Black Elk and Decolonization

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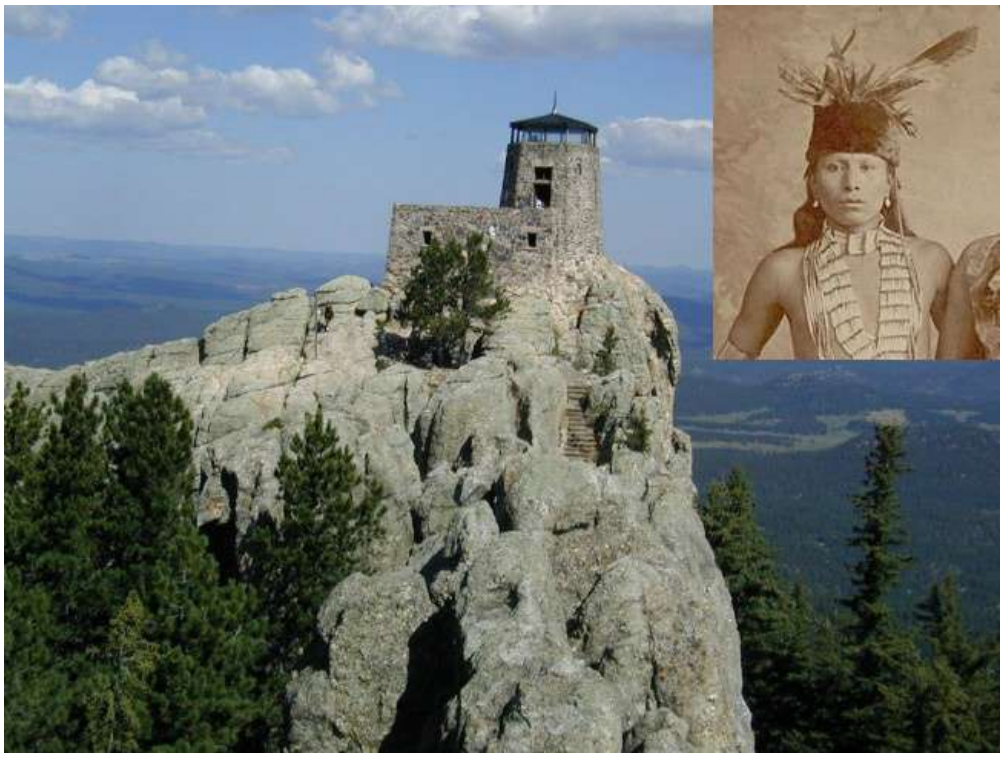

Black Elk Peak, with insert photo of Black Elk[1]

Segment One

Randy Kritkausky: Greetings, or may I say Bozho in Potawatomi, to those joining us for today's Indigenous Perspectives show. I'm Randy Kritkausky, an enrolled Potawatomi tribal member, and the co-host of Indigenous Perspectives.

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[1] *Photo: Black Elk Peak Summit Tower via summitpost.org. Insert: Nicholas Black Elk via Rapid City Journal.* Creative Commons license, TheNewVerse.News https://newversenews.blogspot.com/2016/08/harney-peak.html
"A federal board on Thursday renamed Harney Peak in the Black Hills to Black Elk Peak, saying the name of the state's highest peak was derogatory to Native Americans because Harney was a general whose soldiers massacred Indians. Basil Brave Heart, a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, proposed the change to Black Elk Peak as a tribute to a Lakota spiritual leader who died in the mid-20th century." —Rapid City (SD) Journal, August 12, 2016.

Carolyn Schmidt: And I'm Carolyn Schmidt, the other co-host. Indigenous Perspectives originates from Vermont in the United States. We're located on lands that the Abenaki people call N'Dakinna. This is the unceded traditional territory of the Abenaki, who for thousands of years have been stewards of the lands found here and also across the border in Québec province in Canada.

Today we welcome Damian Costello for the third and final show exploring issues raised by the life and legacy of the Lakota Sioux spiritual leader Black Elk. Damian is Director of Postgraduate Studies and a member of the faculty of NAIITS, the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies. So, welcome to today's show about Black Elk and Decolonization, Damian.

Damian Costello: Great to be back. Thank you.

Carolyn: I'm going to start with a brief recap of the main points of the first two shows. We talked about the historical Black Elk, a figure of spiritual leadership in time of transition for the Lakota Sioux in the late 1800s and early 1900s: being conquered by US soldiers, forced off much of their traditional lands into reservations, unable to thrive when deprived of the means to make their own living.

[Black Elk was] recognized by his people as spiritually gifted, going back to visions he had as a young boy and reaffirmed as a teenager. And then the whole idea that he takes us beyond the binary: his identity as a Lakota medicine man and healer and a convert to Catholicism - how he incorporates Catholic beliefs and rituals into Lakota Indigenous practices and worldviews.

Randy: So while the first two shows focused on Black Elk's biography and the impact of his life, this show expands to looking at community and larger pictures of resistance and resilience, the interactions between Christianity and Indigenous traditional religions. The Lakota and other Indigenous nations, even when under serious assault by the expanding American settlers, developed their religious spiritual lives as a vital force to protect themselves and to navigate their changing circumstances. Damian, can you expand a bit on this point? Because after all, that's the title of your book. [2]

[2] Costello, Damian: *Black Elk: Colonialism and Lakota Catholicism*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2005.

Damian: Sure. You know, I think when we look at this period of history and how Indigenous people navigated colonialism and all the changes that occurred, we sort of by default fall back into a place of, well, let's try to find what was lost and go back there. And that's certainly an important part of the equation; we do want to find what was lost, recover that, and cultivate it and renew it.

But there's also this active process of engaging with what is new and becoming part of a global reality. You know, if you take out, or bracket for a moment, all of the awful parts of this story, the other side of it is that Indigenous peoples are suddenly becoming part of a global community. And so there are real questions about what does it mean to engage with new people, new ideas, while remaining who you were. And so this is an ongoing process of actively engaging with unprecedented questions that are often very tragic and negative, but that often offer new life and new opportunities to see the world and connect with people beyond your traditional horizon.

Carolyn: Okay, that's really helpful Damian. And I'm going to back up for just a minute and say, what exactly is decolonization? It's the title of our show, this show, and you see it in the headlines a lot. You hear people talk about it. What is it? So first off - with colonization or colonialism, this applies in this case to the experiences of Indigenous Americans in North, Central, and South America, where they experienced invasion and conquest by Europeans starting more than 500 years ago.

So decolonization reverses this process. This means coming to grips with the realities of the impact of European colonization on Native Americans, starting with their loss of lives and land, broken treaties. Also moving deeper into ways that the cultural, social, economic, and spiritual lives were altered by the impact of the expansion of European settlements.

Now, the way that decolonization is applied in different situations, one great example I have is at an intertribal powwow - a food summit a couple of years ago on the Pokegan Reservation in Michigan, that people were joking about how they were decolonizing the food because they were making traditional foods, wild rice, gathering foods like mushrooms, elk, things like that. And it was super healthy, much healthier than most people's quote unquote normal diet. And it's part of the bigger picture of the pushback, or trying to recover and build back better.

Decolonize the Americas - poster[3]

Randy: So Damian, one of the things I learned about and was emphasized so wonderfully in your book, and you just said it, but I'm going to repeat it because it's going to be hard for our listeners to really get the message, is that colonization and decolonization have become words that are so fraught, so emotionally loaded in the current arguments about the narrative of American history, particularly as told from a Native American perspective. And as you said so wonderfully, and as you point out in your book, the notion of this being a one-way process, both colonization and decolonization, is really difficult to shake loose.

You know, colonization was not a process of complete and utter oblivion and domination. And decolonization is not merely returning to the pristine, unspoiled traditional beliefs. So we're - today in this show, we're actually challenging a lot of scholars, academic authority and popular literature, which is arguing that if Native Americans want to decolonize, they have to get back to their unspoiled roots. Now, we've discussed it previously, but I would like you to pick that up and talk about it in the context of today's show.

Damian: Well, you know, when we talk about this question, complicated question, we always have to deal with that reality: that colonization was a very dominant force and continues to this day. This absorption into external spheres of power

[3] 

where your society and your culture is subjugated to the needs of a foreign society and culture. And so *[how]* to untangle that when it continues until this day, right? True decolonization requires that those centers of power relinquish their hold, leave and let you go back to a place where you are completely autonomous. And unfortunately, that hasn't happened yet and doesn't seem likely. But at the same time, there's this reframing we have to, I think, embrace in conjunction with that reality - is that, you know, it wasn't just Europeans who discovered new lands and discovered Indigenous people. At the same time, Indigenous peoples are discovering Europeans and they're discovering a new culture and they're actively engaging with it and appropriating aspects of it in order not only to survive this sort of very difficult situation, but to live better.

You know, the horse showed up and it was actively embraced by most peoples independently of their interaction with Europeans, because they recognize this is a better way for our community to function and to flourish in particularly the environment of the Great Plains, which has great distances and has, you know, the Buffalo Nation who is willingly offering itself as a food source.

So we always have to keep in mind, and I think even at the center, the agency of Native peoples in this process, despite all of the horrific fallout. And so when we look at Native cultures, that can look as anything from how Navajo people engage the rodeo culture, how all Native peoples engage liberal democracy - because, let's face it, that is incredibly foreign to most Indigenous communities, and a reality that Indigenous communities have to engage with. Or in the case of Black Elk and what we're talking about, how they engaged the Catholic Church and Catholicism as a way of renewing and flourishing as best they could in a very complex situation.

Carolyn: I want to pick up on one of your comments - on the liberal democracy. If you could help unpack this a bit more, because my understanding has always been that the Haudenosaunee, the Iroquois Nations, had a very well established and resilient form of representation, of checks and balances, the different people making different decisions and so forth, and that that was actually the basis for a number of elements that was put in the US Constitution when it was written. So how do you see liberal democracy as different from an inclusive ruling framework developed by many Indigenous societies?

Damian: Thank you for picking that up, because that's an important point to clarify. And that's absolutely true; the Haudenosaunee gave a lot of the energy and the ideas behind the democracy that was formed in the early United States. But I think the key difference is that in general, in Indigenous context, there isn't the rule of the majority. The main theme, the ideal, is consensus. That rather than just taking a simple vote and those who are in the majority - whether it's something as simple as road maintenance, or *[as complex as]* the question of slavery - we go with that. In Indigenous context, you circle around community – communally - and try to get to a point where everyone can buy in. Now, does it always work perfectly? No. But that's a very key difference that we're not reduced to a tyranny of the majority, but that we are called up to a communal consensus.

Randy: I think that's the perfect example of what you're talking about in your book, which is this two-way street, bi- directional influence that's going on, that we just too often see as, you know, the dominance of one culture over the other. I'd like to just have you back up for a moment and have you explain how this plays out in the personal life of Black Elk and answer the question, is he an outlier or is he an indicator of a broader trend?

Damian: My research shows that he's *[an indicator of a broader trend]* among the people of his generation, so we should be clear about this. What's really important when we look at Black Elk is to look at the culture that existed at that particular point in time and the conversations and the choices that the communities were making, Lakota communities, that were very different from those a few generations before, or even a generation afterwards.

In Black Elk's generation, there seems to be this communal engagement with the different facets of outside culture and influence , that could depend on this very deep Indigenous formation. All these people, such as Black Elk, grew up in the old culture, in the old ways, and they had the language, they had the worldview, they had the spirituality. And despite the outside forces that mitigate against those practices, they still retained those values and still operated in this sort of consensus, you know, the communities around consensus. And so the way he was able to navigate and embrace, selectively embrace, and utilize outside spiritual influences and other cultural influences, I think is representative of the people around him. You see people actively shaping what to outsiders seems as very foreign spaces such as, you know, small Catholic communities or other Christian denominations or the

Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. For Indigenous reasons that allowed these pockets of very integral, communal and consensus based organization to continue on.

Randy: So the theme for Black Elk, if we could crawl back into his biographical individual view of the world, is *[that]* all of this is playing out in the mind of a young man who had an image and a charge from his vision that he is supposed to save his people. It's a pretty heavy burden to be carrying forward in this time of colonization. How does that become an act of decolonization as opposed to an act of surrender?

Damian: Well, the spiritual vision that Black Elk had, which I think is representative of the people around him, but that he had, you know, in sort of the highest degree, was sort of a - you could say a virtue or a skill that was inculcated in him and depended on the spirits that informed him and allowed him to sort of skillfully navigate, to dance through all of these conundrums. You know, even today I think this is representative of our experience in terms of the sort of fractured nature of our culture, not the colonization, for most of us. We're bombarded with so many different influences, so many dividing forces, so many things that tear down the traditions that we inherit. And Black Elk's spiritual vision in particular was that integrative force that allowed him to weather those negative aspects and pull together. You can sort of think of him as sort of a spiritual gravitational force, one of those biggest celestial bodies that are pulling people around him of all kinds towards him, toward this new sort of holistic culture that is deeply traditional at the same time.

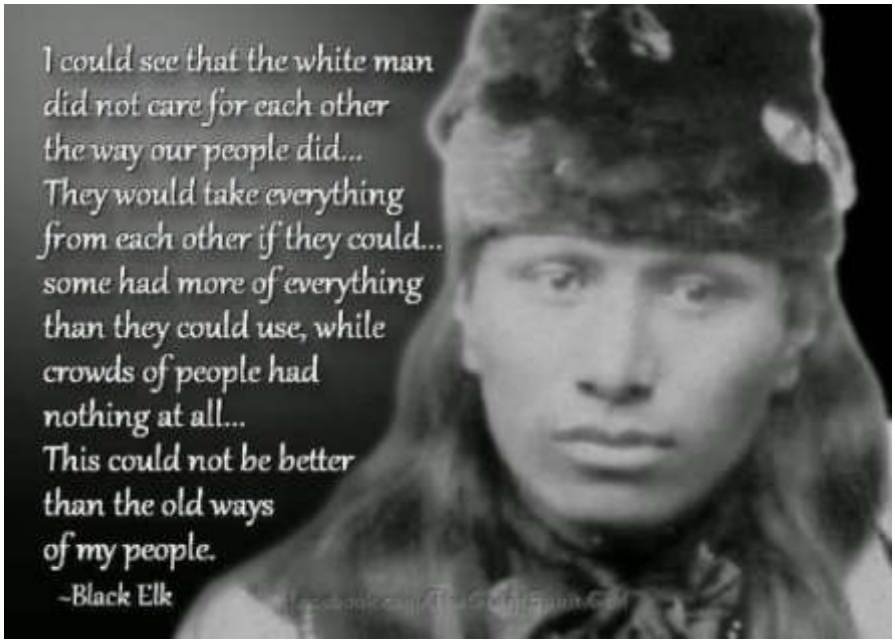
Randy: So if we look at the timeframe in which Black Elk is working through this, we're talking about decades. How old is he, eight or nine when he has this image?

Damian: Say nine years old and that he was born probably about 1866.

Randy: So, and it's many, many decades of going to Europe and investigating the white man's religion and the white man's technology and the white man's form of entertainment -decades -

Carolyn: - being on the losing side of wars and being pushed onto this new reservation -

Randy: - and he manages somehow to navigate this. It's just extraordinary and it defies, again, the image we carry - and unfortunately is represented in practically every movie about the white man's engagement of the Indian that you know - here is this person standing tall and pushing back in his own gentle but firm way. Can you again reaffirm for us and review what you see as a tipping point, when perhaps he realizes that he can use the tools and the ideas of this new religion to enact and to make real this - this burdensome image and vision that he carries?



Black Elk photo and quotation[4]

Damian: So for me, I think this is a - it's a bit speculative, but there are certain clear signposts, I think this happened before he ever encountered the Catholics, the Jesuits who would become collaborators with him. I think this occurred in the Ghost Dance with his encounter with Wanikiya - the Native messiah, "he who makes live" - who Black Elk believed was the son of God, who was the same person that he encountered within the Catholic church. So I think that's important to just sort of reaffirm that this is not dependent on outside people sort of pushing something onto him until he breaks. Though there's an aspect of that, this is something that happened internal to Indigenous communities, that are from the very beginning navigating all of these unprecedented influences and conflicts with their own spiritual vision.

[4] Creative Commons license, https://kathleenjonesauthor.blogspot.com/2015/04/tuesday-poem-great-vision-by-black-elk.html black-elkQuote3.jpg

And I would just also make sure to reiterate that this is in the context of a very non-consensus organization as well. You know, he continually had to bump up against the Catholic Church who - although I'll be the first to tell you, these Jesuits were quite remarkable in the way they engaged the Lakota people on their own terms - they're part of an organization that is not based on the rule of the majority and is not based on consensus building. There is a by and large hierarchical flow from the top down that he had to continually navigate to live out his vision.

Randy: That's the best explanation I think I've ever heard of who Black Elk is. And it's what we learned to call the historical imagination. It's not wild speculation; it's being empathic and understanding the subject matter. Thank you. We'll take a break and be back in a minute.

Segment Two

Carolyn: Welcome back to Indigenous Perspectives, and this is our Segment Two. We've titled it "the role of religion in early resistance and pushback" by the Native American people against the European colonizers' intrusions into their lives. So Randy, you wanted to start us off?

Randy: Yes. I want to step back a little further into colonial history before we get back to the times of Black Elk and let the reader know that modern scholars have clearly identified the reality of Native Americans having an enormous cultural impact on the religion of the Europeans who landed on these shores.

Again, it's quite counterintuitive given the current narrative and dogma surrounding decolonization, but there's a marvelous book written by James Axtell called *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*[5]. And Axtell looks at such things as the abductions of settlers and the conversion of settlers who became known as "White Indians." And he comes down clearly on the side of the power of Indigenous people to convert the settlers. I'm going to read just a very brief quote,

"the contest of cultures in colonial North America" , -and he's talking about the 17th century - was far from one-sided. Despite superior technologies, aggressive

[5] Axtell, James: The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America. Page 302. Oxford University Press, 1986.

religions, prolific populations, and well-articulated ideologies of imperialism, the French and English invaders enjoyed no monopoly of success in converting enemies to their way of life. In fact, the Indian defenders of the continent were more successful psychologically, if not numerically, than either of their European rivals. The Indians, despite all odds, succeeded in seducing French and English colonists in numbers so alarming to European sensibilities that the natives were conceded to be in effect, the best cultural missionaries and educators on the continent."[6]

Now he's talking about the 17th century when the power balance was not what it was in the 18th and 19th century in many ways, on much of a territory Native Americans had the upper hand. But reading that paragraph must be a shock to our listeners who are used to hearing the story about domination and cultural assimilation and acculturation.

Carolyn: Well, as, as a woman, I can also, I've always been able to identify very strongly with the European and American girls and women who experienced some Indian life - either being captives or getting lost in the woods or whatever - and choose to stay because there's a lot more freedom in many ways for women, physical freedom, emotional freedom - and this obviously meant a tremendous amount. However, I don't think that freedom for women expanded from the Indigenous peoples to the European society in a lasting unbroken way. So, I just wanted to put in a little bit of caveat on that.

Damian: And to pick that up just for a moment. You know, in the accounts that you have of, for example, the various missionaries to Native peoples, you know, despite their, dogma or, you know, their agenda, the accounts they give are oftentimes sort of romanticized, just over the top, accounts of their own engagement with, you know, ceremony, for example. That you get this sense that, you know, if you read between the lines, like this is as important to them as their own Catholic ritual, even though they can't say this explicitly or are very conflicted by it.

And you know, one rabbit trail for the readers to pick up is, recently, the book *The Dawn of Everything* by Graeber and Wengrow[7]. *[They]* take up this idea that the influence that Indigenous culture had on Europe and the Age of Enlightenment may have been the seeds for a lot of the Enlightenment ideas that we take for granted

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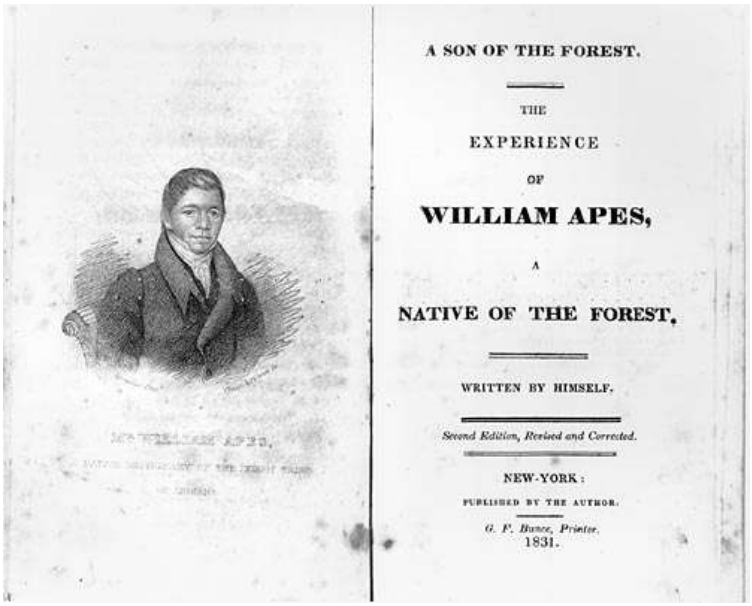
[7] Graeber, David and Wengrow, David: The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021.

and say are found in the seeds of Western culture. No, actually may be *[the Enlightenment ideas]* coming from the influence of these consensus-based cultures talking back to the centers of power.

Randy: So in that spirit, in your book you refer to one William Apess, who is a Mashpee Wampanoag. And again, I think he illustrates, and please elaborate, how Black Elk is not alone in using the values and the very words and concepts of the Christian missionaries, using those very words back against the colonizers. So who is William Apess?

Damian: So Apess was of various tribal backgrounds, I think he was Pequot, but he ended up with the Mashpee Wampanoag, working as their minister.



Portrait of the author and title page of Apess' autobiography, published 1831.[8]

But he had a sort of born again experience in the early 1800s and became a Methodist minister, but a very active and fiery proponent of what we would say social justice[9].

[8] Public Domain. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Apess#/media/File:Williamapes.jpg

[9] "William Apess (1798–1839, Pequot) (also known as William Apes before 1837), was an ordained Methodist minister, writer, and activist of mixed-race descent, who was a political and religious leader in Massachusetts. After becoming ordained as a Methodist minister in 1829, he published his autobiography the same year. It is among the first autobiographies by a Native American writer. Apess was part Pequot by descent, especially through his mother's family, and identified with their culture.

You know, I think we are very aware of the context of the call for liberation within African American Christian circles, right? Everybody's heard of Martin Luther King, most know that he was a minister, and that the Black church was an incredibly important, if not the most important, part to changing the place of Black Americans in the colonial society of the U.S. There's also a strand in Native communities where Christianity became a very explicitly liberative force for Native communities.

And so, you know, if you look at the Lakota context, there's - that language is picked up. And maybe not quite as explicitly, but when Frank Fools Crow, for example, who we've talked about in a previous episode - you know, the last ceremonial chief of the entire Lakota Nation and who was a very prominent spiritual leader during the fifties, sixties and seventies, - when he goes to the U.S. government, he talks about the U.S. failing to live up to the standards set by God and that God is going to judge this.

Randy: And we have the example, which maybe we can discuss in the next segment, of a Mohawk, Kateri Tekakwitha, who according to some accounts is converted to Christianity, but there's an aspect of her conversion where she almost flips the roles of who has the upper hand and the higher authority. But we'll come back to that in a moment after a break.

Segment Three

Carolyn: Welcome back to Indigenous Perspectives. We're picking it right up with Randy and Damian talking about the actions of Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk woman who became a *[Catholic]* saint later on. And Randy, you can continue.

Randy: So I bring her up because I think it's important, again, to emphasize to listeners that Black Elk is not the only person who's engaged in using the teachings

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In 1833, while serving as an itinerant preacher in New England, Apess visited the Mashpee on Cape Cod. Hearing their grievances against white overseers and settlers who stole their wood, he helped organize what was called the Mashpee Revolt of 1833-34. Their attempt to regain civil rights was covered sympathetically by the *Boston Advocate,* but criticized by local journals on Cape Cod. Apess published a book about the experience in 1835, which he summarized as "Indian Nullification."
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Apess

of Christianity, and Apess is not the only other person using the teachings of Christianity to transform the faith from the Native American point of view. Kateri Tekakwitha is a young woman who is born in central New York state, migrates to Canada, and her mentor has a bit of a problem, I would say, managing her in a way, because she becomes a profoundly charismatic figure in this new community that is founded on the St. Lawrence River. And at one point she actually comes to him and says, I want to found a religious order, essentially, you know, a confraternity or like a convent, on an island.

And, and he has to talk her down from this because, well, it's quite frankly, a bit of a threat to the domination of the missionaries who are there, to have a woman, who has in some ways authority independent of theirs - go out and set up her own religious order. So we keep coming back to this notion of the power center of these Indigenous leaders. And recognizing, as the *[Catholic]* Church did, her sainthood, raises the question of what does this process of making Indigenous people saints, what does it do in terms of opening the flood gates of the flow of Native thought back into the *[Catholic]* church?

Carolyn: Okay, well that seems to be the segue into discussing the current situation of Black Elk, who has been - he's in the nomination process of the Roman Catholic Church to be – if he's going to be declared a saint. And Damian has been an advocate for Black Elk getting - being officially declared a saint. And from an article he wrote two years ago, it's a quote from Damian: "Declaring Black Elk a saint is not just to rubberstamp what happened in the past but is an event that changes the church and the whole world: a deep affirmation of Native ways that will help bring us back to our spiritual center and a step toward righting the wrongs that structure our world."[10]

Um, pretty powerful quotation. And Damian, can you jump off from that?

Damian: Well, I really started thinking about this in conversation with Lakota elder Basil Brave Heart, who is a Lakota spiritual leader, Sun Dance intercessor - retired from that now - and grew up Catholic boarding school survivor. But he was the main impetus for starting the movement to change what was known as Harney Peak, the highest mountain in the Black Hills, to Black Elk Peak. Took two years. It

[10] Damian Costello, https://uscatholic.org/articles/202105/nicholas-black-elk-fully-lakota-completely-catholic/ May 12, 2021

was very contentious, a lot of opposition. But it ended up happening in sort of what he regards in sort of an almost miraculous sense. And this is at the time when the, the cause for Black Elk sainthood is starting.

And so he, the way he described it was that those two acts, so to speak, are different sides of the same coin, the same spiritual movement. And in fact, he sees the name change sort of changing the character of the land. And then the sainthood process, the canonization, being an extension of Black Elk's vision from that land out throughout the whole world. That this is sort of the fullest flowering of his vision to speak back into those different places that he had been engaging when he was alive with us on earth.

That his beautiful Indigenous- Catholic integral vision - that includes all of creation as kin, right? That's the foundation of Indigenous thought, that every being around you is not just a life form or something that you can use; it's a relative. And so for the church to acknowledge that his spiritual vision and his life is worthy of generation as a saint, is to make those teachings central to the Catholic Church. They're already sort of there, in their seeds, but this would be the fullest declaration of it. And the greatest popular form of that spirituality for average people.

Randy: What I like about what you're doing, what you write about in your book and what William Apess did in his ministry and his preachings, is to recognize that Native Americans not only vaguely "got" this new religion, but they actually grasped its essence and in many ways called the institution or institutions of Christianity back to their origins. I want you to run with that idea and emphasize it again because it is absolutely startling.

Damian: Yes. The trope - which I think is the reality of the lived experience of many people, that Christianity or Catholicism is the quote unquote white man's religion - does a real disservice to non-white peoples. I mean, the mere fact today is that most Christians across the world and the places in which it's becoming the greatest cultural force are non-white places. That includes Indigenous people. But these, like you said, Indigenous peoples, non-white peoples, don't just sort of mimic what they're given. They're not just parrots that are incapable of grasping the depth and using what they're given for what's important in their lives. They incorporate into who they are and it speaks to their reality, and in turn is passed back to where it may have come from. And so, in Black Elk's case and in these Native Christians, this

is a demonstration of sort of complete mastery of the tradition. This is - to say that they're just forced into this does a real disservice to their humanity and the complexity of how they engage with these difficult situations that they're given, but also how they engage with the global community.

Randy: Why don't you take a moment to explain what you do in your professional work? We haven't really discussed it very much, but I think it's highly relevant right here.

Damian: So what we do at NAIITS –that's how we pronounce it, in popular form, An Indigenous Learning Community - what we are is the first Indigenous founded and governed theological graduate school. So I'm sort of you know, a minority within our community; I'm not Indigenous. Most people in the admin and who teach there are Indigenous. And what we are trying to do is to build up a vibrant academic culture of Indigenous Christian theology. We offer four Masters degrees and a PhD program. It's available across the world. We have students in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and some other countries as well.

And we see ourselves as a boarding school in reverse, you know. We – our elevator pitch is that we are a highly trained, dedicated janitorial team cleaning up messes that churches have left in Indigenous communities for the last five centuries. But my colleagues - my Indigenous colleagues - will be the first to tell you, "this is my tradition, and Christians across the world need to listen to my voice because I have as much right to it. But in many ways, I have seen sides to it and are calling you to live parts of it that your people have ignored or downplayed or downright misinterpreted or mangled into something beyond recognition".

Carolyn: Okay, we'll take a break and be back for the last segment. Stay tuned.

Segment Four

Carolyn: Welcome back to the fourth segment of Indigenous Perspectives. This time, our title for this segment is resilience and resistance: decolonization in a more nuanced context. So Randy, can you pick it up?

Randy: Yes. Damian, this has been a long journey in three shows, and you know, we're not at the end, I think, of a discussion that will go on for a long time, but I think we're at the climax of being able to lead our listeners to the recognition that

something extraordinary happened with Black Elk; something extraordinary is happening today, And that is that Indigenous people are exhibiting resilience and resistance against the forces of colonization.

But as we were just discussing in the last segment, the Christian community and the Catholic Church are also responding and showing resilience and to some degree resistance, pushing back against aspects of their own institutional pasts.

So let's lead into that with the most recent and shocking wonderful development, which is the Vatican renouncing this infamous "Doctrine of Discovery." And it came about because of petitions and persistence of largely, but not exclusively, Canadians who, when the Pope *[Francis I]* visited on his pilgrimage, insisted that this be done , and followed him to the Vatican where they made the argument again. So can you pick up and explain to the listeners how dramatic this development is in not just Native American, but *[Catholic]* church history?

Damian: You know, this is something that Native peoples have been asking for, for decades now, led by Stephen Newcomb, asking to renounce the "Doctrine of Discovery." Other churches have, other groups, but the church has been largely silent on this - the Catholic Church. And, you know, in that context, all these repeated visitations to the Vatican by these delegations from North America. Pope Francis was asked on his way home in the plane by a journalist if he was planning on renouncing the "Doctrine of Discovery" or why hadn't he? And I was dismayed to hear him say, and I think genuinely: "The Doctrine of Discovery? Now what's that? I'm not familiar with it." You know, the Vatican is a huge - the church is huge, and the Vatican operation is huge, and like with any sort of massive organization, you never know what's getting all the way to the top.

But this is not something that has been on the radar of those in power, quite tragically. So it was quite remarkable when, as you said Randy, out of sort of nowhere the Vatican issued a document, renouncing – and they may be saying, clarifying that they never quite believed that - and I think that would be difficult for Native people to hear - but very clearly saying that this is not a valid teaching. And that would've only happened because of the kind of repeated and ongoing pressure that Native people were putting on the Vatican.

Randy: So as, as you and I have discussed in our other communications, in a sense, this is an unburdening, an enormous unburdening, of our Western North American

cultures and our legal system, which took this "Doctrine of Discovery" and used it as legal precedent to force Native Americans off their lands. But it is - it is also an unburdening of the *[Catholic]* Church of a legacy of having once uttered, at least in the words of one very dubious corrupt pope in the 15th century, that because Native people were not Christians, they were not worthy of owning their own land. It is - it must be an enormous relief for many people who are working in the church to no longer have to try to explain, cope with, apologize for this. How did it impact you?

Damian: It's - I'm still trying to process it because like I said, it was very surprising, but it's something that I'm encouraging myself and others to sort of step into, lean into, in the way you're describing this - this unburdening, this relief. You know, I think non-Indigenous people are so burdened or defined by this deficit paradigm - that if we admit wrong or if we start to act to make restitution, boy, we're going to lose a whole lot. It's going to mean that it's at our expense. When the reality is most of the time you are rewarded, you are gifted with this freedom and a return to yourself, you know? You are freed from the negativity that we unwittingly hold onto. And this is an opportunity to step into right relationship in a more – in a fuller way. And so I'm trying to cultivate that with myself and with those people around me who are struggling to understand these issues. [11]

Randy: So we need to remind our listeners that a very large percentage of *[Indigenous]* people in this half of the world, are Indigenous people who became Christians. And this is their faith, along with holding onto their traditional practices. How, how do you think this ending of the "Doctrine of Discovery" hanging over them is going to impact their ability to more openly and unhesitatingly embrace this aspect of their belief system?

Damian: I think for a lot of people, this is an another step forward to accepting and believing what the church says - but that it doesn't demonstrate: Know that this is your home too. You're a part of us. There's no distinction between you or anybody else or any other community or nation in our *[church]* community. And it also, you know, when you think about what's happening, when you think about the claim, for the first time Native peoples are being told know that your right to a home is as legitimate as anybody else. And that's a remarkable claim. It's remarkable that it's

[11] See Damian Costello's article, "The Doctrine of Re-Discovery". Montpelier, Vermont: The Montpelier Bridge, May 2, 2023. https://montpelierbridge.org/2023/05/the-doctrine-of-re-discovery This article is also posted, in .pdf form, as supplemental material for this show. Go to https://www.ecologia.org/news/indigpers.html

taken that long to be said so clearly. But it's my hope that that further breaks down the divisions and the separations that riddle Native communities and all of our communities struggling to find a home together.

Randy: So do you think the spirit of Black Elk is just a little bit lighter in the light – the view of - these recent developments? That this is indeed the image, you know, that part of the image that he had been burdened with and carried forward?

Damian:And I don't know where he is in his spiritual journey. But you know, one of the most compelling parts of who he was, was the struggle he had to live up to his vision and how he was constantly burdened with the idea that he hadn't fulfilled it. And so if he is still on a spiritual journey of some kind, I think probably he recognizes that I've got one step closer to fulfilling my call to live up to my vision.

Carolyn: Well, I think that's a wonderful way to end this show and also to end our three show Black Elk series. Thank you very much.

Randy: Damian, I want to thank you in particular. This has been, you know, a marvelous journey together, these three shows, and I want to thank our listeners for tuning in. I hope listeners will take time to give themselves some space to reconnect with their roots in Mother Earth and their ancestral roots and their spiritual roots. Before your busy day distracts you from this moment, I encourage you to take a few minutes to reach out and feel the presence of living flora and fauna and perhaps even that of your ancestors or our Native American ancestors. Allow yourself to touch their presence, capture that moment, hold onto it. And if you will, write to me and let me know about your experience. I can be contacted through my web site, at www.randykritkausky.com, where you can also find transcripts and supplemental materials for all Indigenous Perspectives shows including today's. Again, I want to thank Damian Costello for being our guest, and thank you for being our listeners.

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