions as well as the
challenges to those structures, validated and stamped with approval, are then extended and made manifest in affiliated events. This process, as we will see, allows for the “simultaneous occurrence of,” what were perceived to be, “nominally incompatible modes of relationship.” These new forms of relationality are then extended and made relevant in other, affiliated outlets, allowing the legitimacy acquired by NAIITS to be enacted where needed.

NAIITS theologians and members are conscious of the symposia’s careful use of “traditional” Western models of knowledge production and incorporation of Indigenous modes of thinking, doing, and information transference. As I have previously mentioned, sometimes this manifests in obvious moments of structural transgression of Western academic models (The Sunrise ceremony and talking circles for example). At other times a mere reference suffices (as in the “circle in a rectangle” spatial analogy expressed by Terry LeBlanc).

Cultural Inversions: Power, Conquest, and Diaspora

The Symposia and related events are rife with inversions. The symposium is perhaps the most obvious; an academic conference wherein Indigenous people become the pedagogues and the non-indigenous are positioned as the students. Even the non-indigenous presenters are vetted and peer-reviewed by the Indigenous board members who read the submitted abstracts and decide upon the final cut of acceptable papers. This notion is also evident in the oft-stated goals of NAIITS; to create a program that would train Indigenous ministers and theologians to develop vernacularized forms of Evangelical theology that could stand toe-to-toe with mainstream theological traditions.

The symposium is an attempt to put this into practice. As the producers of knowledge disseminating that knowledge to a receptive indigenous and non-indigenous audience, NAIITS theologians invert the dynamics of power that have typically existed between Euro-American and Indigenous Christians throughout the colonial period. Thus, the symposium is a ritualization of that inversion.

During the Native American Conference another form of cultural inversion emerged; that of conquest. The location upon which the conference was held represented the conquest of the Cherokee Nation by Euro-American settlers and the U.S. government. Thus, the physical space lent itself to the theme of conquest throughout the event. The inversion of conquest was most prevalent in two specific ways. First, there was the conquest of one’s assimilated identity and retrieval of one’s Indigenous identity in an effort to cure the ills of addiction, abuse, and suicide. Second, there was the spiritual conquest of the land expressed by both the Hawaiian speaker and the Cherokee Baptist preacher from Oklahoma.

In both of the preceding analyses there is, I argue, a pattern emerging from the discourse; namely, the inversion of the diasporic condition. In other words, from the perspective of scripture, the locus of diaspora is inverted. The concept of land plays a central role in this reframing of diasporic conditions. The Euro-American settler population is that which is thoroughly displaced, rendering it the mission field and in dire need of conversion.15 During the symposium, for example, repeated reference is made to the displacement of the settler, Euro-American population and how developments

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15 This sentiment, that the West must be converted, is perhaps most explicitly stated by Randy Woodley on his website. It is, however, implied in many of the papers, discussions, and commentaries from various NAIITS sources.
such as capitalism and Western science have led to a condition of separation from a more environmentally reciprocal, communally beneficial, generationally conscious way of life. This amounts to, for NAIITS theologians, the Euro-American displacement from or loss of the possibility for a Biblical way of life.

**Wiconi Family Camp: Inversions of Conquest and Assimilation**

While the symposia function as mechanisms for the legitimization of the theological, philosophical, and theoretical apparatus of NAIITS, Wiconi Family Camp and events such as the Native American Conference occur at a remove from the academic realm and are significantly more worship-oriented and focus primarily on social issues (e.g., the 2015 Wiconi Family Camp and the 2015 Native American Conference were centered around the issue of suicide among Native youth population across North America). It is in these settings that the practice of contextualized ministry is performed, and disseminated.

Wiconi Family Camp and the Native American Conference are events held by organizations both closely and loosely affiliated with NAIITS. Wiconi International, as detailed in chapters five and six, is very closely affiliated with NAIITS. The founders of Wiconi International, Richard and Katherine Twiss, were also instrumental in the creation of NAIITS. The current acting director of Wiconi International, Casey Church (who took over those responsibilities officially in January of 2015 as a consequence of Richard Twiss’s sudden and untimely passing), has also been a board member of NAIITS since 2004.

In August of 2004, Richard and Katherine Twiss organized the first Mni Wiconi Wacipi, or “Living Waters Powwow” and Family Camp. In his description of this now annual event, Richard Twiss said that “initially we thought in terms of it being a Christian
Powwow. It is now considered a community-centered, intertribal traditional powwow where Jesus is honored, but not a Christian powwow.”\textsuperscript{16} This transition in terms was necessary for two reasons: first, Twiss began to move away from the label “Christian” and instead prefers the notion of “walking the Jesus Path” or “following the Jesus Way”; second, because there are also “traditional,” non-Christian native people on the steering committee and a more generic, inclusive language was needed to facilitate their contributions.

The Living Waters Family Camp and Powwow is generally held in late July each year running from a Thursday to a Sunday. It consists of a variety of events of which the aim is to “strengthen families, enjoy friendships, support communities, teach cultural ways, and encourage people in their spiritual journeys.”\textsuperscript{17} Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays are dedicated to workshops, lectures, and group activities.

Children take classes on the cultural ways of indigenous peoples including beading, painting, drumming, copper plate-making, as well as playing traditional games. Additionally, the children learn the folklore of the Northwest region from community leaders. Parents also take classes designed to augment parenting skills. Twiss assures his readers that the classes are “led by mature leaders married for many years—with healthy families.”\textsuperscript{18} All participants, throughout the event, are exposed to “biblical

\textsuperscript{17} Twiss, \textit{Rescuing the Gospel}, 144.
\textsuperscript{18} Twiss, \textit{Rescuing the Gospel}, 145.
values, love, honor, respect, forgiveness, generosity, prayer, wisdom, courage, humility, and worship.”

Sweat Lodges are used extensively throughout the weekend. The structures themselves are erected prior to anyone’s arrival and the entire process is “prayed over and blessed by spiritual leaders using sage, cedar, and water.” Prayers are held each morning inside the lodges with separate sessions designed specifically for single men, single women, couples, as well as the younger members of the community. Twiss pointed out that,

the sweat lodges are considered sacred places of worship and intercession in the Spirit of Jesus, conducted in exactly, or in much the same way as you would find on any reservation. They are led by a traditional spiritual ceremonial leader, but contextualized to reflect faith in Jesus as the Creator, attended by the Spirit of the Almighty Creator. . . . We have four leaders for the sweats: Randy and Edith Woodley (Keetoowah Cherokee, Shoshoni), Casey and Lora Church (Potawatomi, Navajo), Bryan Brightcloud (Chiricahua Apache), and John Grosvenor (Tsagali Cherokee). All have pastored in different denominations and learned how to conduct a sweat in different tribal traditions, and all guide people to focus on the Spirit of Creator in their ceremony.

The description of the Sweat Lodge is indicative of one of the primary functions of the Wiconi Family Camp. There is a real attempt to engage in the normalization of vernacularized forms of Native Evangelical practice.

Saturday is dedicated entirely to the Powwow. In many cases, people only attend the Powwow, showing up for the day and then returning home that evening. The Saturday Powwow, which is described as “full-on traditional and non-competitive,” has an express rhetorical purpose. “Participation in traditional powwows has for many

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19 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 145.
20 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 146.
21 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 146.
Native Christians,” Twiss reminds his readers, “been discouraged or forbidden. Long considered a seditious threat to government control and an obstacle to the evangelization of tribal people, there was a long-concerted effort . . . to put an end to these practices.” What is more, Native converts often become distrustful of powwows because of the perceived lack of Christian content while “traditionalists discredit “Christian powwows” for being pseudo-Native. The Wiconi Living Waters Powwow is an event that is meant to convince all parties that these events can be inclusive, retaining efficacy for both indigenous Christians and traditionalists alike. The website describes the Family Camp as an experiment of sorts:

Wiconi Family Camp is a blend of the good aspects of our North American Indigenous culture and the rich heritage we have in following Jesus as Native people. It’s kind of like, as Richard once stated, “a living laboratory” where Native and non-Native people come and experience in an in-depth way the freedom Jesus gives in creating new approaches for ministries that are not restricted by the Native traditionalist or the strict religious traditions.22

Twiss himself claims that even hardline traditionalist attendees leave the event impressed with the “spirit . . . felt in this place” and expressing a desire to return the following year. Relating to the long tradition of powwow culture in contemporary Native American life, Twiss states that with the drumbeat acting as “the heartbeat of the people” and the dancing being the act of “dancing our prayers,” the Wiconi powwow is “an irresistible force in maintaining a sense of cultural integrity, endurance, and pride among Native people.” 23

22 “Living Waters Family Camp and Traditional Powwow,” Wiconi.com, accessed 1-3-2016, [http://www.wiconi.com/index470e.html]

23 Twiss, Rescuing the Gospel, 148.
The Wiconi Living Waters Powwow and Family Camp has seen significant growth. In 2004 there were 125 attendees. That number rose sharply to 225 in 2005 because of the inclusion of the powwow at which there were 425 attendees. Since that time the Family Camp and Powwow have seen either steady growth or minimal dips in attendance each year. In 2006, 222 people attended the Camp while 450 people came for the powwow. From 2007 to 2012, attendance rose from 226 camp attendees to 262 camp attendees and from 475 powwow attendees to 1150 powwow attendees.

Wiconi is one example of how the work being done and legitimacy garnered through NAIITS is extended beyond its academic confines. In their affiliated endeavors, through ministry and community work, NAIITS faculty draw upon the legitimacy established through the connections between themselves and the broader evangelical world. During Wiconi Family Camp and Powwow, NAIITS faculty become local community leaders, drawing upon their theological training to facilitate the emergence and maintenance of vernacularized Native Evangelical practices. They also, however, draw upon the legitimacy of “traditional” Native American cultural forms, relying on indigenous methods to organize and carry out the events throughout the weekend. This event and the practices therein exist at the intersection of several positionalities—Native Christians who admonish Native beliefs and practices; Native Christians who are proponents of contextualized forms, traditionalist Native Americans who admonish Christian forms of any kind; non-indigenous Christians who may situate themselves in any one of these camps.

The discourse on identity during the Family Camp (as well as the NASC) is worth noting. The notion that identity crises plays a central role in the plight of Native
Americans across North America is pervasive during these events. Institutional and Missionary Christianity is cast as the culprit (especially as it relates to boarding schools and associations with the Colonial and U.S. governments). The assimilation polices enacted by European and United States interests, leaders such as Twiss, Mohawk, and Church surmise, are what led directly to the problems that Native Americans face; alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic abuse, and suicide are derivatives of the attempt to separate young indigenous people from their cultural heritage. Thus, it is precisely the recovery of that Native identity specifically through an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ that will cure the social ills Native Americans face. The relationship with Jesus is crucial here; any other attempt, through strict traditionalism or through alternative religious methods, could (and would likely) result in regression and/or failure. This inversion of the assimilation narrative casts, therefore, Native cultural heritage as a vital element. Just being Christian will also not lead to beneficial results. The indigenous person must fully recover his or her native roots as they were originally endowed upon them by the creator in order to become truly born again. This process requires, then, convincing Indigenous people that their Native heritage is worth saving and, consequently, that Western culture is worth discarding (or at the very least, bracketing).

**The Native American Conference: Inversion of Conquest**

Much like the Native American Christian band Broken Walls, which is fronted by Jonathan Maracle, a Mohawk Indian from Ontario Canada, The Native American Summer Conference, titled *Sing to the Mountain II: Rekindling the Sacred Fire*, aims to break down barriers between Western and Indigenous forms of Christian worship primarily through a celebration and weekend-long demonstration of Native American cultural forms that are, as Native theologians in attendance regularly say, “redeemed
through Christ.” It is part of and sponsored by the SEJANAM (South Eastern Jurisdictional Association on Native American Ministries). The conference, now only two years running, consists of a series of presentations, cultural demonstrations, musical performances, and a (mini-) powwow. Song and dance (both Western and Indigenous) are the primary forms of Native Christian worship during this weekend event.

The Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center was the location of the 2015 Native American Conference. “The Mission of Lake Junaluska is to be a place of Christian hospitality where lives are transformed through renewal of soul, mind, and spirit.” “Steeped in Wesleyan heritage, Lake Junaluska first opened as part of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church. For over 100 years, we have been a home for people seeking relaxation, recreation, and renewal. Whether for a weekend getaway or week-long conference let us be your place in the mountains.”

The campground is nestled around picturesque Lake Junaluska and consists of Bed and Breakfasts, three large hotels fit with conference rooms, a small stone chapel, several mess halls, a “world Methodist” museum, and the main auditorium where concerts are held.

The cultural heritage and indigenous connections at Lake Junaluska are significant. The lake and compound are named after Chief Junaluska (c. 1775 – October 20, 1868), the leader of the Eastern band of Cherokee Natives who lived in and around western North Carolina. Junaluska was instrumental in organizing the Eastern Cherokee against the Red Stick faction of Creek Indians which constituted a resistance movement against Euro-American settler’s encroachment upon native lands. Junaluska

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is said to have fought alongside Andrew Jackson in the battle of Horseshoe Bend during the War of 1812 and purportedly saved Jackson’s life during this battle. After the war and in anticipation of Jackson’s Indian Policy of Indian Removal, Junaluska urged Jackson to relent, allowing the Cherokee to remain in their ancestral lands. Junaluska’s request had fallen on resolute ears, however, and Indian Removal commenced as originally planned, displacing Eastern Band Cherokee, and many other native peoples, from their homes. It is said that, after this monumental disappointment, Junaluska expressed regret for having rescued Jackson from certain death.

The *Sing to the Mountain* event is part of the NAIITS network of indigenous ministry. Richard Twiss was in attendance at the inaugural event and was engaged in various overseas projects with Jonathan Maracle. NAIITS board members Casey Church and Cheryl Bear were both invited as guest speakers and performers during the 2015 event. Cheryl Bear is a well-known Native Christian musician and vocalist. Church’s ministry work, affiliation with NAIITS, and official appointment within Wiconi International has made him a sought after entity among Native evangelicals who promote contextual ministry. Bear was asked to perform gospel hymns in her Native language; that of the Nadleh Whut’en First Nation community (specifically of the Bear Clan) in northern British Columbia. Church (who is Potawatomi) was asked to give a talk on contextualized ministry as well as conduct the sunrise ceremony each morning. He did so in typical fashion, offering instruction and citing sources as he methodically performed each step of the ritual. Conquest and the residual socio-economic consequences of conquest were the strongest themes throughout the weekend.

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25 This historical information can be found inscribed on the stone statue of Chief Junaluska situated in front of the Lake Junaluska auditorium.
The problem that organizers sought to address throughout the conference was suicide rates among Native North Americans. The underlying thesis of the conference was that identity played a major role in these instances of suicide. The mainstream cultural devaluation and distrust of Native culture, perceived to be ongoing and comprehensive residual effect of Euro-American conquest was targeted by organizers of the conference as a key aspect of identity crises among Native youth across North America. Jesus, they enthusiastically averred, was the answer to this dilemma. Native youth would need to place their lives in control and protection of Jesus Christ in order to overcome the generational consequences of the North American boarding school policies, which include alcoholism, physical and mental abuse, depression, and the like. Christianity, however, also needs to come to terms with its indigenous believers. Thus, the agenda for the 2015 conference consisted of multi-ethnic expressions of Christian worship wherein indigeneity and Christian worship could coexist.

In addition to Native North Americans, drum circles, powwow dancers, and Native Hawaiians and African Americans were contributors, each tasked with demonstrating their particular form of contextualized worship. The group of African Americans were part of a dance troupe from Atlanta, Georgia. The dance troupe performed “traditional” African dances, all the while emphasizing the notion that African cultural forms were pre-colonial expressions of worship of The Creator.

The second day of the conference was headlined by a contingent of Native Hawaiian Christians in attendance. They were presented and entered the auditorium while conducting a traditional song and dance meant to demonstrate their gratitude for having been invited to the land. The leader of this group of Native Hawaiian Christians
tackled the topic of conquest during his talk. He described a project that he had
developed several years prior. In an effort to redeem the Hawaiian islands in the name
of Christ, he and a group of like-minded Native Hawaiian Christian ministers traveled to
those geographical spaces and landmarks considered most sacred according to pre-
Christian Hawaiian beliefs. Once there, they engaged in collective prayer meant to
redeem those sacred locations in Christ and rid them of non-Christian spirits, who from
their evangelical perspective, might be offensive to God.

There is a decidedly charismatic feel to the event. At various moments one can
hear indigenous attendees react audibly to songs or presentations. Amens, hallelujahs,
native cries, spontaneous praises, are standard reactions to the events on stage. It is
also not uncommon to see women and men, in praise posture (standing hands and
head raised toward the heavens). Presenters and performers alike made repeated
reference to the presence of the Holy Spirit, referring to a “pouring out of” or “raining
down upon” of the Holy Ghost.

The Native American dancing is clearly a part of the charismatic nature of Native
Evangelical worship style. During Broken Walls performances, for example, powwow
dancers, donning full regalia, would dance around the stage and through the audience.
As the music increased in intensity and the musicians lost themselves in the moment,
one could notice also the dancers becoming increasingly internal, closing their eyes,
intensifying their movements, becoming, as they often remarked, “filled with the Holy
Spirit.”

One event became especially charismatic in tone. The Friday Night session,
which included a sample of an anti-suicide motivational talk (by Broken Walls drummer
Bill Pagaran, a Tlingit from Palmer, Alaska) as well as musical performances by Broken Walls and a heavy metal Christian band from New York, named Lilly among Thorns seemed to take on a life of its own. Performances went well beyond their scheduled time slots. Broken Walls performed several of their more popular tracks, including “Rise up Mighty Warrior,” and “Ride the Wind” (Lyrics supplied in Appendix A). After Broken Walls performed the heavy metal Christian band Lilly among Thorns (named after a phrase in scripture) were introduced with a bit of hesitation and warning. Older members of the audience were warned that they might be off-put by the style of music but to keep in mind that this was a youth-centered expression of Christ worship and should be taken seriously in its own right. They were, however, given a chance to vacate the assembly hall prior to the start of the music.

The music was indeed heavy and consisted of darker lyrical accompaniments than those typical of the other performers. Subject matter for songs included, for example, admonitions concerning femininity, referencing behavior that resulted in one becoming a “harlot.” Occasionally, members of the band would interject between songs, offering spontaneous witness. They described the troubles experienced in their own lives; including drug abuse and depression. There were also long stretches of instrumental free styling. Band members and audience members alike often assumed praise posture during these moments. One such instance came at the end of the set. The lead singer, now seldom expressing herself verbally, began to play various objects – from washboards to folding tables to trash cans – found onstage. This went on for just under an hour until the members of Broken Walls and various other members of the audience went up on stage and began a drumming session in concert with the band.
members’ instruments. A short time after, more members of the audience began to go up on stage to dance and play various items found on and around the stage. Powwow dancers were in full on dance mode. Their bells could be heard among the various instruments, becoming integrated into the percussive element of the event. Before long, the entire room was contributing to and enveloped by the drum beats and instrumental rhythms. This went on for well over an hour. It was described the next day and for the rest of the conference as a massive outpouring of the spirit.

Dance and song continued to drive the worship style on the third day (second full day) of the conference. Between 6:30 am and 1:30 pm things played out just as they had the day before. The day was ushered in by a Sunrise Ceremony at 6:30am, between 9am and Noon there were a series of talks and demonstrations, and lunch was served at Noon. Subsequently, at around 1:30pm, there was a powwow held at the Lake Junaluska basketball courts which were luckily protected by a roof structure. Rain storms could be seen on the mountain tops miles away. Occasionally a volatile cloud whipped across the campground producing rain showers for two to five minutes at a time.

The dance space was quartered off by a perimeter of chairs arranged in a semi-circle. Beyond the rows of chairs, vendors erected display tables and merchandise tents, as is typical of most powwow events. Merchandise included Native arts and crafts, books on a variety of topics (including Native folklore, Native North American history, and, perhaps most prominently, native and non-native theology. Dancers were in full powwow dance regalia, including Casey Church. There were two drumming groups (at larger powwows there are sometimes ten to twenty) who alternated
performing songs. Multiple drum groups are necessary as powwow dancing can stretch on for hours. Drumming and singing for this amount of time, even during an abbreviated powwow such as this one, can be extremely taxing.

The Sing to the Mountain powwow was typical as powwows go. However, there were moments that seemed, to me, to be specific to this particular event and its overall tone. At specific moments members of the community, usually elders who were influential in their respective communities, would be asked to speak to the crowd. One individual made a lasting impression. A Cherokee man, hailing from Oklahoma reservation land, was asked to deliver a statement and reflect on the events of the weekend. At first glance this man was unassuming and even somewhat frail. He walked up to receive the microphone with a slight limp and in what seemed like a degree of bodily discomfort. As he began to speak, he spoke in a deep southern accent, his voice was low, and I prepared myself, readying to listen more carefully with the expectation that his comments would be difficult to hear. This changed radically, however, as he finalized his basic introduction and moved on to his understanding of the spiritual and political significance of the conference.

His voice rose in volume and his body became increasingly animated. He suddenly seemed neither frail nor reluctant. He explained that he was a decedent of Chief Junaluska, the Cherokee man whose name was given to the lake around which these indigenous and non-indigenous Christians now gathered in worship, praise, and theological contemplation. He made a point to correct the Euro-American mispronunciation of the appropriated term Junaluska. He then warned the crowd that these were auspicious times, that indigenous peoples were emerging on a global scale
and that this marked a massive, world-wide revival of Christian faith. He was now yelling, his cadence was that of an evangelical televangelist, and his tone became one of warning. The more emphatic moments of his Native American jeremiad were met with instant response from the crowd. I could feel the intensity myself. His enthusiasm, when reaching its zenith at specific moments, sent chills through my body. The reactions from the crowd only resulted in further physiological reverberations as I seemed to be somehow caught up in this bubbling effervescence. Onlookers clapped, raised their hands to the sky, proclaimed “hallelujah,” and shouted “amen.” He explained that he was a Cherokee man, displaced from the land of his birth and disassociated from many of the ways of his people. He then used his trip to the conference as a metaphor to demonstrate the coming prophetic era wherein Native peoples would return to the land they once possessed and recover the ways of their ancestors. This, he explained scornfully, was part of God’s plan to empower Native peoples, restoring their Creator-given cultural forms, representing a divinely sanctioned reversal of the harmful effects of Western colonialism.

As he brought his preaching to a close there was an obvious lasting effect on the participants. Some people seemed slightly disturbed while others invigorated. Perhaps his words were too strong for some; just what the doctor ordered for others. In any case, he left a lasting mark on the atmosphere of the powwow. Dancers were asked to continue as the next drum song began to play. The Dancing seemed intensified in the moments immediately following the Cherokee preacher’s prophetic sermon. It was as though they felt they were now actively taking part in the revival of which he spoke,
dancing more forcefully as though they were now physically claiming this very spot in the name of Jesus and for Indigenous peoples who once called this place home.

In this moment, there was arguably an explicit reference to the underlying tension that persisted throughout the conference. Subtle mentions of the notion that this land, upon which this Evangelical Methodist camp ground was built, had once belonged to the Junaluska’s people were reiterated throughout the weekend. Here, however, there was an explicit cultural inversion; an inversion of the process of conquest (albeit mostly symbolic in nature). The powwow dancers danced upon the land in prayer to the Creator and, perhaps, after having heard the Cherokee preacher’s words, imagined themselves reclaiming this land for Indigenous peoples.

The powwow culminated with drum and dance performed by and for the elders in attendance. The remaining attendees gathered around the drum circle. The significance of the moment was met with a sea of smartphones held in the air and a deluge of camera flashes. Powwow dancers moved closer to the drum circle and everyone was invited to dance in celebration of the weekend’s success.

Immediately following the final drum and song session, Casey Church, taking the microphone in his hand, used the moment to provide instruction to all those who were not experienced in powwow etiquette. He explained, quite eloquently and with considerable diplomacy, that the picture-taking and filming of those moments during which elders are honored is frowned upon and should be considered prohibited. “This is something you all will eventually learn,” he explained in a fatherly tone, “especially as you spend more time with us and become more familiar with our Native ways and the kinds of things we expect.”
Chapter Conclusion

As I stated in the introduction, it is often the case that during conferences and public speaking engagements Native Americans/ First Nations/ Indigenous peoples make reference to the fundamental differences between Indigenous and Western/Euro-American cultural forms. This is often expressed temporally and epistemologically; they make reference specifically to time expectations and restraints as well as legitimate sources of knowledge. For them, the Western academic way-of-doing-things is foreign even as it is something they have had to master. On the contrary, they all have extensive practical knowledge of mainstream Evangelical Protestant beliefs and practices. Yet, they nonetheless engage in the juxtaposition of these structures in a theological context in order to empower Indigenous people as they labor through the vernacularization process.

At the outset of the 2015 NAIITS symposium, for example, which was held in the newly relocated Tyndale University College and Seminary, Terry LeBlanc made reference to the problematic spatial situation. Tyndale had recently taken over what was previously a convent and the NAIITS meeting was held in the main chapel. Not only did this create technical difficulties in the form of poor lighting and less-than-ideal audio, but the very space was, as he expressed it, antithetical to the Native way of information transference. He referred to it as “a circle in a rectangle.” In other words, Native Americans and First Nations peoples, they argue, would typically organize themselves in circular fashion, which engenders entirely different social, political and inter-subjective dynamics. This rectangular, top-down arrangement, typical of spatial arrangements found in churches and schools and, as they often remark, are fundamentally Western and Euro-centric. The latter engendered certain hierarchical social arrangements that
are at the very transgressive heart of the very mission of NAIITS (e.g., to instill indigenous modes into the academy). They are fully aware of this paradox; the simultaneous movement within and active discomfort with Western hegemonic institutional, temporal, and spatial forms.

It is in light of this tendency toward self-referential, emically-inflected out-of-place-ness and the negotiated production of indigeneity that I appeal to Homi Bhabha’s concept of mockery. In his oft-cited collection of essays, titled *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha further develops the concept of mockery by drawing heavily on Lacan’s concept “mimicry.” In his fourth chapter, titled “Of Mimicry and Man,” Bhabha describes mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” He continues that “in order for mimicry to be effective [it] must continually produce a slippage, its excess, its difference . . . [it] emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.”

The symposium especially is a space within which there are negotiations between NAIITS members and the administrators of the academic institutions. While certain things are permissible, others are prohibited. Sunrise ceremonies, drumming, and smudging are acceptable forms of Native Christian practice and can be carried out on campus grounds. This was not always the case. During the 2015 symposium, held at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, I was clued in to the fact that the President had only recently agreed to allow Sunrise ceremonies on Campus grounds (Smudging was also permitted with the caveat of not engaging in burning anything indoors as this would

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be a legal violation). Sweat lodges and other practices are, on the other hand, not as welcome (and in some cases prohibited on campus grounds).\(^{27}\)

As such, I argue that, symposia are spaces wherein the mainstream evangelical institutions – through their allowances and limitations – engage in the production an image of what constitutes indigeneity. Conversely, NAIITS members engage in ritualizations constituted by conscious and calculated repetitions of western academic structures while also throwing those structures into ambivalence by questioning them and combining them with symbols of, what NAIITS theologians perceive to be, their opposites. Thus, mimicry, as Bhabha understands it, is not a unilateral process whereby the identity of the colonized is obliterated in the service of imperial power.

What I have called mimicry is not the familiar exercise of dependent colonial relations through narcissistic identification so that, as Fanon has observed, the black man stops being an actional person for only the white man can represent his self-esteem. Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask: it is not what Cesaire describes as ‘colonization-thingification’ behind which there stands the essence of the presence Africaine. The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.\(^{28}\)

It is this relationship between the evangelical institutions and NAIITS that engenders a dialectical process; the institutions determine an acceptable display of indigenous Christianity which, in turn, opens institutional (colonial) power to what Bhabha referred to as the “menace” of mimicry; the colonial gaze turned back on itself. Furthermore, because NAIITS faculty, to the last one, were raised in both Euro-American Christian (some Protestant, some Catholic) and Indigenous contexts, this process is all the more relevant. The NAIITS faculty’s practical knowledge in the “body techniques” produced

\(^{27}\) This information was gleaned during casual informal conversations with various members of the NAIITS program during symposiums.

\(^{28}\) Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 126.
by and constituting the very Western structures to which they direct their efforts, or, more precisely, the way in which their bodies have been and continue to be anchored in these structures makes them, arguably, exemplars of Bhabha’s concept of mockery; they effortlessly navigate the structures of Western hegemony while simultaneously, by virtue of both conscious defiance and simple ethnic birthright, undermine the business of Western hegemony. Simply by being who they are and holding dear to those things which they deem crucial to their social, spiritual, and physical well-being, NAIITS theologians do the work to which Bhabha referred.

“The mimic man” – a term Bhabha borrows from nineteenth century literature – is that which is produced as the colonized takes on certain features of colonial power and the colonial gaze is, once again, turned on itself. An unfortunate turn of phrase, “mimic man” may force the reader into the assumption that the colonized merely engages in empty imitation or that this process amounts to assimilation into colonial structures of power and dominance. On the contrary, Bhabha perceives this process as the calculated and conscious attempt to throw dominance into question, to open the doors of suspicion and produce a ‘slippage’ toward contingency and, ultimately (although I have consciously avoided using the term from a purely etic theoretical position) cultural, social, and political hybridity. Thus, Bhabha argues that mimicry is representative of a partial presence “which alienates the modality and normality of those dominant discourses in which they emerge as ‘inappropriate’ colonial subjects.” It is a presence, he continues,

[that] articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial, and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority. It is a desire that reverses ‘in part’ the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence; a gaze of otherness, that shares
the acuity of the genealogical gaze which . . . liberates marginal elements and shatters the unity of man’s being through which he extends his sovereignty.\textsuperscript{29}

He states further that . . .

The ambivalence of mimicry – almost but not quite – suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal. . . . Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history. For the fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them.\textsuperscript{30}

The mimic man represents, then, “a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically, not to be English.”\textsuperscript{31} This failure, then, undermines the anticipated efficacy of colonial power to produce its subjects; the \textit{modus operandi} of colonial/imperial power is then reduced to mere play of arbitrary signs capable of being manipulated and altered in significant ways. NAIITS theologians and faculty regularly call upon this strategy. As they don graduation robes that look somewhat, but not completely like typical Western graduation garb; or, when they operate in a spatial arrangement that favors Western modes of knowledge dissemination all the while challenging that space by deploying alternative modes, NAIITS theologians produce relations, images, and discursive formulations that manifest the failure of colonial power to create its subjects in precisely the way that colonial power originally intended.

Having described the theoretical frame through which I have come to understand the processes I have observed over the course of the past four years, I must urge a word of caution. “Mimicry,” “mimic man,” and “mimesis,” especially as it relates to the

\textsuperscript{29} Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, 126,127.

\textsuperscript{30} Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, 129,130.

\textsuperscript{31} Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, 125.
relationship between NAIITS theologians and Western modes of theology, are objectionable terms. They imply a sense that the actions and identities of the colonized are being deceptively re-created. They imply that there is an empty re-deployment of a faked identity (Western/Christian belief and practice) in an attempt to stave off rebuke. This could not be further from the reality as it relates to NAIITS. Most (if not all) of the NAIITS original founding members were born into, grew up in, and continue to inhabit the Western Christian (American Protestant more precisely) world and all that it entails. They were raised, in most cases, in urban contexts (e.g., Terry LeBlanc in Toronto; Twiss in Silverton, Oregon; Woodley in Anadarko, Michigan) and as Christians; at a remove from the Indigenous ways of life of their parents and grandparents for various portions of time. They knew this Western and Christian world so well that to call it “mimicry” or “mimesis,” or to refer to them as “mimic man,” is profoundly mistaken and perhaps even offensive.

Alas, my use of these terms is in no way directed toward their being Christian or carrying out Western modes of knowledge production and the like, as these processes come naturally to them. They are not “foreign” agents acting out a “foreign” set of behaviors. Their obvious practical knowledge of the Evangelical world prohibits this perception. I use these terms, rather, in the context of their conscious and calculated development of theologies, symposiums, conferences and other practices where there is a purposeful, playful, and profound mockery of the very Western structures that led them, by virtue of their deep reliance on it, to devalue their Native heritage from the get go. In their use of humor and juxtaposition, then, NAIITS theologians and members actively engage in this process of mockery, a rigorous self-deprecating critique,
highlighting and throwing into stark relief the arbitrariness of Western structures and signs.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

In Summation

The primary objectives of this project were to, first, trace the trans-indigenous network that extends out from the North American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies (NAIITS) and illuminate those aspects of the NAIITS network indicative of its position as a counter network to the dominant Evangelical network. Furthermore, as a counter network, it was necessary to locate and analyze those specific features (e.g., the network building process itself, the theological maneuverings, and the ritualizations of textualization) of the NAIITS network that lend themselves to the reprogramming of the dominant Evangelical network (a feature of networks articulated perhaps most explicitly by Manuel Castells in *Communication Power*). Finally, I set out to highlight the specific contents contained in the attempt to reprogram the dominant Evangelical network. These contents – mockery and inversion – are detailed in the final section.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I set out to illustrate a line of chronological continuity between NAIITS as a contemporary indigenous movement and the trajectory of Native American, Amerindian, and First Nations colonial history. This required that I make meaningful linkages to historical trends in key areas; namely, the history of trans-indigenous networking specifically in North America and the history of the relationship between Native Americans/First Nations communities, colonial missions and the practice of contextualizing Euro-American Christian themes into a Native American worldview.

The first key historical continuity was the formation of what I refer to as trans-indigenous (a term I borrow from Chadwick Allen) networks as a consequence of the
process of urbanization. Native Americans and First Nations peoples have a long history of cutting across ethnic, ideological, and tribal barriers in order to achieve some degree of safety in numbers. This deep historical experience with inter-tribal resource pooling is evident in the various prophet movements throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries as well as the emergent Powwow culture and global inter-tribal networking endeavors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Pooling resources, as well as combining intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual power has allowed Indigenous peoples across the globe (with wildly varying degrees of success and failure) to effectively challenge hegemonic Western culture as well as cope with the inevitable consequences of colonialism. Authors have referred to these movements as Pan-Indianism. Some have even suggested that the community-building across tribal affiliations has resulted in ethnogenesis, in other words, the emergence of a new ethnic category – namely, “indigeneity” – which transcends tribal specificity as well as national borders. I prefer, however, and argue for the use of trans-indigenous networks because it more accurately portrays these movements as amalgamations of different people from different locals with different cultural understandings. The discourse of indigeneity does however provide a *lingua-franca*, providing these eclectic networks with a common language through which to conduct business and exert agency on a global scale. NAIITS, as a trans-indigenous and trans-national movement is a contemporary example of this long history of trans-indigenous networking.

In Chapter 4, I set out to illuminate the NAIITS theological framing. Chapter 3 addresses the development of Native American and First Nations theologies from the colonial period to the contemporary. I attempt to broaden the scope of what constitutes
“theology” in order to suggest that, since their initial exposure to Euro-American Christianity, indigenous communities across the Americas have been engaging in the process of theology; thinking from the positionality of and through their own cultures in order to come to terms with Western forms of Christian belief and practice. In other words, indigenous theologies emerged at the moment of contact. Locating them, however, is difficult, often requiring skilled historians to “read back and between the lines,” as Daniel Richter once said, to come to some sense as to how and what indigenous communities were thinking during the initial years of contact with European conquistadors, explorers, missionaries and settlers.

Having set the stage, so to speak, chapter four delves into the details of NAIITS theology more specifically. Readers will immediately recognize the continuities between NAIITS theologians and important historical figures presented in chapter three. Chapter four examines the simultaneous appropriation and criticism of Western forms in their official (institutionally validated), written, academic work. Here, I highlight the key themes emerging out of theological arguments formulated by NAIITS theologians. These theological arguments are located in the papers published in the thirteen volumes of the NAIITS journal as well as published books, conference presentations, ministry websites, and related materials of some of the key figures of the NAIITS program and movement. The themes that emerge from their writings and consequently serve as conceptual reference for the following chapters are Biblical Indigeneity, theological nationalism (or, “counter-productive syncretism), and “responsible syncretism.”
Throughout Chapters 5 and 6, my aim was to trace the NAIITS trans-indigenous network and show how this network is expressed, legitimized, and sustained through various means. To that end, I provide a series of vignettes, focusing on some of the key figures involved in the founding and continued operation of NAIITS through interviews and supplemental archival research in chapter five. The life stories of Terry LeBlanc, Randy Woodley, Casey Church, Richard Twiss, Matt LeBlanc, and Wendy Peterson offer glimpses into the world that NAIITS has created. It is vibrant and absolutely worthy of further academic consideration beyond what I have been able to capture. The demographic composition, structure, and mission of NAIITS is changing as people move on to other projects or take jobs that profoundly inhibit their ability to remain active. The board of directors is different today than it was at the organization's founding. It will be interesting indeed to see in what direction this all leads and what form NAIITS will take in the coming years.

The expression of the institutional connections and affiliated organizational agendas occurs most explicitly, I contend, online. Thus, in Chapter 6, I examine in detail the organization’s effective development and use of ICTs (Internet Communication Technologies). With the help of Manuel Castells' theory of communication power, I argue in chapter three that NAIITS functions as a counter-network, drawing upon the dominant mainstream Evangelical networks. Taken in combination with other forms of ICT expressions of identity – namely, the use of “homepaging” techniques, Youtube, Vimeo, and other video blogging/documenting technologies – NAIITS theologians and members are simultaneously attempting to effectively challenge the dominant networks to which they are tied and ultimately create a fundamental change in their norms and
values. This is attempted (perhaps not yet fully accomplished as far as NAIITS is concerned) through what Castells calls a “reprogramming of the network,” targeting the most basic and fundamental values of a network, challenging their validity, altering them, and thus changing the beliefs and behaviors that emanate from them. Using these media outlets has allowed NAIITS to claim legitimacy in an explicit way, especially in the examples where the NAIITS mission and agenda is linked directly to specific Evangelical institutions located both in Canada and the United States. What is more, ICTS also provide a mechanism through which NAIITS members can effectively give visual credence to the theology of Biblical Indigeneity (discussed at length in chapter four).

In Chapter 7, I consider the nature and historical trajectory of the relationship between Native North Americans and First Nations peoples and systems of education. The history is fraught with the tragic effects of both neglect and outright physical abuse. No wonder then that movements such as NAIITS and its affiliated organizations specifically target systems of education. From colonial efforts to missionize native populations, to boarding schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and finally to the emergence of tribal colleges in the mid-twentieth century, education has always been a problem and a target for the indigenous population of North America. This is a common point of reference during symposiums, worship events, and in the writings of NAIITS theologians. It is the production of knowledge manifested in the structures of education that NAIITS theologians target as problems that need comprehensive reform. Much of the theology and practices of NAIITS are aimed, thus,
toward the total reprogramming of structural norms and values that have persisted throughout the history of contact between settler and indigenous populations.

The processes of mockery and cultural inversion are the primary focus of Chapter 8. Here, I set out to articulate the specific contents of the attempt to reprogram the dominant evangelical network. These contents include the ritualization of textualization and the production of knowledge as well as the theological inversion of scales as it relates to pedagogical power dynamics, the narrative of conquest, and the diasporic disposition. NAIITS symposia are highly charged events, often dealing with highly controversial issues relating to the Native American, First Nations peoples as well as indigenous communities across the globe. As I have stated on numerous occasions throughout this project, the NAIITS symposium, each time that I have attended, is truly a trans-national and trans-indigenous event consisting of representatives from a diverse range of indigenous communities, administrators and educators from mainstream Evangelical institutions, non-indigenous missionaries, and a smattering of other interested parties. Symposia themselves are, I argue, ritualizations in and of themselves, often consisting of the conscious attempt to highlight the fundamental differences between Western and Indigenous world views and ways of life. These differences are often highlighted and expounded upon in the various papers presented in a Western academic format. Additionally, however, these differences are present in the schedule and structure as indigenous practices are integrated into the conferences. For example, Sunrise Ceremony ushers in the day’s activities after which a Western-style conference format follows; all the while comments and remarks are made emphasizing the temporal and spatial differences between Western and Indigenous
processes of producing knowledge. NAIITS theologians have inhabited these forms of knowledge production for their entire lives. They continue to inhabit them. However, as they continue to inhabit them and demonstrate competence in carrying them out, they also challenge them, point to their arbitrary connection to religiosity, and mock them. In doing so, they attempt to invert the power dynamics that have typically motivated missionary endeavors among indigenous communities throughout Christian history.

All of this amounts to the following: NAIITS is a trans-indigenous network, linking the *lingua-franca* of that trans-indigenous network to the story of Creation and Christology, rendering Indigeneity the ideal Biblical way of being. The connections with mainstream Evangelical institutions provide legitimacy and valuable resources which are channeled out to ministry and indigenous community development endeavors across North America and other parts of the world. Simultaneously, the very structures drawn upon for their legitimizing power are mocked in an attempt to illumine their arbitrariness and, thus, enabling their dissociation from “Biblical truth.” The variety of ministry and indigenous community development endeavors provide spaces wherein indigenous theologies emerge, effectively challenge, and ultimately attempt to flip the script, engendering a diasporic inversion wherein Euro-American forms of religiosity are rendered Biblically at best problematic and at worst wholly displaced from Biblical conscience. In sum, we are witnessing the attempted reverse missionization of the dominant Evangelical network. Mainstream Evangelical institutions are, thus, for NAIITS theologians, the mission field.

**Toward Theoretical Cohesion: The Negotiation between Legitimation and Evasion**

As a transnational network of indigenous peoples NAIITS is working within and responding to the network of Evangelical academic institutions throughout North
America. In this light, I turn to the work of Manuel Castells. In his work on forms of communication and power (both dominant and subversive) in social networks, Castells discusses the various forms of communication and how these forms have transitioned into novel expressions. Interpersonal communication, Castells points out, consists of information transference between sender and receiver (e.g., letters, notes, etc.), with little to no opportunity for the message to become widespread without the intention of either party. Traditional mass-communication, conversely, was information transference consisting of a single source (e.g., scholar, government, etc.) that was intended for society at large. Traditional mass-communication typically consists of, Castells mentions, media such as “books, newspapers, films, radio, and television.” These provided the means for unilateral communication.

It is not the case, however, that any one form of communication stands as a substitute for the other. Instead, Castells wants us to consider, these “three forms of communication coexist, interact, and complement each other.” Historically, he adds, this has allowed for a radically new form of communication, amounting to “the articulation of all forms of communication into a composite, interactive, digital hyper-text that includes, mixes, and recombines in their diversity the whole range of cultural expressions conveyed by human interaction.”¹ Castells articulates this further, suggesting that, the ability to exercise control over others depends on two basic mechanisms: 1) the ability to constitute network(s), and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network; and 2) the ability to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources,

while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation.”

Communication networks are, therefore, central to the power-making process within networks.

With the emergence of the internet and the various forms of communication media available to users, however, a new form of communication has arisen; Castells refers to this new form of communication as mass self-communication. “It is mass self-communication,” he avers, “because it can potentially reach a global audience, as in the posting of a video on Youtube, a blog with RSS feed links to a number of web sources, or a message to a massive e-mail list. At the same time, it is self-communication because the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-directed.”

Castells is ultimately interested in locating power in the networked society. Power-making within and among networks operates in two ways. First, network processes “can enforce existing domination or seize structural positions of domination” through the creation and manipulation of the forms of communication. Conversely, network processes are capable of resisting “domination on behalf of the interests, values, and projects that are excluded or under-represented in the programs and composition of the networks.” Dialectically related, these two processes “configure the structure of power through their interaction,” moreover, Castells adds, they “operate on the same logic.” Therefore, processes that run counter to those in dominant positions,

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2 Castells, *Communication Power*, 45.

3 Castells, *Communication Power*, 55.
then, are successful only in so far as they become conversant with and skilled in utilizing the very mechanisms (programming and switching) that constitute dominant power.\footnote{Castells, \textit{Communication Power}, 47.}

One way for counter-dominant groups to produce change, Castells avers, is to “introduce new instructions and new codes into the networks’ programs.” He avers that, actors of social change are able to exert decisive influence by using mechanisms of power-making that correspond to the forms and processes of power in the network society. By engaging in the cultural production of the mass media, and by developing autonomous networks of horizontal communication, citizens of the Information Age become able to invent new programs for their lives with the materials of their suffering, fears, dreams, and hopes. They build their projects by sharing their experience. They subvert the practice of communication as usual by squatting in the medium and creating the message. They overcome the powerlessness of their solitary despair by networking their desire. They fight the powers that be by identifying the networks that are.\footnote{Castells, \textit{Communication Power}, 431. Although he overplays the transition from mass-communication (traditional books, pamphlets, and news outlets) to new forms of communication (internet and social media outlets), his theoretical model provides a conceptual map capable of illuminating the way that power is distributed and/or harnessed in a society constituted by communicative networks.}

Castell’s sense of networks, power-making, and counter power in networks are all useful to our current discussion by providing a way to recognize and map networks. More importantly, Castells highlights the importance of the network structure as a way to make power and also challenge dominant power. Power is and can only ever be, according to Castells, implemented effectively through networks. Counter power, therefore, can only be effective if it is harnessed and deployed by a stable network of social actors. This is, he argues, because of the comprehensive hold that dominant powers have over forms of mass-communication and, at least to some degree, mass
self-communication. Networks of counter power must, moreover, utilize the very mechanisms that allow for the maintenance of dominant power.

The question remains, however, precisely how is this counter power (a.k.a. reprogramming of the network) constituted and what specifically are its contents? For this I turn to postcolonial theory and two controversial concepts; inversion developed by Ranajit Guha and mockery developed by Homi Bhabha. In the various practices of legitimation carried out by faculty and members of NAIITS there is an interplay of mockery and inversion.

We get at mockery through Bhabha’s extensive analysis of the term mimicry. In developing his particular take on the concept of mimicry, Bhabha first defines what he refers to as the metonymy of presence; “a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them.” In other words, the colonized develops a discourse and practice that function as close approximations of the colonial things themselves. NAIITS theologians, for example, have developed an academic liturgy that mimics mainstream academic practice. It is important to note. However, Bhabha’s notion of mimicry should not be thought of as assimilation nor should it be considered empty repetition.

It may be possible to avoid the semantic pitfalls of the terms “mimicry” and “mimic man” by referring to Bourdieu’s use of the term habitus. Bourdieu, borrowing from Marcel Mauss, imagined subjects to be, he states, active and knowing agents endowed with a practical reason, that is, an acquired system of preferences, of principles of vision and division (what

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6 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. 128.
is usually called taste), and also a system of durable cognitive structures (which are essentially the product of the internalization of objective structures) and of schemes of action which orient the perception of the situation and the appropriate response. The habitus is this kind of practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation – what is called in sport a ‘feel’ for the game, which is inscribed in the present state of play.

NAIITS theologians, then, are not mimic women and men, merely imitating the structures of evangelical Christianity, as the terms imply. They are instead carriers of the evangelical Christian habitus, beholden to the “principles of vision and division” therein. What is more, by virtue of this “practical reason,” NAIITS theologians deploy evangelical “schemes of action” as they disseminate indigenous theologies during symposia and related events. This is why their attempts also to mock these “schemes” and “principles” are so noteworthy; their investment in them is simultaneously caught up in their desire to evade them.

I attempt to retain the theory that animates Bhabha’s theory of mimicry, holding on to the notion that the colonized subject acts through and is dependent upon the structures of the colonizer and in the colonized repackaging and inversion of colonial discourse, she casts doubt upon the efficacy of colonial power. Through the use of habitus as a heuristic, however, researchers can avoid the implicit meanings of “mimicry” – namely, that mimicry entails a lifeless or vacuous repetition of cultural and social structures on the part of the colonized in their attempt to exert agency. NAIITS theologians grew up Christian and have inhabited Western hegemonic forms from childhood. Thus, it would be disingenuous to suggest that, as they attempt to achieve legitimacy as Evangelical theologians, they merely mimic these structures. To the contrary, they have lived these structures, are thoroughly caught up in them, and often, although not in all cases, they cherish them.
As previously stated, NAIITS theologians articulate their project as an attempt to create harmony between Western and Indigenous methods specifically as it relates to the production of theology and religious practice. They have spilled a lot of ink arguing that Indigenous expressions of Christianity are just as valid as Western expressions. However, even as they make these claims they nonetheless highlight, at times relentlessly, the fundamental differences between Western and Indigenous ontologies. These differences make for an interesting oscillation between inhabiting Western structures and undermining them.

While this process may be carried out unwittingly by actors in a variety of other political struggles and circumstances, for NAIITS theologians and faculty this repeated practice of juxtaposition is conscious and calculated, designed for the sole purpose of demonstrating the arbitrary nature of Western academic and theological structures. Simultaneously, however, the efficacy of those structures to produce legitimacy and garner credibility is also taken very seriously.

In his refutation of Fanon’s position that by mimicking the hegemon the colonized becomes subsumed within colonial power and thus disappears, Bhabha argues that metonymic strategies are “at once a mode of appropriation and of resistance,” they function as an “authoritarian voyeurism” through which the colonized reverses the disciplinary gaze, looking back onto the hegemon, relegating the “insignia of authority” to that of a mask, but in the service of mockery rather than disappearance. Through Bhabha’s further development of Lacan’s perspective of mimicry we are able to view the colonized as more than just a dupe who falls in line by inhabiting the social spaces sanctioned by the colonizer. Instead, we are presented with a perception of the
colonized as a conceptual and diplomatic combatant. Mimicry as metonymies of presence constitute non-repressive practices in that they do not require the colonized to lose herself/himself. Rather, they represent “the productions of contradictory and multiple belief. They cross the boundaries of the culture of enunciation through a strategic confusion of the metaphoric . . . axes of the cultural production of meaning.”

Mimicry eventuating in mockery and the production of contradictory belief leads us, then, to Guha’s further development of the term inversion. Although Bhabha attempts to distance himself from the concept of inversion, I argue that it remains vital as a heuristic and helps to explain Bhabha’s notion that mockery provides an opportunity for the colonized to flip the disciplinary gaze back onto the colonizer. Bhabha made this heuristic shift in order to avoid the reification of binaries. Using the term inversion, he argues, forced the researcher into operations dependent upon binary oppositions. Avoiding the theoretical trap that results from the use of inversion, he states, will free the “discourse of emancipation from binary closures.”

This, however, is problematic. Social actors routinely operate in and through discourses that emphasize dichotomous relations, or binaries. NAIITS theologians, as I have demonstrated, make regular reference to stark differences between the West and

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7 Bhabha, The Location of Culture. 128.

8 Here, I am referencing Bhabha’s move away from inversion in favor of the term hybridity. Hybridity, he argues, is a subjective space wherein cultural differences meet and merge (for more on this topic see Bhabha’s The Location of Culture, pages 295 - 298). The colonized subject, then, becomes a symbol of ‘panic’ for the colonizer, constituting the inevitable failure of hegemonic power to completely subsume its subjects. This understanding, however, relegates the colonized subject to the position of a colonial trope, a symbol that has political agency but is unaware of its own function. In my research, NAIITS theologians are fully aware of their function and make regular reference to binary oppositions. They are not merely symbols, vessels of difference who act as referential warnings for those in power. They are actors, consciously deploying difference in an effort to evade dominant networks.
Indigeneity. For example, through the mechanism of inversion, NAIITS theologians deploy Biblical Indigeneity as a direct ontological opposite of Western theology, mission, relations to land, relations among people(s), relations with the divine, and systems of governance (and the list goes on). Thus, inversion is not so much an objective term as much as it is part of the day-to-day practice of counter networks in their varied attempts to reprogram dominant networks.

In his development of the term inversion, Guha explains that the already substantial corpus of literature on the topic of cultural inversions – primarily situated in the area of postcolonial studies and having to do with symbolic ritual moments – demonstrates that in most cases inversions have been understood as “privileged occasions” with which “the 'structural inferiors' in the given societies enjoy the license to indulge in rites of status reversal. . . . Servants act like masters, women like men, children like grown-ups, juniors like seniors, and so on. . . . Yet, as all observers agree, the outcome of such prescriptive inversion is not to destroy or even weaken the social order, but to buttress it.”

In other words, “the purpose of such rituals,” according to many who have theorized them, “is to empty rebellion of its content and reduce it into a routine of gestures in order to reinforce authority by feigning defiance.”

This lack of practical and/or material efficacy relies, however, on the dominant society’s relegation of specific cultural inversions to the realm of pure semiotics, what Guha referred to as “empty gestures.” In other words, these critiques of inversion are

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9 For a refresher, see table 4-1 in chapter 4.
focused primarily on rituals that exist at a remove from state and institutional apparatuses. As Guha shows, and as NAIITS exemplifies in this study, ritual inversions that are situated within state and/or institutional apparatuses can be highly effective in producing material effects. Dominant networks themselves consist of ritual processes (e.g., academic conferences and the like) whose aims are legitimization and the broader production of knowledge. When the colonized successfully make use of and become proficient in the practice of these dominant rituals of legitimization, they have the ability to alter the structures of domination by entering new codes into the dominant network’s programming.

This proximity to dominant power and that proximity’s potential to engender change is, arguably, precisely what is occurring as it relates to NAIITS and the dominant Evangelical theological network. Taking advantage of a theological foundation, poured and formed by contextualization theologians such as Paul Heibert, NAIITS theologians have developed a theological frame that, not only recognizes Indigenous expressions of worship, but casts them as more accurate reflections of Biblical thinking and living. Their influence can be seen in the work of non-indigenous theologians who regularly attend NAIITS symposiums and who have built those experiences into a formal career of issuing a regular challenge to mainstream missiology.\(^\text{12}\)

As Guha points out, with the passing of time and the persistence of these prescriptive inversions, however, something changed. The traditional use of ritual

\(^{12}\) There is a wealth of new theological scholarship dedicated to the reform of missions theology and missionary structure. For example, Gene Green’s collaborative work is invested in the growing literature on Global Christianities particularly from a theological perspective. See, for instance, *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, (2012) edited by Gene Green and Jeffery P. Greenman as well as *Jesus without Borders: Christology in the Majority World*, (2014) edited by Gene Green, Stephen Pardue, and K.K. Yeo.
inversion during ritual moments in India served “as a safety-valve for medieval European society releasing tension and making the social order ‘perhaps that much more tolerable.’” Eventually, however, “‘the idea that the world might be permanently turned upside down’” emerged in the seventeenth century. “It is this threat, real or imaginary, that it carries of a permanent subversion of the local hierarchies of power which distinguishes a peasant rebellion from simulated upheavals.”

The appropriation of colonial productions/enunciations of meaning (e.g. production of texts, the academic conference, academic graduation ceremonies, and the like) is always accompanied by and juxtaposed to indigenous alternatives. In the first volume of his edited series, titled *Subaltern Studies*, Guha argued that rebellion consists of the tactic of *inversion*. In an attempt to make in-roads the colonized inverted the power dynamics. He further explains in the following:

> Inversion was its principle modality. It was a political struggle in which the [colonized] appropriated . . . the insignia of his enemy’s power and hoped thus to abolish the marks of his own subalternity.

Inversion, then, requires the appropriation of colonial structures on the part of the colonized in a calculated and rebellious effort to undermine colonial authority. Similar to De Certeau’s discussion of the micro-physics of power through mass consumption, the colonized develop “popular procedures that manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them[.]” I have demonstrated here that the interplay of mockery and cultural inversion are representative of that move to evade

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14 Ranajit Guha. *Peasant Insurgency*, 75.

and, perhaps even more precisely, manipulate the mechanisms of Evangelical theological discipline.

And so, in those moments when NAIITS theologians stand at the podium during a conference and tell non-indigenous onlookers that it is they who are in need of radical socio-economic, political, and spiritual reform, there exists an inversion of diasporic disposition and with it the inversion of the mission field. In those moments – during a spontaneous sermon during a powwow as a Cherokee Baptist minister from Oklahoma casts himself as a conqueror who guided and emboldened by God’s preference for Indigenous peoples, and understands his presence in North Carolina as a return to the land of his ancestors to reclaim territory – we are witness to a cultural inversion of colonial conquest in theological terms.

None of this means, however, that the power invested in the dominant network has become neutralized. Indeed, as I explained in chapter four, NAIITS theologians are careful caretakers of the sovereignty of God; they make calculated decisions about what aspects of Native belief and practice are more or less appropriate as “redeemed” or “contextualized” forms of Native Evangelical worship. This is evident in many instances described throughout this project. One of the clearest examples is Casey Church’s Sunrise Pipe Ceremony, wherein he makes abundantly clear that as he exhales smoke to the four directions, he is not recognizing the potentially heretical (perhaps even demonic) forces to which some “traditionalists” remain devoted. Instead, during his “Christ-centered” version of this traditional Native practice (which, he and others claim, have, even before the arrival of European powers to the North American continent, always been oriented toward and in recognition of a sovereign Creator) the smoke is
representative of the various prayers (both his own and those of the attendees) being
disseminated in the four directions in the hopes that their (the prayers) power, infused
now with the Holy Spirit, will have real and lasting effects.

It is precisely this harnessing of the dominant network that allows for the
accumulation of symbolic and cultural capital in the effort toward legitimacy. What is
more, this harnessing should not be thought of as acquiescence; it is not reluctant
mimicry for the sake of agency. It is, on the contrary, a deeply held conviction that
Indigenous ways of life have been and always will be Biblical by their very nature; that
being Indigenous is a reflection of Scripture; that seen through the appropriate lens,
God actually prefers Indigeneity over Western hegemony; that some Natives simply
have it wrong by adhering to animism and that, quite simply, those Natives need to be
brought back to alignment with the Creator through Jesus.

As I stated at the outset of this project, this case study was an attempt to analyze
the discourses and practices of legitimation (e.g., theologies of syncretism and Biblical
Indigeneity, rituals of contextualization, institutional affiliations with mainline evangelical
seminaries and colleges) employed by NAIITS faculty and affiliated groups. In that vein,
each chapter has been dedicated to locating and theorizing a particular mechanism of
cultural and symbolic capital accumulation in an effort toward legitimation. I have, in this
vein, mapped out the networks that they have built and continue to maintain, which
evoke and indeed require the legitimating power of said discourses and practices. The
symbolic and cultural capital that is accumulated is then redeployed in an attempt to
simultaneously bring new indigenous communities into the Evangelical fold and reverse-
missionize the missionary centers of American Protestant Evangelicalism.
Ultimately I have shown the way in which NAIITS is attempting to manipulate the mechanisms of discipline by reprogramming the network of Evangelical theology and theological training in three key ways. First they are managing to build a network of counter-power that is stable enough and that has the ideological weight to challenge the dominant paradigm. Second, NAIITS theology produces an inversion of local/global relations by separating the categories of religion and culture, developing a theology of normative syncretism, rendering Western modes of thought fundamentally local and indigenous modes of thought fundamentally global, thereby creating a hierarchy whereby indigenous modes are rendered more universal and more in line with Biblical truth. Third, NAIITS theologians -- by virtue of the demographics and inclusivity of sponsored events -- are rendering indigeneity a cultural choice rather than an ethnic particularity. This perspective – dependent on what I have termed the theology of Biblical Indigeneity – is representative of a merging of scripture with trans-indigenous lingua franca, re-orienting the biblical story by placing Indigenous ontologies and worldviews at the foundation of what it means to live Biblically.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jason E. Purvis received his B.A. in Religious Studies with a concentration in Japanese Buddhism and a minor in Asian Art History from the College of Charleston in 2005. His relevant course work included Religion and Society with a focus on Tibet and Japan, Christian history, Biblical exegesis, as well as Native American religious traditions. His bachelor’s essay, titled “Japanese Rituals and Ethics of Persohood,” was an examination of a primarily Buddhist, Japanese ritual called *Mizuko Kuyo* (“water child offerings”) which memorializes the spirits of miscarried and aborted fetuses.

Jason then received his M.A. in the Academic Study of Religion from the University of Colorado. Course work relevant to his interests included religion in the U.S., which covered topics such as Buddhism in the U.S., Native American religious traditions, Native Hawai’ians, and Japanese immigration to Hawai’i. His master’s thesis illumined the processes (located in migrations, popular discourse, and ritual practice) through which *Mizuko Kuyo* became adapted to and practiced in the American cultural context.

Jason received his Ph.D. in August of 2017 in the academic study of religion from the Religion Department at the University of Florida. While at Florida, Jason’s interests became primarily oriented toward Native American Evangelicals throughout North America. His course work and examination process focused on the Sociology of Religion, religion throughout U.S. history, as well as a hemispheric approach to religion in the Americas generally. His fieldwork has included various trips across the U.S. and Canada, over the course of three years, in an attempt to observe and gather data on a group of Native North American evangelicals. His dissertation highlights these Native American theologians and their attempt to acquire legitimacy from the dominant
Evangelical institutional network while simultaneously evading and challenging its limitations and constraints.