Introduction

How have native people envisioned the critical encounter with Christianity?

Intriguing images appear throughout the collective literary corpus, from early apologetics to the latest experimental fiction. One of the more remarkable contemporary memoirs is Joseph Iron Eye Dudley's Choteau Creek: A Sioux Reminiscence. Raised by his maternal grandparents in a remote corner of the Yankton Reservation, Dudley recalls a mid-century life of material poverty and spiritual abundance. His portrayal of William and Bessie Bourissau, who imparted the values and attitudes that have guided him as an adult, foregrounds "the quiet, common American Indians" rather than the political leaders and media celebrities that usually signify Indian country. In a home without plumbing or electricity or even a horse to ride into town, everyday life revolves around subsistence. These humble circumstances are redeemed through acts of faith and devotion, led by Grandma, that also sustain family and community relationships.

Dudley skillfully weaves spiritual anecdotes into the biographical narrative, foreshadowing a vocational path his own life will later follow. Like many of her generation, Grandma is a devout churchgoer who relies on indigenous intuitions as well; she inhabits a complex religious landscape where Episcopal Christianity and Dakota sacred ways share the territory with other denominational and tribal traditions. Disparate realities are reconciled in the practice of storytelling, and Grandma proves a compelling narrator. When the day's work is done, she settles into

a familiar pose—left arm across abdomen, left hand cradling right elbow, right hand shading her eyes—and begins retelling personal experiences and biblical stories. Young Joseph grows to appreciate the power and piety of Grandma's spiritual vision, which is counterposed with her failing eyesight. At times, grandmother and grandson seem connected by some telepathic faculty, what Dudley characterizes as "a oneness of soul and spirit and mind."

Each experiences a private visitation by a deceased relative during the summer of 1951, a "summer of signs and wonders." Joseph wakes up one night to find a mysterious woman watching him and slowly walking through the house. Listening to his description the next evening, Grandma calmly identifies the woman as his paternal grandmother, who died when Joseph was two years old. Several days later, he overhears Grandma talking to someone in the bedroom, then dissolving in tears. Rushing to her side, he learns that she has just been visited by her firstborn son, who died as an infant but appeared to her now as a grown man in military dress. Both incidents are interpreted as examples of how the dead maintain and nurture relationships with their living kin.

Other visionary encounters recorded in Choteau Creek are more public in nature. Grandma remembers attending a Ghost Dance with her parents in the fall of 1890, when she was thirteen years old: People arrive from all over the Yankton Reservation, enough for a double circle of tipis and tents; they believe the dead will reenter the world through a large ceremonial lodge erected on the dance ground. After a day of conventional Dakota singing and dancing, the mood shifts in the

evening and they begin to sing new songs and to "dance with a different spirit." Then everything suddenly stops and they hear a great whirlwind coming from the west. Some retreat in fear, others stand their ground; it approaches the lodge, the lodge flap swings open, and then the twister moves off to the north. The encampment falls silent again as an owl prophesies tragedy on the horizon. Returning home, they soon learn that Sitting Bull has been killed, and during a Christmas service young Bessie hears the minister offer prayers for their Lakota relations. Four days later, hundreds of people in Big Foot's band are massacred at Wounded Knee Creek.

Joseph registers his own ghostly sighting at the burial of a community member known for his traditional lifestyle. Toward the end of the committal service, as the pallbearers are lowering the casket into the grave, a whirlwind lingers at the northwest corner of the cemetery. Afterward, Grandma explains that it must have been the dead man's relatives, come to guide him to the spirit world. She takes comfort in this observation, but young Joseph's head is still spinning with questions; he finally concludes—as does author Dudley—that our world is "full of mystery."

And what about us, those who learn of such archaic happenings through the modern medium of print? Tribal medicine can be a hard pill to swallow, especially in a dispirited land. We long for explanations that answer more questions than they raise, etiologies not quite so mysterious. Individual claims of supernatural contact can be analyzed as the idiosyncrasies of human psychology. Collective reports of unusual natural phenomena can be debunked by the various disciplines of earth science. But

what should we make of strange testimonies neither personal nor ecological, visions that are both communal and paranormal?

Perhaps the most curious passage in this book, and that least amenable to psychological or naturalistic deconstruction, recounts another episode from Grandma's childhood. One Saturday afternoon, during a Kool-Aid break from their end-of-week chores, she tells Joseph a story of the Advent season: Young Bessie and her parents are attending Christmas Eve services at the reservation church. Afterward, while everyone is outside visiting and waiting to eat and exchange gifts, they suddenly hear voices in the distance. They see a bright light on the southeastern horizon, then a robed choir—men, women, and children—walking in procession across the eastern sky. The choristers are singing all the way, though the words of their hymn are unintelligible. The congregation listens and watches until the last child disappears over the northeastern horizon. Everyone remains silent, and then the minister leads them back into church to say a prayer of thanksgiving for this heavenly postlude.

"As far as I know," Grandma says, "that has never happened again." It is the first time Joseph has heard this particular story, and he feels "something radiant and holy" in the telling. He will hear it several more times in coming years; other stories she repeats often vary in the details, but this one never changes. She does not offer any commentary on the experience, aside from speculating about its uniqueness, and Dudley—a Methodist minister and educator—does not venture a theological or anthropological interpretation of her narrative. Whatever lasting significance this kind of testimony may have, he seems to suggest, it is less a function of verbalized meanings

than of nonverbal perceptions, like an ethereal song whose lyrics cannot be grasped. Such existential insight can appear during an original revelation and, perhaps, in its soulful re-creations. And these storytelling sessions usually leave young Joseph feeling awed and out of breath, as if he has transcended time itself: past become present, history into myth, world without end.

Now grandmother and grandson sit quietly on the old quilt spread over prairie grass, pondering a singular epiphany. Now they come round and their voices rise on the summer breeze. Now he asks if she would like some more Kool-Aid, though it might be warm. Yes, she says now, that will be all right.

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I suppose my affinity for Choteau Creek is not strictly academic. The book crossed my desk in 1993, shortly after it was published and during my nerve-racking first year as a university professor, and I have reread it several times since. As with any biographical text, various elements of the narrative resonate at a more personal level, evoking memories from my own life story. Certain character traits attributed to Grandma and Grandpa, for example, remind me of my paternal grandparents. Some aspects of Dudley's upbringing echo my father's backwoods childhood and his early call to Christian ministry; others suggest my mother's tribal heritage and her occasional, inexplicable premonitions. I can identify firsthand with being raised on the northern plains, and in a family emphasizing faith and morality as well as ecumenical understanding. Even the dust-jacket endorsement by Vine Deloria Jr. conjures up an influential mentor who supported, in one way or another, all of my major publications

to date. And I have come to associate the book itself with my arduous transition into an academic career.

This kind of readerly rapport often goes unacknowledged among rationalist critics, but affect remains a vital factor in understanding personal narratives. Empathy is, after all, the essence of storytelling. Learning how others have shuffled around this mortal coil may be the paramount pleasure of reading biography, and of writing it too. Deloria called Dudley's book "a warm, human story of people who live close to the earth and each other," and it later received a Catholic media award for affirming "the highest values of the human spirit." Our many worldly disparities notwithstanding, we humans are bound together as a sentient species on this organic blue planet. Any sensitive memoir can remind us of the everlasting potential for interpersonal understanding and benevolence. Choteau Creek is commonly ghettoized alongside other books about American Indians, but many of the realities depicted here are not confined to Indian country.

A cosmopolitan reading emphasizing universal themes does not preclude other interpretations pursuing more insular concerns, such as salvage ethnography or native nationalism. Indeed, if human beings are unified on any point, surely it involves the ubiquity of difference, among individuals and between groups as well. I am especially sympathetic to Dudley's position—implied by his project and stated in his preface—on the significance of biography, which can be difficult and rewarding to write, instructive and encouraging to read. Personal identity matters, though not in the crassly self-serving way favored by some who operate beyond the pale of tribal territories.

Scholarship—disciplined storytelling—is forever predicated on character, whatever else it may entail in the way of theory and method and professional style.

Now and then a new acquaintance who learns of my work will inquire after my background: When did I become interested in American Indians? How did I end up teaching Native American studies? Why do I write about the native encounter with Christianity? Fair questions for anyone working in a postcolonial milieu, and I have always tried to avoid the temptation to hide behind ontological posturing. The autobiographical account below anticipates these and other queries, though it should not be read as an oblique assertion of epistemological privilege. I mean to shed light on the circumstances and decisions and experiences that have marked my path, and that is all; this personal preamble offers no special pleading for the articles and essays that follow. I write as an informed critic, not as an essential informant. Beware of putative experts, academic or otherwise, who claim individual authority on the basis of Indian identification. Tribal realities are communal in nature; inherent rights to representation vest in grounded communities, not in self-appointed spokespersons.

And so it is with tribal visions of the church way. How have native people envisioned the critical encounter with Christianity? Iron Eye Dudley sketches some durable, clear-sighted figures in his affecting book, and there are countless other tracts and testaments with imagery bearing on this question. Some of the answers we find seem to point beyond the limits of our language, our rationality, and even our faith in truth itself. Heartfelt efforts at perception often come up short, at least for the time being—and that, as Grandma might say, will be all right. Tribal visions are less about

explanation than experience; the church way is not so much destination as route, a provisional passage through mystery.

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Jimmie Treat and Marcia Jones exchanged vows in Russell, Kansas, on August 25, 1956. A week later they arrived in Philadelphia, where Jimmie enrolled at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Missionary service was always in the back of his mind through three years of coursework and part-time ministry, and during his senior year he chaired a group of seminarians interested in Christian missions; his colleagues also elected him senior class president. After graduating in 1959, he and Marcia felt led to explore the possibility of serving as overseas missionaries, so they applied to the Foreign Mission Society of the American Baptist Convention. Japan became a focus of the interview process, but the timing was not right and they were not offered an appointment outside the United States. They were, however, referred to the Home Mission Society, which needed to fill an opening with several American Indian churches in western Oklahoma. Enduring another round of interviews and soul-searching, the Treats were duly commissioned as American Baptist home missionaries and sent to Anadarko in October 1960.

They had been trying to become parents since their wedding night. After more than four years without success, the mounting disappointment had become a test of faith, especially for the hopeful mother. She eventually visited a local clinic, where medical tests turned up an abnormal thyroid. Her physician prescribed routine medication to correct the hormonal imbalance and Marcia was soon pregnant. The

expectant couple was overjoyed at the news, but only three weeks later the pregnancy ended with a miscarriage. They considered adopting a child and even submitted paperwork to the state adoption agency. But early in 1962, Jimmie and Marcia learned that she was pregnant again. The Oklahoma summer was predictably hot and humid and she felt miserable through the third trimester, particularly once her due date passed without incident. The waiting finally ended on September 13; I arrived three weeks late and trailing an umbilical cord twice the normal length, but apparently enjoyed an otherwise uncomplicated gestation. The delivery-room doctor claimed he had never heard a newborn scream so loud.

The following summer my father traveled to northern Michigan, where he was the featured speaker at a denominational youth camp. My mother and I spent the week in Wichita, Kansas, visiting her mother and other relatives in the area. Shortly after Dad left, I came down with the flu; I was seriously dehydrated within a matter of hours, and nearly comatose by the time my uncle drove us to the emergency room. The situation gradually stabilized, but then I developed an ear infection accompanied by a high fever. We ended up spending the week at the hospital, and it was another test of faith for Mom, this time without the support of her spouse; he was at a remote campground beyond the reach of telephone lines. She also found herself presented with an opportunity to put this temporary health crisis into perspective. Once my recovery seemed certain and Mom emerged from her bedside vigil, she discovered that I had been admitted to a children's ward full of polio patients there for a summer therapy program. She witnessed cases of grave affliction along with moving acts of

compassion; at one point, a boy lying facedown in a body cast maneuvered his gurney behind the nurses' station and pilfered a candy bar, which he then unwrapped and fed to another boy too disabled to feed himself. Dad arrived back in Wichita on the last day of my hospital stay and was shocked to learn what had transpired in his absence, and relieved to know that I had recovered. Then the three of us returned to Anadarko.

I might not have been born in Anadarko. I might not have been born at all. And I might not have lived to tell the tale. Make of it what you will—credit chance, fate, providence, karma, or some other causal theory. Life is radically contingent and enigmatic beyond belief, and each one of us is the living proof.

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Anadarko is not a big town. Lucille Brisbane, an American Baptist colleague who arrived in 1961, once had a memorable encounter at a non-Indian church where she spoke about her work. An elderly woman, apparently hard of hearing, approached her after the presentation; "Where did you say you live?" she asked. "Anadarko," Lucille replied, raising her voice a little. "In a dark hole?!" the senior exclaimed, and it might have felt that way at times for a young woman from southern California. Lucille and my parents often got together on Friday evenings to visit and play games. Their favorite was the board game Careers, in which players follow various occupational paths while competing to accumulate fame, money, and happiness. It was an interlude of escapist amusement for these twenty-something missionaries without much of the first two.

Anadarko may be a small town, but it looms large on the colonized landscape of Indian country. The settlement began to take shape shortly after the American Civil War when government agents and frontier merchants set up shop near the Washita River, the boundary between the Wichita, Caddo, and Delaware reservation to the north and the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache reservation to the south. Riverside Indian School opened in 1871, and the city government was founded in 1901 during the run-up to Oklahoma statehood. The self-proclaimed "Indian Capital of the Nation" boasts a variety of Indian-themed tourist attractions including the American Indian Exposition, an annual intertribal fair incorporated in 1935; the Southern Plains Indian Museum, a federally run facility established in 1947; and Indian City USA, a privately owned living-history museum built in 1954. Anadarko is also home to the Southern Plains office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, one of twelve area offices serving federally recognized tribes in the United States.

My parents moved to Anadarko sight unseen, eager to begin their work and too excited to be apprehensive about the challenges they might face. My father was assigned to oversee three rural churches aligned east to west along the Washita River, a circuit he named the Washita Baptist Parish. Each congregation had a lay pastor who led Sunday worship; Dad tried to attend at least two of the three services each Sunday, and he was expected to show up prepared to preach, though he was not always asked to deliver his sermon. During the week, he spent a lot of time ministering to people in their homes, a pastoral practice—"visitation"—increasingly neglected by Christian clergy. He also worked with students at Riverside Indian School, teaching

Sunday school every week and occasionally leading an ecumenical service sponsored by local ministers on Sunday evenings. He participated in various quarterly and annual meetings of the Western Oklahoma Indian Association. And he traveled around the country telling non-Indian congregations about his work—"deputation"—in order to raise money for the Home Mission Society. But his chief responsibilities lay with the three tribal churches of the Washita Baptist Parish.

Redstone Baptist Church is a Kiowa congregation west of Anadarko, between Apache Wye and Washita. During my father's tenure, it was the only one of the three churches with an indoor baptistry, though the property lacked running water; conducting a baptismal service in keeping with Baptist tradition—believer's baptism by full immersion—meant hauling water by the bucketful from a house down the road. Stecker Paddlety was the lay pastor until his death in 1962, when he was succeeded by his younger brother Victor. By odd coincidence, Redstone's longtime pastor during the early twentieth century was a missionary named Harry Treat. He also served the Saddle Mountain church, another Kiowa congregation, and the Kiowas called him Saddle Mountain; when Jimmie Treat appeared at Redstone a generation later, they promptly christened him Little Saddle Mountain. The American Baptist mission at Saddle Mountain was founded in 1896 by Isabel Crawford, a beloved laywoman from Canada. When she died in 1961, her body was returned to Saddle Mountain, where Little Saddle Mountain officiated at her funeral.

First Apache Indian Baptist Church is south of Fort Cobb. The Kiowa Apaches are a small band of Apaches long allied with the Kiowas, though speaking an

Athabascan language unrelated to Kiowa. The lay pastor was Duke Tsoodle Sr., a Kiowa man married to an Apache woman, Martha Bitseedy. Duke preached in both English and Kiowa; many Apaches could understand Kiowa, though few Kiowas could understand Apache. The congregation enjoyed singing tribal hymns in both Apache and Kiowa as well as English-language gospel standards. The founders of First Apache originally attended Redstone; around the turn of the twentieth century, they began lobbying for their own church. Their first building, erected on an Apache allotment ten miles southwest of the present location, was struck by lightning and nearly burned to the ground. Undaunted, they used the insurance money and whatever building materials they could salvage to start over on land donated by another tribal member.

We lived in the parsonage at Wichita Mission Baptist Church, several miles north of Anadarko, where we shared the wooly tract with some stray dogs and other wildlife. The lay pastor was Allen Moses, who was Pawnee by birth but raised among the Wichitas, having been abducted as a child and later traded to a Wichita family. He and his wife Emma Belle were raising a couple of their grandsons; the younger one refused to be separated from his grandfather, even during church services, so they rigged a small seat underneath the pulpit where the boy could sit while Allen preached. The Wichitas in this congregation had already lost most of their tribal hymns, so Allen taught them Pawnee songs he remembered from his youth. It was a small but energetic church, with weekly prayer meetings and quilting bees and a girls' guild for students from Riverside. The regulars were mostly women and most of them were related to each other. One particularly active member was Bertha Pickard, who

also volunteered as a children's leader at the Anadarko Christian Center. A single woman with no children of her own, she served as an adopted matriarch for our budding family and often cared for me when my parents needed a sitter. I always knew her as Aunt Bertha.

Kiowas naming missionaries after tribal landmarks, Apaches salvaging a lightning-damned edifice, Wichitas singing Pawnee hymns—the congregations of the Washita Baptist Parish were predictably idiosyncratic, and their members always enjoyed recounting the stories of their own amusing incongruities. United by their common humanity and an uncommon faith, they joined hand-me-down names, buildings, and songs with other inspired castoffs in fashioning uniquely vital religious communities. Christianity was a secondhand religion in the Indian Capital of the Nation, but that did not stop these Indian Christians from taking matters into their own hands.

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My parents went to Anadarko with an open-ended sense of commitment, wondering if this might be their lifework. After a couple of years, however, they began to consider the possibility of moving on. My father had come to realize that the lay pastors were fully capable of tending their own flocks, without the oversight of a resident missionary, and he believed in fostering indigenous leadership and congregational autonomy. The home mission field of the 1960s was hardly the religious frontier it had been a hundred years earlier, when the southern plains tribes were confined to their reservations; the Indians of western Oklahoma had become

fairly well versed in Christianity, and the church members among them were mostly cradle-to-grave Christians. And from the start, Dad had been disappointed that his role was more administrative than sacramental, especially insofar as he was able to preach only on an irregular and unpredictable basis. So he resolved to work himself out of a job, and he and my mother began pondering their next move.

An intriguing possibility arose when Dad was recommended for a chaplaincy sponsored by the National Council of Churches. The opening was at Haskell Institute, a federal school for American Indians that focused, at this point in its history, on vocational-technical training. He was attracted by the opportunity to continue his ministry in Indian country and to mentor young adults in an educational setting. He interviewed at the Haskell campus in Lawrence, Kansas, and then was offered the position, but the job entailed even more paperwork and less preaching than the situation he was planning to leave, so he turned it down. A few months later, however, he was called to the pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Horton, Kansas. Horton is a small town next to the Kickapoo reservation, and it is home to the Bureau of Indian Affairs office serving the Kickapoos and several other tribes in northeast Kansas. In the summer of 1964, my father ceded responsibility for the three churches of the Washita Baptist Parish to their lay pastors, and the three of us moved from Anadarko to Horton.

I started grade school in 1967. Among my classmates were a few Kickapoo kids, though a palpable racial divide prevailed in this off-reservation community. Dad had introduced himself to functionaries at the local Indian agency shortly after our

arrival, but the mid-sixties bureaucracy he encountered was still a bastion of colonial paternalism; social protest and institutional reform were just around the corner. We spent four years in Horton and another four in Hays, Kansas, and our family doubled in size along the way, adding two brothers and a sister: John in 1965, Julia in 1968, and Jeremy in 1969. Mom devoted herself to being a stay-at-home mother and, despite the maternal duties, continued working toward a college degree in education. She would eventually realize her dream of becoming an elementary school teacher, then go on to complete a master's in gifted education and to author a couple of short books on active-learning pedagogies.

Our next move took us to Rapid City, South Dakota, in June 1972. My parents were glad for the chance to get back to Indian country and to live near the Black Hills, a scenic and ancient formation sacred to the Lakotas and several other tribes. The church was on the south side of town, next to Mount Rushmore Road, but the parsonage was in North Rapid, where most of the Lakota families lived, so my siblings and I attended schools where many of the Indian kids in town were enrolled: Horace Mann Elementary, North Junior High, Central High School. Our first year in Rapid City was full of drama, both ecological and political. We arrived just days before a catastrophic flash flood tore through the heart of town and killed several hundred people, many of them Lakotas inhabiting substandard housing in the floodplain. Eight months later, Indian activists occupied the village of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation, provoking the largest military mobilization on American soil since the Civil War. We lived in Rapid City for twelve years; I passed my adolescence in a community

struggling—with mixed success—to recover from the collective trauma of natural disaster and social injustice.

During my freshman year of college, I read Dee Brown's Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, an acclaimed revisionist account of the subjugation of Indians in the American West. It was not an assigned text for any class but a book I found on my own at the campus bookstore. Reading this neglected and disturbing history marked my first conscious attempt at developing a critical perspective on my childhood and adolescent experiences in Indian country, on the stories I grew up hearing about my birthplace, and on the family legacies I inherited through my parents.

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My father is from "Little Egypt," the deep southern part of Illinois. Growing up during the Great Depression and the Second World War, he was a big fan of the Lone Ranger and listened to the radio series every weeknight. Dad enjoyed the show's recurrent morality play, good triumphing over evil, and he admired the masked man's strict creed; this hero always subdued villains while inflicting as little harm as possible. The Lone Ranger's "faithful Indian companion" was a sympathetic figure, despite the racial bias conveyed by his caricatured personality and subordinate role, and Tonto instilled in my father a more favorable attitude toward American Indians than he might have had otherwise. Dad's parents encouraged this development, each in their own way; Coy often told him that Indians had been treated worse than any other group in American history, and Ruby sometimes reminded him about the Cherokee kinfolk in a collateral branch of the family.

My mother's family is from eastern Oklahoma, though she grew up moving from place to place. Her father, David Jones, left home at an early age and worked in the oil fields all his life, ranging from Texas to Wyoming to Illinois. Her mother, Jewel Evans, was raised in the Tulsa area during the oil boom of the 1920s. They met during one of David's migrations through the southern plains and married after Jewel finished high school in 1932, and she followed him to an arduous life in the oil patch; decades later, she could still recall the names of nearly forty towns where they had lived, some of them more than once. They produced two children and a rocky marriage until she finally divorced him in 1949 and rejoined her parents, who were then living in Russell, Kansas.

Grandpa and Grandma Evans had moved to Russell for a job in the oil industry. Grandpa Evans was a welder in the small shop next to their house; earlier in his career, he worked on Tulsa's first skyscrapers, the Art Deco monuments built with oil money. Three of his brothers attended Haskell Institute and he might have as well, but he got married instead. The Dawes Commission was active in Indian Territory around this time, enrolling members of the Five Civilized Tribes so their tribal lands could be broken up into individual holdings. Grandpa Evans signed on to the Creek Nation rolls in 1899 and received an allotment south of Muskogee, near the parcels assigned to others in his extended family. But the land was soon lost in the frenzy of fraud that accompanied Oklahoma statehood, so he moved his young family to Tulsa and points beyond. As a girl, my mother took pride in the notion that her grandparents were "the only Indians in Russell," a sentiment her grandfather quietly

appreciated but her grandmother vocally denied. Grandma Evans, who was herself part Cherokee, always insisted that she and her mixed-metaphor descendants were white, not Indian.

Jewel was their second child, born a few years after Oklahoma statehood. As an adult, and despite her transient existence in the oil fields, she remained close to the family; her siblings often looked to her as a surrogate mother, especially once her own kids were grown. In her attitude toward Indians, Jewel was more akin to her father than her mother. When Creek land claims were settled in the late 1960s and the Creek tribal government reorganized shortly thereafter, she took the lead in getting her father's descendents—seven children, thirty-four grandchildren, numerous great-grandchildren—enrolled with the tribe and registered with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Evans clan hailed from the Creek-Cherokee borderlands east of the Katy Railroad, and Grandpa Evans was probably more Cherokee by blood. But he enrolled Creek, so today I and many of his other progeny are citizens of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma, one of the largest federally recognized tribes in the United States.

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Like most Baptist preacher's kids, I was raised at the center of a close-knit religious community. Family life revolved around church activities, and my social development proceeded from Christian fellowship more than it did from public schooling or any civic or commercial association. Yet I never felt much pressure from my parents to profess their faith; they encouraged me to think for myself, and I maintained a skeptical attitude throughout my adolescence. One of the first essays I

wrote in college, for the requisite course in freshman composition, was a tongue-in-cheek exposé of the preacher's kid's plight titled "PK," the preferred acronym among clerical offspring. My instructor—a bohemian, chain-smoking, ex-Catholic graduate student—found it both amusing and pitiable.

Leaving the comfortable confines of home was a disconcerting experience and my need for sanctuary overshadowed my skepticism, at least for a few years. Evangelical Christianity offered refuge from the secular enticements of college life; I was active in campus Christian groups as I moved through several majors at several schools. Near the end of my undergraduate career, I became increasingly concerned about poverty and other forms of global inequity, gravitating toward the progressive corner of the evangelical world. Hewing to the family line sometimes led me in unexpected directions. During the 1953-54 academic year, my father had taken a break from college to serve as a traveling intern with the Baptist Youth Fellowship, which is how he found his way to Russell and my mother. Three decades later, I spent a year doing youth-oriented missions advocacy on a volunteer basis, relying on the generosity of family and friends to cover my living expenses. This rambling path eventually brought me to Berkeley, California, and the Graduate Theological Union, where I enrolled as a part-time student in the fall of 1987.

I had no intention of completing a divinity degree, much less seeking ordination; my initial ambitions were strictly personal in nature. My old skepticism toward institutional religion had resurfaced, augmented by new questions about the existential dilemmas of modern life. Evangelicalism seemed unable—or unwilling—to

address my concerns, so I wanted to explore the other options available to someone who still believed in the pursuit of truth and justice and beauty. The Graduate Theological Union is a consortium of six Protestant and three Catholic seminaries along with several affiliated centers representing Orthodox, Jewish, Buddhist, and other faith traditions. During my first year on "Holy Hill," I took courses in theology, ethics, visual art, church history, and social activism with professors from the Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, and Franciscan schools. By the end of the spring semester, I had a much better feel for the religious landscape and for my own journey across it. And I was enjoying the intellectual life, so I enrolled full-time and began working toward an academic degree.

I was particularly drawn to liberation theology, which integrated my interests in religious belief and social action. During my years in Berkeley, I was able to study with African American, Latino, South African, Taiwanese, and Japanese American theologians as well as other distinguished scholars of religion. I also made important connections with the local American Indian community, in both educational and metropolitan settings. The Native American Studies program at the University of California was one of the stronger such units in the country; I benefited from their collegiality in many ways, especially during the six semesters I served as a teaching assistant for courses on Indian history, literature, and contemporary issues. The San Francisco Bay Area also boasts one of the largest urban Indian populations in the United States, with a variety of intertribal organizations sponsoring community events throughout the year. In my spare time, I worked with the Bay Area Native American

Ministry, an ecumenical agency based in Oakland, which provided an invaluable context for my intellectual pursuits and political commitments.

By the time I finished the master's program, it had become clear that a scholarly vocation focused on American Indian religious issues might be both fulfilling and fruitful. Most of the existing scholarship on Indian Christianity approached the topic burdened by the history of missions, spotlighting immigrant agency, or by theories of acculturation, dramatizing indigenous victimry. Reflecting on my personal background among Indians and among Christians and among Indian Christians, I envisioned an applied, constructive approach to understanding the relationship between indigenous and immigrant traditions in contemporary Indian communities. I hoped to address one of the most troublesome points of contention in Indian country and to engage wider debates over religious praxis in a diverse and conflicted world. In 1993 I completed a PhD in interdisciplinary religious studies, then continued my research while teaching American Indian studies in a series of faculty appointments at public universities in California, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Illinois.

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A reflexive calling has taken me back and forth across this bloody continent. From the rising to the setting of the sun, between winds blowing hot and cold, my journey has been a series of crossings physical as well as spiritual. Looking for pattern in this itinerant quest, some might say that I have visited the four directions of the sacred circle, invoking a common symbolic register; others, oriented to a different cosmic iconography, might say that my tour of the cardinal points has traced a

cruciform figure. The more important question is this: How have native people envisioned the critical encounter with Christianity?

The articles and essays collected here were written during the past two decades, through hell and high water. I have arranged them in four thematic sections reflecting the key problematics that emerged from my research: historicism, indigenization, deconstruction, ecumenism. The pieces in each section are ordered chronologically and introduced by section headnotes, offering topical slants on my intellectual development. My thinking has changed over time; some of these writings strike me now as awkwardly dated, both substantively and stylistically, and it is tempting to make cosmetic revisions, if not wholesale repairs. But Joseph Dudley is right when he argues that biographical texts should render "whole persons" with "all their flaws and imperfections," no matter how precious.

What follows, then, are unregenerate artifacts, relics from one person's optimistic pilgrimage: my earnest attempt to understand the native encounter with Christianity and to document what I found for those who share my concerns. A tribal vision of the church way is more than a tally of trusty converts, more than a map of settled shrines, more than an archive of zealous codes and creeds. The whole is greater—and more vital—than the sum of the parts, and the same is true, I hope, for this book.