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Foreward to Snyder's "Jesus and Pocahontas: Gospel, Mission and National Myth"

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Foreword

When Howard Snyder first asked me to look at the manuscript for this book, I must admit my initial reaction to the title was not exactly enthusiastic. To be completely honest, I have never taken Pocahontas's conversion seriously, thinking, like many people, that her conversion merely serves to support the myth of American imperial expansion and the assimilation of Native Americans into a society based upon white normalcy.

Then I started reading. I soon learned that there is room for an alternative view of this old American story, seen from a broader perspective, that takes the history of Jamestown and Pocahontas, Christian mission, and the American nationalistic myth into serious account. The view presented by Howard Snyder in *Jesus and Pocahontas: Gospel, Mission, and Myth* has never been told. It is fresh, scholarly, integrative, and deeply respectful to both early Jamestown and early American Indian accounts. Professor Snyder's telling is a fair and balanced view of an often mistold story.

In *Jesus and Pocahontas*, Howard Snyder presents us with a realistic look at the myth that Americans have built in order to support one particular ethnocentric American reality. As an indigenous scholar, I am always happy to read a more factual and balanced history than the ones that support the current American myth of presumed progress and civilization. In his research Snyder has revealed a much more complex story than commonly found in a simple Pilgrim versus Indian theme as popularized by past novels and Disney. The characters surrounding the Jamestown story are multilayered and complex, as are the rationales for their predictable, and sometimes surprisingly unpredictable, behaviors.

In this journey to discover Jamestown and the Powhatan Confederacy anew, the reader is exposed to real people, not caricatures who fit the story. In the book we find indigenous peoples who welcome the settlers and those

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indigene who are hostile to the newcomers. The story reveals Euro-Americans and whole groups of American settler Europeans whose loyalties, including the rationale for their actions, fall more closely aligned with the natives than their fellow Europeans. The story of Jamestown in *Jesus and Pocahontas* challenges us all to reexamine not only the myth itself, but to look at where the myth has taken us in terms of social, historical, theological, and missional concerns. After reading *Jesus and Pocahontas*, I believe much of the current thought of those wishing to follow the teachings of Christ, especially from a missional perspective, will need serious adjustment.

Despite the sparse record, Howard's insightful analysis of Pocahontas's conversion and her own Christian experience is fascinating, imaginative, and plausible. This insight alone makes the book worth the read but its uses go far beyond this one theme. In his own words, "Jamestown and the story of Pocahontas is a case study in how the gospel of Jesus Christ time and again gets twisted over the course of Christian history and missionary endeavor. The Pocahontas story casts a long shadow." Indeed, as an indigenous follower of Jesus I have felt the weight of that shadow. Snyder's retelling of the story seeks to reimagine another, Christ-honoring myth based upon what so many of us have missed in the actual story.

I do not pass out compliments lightly to non-Indian writers who deal with Native American history and culture. In such writings I have seen the worst of paternalism and superiority time and again. But happily, I am very impressed with Howard's work. I think he has a keen understanding of both the indigenous and European historical contexts, of mission, and of the nationalistic American myth. This book really speaks to the church and the nation, offering the possibility of a changed world view.

I feel honored that my esteemed former professor asked me to comment on this project. After reading this book I have not been disappointed in the least. I encourage you to give the Pocahontas story another read from Howard Snyder's perspective. I think you will agree, he has begun a new and important conversation; a conversation in which I wish to participate!

—Randy S. Woodley

Randy Woodley is a distinguished professor of faith and culture and director of indigenous and intercultural studies at George Fox University, Portland, Oregon. A Keetoowah Cherokee, he has ministered among First Nations people for over twenty-five years and is the cofounder of Eagle's Wings Ministry. His books include *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Ethnic Diversity* and *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*.