



Q & A



Undoing Manifest Destiny *Settler America, Christian Colonists, and the Pursuit of Justice*

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L. Daniel Hawk (PhD, Emory University) is professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio. Aspects of his work on biblical narrative take a postcolonial turn in books such as *Joshua in 3-D: A Commentary on Biblical Conquest and Manifest Destiny* and as coeditor of *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations*.

Dismantling Settler Narratives

What led to your interest in and now writing about settler colonial theory and history?

L. Daniel Hawk: The urgency of the moment, in which diverse and silenced peoples and communities are making their voices heard and calling White America to account. The US took Indigenous land by force and violence and constructed colonial structures that persist to the present day. Christianity was and is deeply complicit in the colonial project, by legitimating, participating in, and advancing it. It is far past time to acknowledge and dismantle the colonial structures that privilege the descendants of White settlers, to expose its justifying narrative of US colonialism, and to do the work necessary to create a space for healing of both settler Indigenous citizens and Christians—and so to build the foundation for a renewed church that invites all truths to be told, all voices to be heard, and all people to be treated as fellow human beings.

What is your main thesis in *Undoing Manifest Destiny*?

Hawk: Settler colonial systems are cloaked by a mythic narrative that justifies the theft of Indigenous land and the violence and bad faith exerted to take it. This book exposes the US myth of innocence and its justifying mechanisms by tracing the erasure of the Indigenous peoples of the US and what Patrick Wolfe has called “the logic of elimination”—along four trajectories: treaties of land cession, massive violence, removal, and assimilation. It also exposes the extent to which Christians colluded in Indigenous erasure and in the construction of a racialized binary that rendered Indigenous peoples as primitive and stubborn savages. After elaborating the mechanisms of erasure and denial, the book explores the use of Joshua as a critical text for generating decolonizing conversations and makes suggestions for exposing the present-day manifestations of the settler structure and narrative.

What do you hope your book contributes to the study of settler colonial history?

Hawk:

- Although many Indigenous political theologies and alternate histories of the US have been published, there has been virtually no comprehensive response from White settler Christians.
- The book brings together settler colonial theory, historical analysis, and Christian theology to relate settler America’s attempt to erase Indigenous presence from the land seized by the US and its colonial forbearers.
- The result is a work of decolonization that challenges the church to acknowledge its complicity with the colonial project and to enter into conversations directed toward setting things right. Christians constructed the colonial structure; it is the responsibility of Christians to join in bringing it down.
- The book therefore confronts readers with the fact that the past is not dead and Indigenous people have not vanished. Rather, it points to present-day manifestations of colonialism in US interactions with its Indigenous citizens.



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