Crow Jesus: Personal Stories of Native Religious Belonging, edited by Mark Clatterbuck, is an insightful and useful resource for understanding the complexity of the interaction between Native American traditional practices and Christianity. The book itself is a collection of narratives from members of the Apsáalooke (Crow) Nation which centers on the question of the authenticity of Crow identity given Christianity’s negative and positive influences over time.

The book is divided thematically, with sections devoted to narratives from several Crow-Christian varieties: “Crow Catholic Visions,” “Pentecostalism, Culture, and Politics,” “The Baptist Middle Way,” “Peyote and Christ,” “Healing Hymns,” and “Missionary Voices.” Each section contains multiple interviews and the total project encompasses a wide range of participants, for what Clatterbuck determines is a “representative sampling of contemporary Christian beliefs and practices on the Crow Reservation” (32). Importantly, Clatterbuck includes non-Native voices among his sample, because of their past and continued influence on the Crow community. He has chosen to omit narratives from Crow nation members diametrically opposed to Christianity, citing the need to devote more time and space to such a project. Clatterbuck’s main goal with this collection is to explore how multiple religious belonging manifests in all its variety among self-defined Christian Crows today.

The great value of this volume lies in its lived religion approach to understanding the nature of the multiple belonging of Christian Crows and letting speakers share their experiences in their own words. There is thus an important emphasis on the quotidian aspects of religious practice rather than on doctrine and creed, two ideas which are largely absent from the Crow religious experience. Perhaps the most important contribution of this edited volume is Clatterbuck’s attention to the problematic categories of religious identity and multiple belonging.

Acknowledging immediately the apparent tension between the variety of Christian denominations present on the reservation, Clatterbuck points out that this tension is largely absent for Crow Christians themselves, for whom “denominational labels are, to put it mildly, held loosely ...” (11). The fluidity of such labels can in part be ascribed to the “ritual-oriented, community-based, and occasion-driven” nature of traditional Crow religion (12). The centrality of the community and the practical approach to religious participation means that religion or religious behavior is “not generally regarded as an end in itself ...” (12). It is, rather, a means to further fortify the community. Naturally, this
leads Clatterbuck to question the usefulness of both denominational labels and even the term “Crow Christian” itself, as not properly describing the lived experience of the interviewees. The term rather masks the very multiplicity of Crow experience, both within various denominations and with Crow traditional religion.

Given the multiplicity of experiences expressed by the narratives of the volume, Clatterbuck finally suggests the possibility of a “post-missionary” era for Crows. Conversion stories, while still present, are much less straightforward than in early missionizing days. Instead, one finds “integrated Crow-Christian religious practice that meaningfully wed their dual identities in new ways of synthesized religious praxis” (38). One doesn’t simply leave behind one set of practices for another. Though Clatterbuck highlights the fact that “Crow Christian identity is now set firmly on Native terms,” (39), and enthusiastically decries the frequent treatment of Native Americans as “unwitting pawns in the continued devastation of their own cultural heritage” (23), I wonder whether he gives enough consideration to the continued colonial complicity of Christianity on the reservation. Though new forms of religion have developed and continue to develop, participation in white structures no doubt contributes to perpetuating their dominance. This question is, of course, not the main focus of the volume and deserves more attention.

Interestingly, the presence of Pentecostals in particular make this final question particularly relevant. Currently the largest Christian movement among the Crow, Pentecostalism has found a resonance with traditional Crow religion in the emphasis on rituals such as fasting and vision questing, as well as with a spiritual authority not founded upon formal training (9). This might be somewhat surprising given the apparent incompatibility of the two: proclaiming the true and living God seems decidedly antithetical to traditional Crow practices. Indeed, there are critics of the emerging Crow-Pentecostalism on the reservation. However Clatterbuck suggests, along with the broader development of Crow Christianity on Native terms, that Pentecostalism specifically is contributing to a new way of understanding indigenous identity while maintaining a hold on Pentecostal tradition. Among these, Clatterbuck cites ancestor conversion stories, questioning the cultural legitimacy of “traditional” Crow ceremonies, emphasizing Crow social values over traditional ceremonies, and downplaying the religious dimension of Crow ceremonies (24–27). These strategies allow the Pentecostal tradition and authentic Crow identity to exist side by side in the experiences of many.

Overall, Clatterbuck’s volume raises many important questions that are helpfully answered by Crow Christians themselves. The presence of various tensions among Crow Christians is neither wholly problematic nor wholly