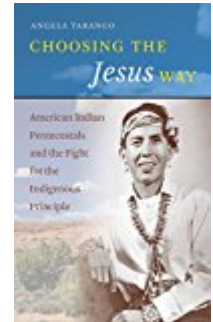


**Angela Tarango.** *Choosing the Jesus Way: American Indian Pentecostals and the Fight for the Indigenous Principle.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 234 pp. \$32.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4696-1292-8.



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*Choosing the Jesus Way* is a study of Native Americans in the Assemblies of God during the twentieth century, and the implications of its arguments stretch far beyond the boundaries of that denomination. It not only provides a necessary and compelling account of Native Pentecostals, but argues that studies of Christian Native Americans must attend to daily practices to see processes of negotiation and adaptation that are rarely discussed in public.

Tarango argues that Native leaders created space for Native Americans in the Assemblies of God through the regular practice of local leadership. Although the Assemblies of God was committed, in principle, to the equality of Native Christians, in practice it tended to recognize the leadership only of white missionaries and administrators. By practicing a Pentecostal ethic that Tarango calls the “indigenous principle”—the idea that churches should be locally led and engage with the cultures of missionized people—Native leaders pushed back on this tendency and held the Assemblies of God to its stated intention

to create new, independent congregations. Through a slow process of institution building and political pressure, Native leaders made incremental changes while staying within the boundaries of a denomination they found valuable. By creating Native-led missionary organizations and slowly leveraging their command of indigenous customs and languages, these leaders not only won representation in the denomination for their communities but also demonstrated new possibilities for living as Native Americans and Christians.

The first chapter outlines the theological background of the indigenous principle in the Pentecostal tradition and discusses its importance for the practices of Native American Pentecostals. This theological commitment to local autonomy and cultural integration, which Pentecostals attributed to the example of the apostle Paul, provided a warrant for the leaders Tarango studies to affirm Native identity and create structures sup-

porting Native autonomy despite the Assembly of God's historical mistrust of nonwhite converts.

The rest of the book proceeds chronologically. It draws on both interviews and archival sources such as periodicals and letters to detail the practice of the indigenous principle by Native leaders in the Assemblies of God from 1918 to 2007. The narrative begins with the conversion of early Native leaders and the work of white Pentecostal evangelists on reservations in the southwestern United States during the early twentieth century. The first white Pentecostals to arrive on reservations distinguished themselves from other missionaries by being willing to consider the material needs of Native Americans. But they often butted heads with Native Pentecostal leaders who insisted on the independence of local congregations from missionary oversight. During the middle of the century, Native Pentecostal leaders developed distinctive approaches to traditional Native religions and the Native American Church. They characterized these religions as outdated and unsuited to life in the wake of colonial settlement, rather than as the demonic or "pagan" threats that some white Pentecostals made them out to be. This rhetoric allowed Native Pentecostals to critique competing religious organizations and maintain credibility with their white coreligionists while incorporating some Native traditions into Pentecostal practice. From the late 1950s through the 1970s, key institutions emerged that would support a new generation of Native American Pentecostal leaders. The white evangelist Alta Washburn founded an all-Native Bible school in Phoenix—now the American Indian College of the Assemblies of God—that would train a new generation of Native leaders and lead to cross-tribal connections within the denomination. Meanwhile, Charlie Lee (Navajo) created and nurtured a Navajo Assemblies of God congregation in Shiprock, New Mexico, that in 1976 became the first Native-led Assemblies of God congregation to be recognized as a full member of the district, rather than a mission. Finally, through steady

pressure, Native leaders in the Assemblies of God won national representation for their interests and needs. This included a permanent seat on the national Home Missions Committee in 1978 and a Native American Fellowship founded in 1996. These changes occurred only because a contingent of Native leaders within the Assemblies of God successfully pressured the largely white leadership and reformulated Pentecostal theologies to advocate for Native autonomy.

Although she does not share Native Pentecostals' views of the world, Tarango writes with a sense of responsibility toward them. In this, she follows the best practices of indigenous studies, which urge scholars to engage with the communities they write about and consider their needs when writing. Some of the challenges of this approach appear in a 2005 encounter with two Mohawk leaders in the Assemblies of God, John Maracle and Rodger Cree, that Tarango describes in the conclusion. During their conversation, Maracle said, "We have been praying that the Holy Spirit would send us someone to tell our story. We can see now that he has sent you to us for that purpose" (p. 177). Maracle's expectations, clearly, were high, which both speaks to the value of this history and suggests the deft touch required to write it. Tarango rises to the challenge by balancing analysis with a narrative that Native Pentecostals could use to understand themselves and their community. Her blending of religious studies and indigenous studies methodologies raises fruitful questions about the responsibilities of scholars to living communities, making this an ideal text for graduate seminars.

Tarango does not, however, reveal much to readers about any internal struggles that Native evangelists may have had with the expectations placed on them as representatives of their communities and denominations. She touches on this topic at times—as in her discussion of why some Native evangelists chose to appear publicly in stereotypical "Indian costumes" not belonging to

their tribes— but the narrative could have accommodated more such reflection. It would have been particularly fascinating, for example, to hear her reflect further on the role of respectability politics in the choices Native Pentecostal leaders made about their self-presentation and personal lives.

*Choosing the Jesus Way* is an important and engaging piece of scholarship. Its clear, narrative style makes it a valuable addition to classroom syllabuses, especially in courses on Native American history, Native American religion, and American evangelicalism.

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