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FOREWORD BY
CASEY CHURCH, POKAGON BAND OF POTAWATOMI

THE
EVERLASTING
PEOPLE

G. K. CHESTERTON AND THE FIRST NATIONS



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INTRODUCTION



FROM THE HOLY MOUNTAIN TO SPIRIT ISLAND

Jesus has a purpose for me. He wants me to paint.

NORVAL MORRISSEAU (OJIBWE)

*Yea, we are very sick and sad
Who bring good news to all mankind.*

G. K. CHESTERTON

*I often think how the forest is like our Christ.
It is stronger than the evil that passes.*

KATERI TEKAKWITHA
(IN DIANE GLANCY'S *THE REASON FOR CROWS*)

ONE OF THE ADVANTAGES of writing a book on G. K. Chesterton and the First Nations of North America is that there is not a lot of competition. Traffic at the intersection of these particular interests is light. Just as curious, perhaps, the person to bring these fields together is a specialist in neither realm of study. My academic training is in the art and architecture of the Eastern Christian world.¹ On first glance, the cavernous, candlelit sanctuaries of the monastic republic

¹I should add that as much as I love Chesterton, on this subject at least he is singularly unilluminating. Late Byzantium was far more than an “Asiatic theocracy” that “flattened everything as it flattened the faces of the images into icons.” G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas*



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of Mount Athos, where prayers rise with incense, and the darkened womb of a North American sweat lodge, where prayers rise with pipe smoke and steam, seem unrelated. But the British journalist G. K. Chesterton, with his gift for making unexpected connections, taught me otherwise. Let me explain.

Throughout my education, I managed to hold on to my Christian faith with confidence thanks in part to the ministrations of Chesterton, “the Prince of Paradox.” Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy* was inoculation against newfangled versions of Christianity while I was a youth minister at a mainline Protestant church and a student at a mainline Protestant seminary. “I tried to be some ten minutes in advance of the truth,” he tells us, “and I found that I was eighteen hundred years behind it. . . . I did try to found a heresy of my own, and when I had put the last touches to it, I discovered it was orthodoxy.”² Written in the early 1900s, when Chesterton was in his thirties, *Orthodoxy*’s attacks on bare logic (“Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do”³) squared well with the fashion for deconstruction of the early 2000s. Chesterton melted the ice of mere reason with the fire of wonder. Fairy tales, he reminds us, “say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green.”⁴ And what upholds this gratitude for existence is not fleeting sentiment but sound doctrine, “the heavenly chariot” that “flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.”⁵

Later in graduate school at a research university where knowledge was fragmented into endless specializations, Chesterton’s coherent

Aquinas (1933; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover, 2009), 47. A fuller response to such reductions will be on offer in chap. 3 below.

²G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; repr., New York: Image, 1959), 4-5.

³Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 10.

⁴Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 51.

⁵Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 103.

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bravado on offer in *The Everlasting Man* provided an antidote. Because the book was published in 1925 when Chesterton was in his fifties, reading it was like enjoying extended conversation with a wise older brother. I learned from Chesterton that so-called pagan culture could be approached positively. “In so far as all this sort of paganism was innocent and in touch with nature, there is no reason why it should not be patronized by patron saints as much as by pagan gods.”⁶ And yet, Christ burst into uroboric time “swift and straight as a thunderbolt.”⁷ Chesterton showed me that when the rivers of mythology and philosophy flowed separately, they flowed sadly. Until, that is, they merged in the joyful cataract of Christian faith.⁸ When the celebrity philosopher Slavoj Žižek visited my graduate school and cited Chesterton approvingly, I was delighted to learn that my reading choice had become suddenly fashionable. I expect Chesterton would have relished Žižek’s challenge just as he enjoyed the company of all his atheist sparring partners. “In order to save its treasure, [Christianity] has to sacrifice itself—like Christ, who had to die so that Christianity could emerge,” claimed Žižek.⁹ “Why not?” I imagined Chesterton replying. For “Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave.”¹⁰

En route to Europe for a research trip, on a plane thirty thousand feet above Nova Scotia, land of the Mi’kmaq (a term I did not then know), I learned from Chesterton that the best thing I could do was leave North America as quickly as possible and make my way to the Mediterranean, for

⁶G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1925; repr., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 108.

⁷Chesterton, *Everlasting Man*, 207.

⁸Chesterton, *Everlasting Man*, 240.

⁹Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 171.

¹⁰Chesterton, *Everlasting Man*, 250.

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round that little sea like a lake were the things themselves, apart from all extensions and echoes and commentaries on the things; the Republic and the Church; the Bible and the heroic epics; Islam and Israel and the memories of the lost empires; Aristotle and the measure of all things.¹¹

What a thrill then to finally land in reality itself, not just its British or North American imitations. Wandering the streets of Thessaloniki on my first trip to that city, I could see Mount Olympus in the distance, abode of the gods. But I could save myself the bus trip and grueling hike because the brown-brick medieval churches I was studying, autumn leaves of the Byzantine Empire's waning years, were themselves the abode of God.

Even Mount Olympus seemed to smile on these late Byzantine-decorated churches.¹² In their frescoes, mosaics, and icons I found the creative zest of Zeus without his escapades of rape; the light and clarity of Apollo without his petulant revenge; and the confidence of Ares absent the warmongering. Hermes's promise of meaning was realized at last; Orpheus's descent to the underworld was confirmed by Christ's harrowing of hell. In these churches—the living heirs of Hellenism—the mother goddesses Hera, Artemis, and Aphrodite, were transformed into something far less expected: Mary, the mortal Mother of God. Athena was present as Holy Wisdom herself. The power of Poseidon was contained in baptismal fonts, Hestia's sacred hearth fire in the votive candles, and Demeter's shafts of wheat in the

¹¹Chesterton, *Everlasting Man*, 79.

¹²"Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury, Diana, Apollo, etc. were not at all demons, but leading prototypes of the development of human personality who, in their turn, correspond to cosmic—planetary and zodiacal—principles. . . . It cannot be otherwise than that as the coming of Jesus Christ was an event of universal significance, it had its universal preparation. . . . The incarnated Logos was awaited everywhere wherever one suffered, died, believed, hoped and loved." Anonymous, *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism*, trans. Robert Powell (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1985), 426-27.

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consecrated bread.¹³ Or, as Chesterton himself put it: “We have entered more deeply than they into the Eleusinian Mysteries and have passed a higher grade, where gate within gate guarded the wisdom of Orpheus. We know the meaning of all the myths.”¹⁴

Three times I enjoyed the ferry to the rocky outcrop of Mount Athos for research in fresco-festooned monasteries. I came to love the massive singular peak of Athos, a monotheistic answer to jagged Mount Olympus. Once Alexander the Great was asked if he'd like his face carved into the mountain. Fortunately, Alexander demurred, saying that the peninsula had already been defaced by a canal carved by the Persian King Xerxes I. That my own government had carved the faces of its leaders into a different holy mountain in the Black Hills of South Dakota did not then occur to me; but it is the kind of connection I expect Chesterton, ever suspicious of imperialism, might have made.



A good decade after my trips to the Mediterranean I found myself on a different ferry, heading for a different rocky outcrop, a freshwater Mount Athos of sorts. A short drive from my wife's childhood home in Ontario is a place known as Manitoulin Island,¹⁵ the largest freshwater island in the world. Just as the Mount Athos ferry flashed with

¹³To suggest that monotheism fulfills pagan insights is, of course, a standard Christian maneuver on offer in thinkers from Clement of Alexandria to Thomas Aquinas, but it is shared by some depth psychologists as well: “The gods and the goddesses are often in opposition. As long as the archetypal powers themselves are divided, the ego is cast in a tragic role, being split by the conflict that exists in the divine realm. . . . It is only with the unification symbolized by monotheism and psychologically represented by the Self that there is a chance to overcome this essential tragedy.” Edward F. Edinger, *The Eternal Drama: The Inner Meaning of Greek Mythology* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), 46. Edinger's faithfulness to the classic Jungian approach, in contrast to more recent polytheistic Jungianism, is refreshing.

¹⁴Chesterton, *Everlasting Man*, 115.

¹⁵As *manitou* can be understood as spirit, a literal translation of Manitoulin Island is “Spirit Island.”

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icons that defied both the norms of Renaissance art and our contemporary digital screens, so the exterior of the Chi-Cheemaun ferry was emblazoned in the Woodland School style founded by the “Picasso of the North,” Norval Morrisseau (1932–2007). I was on my way to Wikwemikong, the only unceded First Nation reserve in Canada.¹⁶ Technically, therefore, Wiky (as its residents refer to it) is not *in* Canada at all. Like Athos or the Vatican City, it is an entity all its own.

And as with Athos or the Vatican, proper connections were required to make this trip. I met an Ojibwe friend, who was understandably cautious that I not be too conspicuous. That night we attended a sweat lodge, as intimate and as foreign an experience for me as the liturgies on the Holy Mountain. First we prayerfully anointed our foreheads with bear grease (an unexpected move, but I went with it). We arrived at the home of a man who was conducting the sweat, a charge his family has upheld for generations. His face was as serious as the face of the Athonite monks who presided over the Eucharist. As Christians, my companion and I were not New Age seekers looking for a spiritual high.¹⁷ Still, I realized just how quickly I could ruin this.

¹⁶Theresa S. Smith, *The Island of the Anishnaabeg* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 10.

¹⁷George Tinker’s caution on this front remains valuable: “These visitors see little or nothing at all of the reservation community, pay little attention to the poverty and suffering of the people there, and finally leave having achieved only a personal, individual spiritual high.” George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 122. Elsewhere, Tinker calls White participation in such ceremonies a “colonizing virus” and the “New Age invasion of Indian ceremonies.” George Tinker, “American Indian Religious Traditions, Colonialism, Resistance, and Liberation,” in *Native Voices: American Indian Identity & Resistance*, ed. Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 229-30. He recommends that even a valid invitation be refused (233) as White participation in Indian ceremonies is “the ultimate act of postmodern colonialism” (237). Such participation can be everything Tinker suggests, especially under New Age auspices. The risks are real, but the answer to appropriation need not always be segregation. For Indigenous leaders who cautiously welcome non-Natives into ceremony, see Casey Church, *Holy Smoke: The Contextual Use of Native American Ritual and Ceremony* (Cleveland, TN: Cherohala Press), 51-74; Howard P. Bad Hand, *Native American*

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I wondered if I already had. As on Mount Athos, nothing about the ceremony catered to my desire to see it, and if I was regarded, understandably, with caution, I was still welcomed.

After the heated stones were deposited in the lodge, ten of us entered, sat in a circle, and covered ourselves with blankets. Most in the group were Anishinaabe, which can be translated “original people.” This is the Great Lakes umbrella term that includes (but is not limited to) the Council of Three Fires, the Potawatomi, the Ojibwe, and the Odawa.¹⁸ The only other White attender was from the nearby drug rehabilitation clinic. One of the elder women looked at me, glanced at my friend, and, guessing why I was joining them, raised her eyebrows and said, “Manopause?” I laughed and braced myself for the first round of heat. As the steam intensified, the prayers began. A woman on the reservation was ill, and this particular sweat was dedicated to her. In other words, this was a prayer meeting. The prayers were extemporaneous, just as they were in the evangelical youth group that won my enthusiasm as a high school student. I internalized my amens, and I kept breathing, anchoring my breath to a word internally spoken, *Christ*. “It’s not my job to make amends,” I remember thinking to myself, “but I know the one who did.” With each round, the heat intensified as did the prayers, and I made it through. We exited for a potluck feast, which was markedly unspiritual. We offered a cake we had purchased at the grocery store, and I enjoyed my first taste of Zizania, wild rice harvested on the Great Lakes.

Healing: A Lakota Ritual (Taos, NM: Dog Soldier Press, 2002). For the latter, “open [and inclusive] self-expression is an affirmation of the dignity, integrity, and strength of the well-being of our people” (xiv).

¹⁸*The Canadian Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Anishinaabe,” by Karl S. Hele, and Gretchen Albers, last edited July 16, 2020, www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/anishinaabe. Though spellings for this term abound, “[I]n the 1990s, this Indigenous People generally agreed that the spelling Anishinaabe was a closer approximation of a phonetic English spelling.” Gregory Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and About Indigenous Peoples* (Edmonton, AB: Brush Education, 2018), 70.

The next day I found myself face to face with the altarpiece by Ojibwe artist Blake Debassige at the Anishinabe Spiritual Centre, which depicts Christ as a cosmic tree.¹⁹ I had learned of the cosmology of the Mississippian Indians (c. AD 900–1500), for whom the above and below worlds were conjoined by an axial tree, and with the throughways between those worlds marked by crosses.²⁰ In a 2004 exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago that attempted to disseminate knowledge of Mississippian art, the director lamented, “Why has knowledge of this early form of [Native North American] civilization failed to make its way more decisively into our public system of education and our sense of cultural heritage?”²¹ Thanks to Debassige’s painting, however, it finally had. Here ancient Native cosmology was not an artifact of a bygone era or an instance of a superseded worldview, but part of a living faith. I asked the Centre staff if they had any resources that put Christianity into conversation with Indigenous spirituality. They promptly produced a responsible, community-generated fusion of the Ignatian Exercises and Ojibwe prayer that now informs a course I teach,²² which includes a visit to “the Ojibwe Jerusalem,” Madeline Island.²³ “The

¹⁹For a description of this masterpiece of Christian and Ojibwe visual theology, see Christopher Vecsey, *The Paths of Kateri’s Kin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). He writes that Debassige’s *Tree of Life* “portrays a cedar tree upon which Jesus is crucified, only in the image Jesus is within the tree; He is the tree; His body is the tree’s trunk and he shared in the tree’s medicinal properties” (232). See also the extensive reading of Debassige’s *Tree of Life* in Ron Tourangeau, *Visual Art as Metaphor: Understanding Anishinabe Spirituality and Christianity* (Graduate Theological Union dissertation, 1989).

²⁰See the drawing of the MACC (Mississippian Art and Ceremonial Complex) Cosmological Map in F. Kent Reilly III, “People of Earth, People of Sky: Visualizing the Sacred in Native American Art of the Mississippian Period,” Richard F. Townsend, Robert V. Sharp, eds., *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 127.

²¹Townsend and Sharp, *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand*, 6.

²²The Anishinabe Spiritual Centre, Dorothy Regan, CSJ, director, *The Quest for Spiritual Wisdom: Naandaawaam Daaming Gi Jemanitou Nibwaakaawin* (Espanola, ON: Anishinabe Spiritual Centre, 2000).

²³Mary Annette Pember, “Welcome to the Jerusalem for Ojibwe People,” *Indian Country Today*, March 7, 2014, updated September 13, 2018, accessed April 13, 2021, <http://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/welcome-to-the-jerusalem-for-ojibwe-people>.

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Christian religion is like a huge bridge across a boundless sea, which alone connects us with the men who made the world,” said Chesterton on a journey to the more famous Jerusalem.²⁴ Thankfully, the insight is not site-specific.



There have been many more trips and experiences like that one in the course of writing this book, along with a temptation to leave G. K. Chesterton behind. After all, he visited North America twice, in 1921 and 1930, including visits to lands rich with Indigenous presence, places such as Oklahoma and Ontario. I have traced Chesterton’s journeys, and then some, in my own travels. Along the way, I have wondered why a thinker so effusive about pre-Christian myth did not make the same connections on his visits to this continent. But instead of cataloging Chesterton’s deeds,²⁵ or his misdeeds,²⁶ why not simply supplement his vision instead? If Chesterton taught me to see European Indigenous culture fulfilled in the churches of Thessaloniki, the same lesson can be applied to sweat lodges and Sun Dances as well. Or as Steven Charleston (Choctaw) puts it:

If, in fact, the Jewish rabbi, Jesus of the first century, is truly Christ of the twenty-first century, then he must be transcendent of time and culture. He must be as much a part of the Native story as he is of the

²⁴G. K. Chesterton, *The New Jerusalem* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1921), 218.

²⁵It is difficult to imagine how Ian Ker’s magisterial biography could be surpassed. Ian Ker, *G. K. Chesterton: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Chapters 11 and 14 offer detailed accounts of Chesterton’s North American journeys.

²⁶For an extended critique of Chesterton’s attitude toward Jews, see Simon Mayers, *Chesterton’s Jews: Stereotypes and Caricatures in the Literature and Journalism of G. K. Chesterton* (self-pub., CreateSpace, 2013). For a defense, see Ann Farmer, *Chesterton and the Jews: Friend, Critic, Defender* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2015). Ian Ker (*G. K. Chesterton*, 420-24) concludes that Chesterton resisted racial anti-Semitism while not being innocent of his culture’s anti-Jewishness.

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story of any tribe or people. Consequently, we should be able to see his vision through lenses of Native American tradition as clearly as through European thought.²⁷

After Chesterton's extensive travels in America, it was *he* who perceived a profound lack in his analysis. "I wish I had more space here to do justice to the Red Indians," he tells us.²⁸ That is what I aim to work toward here. This adaptation (as opposed to adulation) of Chesterton strikes me as necessary, lest North American fascination with figures like Chesterton, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Dorothy Sayers devolve into a self-serving Christian intellectual subscription to BritBox.²⁹ Instead of bewailing the limits of Chesterton's richly Christian vision of history, I aim therefore to extend it.

Chesterton's desire for a "homogeneous England" is evident.³⁰ "One can imagine," a sympathetic biographer suggests, "what [Chesterton's] reaction would have been to a multicultural England."³¹ This book is one attempt to so imagine, and to suggest otherwise, but without leaving Christianity behind.³² Such a project is possible only thanks to the wealth of scholarly material that has recently emerged, complicating the relationship of Indigenous culture and Christianity,

²⁷Steven Charleston, *The Four Vision Questions of Jesus* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), 74.

²⁸G. K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America*, Collected Works 21 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 154. Blaming Chesterton for not using our more sensitive terminology to describe the First Nations is like complaining that a horse and carriage are unequipped with airbags. Obviously I will be updating his terms. Richard Twiss has a helpful terminology guide titled "What Should We Call You?" in *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys: A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 239-41. Also, see Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style*.

²⁹As Alan Jacobs once quipped, "We don't need another C. S. Lewis as much as we need ten people doing the kinds of things that he did" (personal communication).

³⁰Ker, G. K. *Chesterton*, 424.

³¹Ker, G. K. *Chesterton*, 424.

³²Ralph C. Wood's *Chesterton: The Nightmare Goodness of God* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011) is another, and more extensive, foray in this direction.

questioning popular stereotypes of evil missionaries and Indigenous victims.³³ Scholarly prejudice against Christian Indigenous material, sometimes deemed insufficiently “exotic” to White imagination, has led to major losses, making it important to highlight material that survives.³⁴ In lieu of a summary of this literature, which is woven throughout this study, material culture makes the point with particular force, whether the funeral remains of an eleven-year-old Pequot girl, buried around 1700 with a medicine bundle containing the skeletal remains of a bear paw and a fragment of Psalm 98,³⁵ or the illustrated vision of a Kiowa man named Fíqí (Eater), received

³³ “[Missionary] encounters could transform missionaries even as their missionary projects could transform the cultures of Native communities. Missionary encounters have led to the tragic loss of many Native languages; missionary encounters have also led, through the mechanisms and practices of literacy, to the retention of Native languages. Missionary encounters could eradicate tradition; they could also provide material for new articulations of those traditions. The encounters could introduce or exacerbate divisions in Native communities and families, fomenting disastrous results, if not violence; through those encounters could also emerge novel social networks and institutions around which fragmented Native peoples could restore their communities.” Michael D. McNally, “Naming the Legacy of Native Christian Missionary Encounters,” in *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, ed. Joel W. Martin and Mark A. Nicholas (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 289. A Canadian extension of this scholarly project is on offer in Tolly Bradford and Chelsea Horton, eds., *Mixed Blessings: Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016). “In place of . . . dichotomous depictions, scholars of Indigenous-Christian interaction . . . have increasingly stressed Indigenous agency and explored how Christianity had, and continues to have, real meaning for many Indigenous people” (5).

³⁴ “By and large, to most twentieth-century scholars, Native Christianity remained relegated to eddies off the mainstream of scholarly production. As a consequence, important histories of exchange were ignored, compelling stories of individual and communal transformation went unnarrated, archival collections of incalculable value were untapped, and important primary texts written by Native Americans themselves remain unpublished.” Martin and Nicholas, *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, 14.

³⁵ The discovery was made in 1990 in Massachusetts. The girl would have been buried sometime between 1683 and 1720. The verse reads, “The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen” (Ps 98:2 KJV). Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5-6.

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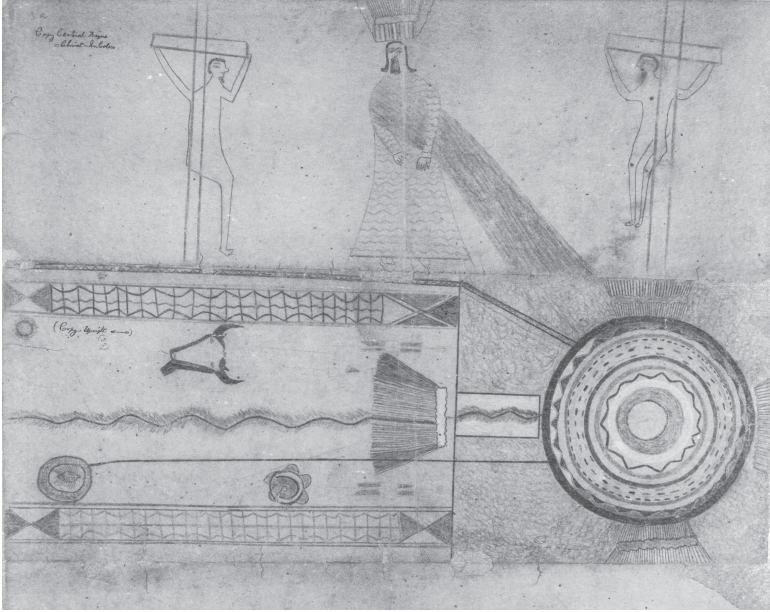


Figure I.1. Fiqui (Kiowa), Vision of Jesus between crosses blessing the Feather (Ghost) Dance collected by Smithsonian ethnologist James Mooney, c. 1890

during the revived Ghost Dance, of Christ blessing the ceremony himself (see fig. I.1).³⁶

Over the last 150 years, White views of Native spirituality have shifted “from a shocked contempt for primitive superstition that verges on devil worship, to an envious awe for a holistic spirituality

³⁶Jennifer Graber explains that this revival of the Ghost Dance, known in this case as the Feather Dance, emerged in Kiowa territory shortly after the suppression of the Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee. Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 187-91. It was looked at with trepidation by Christian missionaries, and by some Native Christians themselves, and yet in the Ghost Dance Christ was repeatedly encountered, a fact also emphasized in Louis S. Warren’s *God’s Red Son: The Ghost Dance Religion and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 2017). The drawings were created because anthropologist James Mooney asked Eater and other leaders to “draw about his experience with sacred power” (Graber, *Gods of Indian Country*, 173).

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that might be the last best hope for the human race.³⁷ Christianity has colored every point of this dizzying spectrum. Yet it is too often forgotten that secular admiration of Indians can be as patronizingly violent in “editing” Indigenous Christianity as Christian missionaries had once been in attacking Indigenous ceremonies.³⁸ The embarrassments of early Christian missionaries are real; but so is the appropriation and commercialization of Indigenous culture by the New Age movement at present.³⁹ While the fusion of Indigenous and New Age thought is a recent invention,⁴⁰ the fusion of Christianity and Indigenous North American culture is nearly five centuries old, and is vastly preferable to more recent uses of Indigenous culture to buttress “claims about lost continents and UFOs. . . .”⁴¹ Tutored by Chesterton’s humor, his taste for paradox, his love of legend and mythology, and his distrust of imperialism,⁴² this book continues the age-old conversation between Christianity and Indigenous North American life.

Some readers might wonder how a Protestant Christian, which I happen to be, manages the ultramontane swagger of Chesterton’s Catholicism. W. H. Auden’s remarks on this score are hard to improve upon: “If [Chesterton’s] criticisms of Protestantism are not very interesting, this was not his fault. It was a period when Protestant theology (and, perhaps Catholic too), was at a low ebb, Kierkegaard had not been

³⁷Philip Jenkins, *Dream Catchers: How Mainstream America Discovered Native Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2-3.

³⁸John Collier’s (1884–1968) blood and soil romanticization of Native Americans, including “the mystical ideas of *Volk* . . . translate painfully well into German.” Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, 89.

³⁹Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, chaps. 8, 9, and 10.

⁴⁰Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, 143. “Though presented as a record of traditional teaching, [Frank] Waters’s (1902–1995) commentary transforms the *Book of the Hopi* into a survey and an overview of occult and esoteric teaching as it has flourished in the United States since the late nineteenth century” (163).

⁴¹Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, 218.

⁴²See “Chesterton the Postcolonial Theorist,” in Luke Seaber, *G. K. Chesterton’s Literary Influence on George Orwell: A Surprising Irony* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2012), 340.

re-discovered and Karl Barth had not yet been translated.”⁴³ Indeed, it may be that the Prince of Paradox underestimated Luther’s Pauline paradox that so effectively describes the redeemed human condition, that of *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time just and sinful).⁴⁴ But speaking of sin, few have considered how much Indigenous Americans suffered from competition among Protestants and Catholics on North American shores. In 1565, decades before Plymouth Rock, Jean Ribault visited the New World, establishing Fort Caroline near what is now Jacksonville, Florida. The first European artist to visit what is now America was on that mission, Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues (c. 1533–1588). He encountered the Timucuan people, producing valuable engravings of their lifeways, which he carefully observed.⁴⁵ And they, in turn, carefully observed European practices, soon witnessing 143 French Huguenots executed by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, a pious Catholic. The inscription above the gallows read, “I do this not as to Frenchmen, but as to Lutherans.”⁴⁶ When the Indians protested, “You killed fellow Christians, the French,” the Spanish reply was simply, “They were bad Christians.”⁴⁷

Whatever is to be said about reports of cannibalism among Indigenous Americans, the French explorer Jean de Léry, who produced

⁴³W. H. Auden, foreword, *G. K. Chesterton: A Selection from His Non-fictional Prose* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), 17.

⁴⁴For an attempt to charitably discern this “Protestant” theme in traditional Catholic and Orthodox art, see Matthew J. Milliner, “Visual Ecumenism: The Coy Communion of Art,” in George Kalantzis and Marc Cortez, eds., *Come, Let Us Eat Together: Sacraments and Christian Unity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 124–49.

⁴⁵Miles Harvey, *Painter in a Savage Land: The Strange Saga of the First European Artist in North America* (New York: Random House, 2008).

⁴⁶Charles E. Bennett, *Fort Caroline and Its Leader* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1976), 38. This killing was later avenged by a surprise French attack on the Spanish, and a sign above the gallows read, “Not as to Spaniards, but as to Traitors, Robbers, and Murderers” (49). For an account of the St. Augustine mission following such violence, see Robert L. Kapitzke, *Religion, Power, and Politics in Colonial St. Augustine* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

⁴⁷Nicholas P. Cushner, *Why Have You Come Here? The Jesuits and the First Evangelization of Native America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37.

similar reports on South American Indians, asserts that Europeans were worse. Hatred between Protestants and Catholics in France was so severe in the wake of the 1572 Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre that one victim "was cut to pieces and displayed for sale to those who hated him, who wanted to grill it over coals to eat it, glutting their rage like mastiffs."⁴⁸ Such was the atmosphere in which competing Christian missions in the New World began, and in which they continued. "Many of the reasons why Native religions offended and irritated American Protestants—ritualism, fanaticism, clericalism, a veneration for sacred objects and places—have to be understood in the context of contemporary anti-Catholicism."⁴⁹ An unsavory, but perfectly typical, illustration of such polemics in full flair is on offer in competing catechetical ladder illustrations used by Catholic, and then Protestant, missionaries to Native Americans, each ridiculing their denominational competitors with perfected visual spite.⁵⁰

Sobered by these facts, I will not perpetuate internecine squabbles here. "We do not want churches because they will teach us to quarrel with God, as the Catholic and Protestants do," complained the Nez Perce chief Joseph (1840–1904). "We do not want to learn that."⁵¹ And some of us now want to unlearn it.⁵² I remain grateful for Chesterton's

⁴⁸Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, trans. Janet Whatley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 132. The account was originally published in 1578. For an instructive caution not to imagine Native societies as any less war-torn, see Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, 220–22.

⁴⁹Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, 33. Also see "Protestant Rivalry" in Christopher Vecsey, *Where the Two Roads Meet* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 20.

⁵⁰Graber, *Gods of Indian Country*, 55–58.

⁵¹Daniel J. Sharfstein, *Thunder in the Mountains: Chief Joseph, Oliver Otis Howard, and the Nez Perce War* (New York: Norton, 2018), 165.

⁵²Laurence Freeman offers just such a lesson centered in the Christian contemplative tradition in *Jesus the Teacher Within* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 146–50. Moreover, his entire argument is surprisingly "Indigenous," based in land and animal life. "The resurrection of Christian contemplative practices, *theoria physike* (natural contemplation), might open the modern Christian's 'inner eye' to the light shining through Native American spirituality and the natural world." Donald P. St. John, "Paying His Debts to Native

reclamation of Christianity's essential contours in the face of a Protestant establishment that neglected them.⁵³ But "Christianity shattered on the shores of this continent," reminds Vine Deloria Jr.⁵⁴ Boasting, as Chesterton does, that the largest piece of a fractured vessel is intact is no argument that the vessel is unbroken.⁵⁵ That Indigenous persons drank from the Christian vessel still, and thereby transformed it, remains a marvel—even one of Christianity's grimmer "proofs."⁵⁶

SUMMARY AND RATIONALE

My first chapter takes its cues from *The Everlasting Man* to examine not the cave paintings of Europe, as Chesterton did, but the Indigenous rock art of North America that is only recently coming to light. The Indigenous belief of the Underwater Panther (Mishipeshu) and Thunderbird (Animiki), so often depicted in rock art and mounds, emerges as the book's guiding motif; the former I connect to the process of settlement, the latter to Christ. Of course, when using Indigenous symbols, the thorny question of appropriation emerges. If anyone has come to this book wishing for an Indigenous description of these complex beings who inhabit the upper and lower realms, they have come to the wrong place. To understand these creatures and their symbolic contours on Native terms, I refer readers to Native

Americana Peoples: Thomas Merton on the 'Spiritual Richness of the Indian Religious Genius,' in *Merton and Indigenous Wisdom* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2019), 140.

⁵³For a coherent account of what it means to be a principled ecumenical Protestant today, see Phillip Cary, *The Meaning of Protestant Theology: Luther, Augustine, and the Gospel That Gives Us Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), esp. 12.

⁵⁴Vine Deloria Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 30th anniv. ed. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2003), 143.

⁵⁵I commend Ephraim Radner's *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012) for an account of Christian division that takes the consequences of discord fully into account.

⁵⁶When asked, after a talk at Wheaton College, why Black slaves embraced the religion of their oppressors, Willie Jennings responded, "Despised Black flesh was drawn to the despised Jewish flesh of Jesus." A similar dynamic may have been at work among Indigenous Americans.

persons themselves.⁵⁷ My Potawatomi contacts in particular were only comfortable with my proceeding with my interpretation insofar as that was made abundantly clear. I am borrowing these motifs not to define, reduce, or explain them,⁵⁸ but in order to drive home the realities of settlement and the presence of Christ among the First Nations, and even to illuminate my own psychology.⁵⁹ To be sure, this method has its risks, but the invitation to employ these symbols beyond the Native world has been extended.⁶⁰ My approach is certainly preferable, I hope, to the current options of popularizing these symbols in tourist attractions (the Hodag), automobiles (the Pontiac Thunderbird), or TV shows.⁶¹

It is also preferable, I hope, to the considerable risk taken by most North Americans by default: ignoring these symbols altogether. Put another way, I refuse to pass by depictions of Thunderbirds and Underwater Panthers that surround me without letting them deeply inform my life as a Christian. What Hugo Rahner said of classical culture applies to Native American culture as well: “All that is good

⁵⁷The sensitive work of Theresa Smith is exemplary in its attentiveness to Indigenous descriptions of these beings. She is careful to avoid the suggestion that the two beings function as a Manichean view of the world where good and evil are paired off in equal combat. Smith, *Island of the Anishnaabeg*, 132. But Smith points out that they can also—supplemented by Ojibwe tripartite psychology—stimulate wider reflection on psychological wholeness, which anticipates the present book’s conclusion as well.

⁵⁸For an example of just that, and how such a reduction played into the process of settlement, see James Joseph Buss, *Winning the West with Words: Language and Conquest in the Lower Great Lakes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 110-17.

⁵⁹For the dangers of using Indigenous culture as a “vehicle for [one’s] own personal mythology,” see Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, 140. Still, when Selwyn Dewdney wondered what we should call Underwater Panthers, he was right to ask, “How does one name one’s deepest, unspoken fears?” Smith, *Island of the Anishnaabeg*, 99.

⁶⁰Kitty Bell, for example, sees “Ojibwe tradition not as a culturally bound belief system but as a potential contributor to a new world philosophy.” Smith, *Island of the Anishnaabeg*, 194.

⁶¹In one episode of the television series *Grimm*, the Underwater Panther possesses Native American and African American men and women, and stalks White men. As will be seen, I am suggesting quite the opposite.

and true has proceeded from the Logos and has its homing-point in the incarnate God, even though this be hidden from us, even though human thought and human good-will may not have perceived it.”⁶² Or as an Ojibwe elder says in Ignatia Broker’s novel *Night Flying Woman*: “Only time will tell if [Christianity] is the right thing for our people. If it is, then the people who wish us to be baptized will some day come to know the goodness that has been our life.”⁶³ That overdue day has come. The Christian Thunderbird, long muffled and suppressed by European entitlement, is once more taking to flight.⁶⁴

In the second chapter, I intend to contribute to the burgeoning regionalist literature of the Midwest⁶⁵ with what I am calling *penitent* regionalism. If Chesterton’s localism adored the Notting Hill neighborhood of London, we can love our own homes wherever they are, but without forgetting the Indigenous cultures that came first. I hope in this exploration to have avoided the risk of romanticization that can emerge, sometimes unintentionally, when approaching Indigenous societies.⁶⁶ In *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Jared Diamond famously explained how the accidents of geography and climate are what gave Europeans “more cargo.”⁶⁷ “If [Indigenous] people had enjoyed the same geographic advantages as my people,” he cheerfully explains, “[they] would have been the ones to invent

⁶²Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (New York: Biblio & Tannen, 1971), xiv.

⁶³Ignatia Broker, *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibwe Narrative* (St. Paul: Borealis Books, Minnesota Historical Society, 1983), 93.

⁶⁴On the currents provided by Indigenous theologies such as Randy Woodley’s *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012). It is particularly exciting to see an Indigenous Bible translation: Terry M. Wildman, ed., *First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021).

⁶⁵Jon K. Lauck, *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013).

⁶⁶Jenkins, *Dream Catchers*, esp. chap. 7.

⁶⁷Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, 20th anniv. ed. (New York: Norton, 1999), 14.

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