



Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion

**Jamestown as Romance and Tragedy:
Abjection, Violence, Missiology, and American Indians**

Tink Tinker (wazhazhe, Osage Nation)

ttinker@iliff.edu

...[W]ithout myth every culture forfeits its healthy, natural creative force: only a horizon defined by myths completes the unity of a whole cultural movement.... and even the state knows no more powerful unwritten laws than the mythical foundation which guarantees its connection with religion, its growth from the mythical notions.¹

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Douglas Smith (Oxford University Press, 2000).

Thus spoke one european² master of tragic nihilism making his argument for tragic myth. In part Nietzsche was attempting to solve the problem of the relativism inherent in any given present (presumably cultural as well as temporal/historical). Ultimately, Nietzsche suggests that when truth becomes destructive to the social whole that a fabricated life-giving delusion, his version of Plato's noble lie, would help the people develop a useful myth.

The question is not whether the triumphal american Narrative of Jamestown is mythic in nature. The real question is what narrative will we today choose to tell ourselves and convince ourselves it is true? How will modern Americans nurture the soul of the people? Nietzsche is arguing for a national imaginary rooted firmly in the european genre of tragedy. What we have in the U.S. today, rather, is a public imaginary rooted in the euro-genre of romanticism. Jamaican scholar David Scott argues that a genuinely post-colonial historiography must replace the romanticism of modernist colonial histories with histories rooted in the genre of tragedy.

² My use of the lower case for such adjectives as “english,” “christian,” “biblical,” etc., is intentional. While nouns naming religious groups might be capitalized out of respect for each Christian—as for each Muslim or Buddhist—using the lower case “christian” or “biblical” for adjectives allows readers to avoid unnecessary normativizing or universalizing of the principal institutional religious quotient of the Euro-west. Likewise, I avoid capitalizing such national or regional adjectives as american, amer-european, european, euro-western, etc. I also refer to north America. It is important to my argumentation that people recognize the historical artificiality of modern regional and nation-state social constructions. For instance, who decides where the “continent” of Europe ends and that of Asia begins? Similarly, who designates the western half of north America as a separate continent clearly divided by the Mississippi River, or alternatively the Rocky Mountains? My initial reasoning extends to other adjectival categories and even some nominal categories, such as euro, and political designations like the right and the left and regional designations like the west. Quite paradoxically, I know, I insist on capitalizing White (adjective or noun) to indicate a clear cultural pattern invested in Whiteness that is all too often overlooked or even denied by american Whites. Moreover, this brings parity to the insistence of African Americans on the capitalization of the word Black in reference to their own community (in contra-distinction to the *New York Times* usage). Likewise, I always capitalize Indian and American Indian.

This essay began as a paper prepared for a conference on missiology and Jamestown, bringing together both evangelical and main line christian scholars—along with a couple of American Indian outliers who identified christian missiology as historically harmful to Indian peoples.³ The original invitation I received to the consultation came close to succumbing to the usual romanticism of the colonial Self when it began a paragraph saying that Jamestown in 1607 “inaugurated a *shared history* of 400 years, weaving together diverse peoples and cultures.” Taken out of its context, this is nothing more than a reference to Frederick Jackson Turner’s now tired “frontier thesis” presented at the World Columbian Exhibition in 1893.⁴ The incipient romantic notion seemed to be that Jamestown was a fortuitous meeting for all concerned parties. That would certainly qualify as a fabricated myth, if a thorough bastardization of Plato's noble lie. An english woman who visited Virginia and Jamestown in 2007 on the occasion of

³ A much shorter version of this essay is currently in press: “The Romance and Tragedy of Christian Mission among American Indians,” in *Remembering Jamestown: Hard Questions about Christian Mission*, edited by Amos Yong and Barbara Brown Zikmund (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2010, forthcoming).

⁴ Turner was the key american historian at the turn of the twentieth century. He is most remembered for his “Frontier Thesis,” notes the closing of the american frontier in 1893. The essay was read at the American Historical Association that year, meeting in Chicago in conjunction with the Chicago World’s Columbian Exhibition. Turner’s argument is that the spirit and success of the United States had been directly connected with its persistent westward expansion. As one on-line source says, “According to Turner, the forging of the unique and rugged American identity occurred at the juncture between the civilization of settlement and the savagery of wilderness. This produced a new type of citizen—one with the power to tame the wild and one upon whom the wild had conferred strength and individuality.” Frederick Jackson Turner: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 1893. Available on-line at: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1893turner.html>. See especially the incisive interpretation of Turner in Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. 2001), 1-78.

Jamestown's quadricentenary "celebration" (so-called), a woman who carries the anachronistic title of "Queen of England," averred before the Virginia General Assembly that Jamestown was important because "Three great civilizations came together for the first time—western european, Native American and african."⁵ Yet this shared history, marred by persistent acts of terrorism (and persistent pre-emptive war-making) that resulted in the death and finally in the total displacement of the aboriginal owners of the land, is a history told essentially by only one of the disputing parties. One White academic commentator responded, "That's like saying Seung-Hui Cho 'came together' with the professors and students at Virginia Tech."⁶ Indeed, for American Indians the typical romanticized and sanitized history of colonialism is just as striking as this professor's comment. The killing of Indian people and the sheer theft of Indian lands dare never be concealed behind the noble lie of romantic memory voiced in the language of some sense of "shared history." The tragedy of America's history of violence must be confronted by all the parties involved. Otherwise, the violence continues to repeat itself in our own present in a multitude of ways. Romance, in any case, merely conceals the truth of history behind a

⁵ Michel Martin reports Ms. Elizabeth's speech on his National Public Radio program "Tell Me More," May 4, 2007 on a program segment titled: "Jamestown: A Celebration for All?" <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10001052>. Elizabeth's speech was widely reported in most U.S. news presses and still widely available on-line: e.g. msn.com; news.google; etc.

⁶ Ralph R. Reiland, "The 'Discovery' Racket," http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/opinion/s_507328.html, accessed March 2008. Reiland, an economics professor at Robert Morris University, calls this queen the "World's Biggest Freeloader." For those who find the analogy uneven or even offensive, we need to remember the result of the 1622 Powhattan War. During the mutual celebration hosted by the english of a peace treaty that brought the war to an end, the english served a poisoned wine that killed some two hundred Indians. Then they proceeded to slaughter another fifty by hand. This was surely an act of terrorism on the part of the english--after signing a treaty of peace with those they slaughtered. Seung-Hui Cho, of course, was the mentally deranged student at Virginia Tech who killed 32 of his fellow students and wounded more than two dozen others in a shooting rampage in April 2007.

convenient façade, behind Nietzsche's fabricated myth—which turns out not to be life-giving at all. For the health and well-being of America, the truth-telling about the tragedy is more critical now than ever.

Indian people, on the other hand, are constantly being told in definitive terms that our memories of our history are heavily romanticized. When Indian people try to remember that Indian people did not much engage in warfare, White critics step in to assure us once again that Indian people had long developed “warrior” cultures, were aggressively war-like and ever blood-thirsty savages. The long history of both White scholarly and popular interpretation of American Indian history, of Indian cultures, of the Indian worldview has always placarded the superiority and normativity of euro-christian Whiteness and the cultural values transported by Europeans to north America. The Europeans brought civilization and Christianity to backward and war-like peoples, we are told—again, Nietzsche's manufactured delusion or myth. Yet just the opposite is the actuality; european peoples brought the barbarism of european warfare and unending conquest to what had been a relatively peaceful world. In the case of Jamestown one need only recall the experience of Henry Spelman, an english survivor of the 1622 war between the english and the Powhattan Nation and who had actually lived with the Powhattans in 1609 and 1610. His commentary on the military prowess of the Indian peoples the english were actively trying to displace and replace concluded that Indian warfare had no “dissipline” about it. When they fought there was never any “greater slawter of nether side But...having shott away most of the arrows and wantinge Vital weare glad to retier.” John Underhill, a Puritan military leader in New

England famously complained "...they might fight seven yeares and not kill seven men."⁷

Against this early evidence, evidently even objective White academic scholars engage in what psychologists call the defense mechanism of projection. Rather than Indians romanticizing their memory, it is White Americans who romanticize their own past in ways that falsify historical reality and engages a denial of their own history of violence.⁸

The genre of historical memory in the Unites States, and in much of the euro-colonizer world, seems to follow a curious pattern, one that ultimately lives Nietzsche's interdiction to fabricate a myth except that it is not a tragic myth in Nietzsche's sense. David Scott has demonstrated that whether it is Jules Michelet's *Histoire de la Révolution française*, Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, or C.L.R. James' *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, the historical message is cloaked in the romanticism of nineteenth century european literature. In the U.S. this seems to be the case with a vengeance where typically Indian people are demonized in history to serve the purpose of justifying White american violence. Indians were unreasonable, uncivilized, and violent; Christian White folk always responded with reasonable force to counter Native savagery. This

⁷ See especially the excellent analysis of the history of Indian war-making in the first part of Tom Holm's volume: *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), pp. 26-65. Spelman's text, "Relation of Virginia" is now available on-line at: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/jamestown-browse?id=J1040>.

⁸ Scholars to the contrary would include Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* (New York: City Lights, 2001); David Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and virtually any American Indian author.

romantic genre of American history has long survived the idiosyncratic ramblings of a Washington Irving and continues in both scholarly and popular literature today.⁹

The typical narrative remembrance of the Jamestown beachhead tends decidedly toward a romanticized heroic narrative about the White English invaders—that is, it romanticizes the colonizer Self, and does so in part by demonizing the colonized Other. It remembers, of course, the suffering of these first English colonizers as well as their heroic endurance. If the narrative treats Indian peoples at all, it is always with an eye fixed on justifying any English response to Indian irritations with their new neighbors. Indeed, this narrative tradition seems to emerge as a particular genre in any memories of colonial missionary endeavors among the aboriginal owners of the land. In many respects, these missionary memories could and should be classified with the medieval genre of hagiography, or the lives of the saints. In this sense, the narratives of European colonialism in North America fit into the larger and contemporary genre of romantic literature and into the larger landscape of European romanticism. Yet from an American Indian point of view, these stories are far from romantic and certainly not holy (hagiographic). They are rather narratives that fit much more closely into the historical European genre of tragedy. My question is: how would it change our understanding of the past to tell the narrative of American colonial history as tragedy rather than romance?¹⁰

⁹ Washington Irving's *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (first published in 1828) has become the main source for much of the American myth / lie about Columbus-the-hero. Too many of his romantic and heroic anecdotes about Colon are simply untruths—which continue to be circulated in the public mind today as accurate historical fact long after they have been demonstrated to be lies.

¹⁰ The inspiration for languaging my text this way comes from a fine postcolonial historiographic analysis by Jamaican anthropologist David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004).

In “‘The American Story’: The Impact of Myth on American Indian Policy,” Richard M. Wheelock (Oneida) traces the contours of the american narrative, the story that determines contemporary american identity.¹¹ By “narrative” here Wheelock and I mean to use the word in the sense that has come to be relatively common, describing the story people tell themselves about themselves, a story that gives shape and identity to a people, a story that integrates itself into peoples’ lives and which people finally live out themselves. While Wheelock is concerned with the contemporary impact of the american narrative on U.S. Indian policy, the narrative itself has played an important role from the beginnings of the european invasion of north America and an important role in how those european / english / and amer-european religious functionaries envisioned their own participation both in the colonial adventure and in what came to be called christian “missions.” This narrative continues to shape american identity and life today. I want to suggest that this heavily romanticized narrative desperately needs to be balanced with an ownership of America’s long and seemingly interminable history of violence. Paying attention to the historical beginnings of the american narrative is quite instructive, especially as christian churches attend to enduring questions of the past and future of their own notions of missiology.

What we see in the american narrative is a regular and almost normative romanticizing of the american narrative that goes back to be beginnings of european settlement on the continent. From the beginning of the first english colony in the Americas, the progenitors of english expansionism began a process of developing a narrative that continues in several mutations to

¹¹ Richard M. Wheelock, “The ‘American Story’: The Impact of Myth on American Indian Policy,” chapter 6, in *Destroying Dogma: Vine Deloria, Jr. and His Influence on American Society*, edited by Steve Pavlik and Daniel R. Wildcat (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishers, 2006).

provide sustenance to contemporary american expansionism. Already by 1609, early in the Jamestown history, preachers in England were ascribing “chosen people” language from the Hebrew Bible to their own english people and particularly in support of those adventurers who were participating in the invasion of another continent—at Jamestown. This chosen people metaphor, of course, was famously appropriated a couple of decades later by the Puritans at Massachusetts Bay Colony as they established their “cittie on a hill.”¹²

By the time of the Jamestown beachhead in 1607, England had already learned a great deal from interpretations of the spanish colonial conquest in America. By this time England, that is the english elites, began to express its own desires and hopes for empire—and the wealth that had accrued to Spain. England already had a tense relationship with this spanish history, of course, and Spain continued to be the major competitor that stood in the way of an english empire. To taint this competitor, England was not averse to using what they called the “black legend” of Spain’s hideous and murderous reign of terror in the south, even as they developed their own dark legacy in Virginia and New England. England was, however, much more cautious to use the religious motivations and goals as cover for the economic and political aims of their adventuring. In any case, the english narrative about America and about the aboriginal owners of the land began long before their own first adventure in colonization. It came to them in the

¹² Robert Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today,” *Christianity and Crisis* 49 (1989): 261-265. See also the response to Warrior by William E. Baldrige, “Native American Theology: A Biblical Basis,” *Christianity and Crisis* 50 (1990): 180-181. Warrior argues that the Hebrew Bible Exodus story is irredeemable for American Indians because it was so mis-appropriated by Europeans as they justified their invasion of America. That metaphoric misappropriation then became the foundation for everything from the religio-political doctrine of “manifest destiny” to the Monroe doctrine to our contemporary modality of the globalization of capital.

narratives used by spanish colonialists to legitimize the century of spanish brutality in the south. Long before ever meeting a Native person, they already “knew” what an Indian was.¹³

Thus the first “successful” english beachhead in America was already building on a coherent narrative about America and particularly about the Native Peoples here, just as it built on the narrative of english self-importance as a budding imperial / colonial force. They had already begun to craft a narrative that represented themselves to themselves in terms of a christian theological legitimation for invasion. This legitimation typically involved three parts—a legal, an anthropological and a theological rationale. Since the initial Virginia Company Charter was concerned only with the economics of the venture, the religious / theological justification comes after the fact—at the second stage of the conquest of Indian lands, beginning in 1609, two years into the invasion and occupation. Suddenly seeing the need to rationalize their adventure with the english parliament and with the english public and particularly in order to secure the renewal of their charter, the Virginia Company began using the sermons of prominent english clergy to develop a coherent narrative that simultaneously brought together legal rationalization for the occupation along with a clear anthropological debasing of the aboriginal owners of the land (particularly described legally as non-owners!) and especially with a theological rationale that promised (but never delivered) a christian commitment to convert the Indians.

¹³ John F. Moffitt and Santiago Sebastián, *O Brave New People: The European Invention of the American Indian* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998). This is a detailed investigation into the mis-informed stereotyping of Native Peoples in the Americas by early Europeans.

This justification was simultaneously intertwined with both a legal explanation that justified English presence in and occupation of someone else's property and an anthropological description of the aboriginal owners of those lands as barbaric and somehow deserving of conquest. But as Edward Gallagher et al. have demonstrated, religious legitimation, which had been lacking in the first two years of the Jamestown colony, also very quickly became prominent in English discourse about conquest beginning in 1609.¹⁴ Thus the narrative was from nearly the beginning intertwined with and even legitimated by an English theological sense of missiology. In retrospect, as was the case with New England and the Massachusetts Bay Company more than two decades later, there is no reason to think that there was ever any actual concern for the human beings that made up indigenous communities in Virginia or in New England and who eventually finally became the target of missionary outreach. In spite of protestations to the contrary, the actual missionary outreach comes very late in both adventures. We know that John Eliot in Massachusetts seemed to have had more concern for his pagan mission wards than did the political system that commissioned his outreach—even as he was thoroughly committed to the colonization of the Indian mind (see below).¹⁵

¹⁴ See the very fine analytic collection essays of Gallagher and several of his graduate students treating this body of writings: Edward J. Gallagher, ed., *The Literature of Justification*, an internet publication of Lehigh University, <http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/justification/about/>. I have in mind here especially the collection of essays included in the section titled *Jamestown—Essays*, <http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/justification/jamestown/essay/>, accessed May 2, 2008.

¹⁵ In Massachusetts the missionary endeavor did not begin until more than a dozen years after the colony was established (well-established, as it were) when the Massachusetts General Court responded to political pressure to satisfy the English Parliament and quite some of their critiques commissioned John Eliot and provided him an annual bonus to begin the mission at Natick. See my *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and American Indian Genocide* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), Chapter One.

The English narrative of conquest was couched, then, in the intertwining of both religious and legal languages that built on one another—both of which built on the anthropological debasing of Native Peoples and the political languages and political system devised by the English to legitimate their own adventuring expansionism. Religion helped explain the laws they invented; and laws helped explain and justify to the English conscience the momentary ruptures in religious coherence.¹⁶ Even this English concern, however, voiced in theological language of missiology was already rooted in notions about English superiority and Indian inferiority that made clear the less-than character of the aboriginal inhabitants of the land.

Since the records of the Virginia Company from 1609 to 1619 are lost, there are precious few documentary resources from the early years of Jamestown itself. Moreover, there are few writings by the earliest colonialists. Indeed from those who began the English beachhead at Jamestown we only have a couple of early eyewitness accounts, one written some years after the fact.¹⁷ The only other documentary evidence for Jamestown, temporally close to the events, consists of materials written and published in England and not in Virginia, by people who had

¹⁶ Karen B. Manahan, in “Robert Gray’s *A Good Speed to Virginia*,” in *The Literature of Justification: Jamestown—Essays*: “Though religion and colonialism have consistently been linked, few times in history has a religious rhetoric been as persistently and effectively implemented as it was in England from 1609 to 1610.” <http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/justification/jamestown/essay/>.

¹⁷ There is the slim volume written by Henry Spelman, who arrived in Virginia early in 1609 at the age of fourteen and spent his first years indentured by the colonialists to a Powhatan village. His *Relation of Virginia*, was a handwritten copy left by Spelman at his death in 1623. Likewise, John Smith’s heavily romanticized and politically slanted *Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, written long after his permanent return to England. He left Virginia in October of 1609, never to return (although he did make another trip to the coasts of New England in 1614. Because Smith has long been noted as an embellisher who was prone to exaggeration—especially where his own heroism becomes the subject—it is all the more important to remember when his *Generall Historie of Virginia* was published. It was not published until 1624, fifteen years after he had left Virginia.

not been to America at all. Thus the earliest and largest assortment derive from the Virginia Company in England and are a good example of the colonizer's imaginary about America and its Native Peoples. Beginning in 1609 and carrying through 1610, the Virginia Company, beset with the trials of the first two years of their endeavor, began a campaign to shift public opinion in their favor in England. Concerned that their charter might not be renewed, the Company intended to press public opinion in ways that would encourage further English participation in the project. These documents consist mostly of sermons preached by very influential Church of England clergy, and they culminate at the end of 1610 with a general statement published by the Company itself.¹⁸ All of these are a consistent attempt to justify the Jamestown project in the English mind and to win the renewal of the Company's charter.¹⁹ An example of the emerging justification narrative for the invasion and occupation of America is this example from a sermon by Robert Gray, who described aboriginal Virginia as

...the greater part of it polluted and wrongfully usurped by wild beasts, and unreasonable creatures or by brutish savages, which by reason of their godless ignorance and blasphemous idolatry are worse than those beasts which are of most wild and savage nature.²⁰

¹⁸ Council for Virginia, *A True Declaration of the estate of the Colonie in Virginia, With a confutation of such scandalous reports as have tended to the disgrace of so worthy an enterprise* (London, 1610). *Virtual Jamestown*. 2000. Virtual Jamestown Archive. 26 March 2006 <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/jamestown-browse?id=J1059>>.

¹⁹ See Gallagher et al., *Literature of Justification: Jamestown*, <http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/justification/jamestown/essay/1/>.

²⁰ Robert Gray, *A Good Speed to Virginia* (London, 1609); cited from Karen B. Manahan, "Robert Gray's *A Good Speed to Virginia*," *The Literature of Justification*, essay 4: on-line at: <http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/justification/jamestown/essay/4/>.

This early development of an english narrative to rationalize the occupation of Virginia gave new impetus to european imaginations about human primal beginnings, which were increasingly described in terms of the english and european imaginations about America and its Native Peoples. By the mid-seventeenth century, in his *Leviathan* Thomas Hobbes builds his notion of an original, primeval state of human beings as totally given over to “warre” and violence, “the war of every man against every man,” perpetuating the White lie about indigenous peoples. People lived in “continual fear and danger of violent death,” with the result, claimed Hobbes, that peoples’ lives were “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” Hobbes evidentiary warrant for his description of the primal human state is vested in using America, sight unseen, as an example, that “savage people in many places in America” continued to live in this primeval state of violence. Here Hobbes is already romanticizing english civilization as a superior state of being to the savagery of those still closer to the primal state.

Later in the same century, John Locke, again never having been to America but financially invested himself in the Carolina Company, continued the developing english narrative in ways that depreciate the value of indigenous peoples in north America. The inadequacies are particularly apparent to him in his discussion of property in the Second Treatise. Indian people are lacking in Locke’s mind because they are unable to generate greater wealth from their property. Namely, their property is unimproved, and Locke’s fundamental doctrine for the making of private property has to do with labor expelled to improve land and ultimately to justify the english ownership of Indian land.

There cannot be a clearer demonstration of any thing, than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land, and poor in all the comforts of life; whom nature having furnished as liberally as any other people, with the materials of plenty, i.e. a fruitful soil, apt to produce in abundance, what might serve for food, raiment, and delight; yet for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundredth part of the conveniencies we enjoy: and a king of a large and fruitful territory there, feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day-labourer in England.²¹

This narrative defining the uncivilized barbarism of Indian peoples continues through American history actually into the present, continuing to show up in technical textbooks and just as frequently in newspaper editorializing.

Colonization of the Mind—and the Work of Christian Missions

As the colonizer romanticizes the Self and demonizes the Other, the colonizer must also pay attention to a perceived need to transform the colonized into a sort of copy of the colonizer's self.²² At some point, colonization moves beyond military conquest and the exercise of political and economic subjection over the colonized Other. As many post-colonial writers have noted, the

²¹ Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, V:41.

²² For Homi Bhabha, the colonized can be and must strive to be “almost the same, but not white” (Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 126). Commenting on Bhabha, Anne McClintock writes: “In Bhabha’s schema, mimicry is a flawed identity imposed on colonized people who are obliged to mirror back an image of the colonials but in imperfect form” (McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 62.

forced transformation of the minds of the colonized becomes an important part of the process of subjection. Europeans in America were convinced that they lived a civilized life; Natives were unequivocally uncivilized. This distinction certainly extended from the beginnings of colonization in the Americas to the colonizers' sense of the superiority of their religious convictions. Here I argue that missionary outreach to indigenous peoples by euro-western missionaries always was and is a significant part of the process some indigenous writers have called the colonization of the mind. Since American Indian peoples do not have "religion" *per se*,²³ the colonial imposition of Christianity (which was virtual U.S. Government policy, especially from the 1880s on) represents an earthshaking, yet coerced, cultural shift in Indian community structures and in the value system that guides people's lives. Far from being an unmitigated good in Indian communities, it is part and parcel of the terrible poverty and the suffocating negative social statistics that characterize the Indian world today. Christianization

²³ Religion is one of those categories of cognition that seem so natural to White amer-europeans that it is taken as a universal that applies to all peoples. American Indian folk do not, however, divide the world up into sacred and secular. Hence all of life has its religious intonations, which means that Indian folk are paying attention to their relationships with the spiritual at all times in everything that we do. See my entry "Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of the North American Indian*, edited by Frederick E. Hoxie (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), pp. 537-541. Most American Indian traditional people have characteristically denied that their people ever had or engaged in any religion at all. Rather, these spokespeople would insist that their whole culture and social structure was and is infused with a spirituality that can not be separated from the rest of the community's life at any point. Green Corn Ceremony, Snake Dance, Kachinas, Sun Dance, sweat lodge ceremonies, and the pipe are not the religions of various tribes but rather these are specific ceremonial aspects of a world that includes countless ceremonies in any given tribal context, ceremonies performed by whole communities, clans, families or individuals on a daily, periodic, seasonal or occasional basis. While outsiders may identify a single main ceremony as the "religion" of a particular people, those people will likely see that ceremony as merely one extension of their day-to-day existence, all of which is experienced within ceremonial parameters and should be seen as "religious," but not as religion.

began the process of colonizing Indian minds and attempting to force a shift in the indigenous worldview.²⁴

Indeed this was a clash of worldviews, but it was a clash that was long in the making. Robert Williams has demonstrated that the euro-western legal tradition that created the oppressive structures of “federal Indian law” in the U.S. has deep roots in medieval Christianity and christian legal discourses beginning with canon law.²⁵ So a worldview of european (White) superiority is deeply rooted in the ontology and habitual thought patterns of all european peoples, perhaps most especially among those in the U.S. The result has been a colonizer’s romanticization of the Self’s worldview and religious conviction as normative and universal, which in turn becomes a rationale for the missiological endeavor.

If the colonized have suffered the colonization of their minds, it should be stressed that the colonizer (including all varieties of christian missionaries) have also had their minds deeply impregnated with thought patterns, beliefs, ways of thinking and problem-solving that hold euro-

²⁴ Note the U.S. Government role—along with Protestant church leaders—in the Lake Mohonk Conferences of Friends of the Indian where the actual late nineteenth century strategy for “civilizing” the American Indian was crafted. See Tinker, “Tracing a Contour of Colonialism: American Indians and the Trajectory of Educational Imperialism,” in Ward Churchill, ed., *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools* (New York: City Lights Press, 2004), pp. xiii-xli. Also note Francis P. Prucha, *Americanizing the American Indians: Writing by the “Friends of the Indian”, 1880-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), for excerpts from actual papers and presentations at the Lake Mohonk Conferences.

²⁵ Robert A. Williams, Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). This is the focus of the first half of Williams' book. He demonstrates that the so-called Doctrine of Discovery, used so decisively by Chief Justice John Marshall in his 1823 *Johnson vs. McIntosh* decision, has clear roots in Roman Catholic canon law. See also Steve Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishers, 2008). Newcomb carries Williams’ project through an even closer reading, focusing on linguistic (as opposed to a legal) analysis of historic texts.

western (and christian) peoples captive just as readily as the colonized are held captive. After centuries of shaping their interpretation of their Scriptures, euro-western folk are boxed into particular ways of reading their own Bible and interpreting its stories and imperatives. While the process of imposing Christianity on the colonized has been tragic for countless communities of colonized peoples, the process has ultimately been just as tragic for those who believe they have been faithfully following the dictates of their “savior.”

Christian missionaries and their theological language very quickly became a deeply ingrained part of the colonial systemic whole. And because the colonial project is never a clearly defined systematic process, it was easy enough for various colonialist players, perhaps especially including missionaries, to lose sight of the nefarious logic for colonizing native minds that lay behind their own discourse and motivations. Thus, they continued (and continue) to participate in the process even in their naïveté. Indeed we could argue that much of euro-christian doctrinal language is rooted in some cultural past that has permeated the euro-christian colonial present. It has become such a permanent fixture in euro-christian discourse that it seems a perfectly natural part of the religious / theological whole. Yet christian doctrines, like the categories of race, gender, class and culture generally, are social constructions. As such, they are much dependent on and influenced by the cultural milieu of the theologian and the social whole in which the theologian lives.

All too often there is a tendency in the development of christian theology to see the past, especially the distant past of the “early church,” as somehow a pristine expression of the christian gospel. This, too, is a romanticizing of history, without remembering that the colonizing

process had already begun in that distant past of the history of early Christianity as Christianity moved from a Jewish worldview to one that was given over to Greek language and categories of cognition in the midst of the Roman Empire. Yet today the theological discourse of the early church gets adopted as a given in interpreting the biblical texts themselves and is usually imposed on the colonized Other without much thought as to questions of cultural appropriateness.

We dare not see Christianity as merely a set of normative doctrinal teachings that are somehow unaffected by the larger culture in which the religion thrives. Namely, we dare not presume that Christianity maintains some pure linguistic attachment to first century Palestine or even the fourth century of Nicea, etc. Rather, we know full well that early Christianity was shaped linguistically by its collision and collusion with Greek philosophy just as it continues to be affected by contemporary cultures. It was after all Greek philosophy that introduced the notion of substance into the early creation of and formulation of Christian trinitarian thinking.²⁶ Of course, I have in mind here the third century (largely Greek) debate whether the “son” was of the same substance (*homoousios*) or merely a similar substance (*homoisias*) as the “father” in the early trinitarian formulation. Jewish language of Jesus’ own day seems to have had no interest at all in talking about the divine as substance, something that is a purely Platonic and post-Platonic discussion. Any American Indian traditional thinker, for instance, would find the whole discussion about divine substance absolutely baffling, since all tribal traditions know of what

²⁶ The language was influenced primarily by Aristotelean materialism, even though the reigning philosophies of the Mediterranean of the early church period was a form of Platonism (the middle- or neo-Platonism of those days).

amer-europeans call the divine only in terms of spirit. Spirit, they will say, is antithetical to matter or substance. And all spirit, ultimately, is of the same spirit. The cultural prominence of the language of substance, however, forced early christian theologians / thinkers / writers to take the question of substance seriously even if the thought had not even occurred to the earliest palestinian (jewish) Christians. The point is that the language of the day, the particularity of the questions raised in the social whole, especially by those thinkers that are foundational for the social whole of their day, always affects public discourse and necessarily affects how people language their faith and, in turn, how they experience and ultimately live their faith.

By the time the english invasion began in Virginia (the choice of language here reflects the Indian perspective²⁷), the languaging of Christianity had been deeply affected by european philosophical discourse, whether it affirmed the whole of that discourse or not. Particularly, the questions raised by that discourse became questions necessarily embraced by people of faith and their key spokespeople (e.g., theologians). Then this culturally specific language gets imposed on other worlds willy nilly as if it were the gospel or some culturally neutral divine truth. The problematic here for American Indian cultures is that the greek reified notion of deity is presumptively imposed on communities where, the concept that the missionaries identified with their own god, defies any move towards reification. The end result is the total loss, in many communities, of the very sophisticated indigenous notion of *wakonda* in favor of the imposition

²⁷ Note the title of the important volume on early english colonial history in America published more than three decades ago by Francis Jennings, the former Director of the Newberry Library's D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian History: *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976).

of the euro-cultural notion of a reified deity that stems not from the christian Bible but from the fourth century world of greek society.

Ultimately, the cultural knowledges about *wakonda* that Indian communities had and continue to have in many places in north America seem to be incompatible with euro-western christian theological notions of salvation. Cultural differences abound from Indian commitments to communitarian sensitivity and euro-western commitments to radical individualism (crucial in the euro-christian salvation schema); to American Indian privileging of spatiality over temporality colliding with the fundamental temporality of euro-western cultures and the ways that temporality is constructed into euro-christian theologizing. I have often argued in the classroom that the first euro-western missionary to enter any indigenous community immediately introduced division into that community with devastating effect. That these missionaries saw themselves from the beginning as working to replace Indian culture and values with their own is neither here nor there, actually. That was the effect in any case, the destruction of native cultures and value systems. With the first convert to his church, the missionary's presence irrevocably split the community in two. Some important ceremonies of the people, those that typically involved the whole of community, could no longer happen because all those needed to perform the ceremony were no longer available to the people.

The colonization of the mind changes how one thinks about everything from religion to running our tribal governments. Colonization of the mind is the ultimate genocide and the ultimate tragedy for indigenous peoples. Conversion means, finally, leaving behind this intimate sense of community wholeness and balance in favor of one's own (individual) spiritual security

and salvation. It means surrendering all expectation and hope for a spatially oriented sense of balance and harmony in favor of temporal euro-christian eschatological / salvific expectations.

Martinique theorist and revolutionary Franz Fanon first named the colonization of the mind as “the emptying of the native’s brain of all form and content.” More than that, “by a kind of perverted logic,” continues Fanon, “it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.”²⁸ Nigerian writer Chinweizu calls this process of colonizing the mind of the indigenous a form of psychological warfare.²⁹ It is a process engaged in very intentionally by the colonizer and intends to separate the colonized from their cultures and to convince them of the inferiority of their own values, beliefs, and ways of life. It intends to convince the colonized that their conquerors are in all ways superior, most particularly with respect to the realm of ideas and even religious ideas. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Kenyan literatus Ngugi wa Thiong’o argues that the imperial, colonizing force of the West “is total” and “has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today.”³⁰ Ngugi calls this force “the cultural bomb” and describes its effect as follows:

The effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that

²⁸ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 210.

²⁹ Chinweizu, *Decolonising the African Mind* (Lagos: Pero Publishers, 1987).

³⁰ Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 2.

which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own.³¹

This colonization of the mind extends deeply into the missionizing process as Indians are further separated from their indigenous world. We could and should add a classic text from Albert Memmi:

In order for the colonizer to be a complete master, it is not enough for him to be so in actual fact, but he must also believe in [the colonial system's] legitimacy. In order for that legitimacy to be complete, it is not enough for the colonized to be a slave, he must also accept his role. The bond between colonizer and colonized is thus destructive and creative. It destroys and recreates the two partners in colonization into colonizer and colonized. One is disfigured into an oppressor, a partial, unpatriotic and treacherous being, worrying only about his privileges and their defense; the other into an oppressed creature, whose development is broken and who compromises by his defeat.³²

So at some point we need to ask what we might expect at this late date from our euro-christian relatives and their deeply embedded notions that impel their colonizing of their religious traditions. What are christian folk to do with their deeply held religious convictions and the correlative mission imperative that comes with those convictions? Obviously, continuing to do business as usual will merely produce more pain and cultural dislocation for indigenous peoples. Unifying the globe (i.e., globalization) around an imperialism of the christian gospel

³¹ Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 3.

³² Albert Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967; French original, 1956), 88-89.

will simply codify european and amer-european normativity. So it becomes incumbent on all of us (euro-christian folk and those of us from the indigenous / Two-Thirds World margins) to address the problem of the euro-christian imaginary with a constructive and creative eye. Might our relatives yet develop a sense of mission / missiology that is more appropriate to the values of the gospel and also appropriate to the present context of religious and cultural diversity in the U.S.? Indeed is any missiological project viable today?

Given the disastrous history of euro-western mission practices—to the cultures and the peoplehood of those missionized—it would seem that there are no missiological projects that we might conceive that would have legitimacy of any kind. At least, it must be argued that any time the powerful of the world (e.g., euro-western churches or mission organizations coming out of politically powerful and economically wealthy northern countries with long histories of colonization) attempt to convert the less powerful there are inherent problems involved that make the endeavor invariably a colonizing project that would make Jesus blush—with embarrassment and probably with the same anger he showed the money changers in the temple. There are the lingering problems of privileging and the universal sense of normativity that comes with certain kinds of privileging. By privileging I mean to point to the long euro-western and particularly amer-european christian certainty of its own universality and, hence, superiority to other cultures and other religious traditions. The privileging of Whiteness is necessarily part of this notion of euro-christian universality, and ultimately gendered notions of male privileging need to be addressed in this context as well. Indeed, the euro-western christian narrative has

postured itself as normative and universal, the only access to salvation, almost from the fourth century on (marked by the so-called conversion of Constantine, circa 323 CE).

On the other hand, another kind of missiological project might yet prove to be legitimate and a much closer reflection of the New Testament gospel sense of mission. But this is precisely where such a new notion of mission will require a distinct shift in the euro-christian imaginary, a shift that must be intentional and self-conscious. As I have argued in another essay, perhaps it is time for christian people to stop preaching Jesus and to simply BE Jesus, that is, to reflect Jesus, Jesus' values, Jesus' teachings, Jesus' own attitudes in how one lives every minute of one's life—without any perceived need to open one's mouth and “preach” some mode of conversion.³³ In other words, BE *agapē*, that is be that sort of love that intends the best for the other person, but intend it materially and physically, and forget imposing one's own spirituality on the other as some superior way of existence. But then this would presume that such a silent living of one's faith is sufficient unto itself and that there can be no longer any need to seek the conversion of (that is, the imperialistic imposing of this belief system on) the colonial Other or indeed any Other.

³³ “Abjection, Violence, Missions, and American Indians: Missionary Conquest in an Age of Pluralism” was originally published as my response to an invitation to join a discussion initiated by Joseph C. Hough Jr., president of Union Theological Seminary through his essay titled, “Christian Revelation and Religious Pluralism.” Both essays appeared in the same issue of *USQR*; this issue also included Hough's “Continuing the Discussion,” in which he addressed all seven of the scholars who had responded to his essay (*Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 56, nos. 3-4 (2002): 65-80, 106-121). I revised the essay for inclusion in my book *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008).

Let me close simply by suggesting that the romance of the american narrative or correlatively the christian (amer-christian) narrative would call on people merely to celebrate their successes (while concealing the failures—even while rigorously noting the failures of others). Tragedy, on the other hand, calls for confession and repentance—and only then is salvation a real possibility: that is salvation for the colonial Self! The latter, confession and repentance, have been distinctly absent in White America's and christian missionaries' relationships with Native Peoples. I would suggest that one can only live out the ideal of *agapē* when one lives out of a constructive sense of tragedy. Romantic triumphalism can only result in a continuation of tragedy that is the opposite of constructive or creative.