

## AMERICAN PROPHETS BY JACK JENKINS

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR CHAPTER 7: THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

- “Under various theological and legal doctrines formulated **during and after the Crusades, non-Christians were considered enemies of the Catholic faith and, as such, less than human.** Accordingly, in the bull of 1452, Pope Nicholas directed King Alfonso to ‘capture, vanquish, and subdue the Saracens, pagans, and other enemies of Christ,’ to ‘put them into perpetual slavery,’ and ‘to take all their possessions and property.’
- Thus, when Columbus sailed west across the Sea of Darkness in 1492 - with the express understanding that he was authorized to “take possession” of any lands he “discovered” that were “not under the dominion of any Christian rulers” - he and the Spanish sovereigns of Aragon and Castile were following an already well-established tradition of “discovery” and conquest.”

#### Wikipedia

- “When European monarchies invasively arrived in the Western Hemisphere in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and later centuries, during the so-called Age of Discovery, they claimed the lands, territories, and resources of the Indigenous Peoples, asserting that the monarchies had a right to appropriate on behalf of Christendom.
- The monarchies’ claims of a Christian dominance over Indigenous Peoples and their lands served them pragmatically to fend off competing monarchies and to de-legitimize the long-established autonomous indigenous peoples’ governments.
- **Criteria for claiming land:**
  1. **European monarchies treated indigenous land as ‘unoccupied,’** as long as Christians were not present. **Status of a ‘human’ was based on religion.**
  2. **Land deemed ‘unoccupied’ were therefore ‘discovered’** as if it had been previously unknown to humankind, and the land thus claimed by the ‘discovering’ Christian European ‘sovereign.’
- **Transfer of the land.**
  1. A Christian government’s claim to sovereignty over the territory of an indigenous nation or people could be transferred by a treaty with another Christian government.
  2. Government by agent or proxy. Sovereign monarchs gave royal charters of ‘discovery’ to companies or individuals to delegate the work of claiming Indigenous lands.”

<https://www.nyym.org/content/doctrine-of-discovery-factsheet>

- “In 1792, U.S. Secretary of State [Thomas Jefferson](#) declared that the Doctrine of Discovery would extend from Europe to the infant U.S. government. The Doctrine and its legacy continue to influence [American imperialism](#) and treatment of indigenous peoples.”

#### Wikipedia

- “This ideology supported the dehumanization of those living on the land and their dispossession, murder, and forced assimilation. The Doctrine fueled white supremacy insofar as white European settlers claimed they were instruments of divine design and possessed cultural superiority. It was permissible to virtually ignore the most basic rights of indigenous ‘heathens,’ and to claim that the ‘unoccupied lands’ of America rightfully belonged to discovering Christian European nations.
- The Doctrine of Discovery was the inspiration in the 1800s for the **Monroe Doctrine, which declared U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere, and Manifest Destiny, which justified American expansion westward by propagating the belief that the U.S. was destined to control all land from the Atlantic to the Pacific and beyond.**
- **In 1823, the Christian Doctrine of Discovery was quietly adopted into U.S. law by the Supreme Court** in the celebrated case, *Johnson v. McIntosh*. Writing for a unanimous court,

Chief Justice John Marshall observed that Christian European nations had assumed 'ultimate dominion' over the lands of America during the Age of Discovery, and that - upon 'discovery' - the Indians had lost 'their rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations,' and only retained a right of 'occupancy' in their lands. In other words, Indian nations were subject to the ultimate authority of the first nation of Christendom to claim possession of a given region of Indian lands. Most of us have been brought up to believe that the United States Constitution was designed to keep church and state apart. Unfortunately, with the Johnson decision, the Christian Doctrine of Discovery was not only written into U.S. law but also became the cornerstone of U.S. Indian policy over the next century. By penalizing Native people on the basis of their non-Christian religious beliefs and ceremonial practices, stripping them of most of their lands and most of their sovereignty, the *Johnson v. McIntosh* ruling stands as a monumental violation of the 'natural rights' of humankind, as well as the most fundamental human rights of indigenous peoples.

- **Forced removals such as the Trail of Tears, the seizure of natural resources, the destruction of traditional languages and cultures, the sterilization of Indian women, and the disruption of Indigenous communities are examples of implementation of the concepts of 'discovery' and 'dominance.'** The homelands of Indian peoples living east of the Mississippi River were stolen by removing them from their traditional ancestral homelands through the **Indian Removal Act of 1835**.
- In **1877 the sacred Black Hills were stolen from the Sioux nation in violation of the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie** which recognized the Sioux Nation's exclusive and absolute possession of their lands.
- A congressional statute, known as the **General Allotment Act of 1887, divested Indian people of some 90 million acres of their lands**. This act, explained John Collier (Commissioner of Indian Affairs) was 'an indirect method - peacefully under the forms of law' - of taking away the land that we were determined to take away but did not want to take it openly by breaking the treaties.

### **The Doctrine of Discovery Today**

- In a country set up to maintain a strict separation of church and state, the Doctrine of Discovery should have long ago been declared unconstitutional because it is based on a prejudicial treatment of Native American people simply because they were not Christians at the time of European arrival.
- To begin to bring that system of colonization to an end, and to move away from a cultural and spiritual tradition of subjugation, we must overturn the doctrine at its roots.
- Revoking those papal documents and overturning the *Johnson v. McIntosh* decision are two important first steps toward correcting the injustices that have been inflicted on indigenous peoples over the past five hundred years. They are also spiritually significant steps toward creating a way of life that is no longer based on greed and subjugation. Perhaps then we will be able to use our newfound solidarity to begin to create a lifestyle based on the first indigenous principle: 'Respect the Earth and have a Sacred Regard for All Living Things.'"

<https://www.nnym.org/content/doctrine-of-discovery-factsheet>

## SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 7: CREATION CARE

### Spirituality and Faith Inform the Care of Creation

In the **1980s** the US Supreme Court:

- Granted the US Forest Service the right to build a road through (sacred land of the Yurok, Tolowa, and Karok tribes of California).
- Upheld the State of Oregon's claim that it did not have to provide unemployment benefits to 2 Native Americans who were fired after they tested positive for traces of mescaline, found in the illegal drug peyote, which they used as part of a religious ceremony, (In 1993 Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, **RFRA**, which overruled this decision). However Native Americans rarely win in legal courts when invoking the **RFRA**.

**(Note: 1993: The Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) of 1993** - Prohibits any agency, department, or official of the United States or any State (the government) from substantially burdening a person's exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability, except that the government may burden a person's exercise of religion only if it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person: (1) furthers a compelling governmental interest; and (2) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.)

**1998:** "**Interfaith Power and Light (IPL)**, a faith and climate group founded as a project of a few Episcopal churches in California, grew to 40 state affiliates and 20,000 congregations (that) espoused creative care theology encouraged faith communities to install solar panels, (fought) mountaintop removal in North Carolina, and met with lawmakers at every level to lobby for legislation that would protect the environment." (Creation care is espoused by Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs based on their sacred texts.)

**2006:** "Al Gore's landmark film, *An Inconvenient Truth* reinvigorated the climate movement. Gore, a divinity school dropout led trainings for Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu activists eager to frame environmental issues in religious terms."

**2012:**

- "4 women in Western Canada (3 of whom are First Nation women) convene a teach-in ('Idle No More') to protest legislation that would erode the consultation and approval process for construction near bodies of water. This sets in motion activism across North America and parts of the Pacific, not only environmental in scope but also unapologetically spiritual."
- "A Spirit Camp is created at Cheyenne River Reservation in SD where activists prayed and taught classes in civil disobedience to (protest) against the Keystone XL pipeline. Tribal Chairman Archambault lobbied President Obama. Activists marched through Washington DC."

**2013:**

- "Pope Francis in his inaugural homily called on world leaders and Catholics to be 'protectors of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.'"
- "Pope Francis in his first address on American soil spent most of his time talking about climate change. Democrats praised the Pope's comments. (Republican sentiment was expressed by Paul Gosat, 'When the Pope chooses to act and talk like a leftist politician, then he can expect to be treated like one.') And just like that, **the decades-old claim of spiritual dominion of the religious Right in American politics began to slip away**. Environmentalism and climate change had emerged as a religious issue, a *progressive* religious issue."
- "A **rift** (grew) between the **scientific community** and **white Christian America** over whether to 'believe' climate research. (Pope Francis's) rhetoric on climate change (was) an existential threat to white Catholic Republicans (although it was consistent with previous pope's (stance)."

**2014:** "Inspired (by Native Keystone XL protests), (Native Hawaiian) activists interrupt the groundbreaking ceremony of the **Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT)** on top of (**a sacred site**) the volcano **Mauna Kea**. Native Hawaiians, most of them **kupuna (Hawaii elder protectors)**

formed a human blockade across the road (blocking construction vehicles). (Politicians and celebrities also visited the site to show support.)

- “The rationale for opposing **TMT** was partially environmental. A court-ordered environmental impact study concluded that previous construction projects on the summit had “substantial, significant, and adverse impacts on the mountain. Protectors insist that further building would affect aquifers and local wildlife. (Many Indigenous Hawaiians believe) that the mountain is quite literally, divine.”

## 2015:

- “(3,000 – 5,000 people came to **Mauna Kea** in Hawaii because of environmental concerns and to protect the rights of Indigenous people. (Many Native Americans come from the mainland to pray with the *kupuna*.)”
- “**Pope Francis** put the might and authority of the Bishop of Rome, planted his flag in the environmental camp, and earned acclaim from several scientists when he published his encyclical, ‘*Laudato Si*’ – writing, ‘God calls on human to be stewards of the earth.’”
- “**IPL** partners with the Catholic Climate Change Collective for a national and international climate change response to ‘Laudato Si.’”
- “The **Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective** cites ‘*Laudato Si*’ calling world leaders to completely phase out fossil fuels. (It is) signed by the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh and other Buddhist leaders.”
- “The **Sierra Club** promotes the ‘Green Bible’ which highlights environmental passages in green and includes commentary from progressive faith leaders.”
- **Apache** Nation members occupied (holy) land near a proposed copper mine at Oak Flat, AZ.
- Activists from various tribes and traditions, even from Hawaii (crisscrossed) the country to support each other’s events, with participants saying that their religion and activism were one in the same. Spirituality is at the core of Indigenous environmental activism because, while their spiritual traditions are diverse, Indigenous people share a common belief that the earth is sacred.”

## 2016:

- “The proposed path of the **Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL)**, a project of Energy Transfer Partners, a Texas-based corporation (whose pipelines had a history of leaks), was **beneath Lake Oahe, less than a mile from the Standing Rock Sioux reservation.**”
- “A potential spill would threaten the water supply as well as lands that their people deemed sacred. By the end of 2016, an estimated 10,000 had descended on the region to sing, pray, and protest **DAPL**. The **#NoDAPL** campaign captured the hearts of progressives and the attention of national news. The demonstrations (were) one of the most unabashedly spiritual progressive-leaning movements of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”
- “The pipeline threat (was a reminder to the Native people) of The ‘**Doctrine of Discovery**’ (**DOD**) and ‘**Manifest Destiny**,’ which anointed **European Colonialism** and **American westward expansion with spiritual justification for various forms of subjugation.**”
- “500 Episcopalian Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and other Christian clergy stood (at Standing Rock), read messages of support, and repudiate the **DOD.**’ The World Council of Churches also repudiates the **DOD.**”
- **Kai (Native Hawaiian activists)** visit Standing Rock to support the Sioux.
- “An Indigenous delegation travels to Rome and **asks Pope Francis to revoke the DOD. He did not.** (Francis also needed to make amends for canonizing Father Junipero Serra.)”
- “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a 20 something Puerto Rican woman working as a bartender in NYC, a Boston College graduate and an avowed Catholic, ‘felt called’ to Standing Rock. She became the chief author of the ‘Green New Deal,’ a ‘paradigm shift in society.’ (This) is first and foremost a spiritual battle, a spiritual transformation.”

## 2017:

- “Pope Francis speaks of the need to ‘reconcile the right of development with the protection of the particular characteristics of Indigenous people which may interfere with their ancestral relationship with the earth.’”
- “The Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux (invoking the **RFRA**) file a temporary restraining order to halt construction of the **DAPL**. The federal court ruled against the tribes. On February 22, 2017 authorities expelled the water protectors. A judge ordered an additional environmental review in June 2017, but the Trump administration rejected it. The first oil flowed through the finished pipeline that summer.”
- “Standing Rock did not win the DAPL fight but it (forged) dialogue between different environmentally conscious spiritual movements. Iterations of faith-fueled environmentalism began to spread. The contributions of Indigenous spiritual fights to the environmental cause remain profound.”

## 2019:

- “The Hawaii Supreme Court clears the way for construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (**TMT**) on top of (**a sacred site**) the volcano **Mauna Kea**.” (Four times a day **kupuna, Hawaii elder protectors**, shout directions in the Hawaiian tongue, horns crafted from wood and seashells drone and hundreds of people who see themselves as **Kai (Native Hawaiian activists)** emerge from multicolored tents scattered across a crag of dried lava and face the 4 different directions to pray (sing and dance).”