

In his 1624 Declaration of the State of the Colony, Virginia Company Secretary Edward Waterhouse referred to the indigenous peoples of Tidewater Virginia as “naked, tanned deformed Savages... no other than beasts.” He advised a policy of extermination, “using bloodhounds to draw them and mastiffs to teare them.”

I am Chickamaugan Cherokee of the White River Band of Missouri and Arkansas. However, I am also a descendant, on the direct Francis line, of the Accomack or Gingaskin tribe, from the land east of Chesapeake Bay, some of the same “tanned deformed Savages” of which Secretary Waterhouse wrote.

During my final semester at Midwestern Baptist Theological seminary, I recall asking a fellow student whether he had learned anything concerning liberation theology during his years in seminary. “That dog won’t hunt,” the young man quipped. That’s all anyone needs to know about *liberation* theology.” Up until then, I had not realized we were talking about hunting with dogs. In Jesus’ purpose statement delivered in his home synagogue in Nazareth, the young carpenter-turned-rabbi spoke of preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind. He said he had come to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of Creator’s favor (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus made no mention of hunting with dogs.

In Part 3 of “From Conquest to Freedom,” I examine passages from the Four Gospels of the New Testament that specifically point away from theologies of conquest and in the direction of theologies of freedom. These are just a few examples of “Markers for Freedom” that may be found in the Christian Bible. There are many others besides these few.

From Conquest to Freedom Continued

Part 3 “Markers for Freedom”

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.

Advice from the Mountainside: Matthew 5:21-26

In this section of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus brings up the subject of murder, the most obviously violent and permanent of conquering actions. Jesus goes on to speak of dehumanizing attitudes and language in their relation to murder. Jesus speaks of unreasonable anger, perhaps the result of jealousy or envy. This is reminiscent of Cain’s murder of his brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-16). Jesus says this attitude of the heart is just as bad as murder. Jesus goes on to address the use of name-calling or hate-speech. “Raca” is an Aramaic term meaning “you empty or worthless one.” Jesus says the use of such contemptible language is *worse* than murder. The word translated “fool” is “moros,” meaning “one with no morality” or “one having not relationship with Creator.” Jesus says dehumanizing a person in this way, by saying the person has no relationship with Creator, is *the worst offense of all*. In spite of Jesus’ dire warning, individuals and entire people groups are routinely labeled and dehumanized in just this way, in the name of Christianity! When a judgment is made that such-and-such a percentage of this or that people group is “unsaved” or “lost” or “unreached” or “without Christ,” what, exactly, is being said? Once a nation, tribe or people group is dehumanized in this way, theft, murder and cultural cannibalism are easy, and according to Jesus, lesser offences.

Jesus moves from here to the importance of reconciliation. According to Jesus, Creator accepts nothing from the hands of those unwilling to seek reconciliation with those they have wronged. All true reconciliation is on the terms of the injured or wronged party, not on the terms of the one who committed the injury. Jesus says matters

should be settled quickly, in this life, before the case is handed over to the judge. But my question is this: How can reconciliation occur so long as conquest continues?

Invasion or Dialogue

Invasion Following the Flood

In July 2007, the Marais des Cygnes River flooded. Houses built along the river, even those on stilts, were washed away and destroyed and all the lowlands and croplands of the Marais des Cygnes or Marsh of Swans in Bates County, Missouri and Linn County, Kansas were under water. My family's little subsistence farm lies within one mile of the Marais des Cygnes River. The lower pasture of our farm was completely flooded, as well as our entire garden. We depend on that garden for most of the vegetables we eat, and we depend on the pasture to provide for the goats and sheep that also provide for us.

It was the Saturday after the flood, and my wife Janet and I were preparing to drive to a neighbor's farm to buy hay, hay in the summertime, hay we really could not afford. As we were climbing into our little pickup truck, we saw a vanload of people, dressed to the nines, coming down our driveway. We were surprised and more than a bit annoyed that people we did not know would take it upon themselves to unlatch and open our gate and drive onto our property without an invitation. As the group of overly dressed ladies and gentlemen got out of the van, one man carrying a large, leather satchel full of literature, we realized who they were or at least where they were from.

Although we had never seen this particular set of invaders before, we deduced that they were from a church in the nearby town of Butler, Missouri. Time and time again over the years, groups from this particular church had come to our home, uninvited and unannounced, for the express purpose of converting us, or at least some of us, to conformity with their theological understandings and religious practices. If I was home, I had always invited them in, given them something refreshing to drink and sat down to talk with them. However, they never wanted to talk *with* me; they only wanted to talk *to* me or preach *at* me. They didn't know who we were and didn't want to know. They never wanted to reveal anything real about themselves either. They seemed to consider themselves on a very important mission, with a set agenda. Each time before they left, I had said, "I don't mind dialoguing with you, but please call and make an appointment next time. I'm a busy man. I'm often not at home, and it would be polite of you to call and make an appointment." Each time, I was assured they would indeed call before coming the next time, but that promise was never kept as wave after wave of invaders continued to arrive from that church. They took to coming most often when I was gone and usually when my wife Janet and I were both gone. We were pretty sure they planned it that way, so they could talk to the younger members of the household while the older "heathens" were out of the way. And so, we put up a gate, thinking that would somehow intimidate the invaders. We were surprised when it didn't, and on this day we were already out of sorts.

As I strode, stern-faced toward the group, the man with the leather satchel made some remark about our geese being in the driveway. I suppose he meant it for a joke, but

I was not in the mood. “The *geese* are supposed to be here,” I said. “Who gave *you* permission to open that gate?”

“The gate wasn’t locked,” the man began. “I thought....”

“Anyone who comes through that gate without permission is trespassing,” I said. “There are people who have permission to open that gate and come through anytime they want, but I don’t know you, and I have never given *you* permission to open that gate. Time and again, I have told people from your church to call and make an appointment before coming here.”

“I didn’t know that,” the man protested.

“Nobody ever knows,” I answered. “I say it to every group that comes, but I guess no one ever talks to anyone in your church. In any case, you know it now. I will gladly dialogue with you, but you have to call first and make an appointment. Most of the time people from your church have come here when my wife and I are not at home. We don’t appreciate you messing with our kids.”

“Messing with your kids?” The man was clearly taken aback.

“Yes,” I said, “Messing with our kids! When you intentionally try to change someone’s spirituality, you are messing with them. We don’t appreciate it; our kids don’t appreciate it. It is going to stop. Right now you are going to drive back through that gate, and I don’t want to see anyone from your church opening that gate again until you have the decency to call first and make an appointment.”

I suspect the over-dressed group in the van considered themselves “persecuted for Jesus” that day. I’m sure they considered themselves to be well within their rites to invade our property, after all, in their estimation we are unsaved fools with no hope for eternal life apart from the truth that they and only they have to bestow.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus points out the problem with exclusive truth claims: Those who would exclude others exclude themselves. But remember, those who free others, free themselves.

Honest Dialogue

Maybe you think I was too harsh on the well dressed invaders. Frankly, I think I was probably not nearly harsh enough. Please note that I did not totally ban the members of that church from our property. I merely set a reasonable condition on them. I sincerely do enjoy honest dialogue with those of other spiritualities. The people of that church might be surprised to know that even though I would never join their church, I do admire some of their ways. Furthermore, I have no desire or intent to convert them to *our* way. The people of that church will probably never learn this, since they clearly desire no honest dialogue with me. I have not seen them since that hot July day in 2007. They certainly have not called on the phone to make an appointment. If they can no longer make surprise invasions, they will not come here at all.



“Bound TV Evangelist”
Art and Photo by Wyandotte
Artist Richard Zane Smith

An honest dialogue is an exchange of stories in which neither party has an agenda for converting or proselytizing the other. Bud Moellinger, helper for the Auxvasse Creek Indian Fellowship, told of an experience he had in the little town of Bridger, on the Cheyenne River Sioux Indian Reservation. Bud and his wife, Dr. Sheri Moellinger DVM, make at least two trips a year to the Cheyenne River Reservation where they provide much-needed veterinary care for some of the horses, dogs and cats. On one occasion, a group of people, Christians and tribal traditionals as well as those who may follow both ways, were all together for a meal in a local church fellowship hall, and Bud was invited to ask a blessing on the food. Standing, and with his eyes open, Bud said a prayer that was decidedly Cherokee and completely lacking in any Christian formulary. After the meal, one of the Lakota men came up to Bud and asked, "What do you people have?"

"What do you mean?" Bud said.

"Well, we have the Pipe. What do you have?" the man continued.

"Oh," Bud said. "We have the Fire."

The two talked together for quite a little while, each sharing about his tribe's traditional practices. As it was getting late and the Lakota man needed to leave, he said, "You know, it would be good if someday we could take a whole day to talk like this."

That is honest dialogue. Both were honestly sharing about their own people's divine revelations and practices, but neither had any intention, either forthright or hidden, of converting the other.

Now, according to Cherokee tradition, the Fire that we keep fell from the heavens to the top of Rattlesnake Mountain. According to another Cherokee tradition, the Fire was given to our people by Jiya Unega (White Otter) who is also Unelvnvhi Uwegi (Creator-Offspring). These stories are not mutually exclusive or contradictory. In either case, the Fire along with the ceremonies surrounding it, is understood as coming from Creator to the People and is seen as unique and precious.

According to Lakota tradition, as I have heard it, the Pipe was brought by the White Buffalo Woman. The Pipe too, along with its sacred rites, is seen as a unique and precious gift from Creator to the People.

Now, there are other Indian Peoples besides the Cherokees who keep a sacred Fire. In fact, most Indian Peoples ascribe sacredness to specific fires that are made or kept. What if the Cherokees said, "Oh, you people keep a fire, but that's not the *real* Fire. The real Fire is the one *we* have. Your fire and ceremonies are but a mockery. Let us share the real Fire with you along with the sacred ceremonies that were taught directly by Creator to us."? Or, what if the Cherokees said, "Your fire is just a 'redemptive analogy,' but Creator sent the real Fire to us. So, if you accept this real Fire, the historical Fire, the one that, in actuality, came down from heaven, your spirituality will be complete as Creator intends it to be, and when you die, Jiya Unega himself will come and escort you to the West."?

Likewise, most Indian Peoples keep some sort of pipe ceremony. What if the Lakotas said, "Your pipe ceremony is a mockery," or "Your pipe ceremony is only a 'redemptive analogy.' Let us show you the *real* way. It's not that we Lakotas are more special than anyone else; Creator had to give the real Pipe and the real Pipe Ceremonies

to someone. Creator gave these to us, but they are for everyone. And if you don't have them, you can't really have a right relationship with Creator."? What I'm describing here, in the hypothetical sense, is the exclusive truth claim. Where an exclusive truth claim is present with one side or the other, it is very difficult, if not impossible for any real and honest dialogue to take place. One or the other party will not really be listening, but only watching for ways to snare or catch the other, to reel him in and convert him. Honest dialogue has to do with building and increasing respect for the other. By respect, I mean both appreciation for or holding the other in high esteem and also an attitude of non-interference which is, itself, an exercise of faith in Creator's complete love for and connection with all Peoples, everywhere.

**The Way of the Cross: Matthew 16:15-28;
Mark 8:29-9:1; Luke 9:20-27**

**Excerpt from the Story of Jiya Unega
As Was Told to Me**

The Uktin, the Great Horned Serpent was in the earth. He was very angry. He wanted to destroy the earth, and it looked as though he would do it. Then the one named Jiya Unega (White Otter) came down from heaven. Jiya Unega fought with the Uktin and defeated him. But in the process of defeating the Uktin, Jiya Unega was wounded, one arm being torn from his body. The blood of Jiya Unega gushed out onto the earth, and he died. But Jiya Unega rose from the dead. Ascending into heaven, Jiya Unega became the Morning Star which in Cherokee we call Unelvnvhi Uweji (Creator-Offspring).

The Story of Charley

In 1838, Cherokees in the eastern states of Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama were rounded up at gunpoint and brought to stockades or concentration camps where they were held through the long, hot summer in preparation for removal to the west. Most were submissive, but there were many who managed to escape and hide in the mountains.

There was an old Cherokee man named Charley who was captured by soldiers along with his wife and his three sons, their wives and children. Charley's brother was also in the group. As they were being herded along the road, the soldiers kept prodding Charley's wife with their bayonets, insisting that she pick up her pace, but she was old and sick and couldn't walk fast. Charley became angry at the brutality of the soldiers and spoke to the others, in the Cherokee language, about a possibility of escape. Quite suddenly, Charlie, his brother and his sons each grabbed for the gun of whichever soldier was nearest. In the struggle, one soldier was killed and the others ran away. And so, Charley and his family were able to escape to the mountains.

Finding and capturing the hundreds of Cherokees hiding in the mountains proved an impossible task, so General Scott, in a face-saving move, sent word of that if Charley and his party were surrendered for punishment; all the rest would be spared. Hearing of this proposition, Charley voluntarily came down from the mountains along with his

brother and sons. By order of General Scott, Charley, his brother and his two elder sons were shot, with other Cherokee prisoners being forced to act as the firing squad. In this way, Charley, his brother and his sons sacrificed themselves for the people.

Answer to a Probing Question

More than once, Christian people have asked me this question: “What is the meaning of the cross to you?” To indigenous peoples of many tribes in North America, the four directions are represented by a cross, with the center of that cross being the place where we are, the place where Creator meets with us. For others, the place where the two paths meet is represented by a cross. Of course, I realize that when a Christian asks, “What is the meaning of the cross to you?” He or she is referring specifically to the cross upon which Jesus died or, more precisely, to the act of Jesus’ crucifixion.

What the common people of first-century Palestine considered Messianic hope, the Roman conquerors and occupiers considered insurrection, and they had ways of dealing with it. When Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest, said, “You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (John 11:50), he was not speaking metaphorically, nor was he speaking in spiritual terms. Time and again, Caiaphas had witnessed bloodbaths perpetrated by the Romans on the Jewish people whenever and wherever the Messianic hope of independent sovereignty had dared to lift its head. As Jesus’ popularity increased, the concern of the chief priests and Sanhedrin Council also increased, with their primary thought being what the Romans might do in response.

Then came the Passover-week protest through the streets of Jerusalem and another in the temple – both protests led by Jesus (Matthew 21:1-17). The last time there had been a protest in the temple, the Roman Governor Pilate had ordered soldiers to disguise themselves and infiltrate the protestors. At a signal, they attacked, splitting the people’s heads with clubs (Barclay, *Luke* 172-173). What would happen this time? I cannot believe the Roman Governor, Pilate was unaware of either demonstration, nor do I believe he was willing to ignore them. The temple protest would have been of particular concern. There most certainly would have been a message delivered from Pilate to Caiaphas, something along the lines of this: “Bring me the leader of the protest and make it look as though it is your idea, or else there will be a slaughter such as has never been seen in Jerusalem.” And so the leader of the protest, Jesus of Nazareth, was quietly arrested in the night and publicly hanged on a cross the next day, one man dying for the people.

After Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection, his followers sought to make sense of what had happened. Their leader had been put to death by those in power, in a most ignoble way, as an insurrectionist. The logic of the time was that good men simply did not die on crosses. Why had God allowed Jesus to die in this way? What did this mean? Over the years, many Christians began to believe that, in some way, Jesus’ death was necessary for achieving atonement between God the Creator and human beings. Within a little over a hundred years, theories attempting to explain the necessity of the crucifixion of Jesus in achieving atonement with God began to surface. Most of the atonement theories that developed over the following centuries and millennia tend to center on what

might be called the “vicarious punishment” of Jesus for the sins of all humanity. Some theories view Jesus’ death as buying off or placating the wrath of God. Others view Jesus’ death as payment to the devil. In all theories of “vicarious atonement,” an economic transaction is understood to take place. The sins of all humanity are placed upon and punished in Jesus while the righteousness of Jesus is miraculously or magically conferred upon all who make proper confession, following Jesus in baptism and placing themselves under the authority of the church. In his book, *Cross & Covenant*, Larry Shelton provides an excellent examination of the various theories of vicarious atonement (Shelton 159-203).

Then there was Peter Abelard (1079-1142), scholar, philosopher, clerk and canon of the church. Abelard may well have been one of the greatest European thinkers of the Middle Ages, although most great thinkers of that era were consigned to the fire along with their writings. Abelard reasoned that “if humanity owed a debt to God’s honor that has to be satisfied, then [Jesus’] death would have only made matters worse, since he was murdered by human beings, and not by God, to whom the debt was owed” (Shelton 206). Abelard understood Jesus’ death on the cross as a sacrifice rather than a payment. He saw the sacrifice of Jesus as an example of God’s love and forgiveness designed to remove human fear of divine wrath, thereby drawing human beings back into unity with Creator (Ibid).

There is nothing in Abelard’s theory with which I necessarily disagree. Incidentally, Abelard was also of the conviction that knowledge of God is available outside of Christianity and that “The doctors of the Church should be read, not with the necessity to believe, but with liberty to judge” (Campbell 396-397). Abelard was on dangerous ground here; it is a wonder he didn’t wind up tied to a stake with fire consuming his flesh.

I see a tendency in Christianity to look at the cross as something borne and suffered *only* by Jesus. The attitude is, “Jesus paid the price so I don’t have to” or “Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice; no further sacrifice is needed.” The cross is viewed as something one kneels before. However, by looking at these texts: Matthew 16:15-28; Mark 8:29-9:1; Luke 9:20-27 one may see that Jesus himself viewed the cross much differently.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell the story of Jesus asking his closest followers, “Who do you say I am?” Peter answers, “You are the Christ (Messiah, One Anointed to be King).” Only in Matthew’s account does Jesus praise Peter for this answer. Yet, in all three accounts, Jesus warns his followers not to tell anyone that he is the Christ. The title “Christ” or “Messiah” was a loaded term in Jesus’ day and not only for the reason that Messianic hopes for national freedom or sovereignty were seriously upsetting to the Roman Imperial authority. Then as now, this title conjures up images of a conquering king who will lead his people not simply to freedom but to international greatness through the conquest, destruction or subjugation of others. Along with the related term, “Son of David,” the Christ title was arguably Jesus’ least favorite designation for himself. With limited success, he tried to refocus his followers’ thoughts from the Conquering Christ image to the image of the humble “Son of Man” who gives himself that the people may live.

And so, in this story, referring to himself as the “Son of Man,” Jesus explains how he himself will be rejected by the elders of his own people, by the chief priests and by the teachers of the law. He goes on to say that he will be killed but will rise again. When Peter begins to rebuke him for saying such things, Jesus shouts Peter down. Calling the crowd of people together, Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

Jesus did not call his followers to kneel before his cross but rather to *take up their own cross and follow*. In the Roman Empire of the era in which Jesus lived, the mention of a cross, or of carrying a cross, evoked no sentimentality. Jesus, along with all those to whom he spoke had witnessed the awful reality of public crucifixion. People who took up crosses were those about to be crucified, and those who were crucified were those who had resisted the authority of the malignant power structure – the empire – along with whatever puppet regimes the empire put in place.

Jesus was saying that to have life one must be willing to risk everything and make of oneself a willing sacrifice. One must resist the controlling authority which calls itself divine but is not – being of human or possibly even of demonic origin. Jesus calls his followers to resist this authority in spite of threats of torment, willing to suffer hell itself, eternally if need be, for those who are loved

- This is Jiya Unega facing the Uktin.
- This is Charley, his brother and sons facing a firing squad of their own people.
- This is Jesus carrying the cross.
- This is Abelard willing to challenge the authority of church dogma.
- This is all who are willing to lay down their life that the people may live and be free, including those willing to continue in or return to indigenous spirituality even if the Christian powers-that-be would consign them to hell for doing so.

Let me tell you more about Abelard. Peter Abelard was 38 years old, living in Paris, when a beautiful and intelligent young woman named Heloise, 20 years his junior, caught his eye. She lived with her uncle, a notoriously mean-spirited churchman named Fulbert. Abelard made an offer to Fulbert to educate his niece, free of charge, in exchange for room and board. A deal was struck, and Abelard moved in. Before long, Abelard and Heloise fell in love.

Some time later, when Heloise discovered she was pregnant, the two lovers quickly and quietly ran away to Brittany. There, living in the home of Abelard’s sister, Heloise gave birth to their son whom they named Astralabius.

Heloise was quite happy living with Abelard and Astralabius, but Abelard was dissatisfied. He wanted to take Heloise back to Paris, obtain her uncle’s blessing and marry her in the church. Knowing her uncle as she did, Heloise argued against this, but finally Abelard won out. Leaving little Astralabius with his aunt, Abelard and Heloise

returned to Paris, seemingly received Fulbert's blessing and were married. However, Fulbert did *not* lay aside his grudge. On the night of the wedding, he along with his servants, invaded Abelard's and Heloise's bedroom and castrated Abelard.

In shame and seeing the castration as just punishment for his sins, Abelard entered a monastery and persuaded Heloise to enter a convent. Ten years later, Heloise wrote a letter to Abelard (Campbell 53-58). I have reprinted translated segments of that letter below:

To her master, rather to her father, to her husband, rather to a brother, his maid or rather daughter, his wife or rather sister, to Abelard, Heloise....

Thou knowest, dearest – and who knows not? – how much I lost in thee, and that an infamous act of treachery robbed me of thee and of myself at once.... Love turned to madness and cut itself off from hope of that which alone it sought, when I obediently changed my garb and my heart too in order that I might prove thee sole owner of my body as well as of my spirit. God knows, I have ever sought in thee only thyself, desiring simply thee and not what was thine. I asked no matrimonial contract, I looked for no dowry; not my pleasure, not my will, but thine have I striven to fulfill. And if the name of wife seemed holier or more potent, the word mistress [amica] was always sweeter to me, or even – be not angry! – concubine or harlot; for the more I lowered myself before thee, the more I hoped to gain thy favor, and the less I should hurt the glory of thy renown.

I call God to witness that if Augustus, the master of the world, would honor me with marriage and invest me with equal rule, it would still seem to me dearer and more honorable to be called thy strumpet than his empress. He who is rich and powerful is not the better man: That is a matter of fortune, this of merit. And she is venal who marries a rich man sooner than a poor man, and yearns for a husband's riches rather than himself. Such a woman deserves pay and not affection. She is not seeking the man but his goods, and would wish, if possible, to prostitute herself to one still richer....

Why, after our conversion, commanded by thyself, did I drop into oblivion, to be no more refreshed by speech of thine or letter? Tell me, I say, if you can, or I will say what I feel and what everyone suspects: desire rather than friendship drew you to me, lust rather than love. So when desire ceased, whatever you were manifesting for its sake likewise vanished. This, beloved, is not so much my opinion as the opinion of all. Would it were only mine and that thy love might find defenders to argue away my pain. Would that I could invent some reason to excuse you and also cover my cheapness. Listen, I beg, to what I ask, and it will seem small and very easy to you. Since I am cheated of your presence, at least put vows in words, of which you have a store, and so keep before me the sweetness of thine image.... When little more than a girl I took the hard vows of a nun, not from piety but at your command. If I merit nothing from thee, how vain I deem my labor! I can expect no reward from God,

as I have done nothing from love of Him... God knows, at your command I would have followed or preceded you to fiery places. For my heart is not with me, but with thee (Ibid 58-59).

This is Abelard's reply:

I have composed this prayer which I send thee:

O God, who formed woman from the side of man and didst sanction the sacrament of marriage; who didst bestow upon my frailty a cure for its incontinence; do not despise the prayers of thy handmaid, and the prayers which I pour out for my sins and those of my dear one. Pardon our great crimes, and may the enormity of our faults find the greatness of thy ineffable mercy. Punish the culprits in the present; spare, in the future. Thou hast joined us, Lord, and hast divided us, as it pleased thee. Now complete most mercifully what thou hast begun in mercy; and those whom thou hast divided in this world, join eternally in heaven, thou who art our hope, our portion, our expectation, our consolation, Lord blessed forever, Amen.

Farewell in Christ, spouse of Christ; in Christ farewell and in Christ live. Amen (Ibid 60).

Heloise has bravely taken up her cross, willing to give up everything, even the hope of heaven, for her Abelard. But, just as with Augustine before him, Abelard fails to recognize Creator-Offspring close by, in his most significant other, in the woman who loves him and has shared her life with him and given life to their child. Just as with Augustine, Abelard only recognizes and worships Creator-Offspring as far off – the ascended Christ and the stories of Jesus' life, death and resurrection long ago in Palestine. Abelard, this time, has left his own cross lying in the dirt, so that he may kneel, paralyzed with fear and self-loathing, at the foot of what he imagines to be the cross of Christ. In reply to the true love that casts out all fear, the love that willingly sacrifices all for the object of its love, Abelard offers only the standard platitudes of malignant power.

Whenever anyone willingly struggles in resistance against malignant power, refusing to back down regardless of the consequences, the love of Creator is revealed. Jesus said if you cling to life you will lose it. Rather than kneeling at the foot of the cross, the "way of the cross" as Jesus taught it means taking up the cross, taking up the struggle, and today that struggle would be even against the new manmade authority: Christian dogmas and the American hegemon. Lived out, the power of love is the only check or remedy against the evil, controlling authority or malignant power that falsely claims divinity as its own. In addition to those listed above, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) is another example of one who understood and lived out this power of love. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) is yet another. There are many, many more besides.

Those wanting to be in controlling authority have twisted the sacrificial death of Jesus for their own controlling ends. For many, Christianity is experienced not as the giving of life Jesus called for but as a clinging to life – a way to be accepted in this life

and gain heaven in the life to come. This is achieved through surrendering to the controlling authority, the malignant power which claims divinity or claims to be the sole or unique mouth or body of divinity in the world.

King & Kingdom

Before we go on to the next “Marker for Another Way,” please be patient as I circle back. In reference to Jesus’ asking his disciples, “Who do you say I am” (Mark 8:29), and the ensuing discussion outlined above, I think it proper, at this point, to address the use of “king and kingdom metaphors” in Christianity.

From the time I was a small child, I have heard of the “Kingdom of God” or the “Kingdom of Heaven.” I have heard Jesus referred to as “King Jesus” and “Lord Jesus.” I know the source of these King and Kingdom terms to be the Christian Bible. Still, I must confess that through the years, these terms have seemed troublesome and confusing to me. Some years ago, I came to the point of wondering how appropriate these metaphors are for American Indian followers of Jesus, or even for European-American Christians. Do I have your attention?

Terms or phrases such as: Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven, King Jesus, Lord Jesus, are only metaphors, which is to say, word pictures used to describe something much larger than themselves. Furthermore, no matter how good or appropriate a metaphor may be, it is at best, an imperfect attempt at communication. Finally, every metaphor is bound to or informed by the culture in which the metaphor originated.

To people living in the Middle East some 2,000 years ago, having a king and being a kingdom meant unity as a people and freedom or self-determination and independence as a nation. These concepts of King and Kingdom meant similar things to Europeans, Asians and Africans. I can see how this could be seen as a positive picture. Even so, use of this imperfect metaphor of King and Kingdom presented a challenge, I think, even for the writers of Jewish and Christian scriptures who sought to communicate Creator’s love. I find Biblical evidence that suggests that even Creator was never completely comfortable with the King and Kingdom metaphor. *Now* do I have your attention?

The first king in ancient Israel was not David, nor even Saul, but rather Abimelech, one of the 70 sons of Gideon, the mighty warrior. After he murdered all his brothers except for Jotham, who got away, the people decided to crown Abimelech king. The coronation was interrupted by the surviving brother Jotham, shouting from the summit of a nearby hill. This is what Jotham had to say:

"One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.'

"But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees?'

"Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.'

"But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?'

"Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.'

"But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?'

"Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king.'

"The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'"

- Judges 9:8-15

Abimelech was king for only about three years and proved himself to be every bit the thornbush his brother said he was. Even so, some years later, the people of Israel asked their prophet, Samuel, to anoint for them another king. As Samuel warned of the despotic nature of kings, the people refused to listen to the holy man. Creator saw the request for a king as the people's rejection of divine leadership. Nevertheless, Creator told Samuel to go ahead and do as the people asked (1 Samuel 8:4-24).

Deuteronomy 17:16-17 outlines a few things a king must *not* do. "The king....must not acquire great numbers of horses (build up a large standing army).... He must not take many wives.... He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold." According to the biblical account, the two greatest kings of Israel, David and Solomon, broke these laws and many more besides. If you want to discover the extent of their folly as well as their wisdom, read their stories in the Bible. Due largely to Solomon's excesses, the kingdom split in two after his death (2 Chronicles 10:1-19).

In Jesus' day, it was common for the Jewish people to refer to the Messiah or Christ as "The Son of David", yet Jesus rejected this designation which associated him with a conquering king (Matthew 22:42-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20: 41-44). Although Jesus spoke often of the kingdom of heaven, he seemed to have some discomfort even with the title Christ or Messiah, words which mean "The One Anointed as King". When Jesus asked his followers, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter answered, "You are the Christ," Jesus' response was basically to say, "Yes, but don't tell anyone." Jesus seemed much more comfortable with the title "Son of Man." He made repeated attempts to persuade his followers that greatness is not measured by controlling or lording it over others but rather in giving oneself that the people may live (Matthew 16:15-28; Mark 8:29-38; Luke 9:20-27; Luke 22:25-27).

The night before he died, Jesus went so far as to say to his followers, "I no longer call you servants.... Instead, I have called you friends...." (John 15:15). This brings to mind a conversation I had some years ago, with a mother of a teenage girl. This was a Cherokee family that had also been Christian for several generations. The woman's daughter had opened up to her, saying, "I want Jesus to be my friend; I have a problem calling him Lord." The woman was upset, even distraught at what she was seeing as a rejection of Jesus Christ by her daughter. After all, this term Lord is *the* magic word used by the church to obtain, judge and measure salvation. Yet, what does it mean?

What do the terms King and Kingdom or the related term Lord mean to American Indians? These are completely foreign concepts for us. There were no kings or lords in what is now called "The Americas" before European conquerors came. Even then, the kings stayed on the other side of the Atlantic, where our ancestors no doubt imagined them as simple-minded brutes presuming to own lands and control or destroy whole nations of people they had never even seen. That's pretty much how I imagine them today. There was nothing here that remotely resembled a king. Headmen or headwomen of towns were those who did most to give themselves for the people. Their authority was limited and did not infringe on individual autonomy. They governed loosely and by the peoples' consent, working carefully to build and maintain consensus. Even Moctezuma II of the Mexica or Aztec people was not a king. When it became apparent that he was governing inappropriately, he was quickly deposed. Within our own cultures these metaphors of King and Kingdom, even Lord are meaningless. In order to bring any meaning to them at all, we must go outside our own cultures, bowing to the culture of the conqueror. Doing this, we say, in effect, that the conqueror's metaphors, as well as his culture are superior to ours.

For that matter, what do these terms mean to European-Americans? When their ancestors saw how our people got along without kings and lords, they were ready to toss allegiance to their own kings and lords over the side, as well. What's more, most of Europe followed suit. While many European-Americans still grow teary-eyed at the mention of the British Royal Family and half the characters in Disney animated films still wear crowns, hardly any European-American has any idea what it means to live in a kingdom or under the thumb of a lord. In order to continue using these metaphors of King, Kingdom and Lord, even European-Americans... even modern Europeans, must be educated as to what these words meant to the peoples of ancient Palestine and the Greco-Roman World. In other words, these metaphors no longer lie even within the context of European or European-American cultures! They have become, in essence, "religious words," separated from real life experience.

On several occasions I have witnessed what are commonly referred to as "contemporary praise and worship services." From my own observation, the music used in such services may be contemporary, but the lyrics of the songs, with their focus on the king, the throne, etc., are positively medieval. I will mention here that there is no longer anything I do that could properly be called "worship" within the European-American, European or Middle-Eastern understandings of that term, since I have come to see such practices as also arising from the metaphoric understanding of Jesus or God as a celestial king. In keeping with Cherokee tradition, I give thanks, participate in ceremonies and ask for blessings. However, I do not consider that Creator wants me to prostrate myself or bow down but rather to rise up and walk freely *with* the Divine presence.

King and Kingdom metaphors are basic to theologies of conquest. The idea of the conquering and controlling Christ or Messiah gives an air of legitimacy to hierarchical structures within church and state as well as racial, ethnic and socio-economic caste systems. Theologies of conquest base themselves on the value of conquering and controlling others rather than the value of giving self for the people, as Jesus taught his followers.

Where do we go from here? Some may choose to retain the King and Kingdom metaphors, hopefully with renewed awareness of metaphoric imperfection. Others may see the value of replacing these metaphors with other metaphors that are more culturally appropriate. For Christians and followers of Jesus, there are many culturally appropriate metaphors that are also very much in keeping with the intent of the Christian scripture. Appropriate terms and metaphors within American Indian cultures are rich and varied. Personally, I am comfortable speaking of Creator as Father and Grandfather (Father of us all). I am comfortable speaking of Jesus as Creator-Son, who became one of us, became our Brother and our Friend, and gave himself that the people may live. In the larger sense, I see Creator-Son's or Creator-Offspring's self-giving love communicated in many of our traditional stories. I am also comfortable speaking of Creator-Spirit who guides us in all truth. Instead of speaking of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, I am more comfortable speaking of the territory of Creator, where Creator is at home. Creator's territory is without boundaries. This is *not* to say that we, Creator's children or grandchildren should ignore boundaries or go where we are not invited. But, Creator is in all and above all, surpassing and transcending all boundaries and all limitations. I am also comfortable speaking of the community of Creator, which is to speak of the oneness of Creator and creation. You may have other words, other metaphors, that are every bit as good and speak to you from your own culture. Have Creator's strength in you and be free.

Now we will look to the next "Marker for Freedom."

Eternal Life Defined: Luke 10:25-37

In this story outlining Jesus' definition of eternal life, a Samaritan finds an injured man along the road. As to religion and ethnicity, the injured man is unidentifiable, being naked and probably unconscious. The Samaritan evidently sees the man only as a fellow human being and goes out of his way to help.

Samaritans were people who claimed descent from the northern Kingdom of Israel, yet their beliefs and practices were different from and considered "syncretistic" or "heretical" by the Jewish people of Jesus' day. For a Jewish person to speak of a "Good Samaritan" was unheard of or even offensive. However, somewhere between the first and 21st centuries, the idea of a "Good Samaritan" lost all its shock value. By the end of the story, modern audiences are never offended. No one ever storms away in a huff. For that reason, when I tell the story, I change a few of the details.

Story of the Good Gay Activist

A man was traveling on Interstate 70 from St. Louis to Kansas City when he saw an old car broken down on the side of the road. An attractive young lady was looking under the hood of the car. When the man stopped to offer assistance, four men jumped out of the bushes. They beat the man up, stole his car, his wallet and all his clothes, leaving him bruised and bleeding and half dead just off the shoulder of the road.

The first person to notice the man was an Indian preacher who drove by about fifteen minutes later. He slowed down to get a good look, but didn't stop. He was already late for a denominational conference in Kansas City and didn't want to hear any more jokes about arriving on "Indian time."

The second person to notice the man was a Traditional Indian Healer who came along about an hour later. He also slowed down but didn't stop. It's probably just bait for a car-jacking, he thought, and besides, the man never actually *asked* for my help.

Some time later, another driver happened to notice the man when he saw two crows picking at his seemingly lifeless form. This man was, I think, of completely Italian ancestry. Although in some circles he claimed to be "Part Cherokee," in fact, he was a direct descendant of Christopher Columbus. He was of the Wiccan faith, and he was on his way, that day, to the west coast, where he planned to participate in a Gay Pride Rally.

But he stopped and got out of his car. He saw that the man was alive, and his heart went out to the man. He used his cell phone to call 911, waited and followed the ambulance to the hospital where he signed as the one responsible for paying the bill (Francis 55-56).

As with the "Good Gay Activist," the Samaritan of Jesus' original story has no thought of taking control over the injured man or of becoming his "keeper" after others have attempted to be his murderers. The Samaritan simply acts as a brother, a neighbor, a friend. There is absolutely no indication of any desire or hidden motive on the part of the Samaritan to change the injured man's politics or theological beliefs to those of a Samaritan. From a heartfelt understanding of his own relatedness or unity with the injured man, the Samaritan simply does all he can to help free the man from his helpless condition. That, according to Jesus, is what it means to inherit eternal life.

And Jesus looked at the man who had questioned him, and he looked around at all the shocked people who had gathered to listen, and Jesus said, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37b).

Atonement: John 17:11

In his prayer for his followers the night before his death, Jesus' request was for atonement (at-one-ment) "...that they may be one as we (Creator) are one." The nature of Creator's oneness is recognized as unity in plurality, which is to say unity in diversity, which is to say harmony. Various human efforts have tried to create unity through sameness: converting, excluding, removing or killing those who are different or who disagree. The result is not unity but fearful monotony. Others seek diversity with no thought given to unity. The result of this is fearful isolation. Unity in diversity is the beautiful music of Creator – different notes in a chord (accord) – harmony.

Respect, Reciprocity, Reconciliation, Relationship: These four interrelated qualities are what I refer to as "The Four R's of Harmonious Living." These four values are essential for the realization of the atonement for which Jesus prayed – living in proper

unity or harmony with Creator and creation. Each of the “Four R’s” is an aspect of love, and without the practice of these four, true freedom does not exist. The next four parts of “From Conquest to Freedom” will focus carefully on these “Four R’s” which are also, in and of themselves, “Markers for Freedom.”

End of Part Three

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.