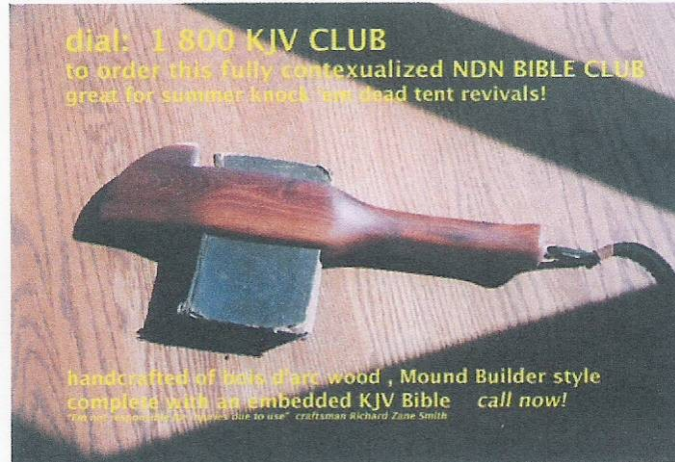


Exclusive truth claims which serve to alienate and dehumanize non-Christians as “unsaved” or as “lacking a relationship with Creator,” lie at the very heart of conquest theology. Among the various passages in the Bible commonly used to defend or advance the exclusive truth claims of Christianity are the “No Other Name” passage of Acts 4:12, “The Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20 and the several “I Am”

passages found in the Gospel of John. In Part 2 of “From Conquest to Freedom,” I examine each of these passages commonly used as weapons with which to club indigenous people over the head. Along the way, I chase an occasional rabbit, so please bear with me.



Art and Photo by Wyandotte Artist Richard Zane Smith

From Conquest to Freedom Continued

Part 2 “Clubbing Them with Scripture”

Theologies of conquest are those theologies that serve to set one people group over and against another, claiming for their own group legitimacy, mandate or destiny to violate the sovereignty, autonomy or self-determination of others.

Theologies of conquest have been and continue to be used time and again to encourage and excuse theft of lands, military and political subjugation and/or wholesale slaughter of human beings, as well as subtler forms of cultural, spiritual, social and economic oppression. It is the nature of theologies of conquest to claim exclusive ownership of universal truth and/or special status as *the* chosen people. Others are alienated and dehumanized as pagan, heathen, unsaved or heretical. Theologies of conquest serve to develop and maintain hierarchical systems of government and church structure, as well as racial and socio-economic caste systems.

Theologies of freedom are those theologies that encourage harmony – the same harmony (unity in diversity) that is the very nature of Creator as mirrored in creation. Theologies of freedom encourage harmony between human beings and other human beings, on both individual and group levels, as well as harmony between human beings and the rest of creation, through loving the other as oneself – giving self in quest of freedom *for all* from bondage and oppression of every sort.

Theologies of freedom encourage recognition of giftedness and chosenness as well as neediness of *all* peoples (one’s own as well as others). They encourage the understanding that there is no place where Creator is not already made known through Creator-Offspring, no place where Creator-Spirit does not already move. In regard to the sharing of good news, theologies of freedom encourage an attitude of watching and listening first for the good news already there. They encourage an expectation of seeing Creator-Offspring’s presence already evident in every aspect of creation, including each and every human people and culture.

Far from encouraging attempts to recreate others after one’s own image, theologies of freedom encourage a humble attitude of seeking, respectfully and with permission, to help with what Creator is already doing in and through others while accepting reciprocal help *from* others. Theologies of freedom yield an understanding that reconciliation and proper relationship with Creator and reconciliation and proper relationship between individuals and groups on earth are interrelated and inseparable, with greatness measured not by ability to control others but by the active giving of self that the people may live.

No Other Name

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

- Acts 4:12

Of all the verses in the Bible, this is the one most often used as a weapon of power with which to conquer indigenous peoples. They show us this verse in the book and tell us what it means. They say that unless a person knows about this man, Jesus, who was born and lived and died across the ocean a long time ago, there is no hope. They say you have to hear this name and call on this name in the way they tell you to, and then and only then can you be saved. They say all our ancestors are burning forever in hell, because they didn’t know this name. They say it was God’s will that they came, that it doesn’t really matter that they took our land and killed most of us and are still doing their best to destroy our cultures. In fact, according to them, they have the right and the mandate, the Manifest Destiny to do this, because we were all going to hell before they brought this name by which we must be saved.

These preposterous claims are written into American law. Although the Doctrine of European Christian Discovery, rooted in the Crusades and codified in papal bulls of the 15th Century, was used from the beginning to justify and legitimize European and European-American conquest, in 1823, in the case of *Johnson v. McIntosh*, the Doctrine of Christian Discovery was officially adopted by the United States Supreme Court. In their summation, the Court stated,

On the discovery of the immense continent, the great nations of Europe were eager to appropriate to themselves so much of it as they could respectively acquire. Its vast extent offered an ample field to the ambition and enterprise of all; and the character and religion of its inhabitants afforded an apology for considering them as a people over whom the superior genius of Europe might claim an ascendancy. The potentates of the old world found no difficulty in convincing themselves that they made ample compensation to the inhabitants of the new, by bestowing on them civilization and Christianity (Miller 174).

As The Honorable Robert J. Miller writes in his book, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered*, “The Doctrine of Discovery is not a relic of ancient history in either American law or international law. It continues to have relevance and application today” (23).

We should look closely at the scriptural verse above; to be sure we know what it really means. To begin with, this verse (Acts 4:12) is part of a story. If we take it out of the story, how can we hope to understand the meaning? The story begins at the beginning of Acts chapter 3, where it is written, “One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer....” At the gate of the temple, there was a man whose feet and ankles were useless. He sat there begging. Peter and John stopped when they saw the man. Peter said, “Look at us.” The man looked up. Then Peter said, “We don’t have silver or gold, but what we do have, we give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Peter then helped the man to his feet, and he could walk!

This caused quite a commotion in the temple. As people came crowding around, Peter began talking to them about Jesus and the power of his resurrection, reminding them that they all had a hand in killing him and should now repent or turn around to follow Creator’s path. Seeing the commotion, the priests of the temple sent guards to arrest Peter and John. The two were kept in jail through the night and brought for questioning the next day. Concerning the healing of the man who had been begging at the temple gate, the priests asked, “By what power or name did you do this?” Peter answered that the healing was done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Then comes the famous verse:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name
under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

- Acts 4:12

That’s the story. Now, at this point, certain questions should come to mind, namely: What did Peter mean by "saved"? And, what did Peter mean by "no other name"?

The story was first written in Greek. The word translated “save” is “sayos,” which means “to heal, preserve, save, do well, make whole.” It is exactly the same as the word translated “healed” in an earlier verse. The word has broad meanings, but most usually refers to some sort of healing. In this story, it is in direct and specific reference to

the healing of the man's ankles and feet. The word translated "salvation" in this verse is simply the noun form of the same word. From this, it may be understood that Peter is saying, "There is no healing, no health, no wholeness except by this name."

What name? Christ is not a name; it's a title. Nazareth is just where he grew up. "Jesus" is the name. So, the next question to ask is this: What does the name "Jesus" mean? In the old days, in all cultures, names always had meaning. The name "Jesus" is a transliteration of the name Yeshua, which goes back to two Hebrew words: the first being a Hebrew name for the Creator and the second being a Hebrew verb that means "saves." So, the name "Jesus" basically means "Creator-Saves." That's the name: Creator-Saves. Peter was saying there is no healing, no health, no wholeness, no salvation except by this name: Creator-Saves.

All healing, all wellness, all wholeness, all life is of the Creator. That is the basic meaning in the name "Jesus". And, I will tell you this: There is not a traditional, indigenous healer on earth who would disagree with the premise that all healing, all wholeness, all life is of the Creator; although there may be many modern western physicians who would doubt it.

Christianity tends to separate salvation into what might be termed "tangible" and "intangible" aspects and into what might be termed "corporate" and "individual" aspects. While the Church concerns itself with the "intangible" and "individual" aspects of salvation, the "tangible" and "corporate" aspects of salvation are largely entrusted, respectively, to medical science and the body politic, i.e. the leadership of the state or empire.

Therefore, a Christian, walking in faith past the serpentine image of Aesculapius, the Greco-Roman god of healing, may entrust herself or himself to the care of a physician or even to a psychologist who is not a Christian. The doctor may be Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist or even agnostic or atheist. This is perfectly acceptable so long as the doctor operates within the parameters of Western medicine. It is still acceptable even if the doctor uses Eastern methods such as chiropractic or acupuncture that have become properly westernized. Indigenous medicine is still looked upon askance. Herbalism or other practices deriving from indigenous medicine may be used, but again, these must first be fully westernized. The "intangible" must be separated from the "tangible." One may not speak of the herb having a spirit or being a spirit sent by Creator.

So, a Moslem doctor is trusted as an agent of salvation, in the "tangible" sense, Monday through Friday. On Saturday the same doctor receives an unsolicited visit from members of a local church concerned that, in no way, has she received or experienced salvation, in the "intangible" sense and so has a desperate need to attend church on Sunday.

Here is a question worth considering. Are there really intangible aspects of salvation? "The wind blows wherever it pleases...." (John 3:8). We may not see the wind, but we certainly see the wind's effects, if we have eyes to see. There are also ill winds, known or recognizable by their ill effects.

What of the corporate aspects of salvation? The focus of much of Jesus' ministry was on the healing of the people as a group. "Western civilization," at the time of Jesus and up until the present day, sees imperial rule or government, republican though it may be, as the salvation of all peoples. This is counterfeit salvation. There is no healing or wholeness in conquest and colonization, only malignancy. However, since the time of

Constantine, the exclusive truth claims of Christianity have been extended to the advancement of this “Western civilization.” Those who accept the imperial rule are considered “saved,” in the “corporate” sense, and become part of the “free world.” Those who reject imperial Western rule are condemned as “hostiles, renegades, terrorists and haters of freedom and the rule of law.” Some will say, “Oh, but the government, the nation-state, the empire *is* the people.” I disagree and so did the great thinker Friedrich Nietzsche. Consider what he said.

The State, that is the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly, also, it lies; and the lie that creeps from its mouth is this: “I, the State, am the People.”

That is a lie! Those who created peoples were creators, and they hung a faith over them and a love, and so, served life.

Destroyers are these who lay snares for many and call it the State: they hang a sword over them and a hundred cravings.

Where the people still exist, the State is not understood, but hated as the evil eye and as sin against custom and law.

I give you this sign: every people speaks of good and evil in its own language, which its neighbor does not understand. It has devised its language for itself in customs and in laws.

But the State lies about good and evil in all tongues; and whatever it says, it lies – and whatever it has, it has stolen.

Everything in it is false; it bites with stolen teeth – the biter. False even are its bowels....

But the earth still is free for great souls (Campbell 88).

All healing, all wholeness is of the Creator. Nothing is intangible. The effects of counterfeit salvation may be clearly seen.

So, when missionaries or whomever say, “Look at us. We are bringing Jesus to these lost people or to those lost people who have never heard the name of Jesus,” what are they really doing? Are they trying to make Creator small, so they can look big? Are they trying to take control over Creator, so they can use him to conquer and control others?

The book of John speaks of the Logos or Word who is from the beginning, eternal, one with Creator (John 1:1-2), and the true light that gives light to *every* person (John 1:9). John says no one has seen the Creator, but this one who is with Creator and who is Creator – this Creator-Son has made Creator known (John 1:18). Wherever Creator is made known.... that is Creator-Son or Creator-Offspring. Of course, John is speaking most directly about Jesus, yet what he is saying goes way beyond the 33 year lifespan of the man from Galilee. John closes his book by saying that if everything Jesus did was written down, the whole world would not have room for the books (John 21:25). Personally, I think everything a man did and said in 33 years *could* be written down, without so much as filling the shelves of a small library. I understand Creator-Offspring as the visible, palpable image or presence of Creator – God with Us so to speak. This

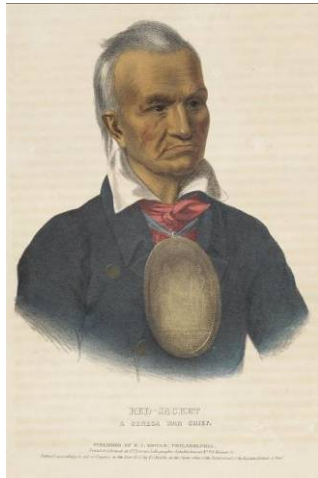
understanding is inclusive of the 33 year lifespan of Jesus of Nazareth as well as his resurrected appearances, but my understanding of Creator-Son or Creator-Offspring broadens from there. Speaking as Creator-Offspring, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Who are the least of these brothers or siblings? They are described as those who are hungry or thirsty, those who are alien or different, those in need of clothing or those who are sick or in prison (Matthew 25:35-36). They are the poor, the despised, the wounded, the oppressed. Whatever is done or not done for these is done or not done for Creator-Offspring. Contrary to some current ethno-centric thinking, it matters not of what ethnicity or religion they are. To do or not to do something for those in need is to do or not to do something for Creator-Offspring. So, those in need *are* the very presence of Creator-Offspring in the earth. Furthermore, those who help *are also* the very presence of Creator-Offspring in the earth. Whether or not they have any religious training or theological understandings, these are known by Creator as those who *do* the will of Creator in the earth (Matthew 7:21-23). To recap thus far: Those in need and those who help *are* the very presence of Creator-Offspring in the earth. Of course, it is to be understood that the one in need today may be the one who helps tomorrow and vice versa. We are all in this together.

Furthermore, the image of Creator and the presence of Creator-Offspring in the earth are not confined to human beings. Jesus said, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29 K.J.V.). And, to his friends, the man Job advised, “But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you” (Job 12:7-8). All of these, in fact, the entirety of creation helps the one in need. At the same time, any aspect of creation may *be* the one in need. The presence of Creator is in every aspect of creation. That *is* Creator-Offspring. That *is* God with Us.

Jesus, on the night before he died, reclined with his closest followers. Breaking bread, Jesus said, “...this is my body” (Matthew 26:26). Passing a cup of wine, Jesus said, “This is my blood...” (Matthew 26:28). Jesus did not say, “This is a symbol of my body” or “This is a symbol of my blood.” Jesus did not say, “This becomes or transforms into or contains the essence of my body and my blood whenever the proper ceremony is observed by properly ordained clergy.” Speaking as Creator-Offspring, Jesus very simply said, “...this is my body....This is my blood....” As with the entirety of creation: everything we eat, everything we drink, the air we all breath together, the earth in all her aspects including all that walk on the earth or fly through the air or swim in the waters or creep through the soil, including we ourselves – every child born and also the sun and the moon and all the planets with their moons and all the stars with all their planets, the entire universe: Along with all of this, the bread and wine are indeed and quite literally the body and the blood of Creator. This too is Creator-Offspring.

And what was Jesus’ greatest wish or prayer for his followers? “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...” (John 16:21). Do you see the implications? “...*just as* you are in me and I am in you...” And human beings are the only ones who have ever forgotten this: the oneness of all that is. There are human beings who have raised themselves up as if they are not even part of the earth, and becoming conquerors and destroyers, have formulated elaborate theologies of conquest to

justify their evil actions. And these same ones say, “We are bringing Jesus to these lost people.”



Red Jacket's Speech

The following speech was delivered by Seneca Chief Sagoyewatha otherwise known as Red Jacket. Delivered in 1805 at Buffalo Grove, New York, the speech was in response to a white missionary's efforts to convert the Seneca people to Christianity.

The entire speech is reprinted here as an illustration of indigenous respect for diversity.

Friend and Brother: It was the will of the Great Spirit that we should meet together this day. He orders all things and has given us a fine day for our council. He has taken his garment from before the sun, and caused it to shine with brightness upon us. Our eyes are opened, that we see clearly; our ears are unstopped, that we have been able to hear distinctly the words you have spoken. For all these favors we thank the Great Spirit; and him only.

Brother: This council fire was kindled by you. It was at your request that we came together at this time. We have listened with attention to what you have said. You requested us to speak our minds freely. This gives us great joy; for we now consider that we stand upright before you, and can speak what we think. All have heard your voice, and all speak to you now as one man. Our minds are agreed.

Brother: You say you want an answer to your talk before you leave this place. It is right you should have one, as you are a great distance from home, and we do not wish to detain you. But we will first look back a little, and tell you what our fathers have told us, and what we have heard from the white people.

Brother: Listen to what we say. There was a time when our forefathers owned this great island. Their seats extended from the rising to the setting of the sun. The Great Spirit had made for the use of the Indians. He had created the buffalo, the deer, and other animals for food. He'd made the bear and the deer, and their skins served us for clothing. He had scattered them over the country, and had taught us how to take them. He had caused the earth to produce corn for bread. All this He had done for his red children, because He loved them. If we had any disputes about hunting grounds, they were generally settled without the shedding of much blood.

But an evil day came upon us. Your forefathers crossed the great waters and landed on this island. Their numbers were small. They found friends and not enemies. They told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men, and had come here to enjoy their religion. They asked for a small seat. We took pity on them, granted their request, and they sat down amongst us. We gave them corn and meat; they gave us poison in return.

The white people had now found our country. Tidings were carried back, and more came amongst us. Yet we did not fear them. We took them to be friends. They called us brothers. We believed them, and gave them a large seat. At length their numbers had greatly increased. They wanted more land; they wanted our country. Our eyes were opened, and our minds became uneasy. Wars took place. Indians were hired to fight against Indians, and many of our people were destroyed. They also brought strong liquors among us. It was strong and powerful and has slain thousands.

Brother: Our seats were once large, and yours very small. You have now become a great people, and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets. You have got our country, but you are not satisfied; you want to force your religion upon us.

Brother: Continue to listen. You say that you are sent to instruct us how to worship the Great Spirit agreeable to His mind. And if we do not take hold of the religion which you white people teach, we shall be unhappy hereafter. You say that you are right, and we are lost. How do you know this to be true? We understand that your religion is written in a book. If it was intended for us as well as for you, why has not the Great Spirit given it to us, and not only to us, but why did He not give to our forefathers knowledge of that book, with the means of understanding it rightly? We only know what you tell us about it. How shall we know when to believe, being so often deceived by the white man?

Brother: You say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the book?

Brother: We do not understand these things. We are told that your religion was given to your forefathers and has been handed down -- father to son. We also have a religion, which was given to our forefathers, and has been handed down to us, their children. We worship that way. It teaches us to be thankful for all the favors we receive; to love each other, and to be united. We never quarrel about religion.

Brother: the Great Spirit has made us all, but He has made a great difference between his white and red children. He has given us a different complexion and different customs. To you He has given the arts. To these He has not opened our eyes. We know these things to be true. Since He has made so great a difference between us in other things, why may we not conclude that He has given us a different religion according to our understanding? The Great Spirit does right. He knows what is best for his children; we are satisfied.

Brother: We do not wish to destroy your religion, or to take it from you. We only want to enjoy our own.

Brother: You say you have not come to get our land or our money, but to enlighten our minds. I will now tell you that I have been at your meetings, and saw you collecting money from the meeting. I cannot tell what this money was intended for, but suppose it was for your minister, and if we should conform to your way of thinking, perhaps you may want some from us.

Brother: We are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while, and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, and makes them honest, and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said.

Brother: You have now heard our answer to your talk, and this is all we have to say at present. As we are going to part, we will come and take you by the hand, and hope the Great Spirit will protect you on your journey, and return you safe to your friends.

In reference to the next-to-last paragraph of Red Jacket's speech, in bold print above – I will say only that indigenous people are still watching and waiting.

Jesus' Early Followers

The Apostle Peter learned that Creator does not favor one nation or ethnicity over another (Acts 10:34-35). Paul understood that everyone, from the beginning of time, has already heard what he termed "the word of Christ" or the good news of Creator's sacrificial love for and unity with creation (Romans 10:17-18). On the Mediterranean island of Patmos, John had a vision of all peoples centering on Creator and saying "Salvation belongs to our God." The innumerable multitude of John's vision do not say, "Salvation belongs to the Jewish God." They do not say, "Salvation belongs to the Christian God." They say, "Salvation belongs to *our* God.... and to the lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10). The "lamb" may be understood as a reference to Creator-Offspring in the larger sense – Creator in unity with, embodied in and sacrificing self through and for creation.

And then there was Augustine. Augustine of Hippo, born in 354 C.E. He was arguably the most influential theologian of Western Christianity, Protestant as well as Catholic (Gonzalez 216). I read one or two of his books. I pondered what the man had to say, but to be truthful; I could never get past what Augustine *did* at what most Christians would consider the great turning point in his life: When Augustine became a Christian, he immediately divorced himself from his wife. Alright, they were not *legally* married, but they had lived together and she was the mother of their child. It seems that Augustine recognized and worshipped Creator-Offspring as far off – the ascended Christ and the stories of Jesus' life, death and resurrection long ago in Palestine. But why did Augustine *not* recognize Creator-Offspring close by, in his most significant other, in the

woman who loved him and had shared her life with him? If Augustine was mistaken in this most important point, how can he be trusted by so many in matters of faith, life and practice?

Yes, Jesus was born and lived and died and rose again long ago in the Middle East. It is not a bad thing that we know this; it is good to have this picture of Creator's love. Yet, from the beginning Creator-Offspring has been busy bringing healing and wholeness, salvation in the earth, restoring the abundant life he means for all to have. As a traditional Cherokee person, I see the name Creator-Saves, Creator-Heals, Creator-Makes-Whole, revealed in our own indigenous oral tradition, in our ceremonies, in our agriculture, in our language (what little I know of it), in our every-day living, in our personal relationships, in all of creation. That name is revealed in a thousand or ten-thousand or a million ways for people in every part of the earth. If everything was written down, the whole world could not contain the books. This name in which there is salvation, has never been kept secret, has never been far from any of us.

The Great Commission

Exclusive truth claims are the root and heart of conquest theologies. Another Biblical passage often used as a mandate for clinging to exclusive truth claims is this one, most often referred to as "The Great Commission":

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"

- Matthew

28:18-20

For evangelical Christians, this is considered one of the most important passages in the Bible. I wonder whether it was as important for First Century followers of the Jesus Way. Should the fact of this saying of the risen Jesus having been recorded in only one of the four Gospels say anything to us? Does the very clear and unambiguous recital of the Trinity have anything to tell us? Is it possible or even probable that this passage was added or at least altered after Trinitarian doctrine was more fully developed and after Christianity had already become a tool of empire building? There are Bible commentators who allow that the entire sequence of baptismal instruction could have been a much later development (Barclay 378).

Steve Ruediger, of Switzerland, having discussed "The Great Commission" with a fellow Greek scholar, points out that the word transliterated in the passage as "baptize" actually means "repeated or constant immersion" rather than the one-time ceremony typical of the Christian rite of passage. Of course, I realize this could refer to immersing three times, once for each person of the Holy Trinity. However, another possible understanding could be that of constant immersion in the *nature* of the Creator, represented by the "name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." The word translated as

"make disciples" may also mean "help with the development of." Even after this close scrutiny, the passage remains problematic.

Whether or not Jesus really said this, or said this in exactly these words, I don't know. In any event, it is certain that the Church's understanding of this passage as a mandate for religious and other forms of conquest and colonization has worked and continues to work great violence in the earth.

Proper exegesis would have us compare and contrast this recorded saying of Jesus with other sayings and actions of Jesus recorded throughout the Gospel accounts and especially in the same Gospel account as the passage in question.

- During his lifetime, Jesus actually forbade his disciples from cross-cultural preaching (Matthew 10:5-6).
- Jesus pronounced a curse on those who crossed land and sea to make proselytes from other faith traditions and was, himself, very careful not to make proselytes (Matthew 23:15; Luke 8:38-39).
- Although Jesus helped those of other cultures and other faith traditions when asked, Jesus never, ever preached to or discussed theology with any besides Jews and Samaritans. He praised the faith of those of other cultures *as it was* and made no attempt to change it. Jesus even went so far as to say "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 8:5-13; 15:22-28; Luke 8:26-39).

Here is the closest thing I can find to a parallel to the Matthew 28:18-20 passage:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
- Acts 1:8.

There is no mention here of making disciples, but only of sharing the story, presumably allowing people the freedom to make of the story what they will.

The "I Am" Sayings of Jesus

Many Christians use what are commonly termed the "I Am" sayings of Jesus to say that Jesus himself first promoted or even mandated the exclusive truth claims of Christianity. I have reprinted some of the "I Am" sayings below.

Then Jesus declared, "**I am the bread of life.** He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the

Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”
- John 6:35-40

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “**I am the light of the world.** Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
- John 8:12

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “**before Abraham was born, I am!**”
- John 8:58

Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, **I am the gate for the sheep.** All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”
- John 10:7-10

Please pay close attention to this: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” There is no mandate for conquest here. Those who come stealing, killing and destroying along with those who enable such behaviors are *not* on the same side as the one who made this statement.

“**I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep....

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”
- John 10:11, 14-16

Jesus said to her, “**I am the resurrection and the life.** He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

- John 11:25-26

Jesus answered, “**I am the way and the truth and the life.** No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”
- John 14:6-7

“**I am the true vine,** and my Father is the gardener.... Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

- John 15:1, 4

The “I Am” sayings in the Gospel of John are allusions to the story of Moses and the Burning Bush. When Moses said he would need to know God’s name in case the people might ask, “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:12). The purpose of the “I Am” passages is to attest the divine nature of Jesus. In these passages Jesus is speaking as Creator-Offspring, as Creator embodied in creation, as God with us. But is it necessary to interpret the “I Am” passages as exclusive truth claims for Christianity? Do these passages necessarily convey the meaning that a person is spiritually lost unless and until taught about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth? Do these passages necessarily mean that unless a person accepts a standard Christian interpretation of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, that person’s life is worthless and unacceptable to Creator?

Bill Horn, pastor of Church of the Abundant Life in Kansas City, Missouri says,

It is important to notice that Jesus does not say, ‘I show you the way; I teach you the truth; I offer you life.’ We do not find the way, the truth, and the life by learning things about Jesus or about God. Jesus is saying that living in relationship with God, we enter into the divine life and become one with God's truth, one with God's life.... When Jesus continues with ‘Without me, no one can go to the Father’ (John 14:6b), we should not interpret that to mean that by becoming followers of Jesus' religion, we will get to heaven and one day see God. Jesus points us and all people, whether Christian or not, to the basic truth that Jesus lived by, the truth which Jesus was. The way of God in the world is to empty oneself and become a servant. No one comes to God except by that way, Jesus personified.

Jesus was talking to the people closest to him, telling them how they could become one with God. We must not let Jesus’ invitation to God’s bountiful grace belong to the zealots who think they have God in their box. God challenges us to be His humble servants and not management. God is greater than our religious border wars.

Once again, I assert that in all the “I Am” passages, Jesus is speaking as Creator-Offspring. I used to see these as ego-centric statements of Jesus, so to speak. However, if we pay close attention to all the sayings and acts of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels, we see that Jesus’ own understanding of the Creator-Offspring was not exclusive to his “individual self.” Jesus was speaking, as did the prophets of old, from that which is beyond self, beyond any self or any person. He was speaking as Being itself. Each one of us along with all of creation *is* in that Being and a window into that Being. And, if this all sounds mysterious or beyond understanding or explanation or comprehension, well it is! Truly, the “I Am” sayings were spoken by one who understood and understands the unity of Creator and creation – his own unity with all that is. And certainly, by no means should any saying of Jesus, who himself refused to proselytize people of other cultures, be used as an excuse or mandate for conquest, either physical or spiritual.

End of Part Two

To Be Continued....

Works Cited in “From Conquest to Freedom”:

- Barclay, William. *The Daily Study Bible Series: Revised Edition: The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia: 1975.
- Barclay, William, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Luke*. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia: 1975.
- Campbell, Joseph. *Creative Mythology: The Masks of God*. original copyright 1968. Penguin Books, New York: 1976.
- DeMeo, James. “Peaceful Versus Warlike Societies in Pre-Columbian America: What Do Archaeology and Anthropology Tell Us?” in *Unlearning the Language of Conquest: Scholars Expose Anti-Indianism in America*. Four Arrows (Don Trent Jacobs), ed. University of Texas Press, Austin: 2006. pp. 134-152.
- Fox, Matthew. *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. HarperCollins, New York:1988.
While my own understandings have developed independently of Matthew Fox, I have read this book and recommend it, as an aid to indigenization, for Christians of European descent.
- Francis, Robert. *Talks from the Heart: 12 Lessons for Native American Contextual Ministry, Volume 1*. Healing the Land, Scotland, Pennsylvania: 2004. Sorry, this book is out of print.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1*. Harper, San Francisco: 1984.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Volume 2*. Harper, San Francisco: 1985.
- Miller, Robert J. *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, and Manifest Destiny*. Praeger, Westport, Connecticut: 2006.
- Shelton, R. Larry. *Cross & Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission*. Paternoster, Tyrone, Georgia: 2006.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Silmarillion*. Christopher Tolkien, ed. Original Copyright 1977. Ballantine Books, New York: 1979.
- Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. originally published by Charles L. Webster and Company: 1885. Aerie Books LTD.
- Williamson, Margaret Holmes. *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln: 2003.

Warrior, Robert Allen. "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today" in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices On Religious Identity In The United States and Canada*. James Treat, ed. Routledge, New York: 1996. pp. 93-104. While my own thoughts on the subject predate my reading of this excellent essay, Warrior also connects Canaanites and Indians while contrasting Joshua and Jesus.