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“False Doctrine” and the Stifling Of Indigenous Political Will

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Abstract

I hypothesize that there is a correlation between the failure of Indigenous politics to achieve its goals and the sway of what Thomas Paine refers to as the false doctrine of Christian dogma. Unremitting evangelism and Christian hegemony has led to silencing or compromising authentic grassroots voices of too many Indigenous people. High conversion rates have weakened opportunities for resistance to colonialism and the loss of vital traditional values. (I suggest that a similar problem may relate to the failure of contemporary black politics.) It is important at this critical time for human civilization to reflect carefully on the influence of dominant worldview assumptions as relates both to the tragic problems facing Indigenous Peoples as well as to the broader consequences globally of having dismissed Indigenous understandings about the world. Overcoming the problems of religious hegemony does not require wholesale rejection. It includes possibilities for a complementary relationship between Indigenous spiritual understanding and alternative interpretations of Biblical Gospel that have existed for centuries. Moving to a different location is a simple process, though it often takes courage. One merely decides what to take and what to leave behind. What man makes, whether computers or religions, requires consumers to critically and intuitively consider both positive and negative potential outcomes. We must engage dialectically about likely universal truths and those that we invent about how best to live in flowing balance. All of us, Indigenous as well as those far removed from their Indigenous ancestors, however, can learn to again trust in the laws of Nature on which Indigenous worldviews are based.



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The imminent and expected destruction of the life cycle of world ecology can be prevented by a radical shift in outlook...Making this shift in viewpoint is essentially religious, not economic or political.

—Vine Deloria, Jr. (1973, p.290)

We must be compelled to hold this doctrine to be false, and the old and new law called the Old and new Testament, to be impositions, fables and forgeries.

—Thomas Paine (1996, p.134)

Indigenous Political Will and Christian Hegemony

As I write this essay, the Bougainville Independent Indigenous People's Foundation is preparing to once again stand against an effort to reopen the infamous Panguna gold mine. The first stand against the devastation of the mind on land and people that continued in a ten-year war between a coalition of Indigenous Peoples on the island and the military force of Papua New Guinea that was supported by Australia led to widespread human rights violations and 20,000 Indigenous fatalities (Ambassador, 2012). The Bouganvillians survived a gunboat blockade around the island that prevent anything from reaching the people by using their Indigenous wisdom to survive completely off the land. A number of documentary films have been made about all of this, referring to it as the first modern ecological revolution. Bernadine Kama, a leader of the foundation and daughter of one of the leaders of the original resistance is quoted in the *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*:

I just cannot comprehend why we must continue to suffer at the hands of our leaders and our government, which has been negotiating to re-open the mine when a lot of issues which resulted from previous mining activities in Panguna remain unaddressed. Can we not be left alone to live our own lives in peace on our land? Many people are going where the wind blows them and they will not even consider the dire consequences of mining. Once mining begins it will not end in Panguna: the whole island will be affected and no amount of legislation or law will stop it, once money starts flying around. President Momis tries to equate mining with independence. I don't see any logic in that, simply because we are the most independent people in the world as we are now, because we live off our land; and if we were cut off from the rest of the world, surely we would find a way to survive. We have done it before and we will do it again (August, 2013).

The driving force behind the Indigenous protest and demand for sovereignty was the common worldview shared from the different Indigenous groups. This encouraged the original resistance and the ability of everyone to join together to live totally off of and in harmony with the land. One group, "Damien Dameng's Me'ekamui Onoring Pontoku," (very roughly translated from the Nasioi language as "government of the guardians of the sacred land.") started resisting against colonialism and missionary imposition in the 1950s. They declared that, in spite of an estimated 80 percent of the population then belonging to the Catholic Church, the traditional egalitarian social structure and values were superior (Reagan, 2010). I contend that without this

consciously discussed basis for opposing the hegemony¹ of the Christian worldview and its indirect affiliation with the forces of economic oppression and ecological destruction, the remarkable achievement of the Bougainville revolution would not have come about.

Consider Bolivia as another example in support of this claim. Before the 1990s, the Bolivian Indigenous Peoples had the same relatively absent political voice that exists in most of the other Latin American countries, even in those few that have managed to gain Indigenous political parties and representation in their governments. Chaplin's article, "Social Movements in Bolivia: From Strength to Power" reveals Indigenous solidarity around their traditional worldview led to the landslide election of Evo Morales, who earned 54% of the vote in contrast to a historical 2 percent (2010, p. 346-355). "By strategically arranging and enacting elements of traditional narratives and myth, like the notion of *pachakuti*, these political actors have been able to produce consensus about the kinds and forms of change that are appropriate and possible in the complex historical conjuncture of contemporary Bolivia" (Postero, 2007, p.4). I participated in some of the discussions prior to the election and know that respectful but nonetheless strong challenges to Christian doctrine and the cultural hegemony stemming from it were significant, something that has largely not occurred in Mexico where I live and that may ultimately be partially responsible for the ineffectiveness of the Zapatistas.

Contrasts between the United States and Canada also may support my contention that Christian hegemony stifles Indigenous political strength. In both countries Indigenous rights and well-being are inadequate, but Canadian Aboriginals have somewhat more political voice than American Indians, not enough to brag about but perhaps enough to support my argument.) From the relatively successful effort to give the tribes in British Columbia control of their own educational curricula to the existence of the growing "Idle No More protest movement, Aboriginal efforts in Canada can easily be viewed as stronger than those in the United States. It may not be a coincidence that Canada is significantly less Christianized, not so much in terms of claimed affiliations, but in attitudes. For example, a 2005 Gallup poll showed 28% of Canadians consider religion "very important" compared to 55% of Americans.

Evangelism in Indian Country

Starting with the United States government's violation of the church-state separation contentions with its "kill the Indian, save the man" policies, a less violent but equally enthusiastic evangelism remains strong in "Indian country." On the Navajo and Lakota reservations, Christian missionary strategy work, churches and input into education seems more prevalent than ever, even though some reports say fewer individuals claim being Christian. As for my own Cherokee relations,

By the twentieth century Christianity was a major faith in the Oklahoma Indian community. The Methodist Oklahoma Indian Mission Conference, for example, reported in the year 2000 that it had seventy-two hundred members worshipping in

¹ Realizing it is not a scholarly reference, I borrow here from a wiki offering for "Christian hegemony" that suitably describes my use of the phrase: describes the ways in which the dominant group, in this case U.S. Christians in general and predominantly Protestants, successfully disseminate *dominant* social constructions as being common sense, as normative. Christian hegemony supposes that Christianity is part of the natural order, even at times by those who are marginalized, disempowered, or rendered invisible by it. Thus, Christian hegemony maintains the marginality of already marginalized religions, faiths, and spiritual communities.

eighty-nine churches in Oklahoma, Kansas, and north Texas. Baptist and Methodist congregations outnumbered the rest of the field, but there were sizeable numbers of Catholics and a growing number of Pentecostals as well (Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History).

One of many examples of this evangelical movement comes from a seminary student's paper that is posted on the Internet. In his thesis paper during his senior year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, William Cornelius concludes, "I cannot imagine a people more in need of the gospel than the Lakota" (N.D., p 9). His paper, based on missionary work and research on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, is titled, "Evangelizing the Lakota: Understanding the Differences in Order to See the Opportunities." Referring to the high rates of disease, substance abuse, poverty and violence among the Lakota, he says it is wrongheaded for the many competing churches on the reservation to attempt to "harmonize" with the Lakota culture, such as having dance rings for traditional dances located on church property. Rather, he asserts that the Gospel "has changed cultures before and can change this one as well" (p.14).

Although my hypothesis that Christian hegemony continues to stifle Indigenous political will is seldom debated in politics, education or culture, the general idea has a long-standing and somewhat illustrious history. Criticism of religion in general dates back thousands of years to ancient Greece when Diagoras Melos, the poet, criticized Greek religious beliefs. Karl Marx's famous quote, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (2009, n.p.) comes closer perhaps to describing effects on Indigenous Peoples I offer here. Even closer, however, is the most influential of America's founding father's, Thomas Payne. He had visited the "wild Indian" and contrasted the European worldview with the life and perspectives of the Indigenous People he observed. "Among the Indians," he wrote, "there are not any of those spectacles of misery that poverty and want present to our eyes in the towns and streets of Europe" (Foner, 1995, p.610). Worried deeply about the influence of Christian religion on the manifestations of democracy, he wrote his famous text, *The Age of Reason*, an act that cost him dearly for the rest of his life. He writes, "It is the reverse of truth, and I become so tired of examining into its inconsistencies and absurdities, that I hasten to the conclusion of it, in order to proceed to something better" (Paine, 2010, p.31).

Professor David Gabbard writes in "Before Predator Came," about the importance of examining how "Christianization" played an important role in the conquest of both European Indigenous cultures, as well as in the colonization of Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. He says that our collective ignorance or denial about this contributes to continuing ethnocide today (2006, p. 229). He does not mention such ignorance or denial exists among Indigenous individuals themselves, but of course I am making this point. When a professor at NAU, I taught reservation Navajo, Apache and Hopi seniors about the true history of Christopher Columbus by assigning primary source documents about his atrocities in the name of Christian doctrine. Over the years, many came to me after class shocked to finally have realized that celebrating such a person could be such a horrible and damaging practice. I was not all that surprised. When I was Dean of Education at Oglala Lakota College, I saw how teachers at the Christian school presented a history class one day when I was observing an Oglala student teacher handing out copies of something to the 4th grade Lakota children. It was a reading assignment created by her non-Indian mentor teacher. The handout was titled, "The First Americans." It was about Davy Crocket, Kit Carson and Daniel Boone!

Of course, the sacred authority of Biblical scripture (should I capitalize "scripture" as well?) is at the heart of Christian hegemony. Robert Allen Warrior, a member of the Osage Nation, writes in "Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians" that the Bible will always be incompatible with authentic Indigenous ways of seeing the world. "The Bible is part of the heritage and thus the consciousness of people in the United States. Whatever dangers we identify in the text and the god represented there will remain as long as the text remains" (1989, p.263).

Red and White Partnering?

My position is sympathetic but differs from Warrior's in that I see a potential for complementarity between the two worldviews as long as blind acceptance of Biblical inerrancy on the part of the Christian partner is not invoked. I have written about such a partnership as relates to solar and lunar twin hero myths from around the world (Jacobs, 1998, pp.144-148; Four Arrows, 2006 and Four Arrows 2013). (See also the work on this by archetypal psychologists, Howard Teich (2012).) In essence, I offer that Western myths have split the metaphorical twins, making dominant the solar one who either kills or diminishes the lunar twin. In Indigenous twin hero stories, the two work in complementary harmony. I suggest that Christianity has emerged as the "solar" twin- active, heroic, intent on mastery and physical, materialistic outcomes. I do not believe this split originated with the teachings of Jesus (the man), but to the subsequent politically based interpretations set forth in the Bible, interpretations that rejected alternative realities.² Thus, the dominant, assertive "above Nature" cultures, under the banner of Christian fundamentalism (and related Islamic and Jewish versions as well) may be the "twin" of the more reflective, creative, mystical Indigenous spiritual traditions that focus on the complex and mutually supportive interconnections with Nature.

I hold to this possibility for complementarity between the Indigenous and the Christian worldview perhaps because the former embraces all forms of diversity and sees complementarity and reciprocity in everything. Still, Warrior may be more accurate in realizing that there is a difference between respecting another's right to contrary beliefs and allowing such beliefs to cause harm to future generations. I am reminded of what Alice Walker told me when I proudly gave her a newly released copy of my book, *Differing Worldviews: Two Scholars Argue Cooperatively about Justice in Higher Education* (2012). I thought she would complement me on having invited my philosophical "enemy," a scholar who truly believes only humans have intrinsic value, to co-author the book with me so we might find common ground. Instead she scoffed, saying that I was "in bed with the devil." Bruce Wilshire, in his chapter for *Unlearning the Language of Conquest*, may have more eloquently captured a more appropriate sentiment:

It is difficult to imagine any of the three great Western religions seconding Black Elk's insight that the roundness of teepees corresponds to the roundness of bird's nests: "Birds build their nests in circles for there's is the same religion s ours." From this primal original point emanate salient features of the West's worldview." It is hierarchical, dualistic, exclusivist, and divisive (p.266).

This ironic phrase ("Being in bed with the devil") itself stems from the dualist, punitive features of dominant Christian orthodoxy. Perhaps a better phrase to describe what Alice meant and what I am presenting here is Audre Lorde's, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's

² For example, some of the Gnostic texts question whether suffering derive from human sin, others speak of the feminine element and see God as both father and mother, etc. (Pagels, 1979).

house.” I interpret this to mean that when good Christian activists use Biblical references and concepts to argue for the environment, for woman’s equality, against slavery or punishment or in behalf of “primitive” worldviews, contradictions ultimately surface that weaken one’s position. As Warrior notes, whatever dangers exist in the Bible that caused the genocide and contribute to continuing culturicide of Indigenous Peoples are still there. They likely touch some portion of our unconscious psyches, no matter what we consciously pick and choose to believe.

Even my friend and colleague, the late Vine Deloria, Jr., in spite of his life-long critique of Christianity and his tireless work in behalf of Indigenous worldview and justice for American Indians (*Time Magazine* named him one of the most important religious thinkers of the world in the early 1970s), may have been compromised by his close affiliation with Christian evangelism. His family were among the earliest Sioux converts to Christianity, in the 1860's, and his grandfather and father were ministers. Vine himself received his master’s degree in theology in 1963 from the Lutheran School of Theology in Illinois.

If such a champion of Indian rights and supporter of Indigenous mythology over Christian mythology might be compromised by his Christian background, this would be another possible indicator that one cannot dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools. Well, Ed McGaw (Eagle Man) feels strongly that Deloria *was* guilty of offering “implicit accommodation to the colonialism of the West (Four Arrows, 2013, p. 260).” Eagle Man has much in common with Deloria. Both are Oglalas from Pine Ridge; both practiced law; both wrote books on Indigenous spirituality; and both were Marines (although Deloria never saw action and Eagle Man flew 110 missions in an F-14 over Viet Nam.) Eagle Man believes that Vine’s affiliations with Christianity, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, kept him from being a true ally in the struggle against the missionaries and the government during a crucial time when the Civil Rights Movement gave American Indians who wanted to reclaim their traditional spiritual ways a fighting chance to do so. Discussing the control of the missionaries and the struggle to reclaim Lakota spiritual paths, Eagle Man largely dismisses Deloria’s many published challenges to doctrine and dogma in Western Christian traditions:

Vine Deloria offers no such exposure or such writing nor involvement with we who were in the Trenches of Change back in the 60s and 70s. His family, leading Missionaries, knew of the existence of Canton yet nary a word from Vine. It was I whom Chief Fools Crow sent to invite AIM to come to the Sun Dance and protect it from its detractors....Vine never danced with us (Personal email, August 10, 2012).

And,

Vine Deloria wrote a book called *Singing in the Spirit*. It is dedicated to his great grandfather, Saswe, whom God allegedly told he had to kill four Indians before becoming a Christian. Two of these fellow tribal people were innocent Indians. One was simply sitting on a hill and was shot point blank: Justifiably so, according to Deloria. Singing in the Spirit never includes one Medicine person of Native background for references that he personally knew! He describes Sun Dance and Vision Quest from a narration by a white woman who had absolutely no spiritual respect for her subject. She claimed, like Deloria’s influencing Aunt Ella- our Spirit calling ceremonies were ‘Devil influenced’. Odd! We don’t have devils or Satans! He was an Indian Academic like so many who never told about

boarding school, our many struggles, or our dedicated heroes. I have yet to read about one Indian academic to report on South Dakota's greatest secret- the Federal Indian Insane Asylum at Canton, SD and this includes those 4 academic Indians who presently sit on South Dakota's Humanities Commission. Our Medicine Men and Women were conveniently sent there- forever as evidenced by the surrounding graves. This was at a time when the Delorias, Rosses, and Jesuits were at the height of their missionary power in league with the government over the people (McGaw, 2010).

Whether or not Deloria's Christian upbringing made him a somewhat weaker promoter of Indigenous worldviews at the grassroots level or not cannot be known. Nor, if Eagle Man is accurate, can we say much about him not Sun Dancing or not talking about his family's knowledge of the horrors of the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians? If Eagle Man is right, could Deloria, with his academic clout and reputation, have done more to move Indigenous Peoples closer to authentic sovereignty? Was he using the master's tools somehow to too great a degree for making the highest possible contributions to gaining sovereignty? Such questions merely serve to give us more possibilities for seeing merit in my thesis.

It also may be that Deloria understood the risk of not working within and with the system. Colloredo-Mansfeld's writes about how an authentic community focus by Indigenous grassroots organizers can sometimes get in the way of more collaborative Indigenous groups who have gained access to political machinery by at least partially "playing the game" (2007). This is why this discussion must be on the table. If the evidence exists that in the long term staying within the boundaries of the system as a way to change it ultimately does not work, however, then we must have the courage to change strategies?

The African American Example

I now briefly look at how the failure of black politics³ may be correlated to uncritical acceptance of Christian dogma as it is generally understood in the United States (Christian hegemony). African Americans have Indigenous roots that were also initially destroyed by force and were later suppressed or forgotten via evangelism. African Americans, however, unlike American Indians, went full tilt with Christianity. I have not researched to see if freed slaves in America wanted to reclaim tribal values and ways of life, instead of preferring to own a piece of the pie created by their previous owners. However, it is rare to see African American writers arguing for their Indigenous worldview in political discourse, a common occurrence among Indigenous writers and academics. Certainly a number of civil rights activists turned away from religion totally. Some turned to communism. Malolm X turned to another of the Abrahamic religions- Islam- perhaps feeling the need to offer some spiritual perspective for the movement. All seemed wary of Christianity, but none spoke of returning to African Indigenoussness. In his grassroots speech three months after Martin Luther King, Jr. led the famous march on

³ A June, 2013 report shows many situations are worse for African Americans than those exposed in Daniel Patrick Moynihans 1965 report to the U.S. Department of Labor, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." In spite of the civil rights movements, family breakdown, income inequality and poverty, imprisonment rates, segregated schools, domestic and gang violence, police brutality and the loss of voting rights (Acs, G., Braswell, K., Sorensen, E. and Austin Turner, M., 2013)

Washington, D.C., in November of 1963, Malcolm X is clear that he does not want to be in bed with the devil, so to speak:

They controlled you, but they never incited you or excited you. They controlled you; they contained you; they kept you on the plantation. They invited a priest, a rabbi, and an old white preacher. Yes, an old white preacher. The same white element that put Kennedy in power — labor, the Catholics, the Jews, and liberal Protestants; same clique that put Kennedy in power, joined the march on Washington. It's just like when you've got some coffee that's too black, which means it's too strong. What you do? You integrate it with cream; you make it weak (1963)

We know from his autobiography that Malcolm X believed that Christianity was strategically used to brainwash African Americans and fill them with self-hate by making them worship a “blond, blue-eyed God” (1964, p. 319) and rob them of political power. “Christianity had made black men fuzzy, nebulous, confused in their thinking” (p.424). He chose Islam perhaps because, well, it was there for him and shared his negativity about Christianity. His activism, however, was about black people creating their own society, their own rules and values and this is what made his grassroots organizing powerful.

Amos Wilson echoes some of the same understanding about how Christianity robs the black man of power. In a chapter entitled, “The Social and Cultural Origins of Power,” from a book he wrote named, *Blueprint for Black Power: A Moral, Political and Economic Imperative for the Twenty-First Century*, Amos Wilson writes:

For Blacks, Christianity disempowers; induces a sense of moral inferiority; preaches submission, subordination and obedience; is associated with material deprivation; sanctifies material discomfort and suffering; is self-negating, self-effacing; produces relatively few tangible and desirable results; promotes the worship of a god that wears a non-African face and bears the facial image of their White dominators and enemies (leading them to consciously worship White people, to think of them as more god-like than themselves, to perceive them as divinely ordained to rule over themselves, to associate whiteness of skin with all that is good and blackness of skin with all that is bad); provides a rationale for racial self-denial, selflessness, inclusiveness, etc. (1998, pp. 71-72)

Both Wilson and Malcolm X understood that understood that one does not sell out one's deepest values for a colonial model that opposes them.

This is the lesson I hope for Indigenous Peoples and others who can influence political power to understand. Andrea Smith offers this warning in a published interview entitled, “Building Unlikely Alliances.” She says,

Native people focusing on settler colonialism sometimes don't see how it intersects with capitalism and white supremacy. Consequently, things get articulated as sovereignty projects that really are not that great. Your sovereignty comes to be defined as economic development by any means necessary – let's exploit the resources, let's build a class structure within Native communities – and that ends up destroying the land as much as multinational corporations are doing. That goes against the principle of having a radical relationship with the

land. And it's self-defeating ultimately, because multinational corporations are not going to let you do what you want to do with the land because they want the resources. It ends up hurting your communities. Khan, S, Hugill, D. and McCreary, T., 2010, p.4)

Conclusion

This has been a difficult piece to write. It has not been my intention to pull anyone's faith from them as relates to the strength it gives them to live and die in this and future worlds. I only want to get people to use emotional, logical, and intuitive reflection to better understand the impact of their beliefs on the world. My targets are first the intellectuals and activists likely to read an essay such as this, for they can perhaps be encouraged by it to continue similar reflections and dialogues. My second target, though I wish it were first, are the grassroots Indigenous Peoples from around the world who have suffered and are suffering away their greatest legacy and their greatest strength- their Indigenous worldview, a worldview that if reclaimed will not only help them rise above their current plight, but can help everyone possibly reverse the current downward trajectory of our species. My third hoped for audience are Christians themselves who may not yet realize how their ideas and actions have been influenced directly from Christian teachings or indirectly via Christian hegemony.

Whomever the reader of this piece may be, I know that truly hearing what I am trying to say requires courage and fearlessness. It is not easy to stand before a Christian society and respectfully exclaim that we can no longer stifle honest, reasonable and scholarly concerns about the negative influence of organized religions on the problems facing Indigenous Peoples. Or to go further and say we cannot afford to suppress the conversation because of its effect on human survival. For the Indigenous reader who has lost his or her cultural bearings, fighting in support of an Indigenous worldview relatively unknown will take special courage. If you do not speak the language⁴, do not feel inadequate for the job. Speak from the language of your heart and DNA! The same goes for the many non-Indians willing to speak out.

With this in mind I begin my closure with some concise words from a respected and truly courageous colleague and co-author. Waziyatwawin is a Wahpetunwan Dakota from the Upper

⁴ Most of our Indigenous languages are rapidly disappearing, along with them the cultural wisdom. Complementary conversations are thus going to be more challenging. Chet Bowers writes, "The lack of awareness that language encodes the deepest and most taken-for-granted assumptions about culture marginalizes the awareness that other cultures are based on different assumptions- and that some of these cultural ways of understanding human nature account for their smaller ecological footprint" (2006, p. 186). Bowers is not referring to Indigenous languages per se, but to how presumptions behind words like "tradition" or "progress" are not carefully considered. Such problems are less likely when thinking in Indigenous languages, however. They reflect a view of the world as interdependent and in constant motion. For example, in Lakota the word for "dirt" or "soil" is "ma ka." "Ma" means essentially the essences of oneself and "ka" means that which came before. In other words, when a Lakota speaker refers to the soil in a field, garden, riverbank or garbage dump, he may be understanding that "Here exists the essence of all that has contributed to who I am becoming," knowing from other beliefs that the "all" especially refers to other than human contributions, including the DNA and epigenomes of the ancestors.

Sioux Reservation in Minnesota. She is currently a professor at the University of Victoria. The following is from her article, “The Paradox of Indigenous Resurgence at the End of Empire.”

In the twenty-first century, we are facing the unprecedented convergence of human-created crises. Climate chaos, fossil-fuel resource depletion, overpopulation, and the ongoing destruction of ecosystems threaten the very foundation of colonial empire, both creating emancipatory potential for Indigenous societies struggling against colonial subjugation and wreaking devastating havoc on the lands, waters, and ecosystems upon which our people must survive. While the vulnerability and unsustainability of empire is clearly exposed, Indigenous people must wrestle with the continued cooptation of our people into civilization’s fallacies and destructive habits as well as the increasing threats to our homelands that jeopardize our capacity for a land-based existence. Thus, just when liberation may be within our grasp, the ecological destruction may be so complete that Indigenous lifeways may be impossible to practice. In this context there is a simultaneous and urgent need for both the restoration of sustainable Indigenous practices and a serious defense of Indigenous homelands (2012, p.68).

...The desanctification of non-human life was certainly codified in the Genesis hierarchy and embodied in Judeo-Christian teachings. While this hierarchy of creation is conveyed throughout the Old Testament, it is best elucidated in the Book of Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’” This mandate for human (and male) domination over all other beings has contributed to the relentless pursuit of resources without substantive regard to the impacts on eco-systems and all the beings who inhabit them. Indigenous Peoples recognized the dangers inherent in that worldview, especially as the consequences of that worldview were materially manifested within our territories through the destructive actions of the colonizers (p.71).

Most Indigenous Peoples collectively recognize the inherent dangers of the “civilized worldview” of Western culture. Too many individuals and too many tribal governments, however, have embraced, bowed to or acquiesced helplessly in wake of the world’s most dominant and dominating religion. Some are too engaged with mere survival to think of these matters. Others who are more able may be choked with fear in a world that has pulled no punches in its effort to suppress Indigenous beliefs and values (Four Arrows, 2013). Nonetheless, I say to my brothers and sisters, the urgency of the ecological situation we all face in the world today we all face makes this conversation about the role of religion in politics and power a matter of life and death. As Waziyatwawin asserts, it may be too late for such Indigenous resurgence. Yes, we are losing our Indigenous languages rapidly and with them the culture. Yet hope is always a good excuse for taking action, so I continue to have hope.

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