



# MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

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## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY ON THE RISE AMERICAN INDIAN RELIGION: MAKING A COMEBACK

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**L**uke 18:8 records Jesus' question if, when He returns, He would find faith on the earth. He was, of course, speaking about faith in Himself.

With all the talk about revival in the churches today, one wonders if it is biblical Faith in Jesus Christ that is being spoken of, or something else—something that resembles biblical Faith, but, in truth, may only be a melding of biblical truths with human wisdom. Any student of the world's religions easily recognizes that, in spite of the distinctions between those religions, there are similarities that suggest a common origin. Whereas biblical faith (Old Covenant and New Covenant) is Christo-centric (centered on Jesus Christ as the only way to the true God who is transcendent above nature), virtually all of the world's religions prior to the coming of Christ (and most since) are earth-centered. As Paul stated, they worship the creature more than the Creator.

In these days, biblical truth is under attack even in the mainstream religious community. There are concerted efforts to blur the distinctions between biblical truth and other religious philosophies.

The new spirituality for America's religious establishment seems to be predicated upon denigrating the "white man's God." It has become incumbent upon some leaders within Christianity to impose upon Christians guilt for what unbelieving Europeans did in exploiting other races, as if the Faith itself was culpable. In truth, however, it has been true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ who have resisted the injustices of all races against others. By pointing the way to God's Word as the only basis for truth, they have braved the wrath of both sides and, in many cases, have paid the supreme sacrifice of their very lives for doing so.

None of this seems to matter to those who are bent on destroying the Faith and creating a homogeneous religious establishment that will usher in the man of sin. Playing all cultural traditions against biblical faith, the movers and shakers of the globalist order promote cultural diversity as a means to persuade the nation from the biblical ethic upon which it was founded. Thus, it is perfectly acceptable in government schools to engage children in any form of cultural religious tradition—even witchcraft and shamanism—while treating biblical faith, and even "Christian" traditions as something to be avoided. As a result, the distinctions between biblical faith and the world's religious traditions are becoming blurred. Those from pagan traditions are returning to their roots, believing that all traditions are equal. This will allow the nation to be easily melded into the global community.

Educator Lee H. Smith has delineated this goal:

Students should also gain a global perspective on religious diversity. This is especially neces-

sary in an age when global interdependence is increasing with jet-age speed. For Americans, I think this means that the study of Eastern traditions in all their variety is as important as study of the religious traditions of the West.

Because all the religions address basically the same questions, there is great value in studying the religions of the past, such as those of the Greeks and Romans, and the primitive and tribal religions of the contemporary world....Western chauvinism is a common example of a problem of balance. Teachers can manage it by focusing on education about religions that is multicultural and global in scope.<sup>1</sup>

Another prominent educator, Joseph Forcinelli, has also disclosed the globalist nature of today's religious education in government schools:

I hope it is evident to the reader that our method is historical, scholarly, direct, and may I hasten to add, phenomenological. It may properly be said that we seek to be students of religion and the religions and not adherents. Therefore we lay aside all tendencies to evaluate or judge or compare the religions or complement them in any determinative fashion. Rather, we present the facts and data in a descriptive historical context. It is this contextual approach that increasingly seems to solicit perhaps a more appropriate term to describe our methodology, namely, a global approach. Here, one senses the interrelatedness of geography, culture, language, and history inhering in the meanings discovered in the study of man's religions.<sup>2</sup>

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Forcinelli's disclaimer aside, it has become evident that the purpose of religious education in government schools is not only to instill a globalist mentality, but to cause Christian students especially to question the validity of their faith. An example is found in a study entitled *Special Times in Families*, for the Teacher Education Institute on the Religious Dimension of World Cultures:

In the stories about celebration and tradition, the student will have a chance to see how both contribute stability and continuity to life. He will read about traditions and religious experiences that are different from his and will have an opportunity to examine another person's point of view.

As he identifies with characters facing moral problems, the student will see how he has acquired attitudes from his family. It is hoped that the student will appreciate his heritage but also realize that he can constantly evaluate those familial attitudes in light of his own ongoing experiences.

...In the broadest sense, then, this unit deals with the "religious dimension" of life since it encourages the student to explore the values, the world view and lifestyle, and the traditions and celebrations of life, of himself and his family as he reads adolescent literature.<sup>3</sup>

This study was funded by Religious Heritage of America, an ecumenical organization that is supported by, and which honors, many well-known leaders in the Christian community. And it is quite evident that the vast majority of students targeted are from homes that espouse at least a nominal Christianity.

Although the target in America is primarily biblical faith, the goal of world planners is to dilute all strong attachments to any particular philosophy other than the global brotherhood of man. The reason biblical faith is the primary target is that it asserts only one way to God—Jesus Christ—leaving no room for other religious philosophies as valid expressions of faith. This cannot be tolerated by the global-

ist movement, which recognizes that virtually all religions apart from biblical faith do adhere to the concept of the brotherhood of man.

In the process of teaching religious diversity, government schools actually engage students in religious activities, instructing them on how to pray, how to make religious artifacts, and how to honor various religious deities (with the exception of Jesus Christ, of course).

Because of this concerted effort to promote non-Christian religious traditions in society, as well as the current push for cultural identity, many Christians whose ancestry is traced to pagan cultural roots, are adopting their ancestors' pagan cultural traditions. In the United States, the two most prominent cultural traditions that are receiving concerted promotion in the media, as well as support by government resources, are the African-American and indigenous American cultures. Both are predicated upon shamanistic religious systems that revolve around ancestor and/or nature spirit worship. Both involve overt demonic influence and control through shamans who possess incredible powers of psychological and spiritual control over their populations.

In this study we will be addressing the similarities of American Indian religions which, though differing in details according to tribes and regions, nevertheless exhibit common characteristics that set them at odds with biblical Faith. I have chosen to use the term "American Indian" rather than the generally accepted "native American" term for addressing the descendants of tribes that were indigenous to the American continents at the time of their discovery by European explorers. I do this for two reasons: 1) either term is generally acceptable, and 2) anyone born in North, Central, or South America is a native American, regardless of ethnic origins or date of birth.

The purpose of this writing is not to denigrate American Indians; it is, rather, to emphasize the need for American Indian Christians to recognize those areas in which faith in Christ is incompatible with their native traditions. We hope our readers will be able to use the information contained herein to reach others who may be compromising their faith with ethnic pagan traditions.

The reason such a study is needed is that American Indian religions (and other ethnic religious traditions) con-

tribute much to the current move back to pagan roots among westerners, and among American Indians themselves. This move is fueled by a political correctness that is not only promoted in the media, but is imposed upon our citizenry through programs in government schools. These programs are presented as studies in cultural diversity, but they are designed to challenge the biblical truths upon which western society has been based for centuries.

It would be wrong to assume that West European tradition is any more godly than any other cultural tradition. The only redeeming value to West European tradition is the history of missionary work to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The injustices and abuses aside, West European culture does have a biblical ethic as its philosophical basis. Of course, it must be acknowledged that much of its tradition is also Greek and Roman. Yet it is not the blending of West European cultural tradition with indigenous cultural tradition that concerns us. Rather, it is the blending of biblical truth with other religious traditions that is at issue. This becomes a delicate operation, for virtually every ethnic cultural tradition is predicated upon some religious philosophy.

Every race jealously guards its religious traditions and culture not only out of a sense of loyalty, but in the belief that there is something inherently superior to that race and culture. Such misplaced pride is the cause of much tension among the races. But the fact is that there is no superior race—certainly no *spiritually* superior race. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). It is only in Christ Jesus that all can find forgiveness and a true brotherhood in the Spirit. Thus, we must consider the effect this present trend toward melding biblical truth with indigenous spirituality is having upon American Indian Christians.

For a time, missionary efforts on behalf of the Gospel made tremendous strides in reaching American Indians. In spite of having to deal with the injustices of federal policies and corrupt Indian agents, the love of Christ, demonstrated through the efforts of committed Christians, brought about many genuine conversions. At the same time, a corrupted "Christianity"

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was exploiting the religious nature of many American Indians, forcing them to abandon their traditions—not for the sake of truth, but for the sake of gaining power over them. This is most evident in Roman Catholic influences which, on one hand, required a departure from some traditions, and, on the other hand, turned a blind eye toward the practice of traditions that did not threaten the papacy's power. Even so, there were many Roman clergy that genuinely loved the people and believed they were serving God by serving the papacy's agenda.

Through both godly and ungodly means, there occurred an erosion of American Indian religious traditions, leaving the people either fully committed to Christ, or hanging by a thread to their revered ways of life. This latter condition has resulted in much pain and suffering as well as a hatred for everything white.

There is also developing a strong aversion toward outsiders using American Indian religious practices and fetishes, even within the New Age Movement. Mary K. Feeney, writing in the *Hartford Courant*, reveals strong sentiments on the part of American Indians against what they perceive as sacrilege:

The last decades of the 20th century have been characterized by a renewed search for personal meaning and growing interest in spiritual beliefs outside mainstream, organized religion.

That search, however, has been accompanied by controversy about who "owns" certain religious practices, particularly those of American Indians.

Many American Indians believe vision quests, sweat lodges, various spiritual dances and the fashioning of ritual artifacts are sacred and should not be performed—particularly for profit—by people who are not American Indians themselves.

In 1993, during an international gathering of the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota nations, representatives from 40 Lakota

bands and tribes passed what they called a "Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality."

In it, they spoke of suffering "the unspeakable indignity of having our most precious Lakota ceremonies and spiritual practices desecrated, mocked and abused by non-Indian 'wanabes,' hucksters, cultists, commercial profiteers and self-styled 'New Age shamans' and their followers."<sup>4</sup>

As we approach the end of this age, the myths and traditions of native religions are making a comeback. This is due in large part to the current quest for inner knowledge fueled by dissatisfaction with traditional religion (i.e., Christianity, so called). Feeney explains:

This feeling has been nurtured by concerns for the environment, multiculturalism, skepticism about large institutions, including the medical and religious communities, and the growing movement away from materialism.

This interest, which began in the 1960s and '70s with Eastern religions, natural foods, meditation and yoga, has expanded to include Ayurvedic medicine, herbalism, reiki, past life regression, spiritual imaging, feng shui, breathing workshops, shamanic healing and spirit journeys and other practices.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the move away from pure biblical faith, especially, American Indian myths and traditions, once eroded, are again on the rise. John Bierhorst, in *The Mythology of North America*, explains:

Today the erosion of live myth continues at a rapid pace. At the same time, there are signs that the loss may have slowed somewhat. In the early 1900s, at the lowest ebb of Indian vitality, when it became fashionable to speak of the "vanishing race," few would have believed that Indian mythology, still functional, could have made its way into the twenty-first century. Aided by a changed political climate, it is about to do just that.<sup>6</sup>

It is understandable that American Indian rights organizations would promote a return to their cultural roots with all their religious connotations. Many tribal leaders, having been stripped of much of their prestige and

power, as well as their revered traditions, want little more than a modicum of western technology that may make their lives easier. Also, perceiving the federal government as a guarantor of their posterity, they want as much power as they can get. But the desire of Christians—no matter what our ethnic background—should not be for cultural identity. It should be for identity in Christ, wherein lie no cultural barriers. When Christians seek equal identity on the basis of cultural traditions in addition to identity with Christ, they are re-establishing the "wall of partition" that was destroyed on the Cross. As Paul stated:

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

*And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:28-29)*

By the same token, there is neither European nor American Indian. We are all one in Christ if we possess the same Faith. This does not mean that we must abandon all our cultural trappings. But we must abandon all religious trappings that separate us and are contrary to God's Word. It is those areas where American Indian Christians are failing to separate from their religious myths and traditions that we address in this writing. And while it is specifically addressed to American Indians, the message is relevant to all ethnic groups, including West European. It is only because American Indian religious traditions are being promoted in government schools, in the media, and especially in some churches, that we have chosen to specifically address them here.

## COMMON GROUND

Regardless of the distinctions between tribes, we find common characteristics among all American Indian religions. These common characteristics include an emphasis on myth, a reverence of—as well as belief in—a spiritual connection to animals and plants, great influences from local characteristics of the land, shamanic medicine, belief in the influence of ghosts upon individuals and society, and strong taboos meant to keep society intact. These, of course, are also common to other "primitive" cultures.

By “primitive” I do not mean less evolved, as some anthropologists may imply. Rather, it is the only term I can think of to apply to cultures that are less technologically advanced and “sophisticated” than, say that of Western Europe.

As far as individuals are concerned, there is no difference between the Wall Street financier and the Choctaw farmer. Human nature is the same throughout the species. American Indian intelligence, common sense and resourcefulness are no less innate than are those of others. It is only because of God’s design according to His eternal plan that certain cultures have achieved relatively higher levels of technological superiority. But technology has also contributed much to the misery of not only those conquered by those cultures, but by those cultures themselves.

Certainly moral character is no greater among other men than among American Indians. All have high standards, and all fail to meet those standards on a regular basis. If we accept biblical morality as the primary standard by which men must live, then it is incumbent upon all—American Indian, West European, Asian, et al, to submit to that standard on an individual basis.

Yet no matter how well one adheres to that biblical standard, it means nothing without faith in Jesus Christ as the only way to God. And that is the point of this writing. Neither American Indians nor West Europeans can claim the high moral ground without saving faith in Christ Jesus. Current attempts to propagandize Americans with the idea that American Indians possess(ed) a higher moral standard than that of their conquerors are just as dishonest as prior attempts by some American settlers to paint American Indians as savages worthy of extinction.

It is only in those areas where American Indian religion keeps the people in darkness that we should be concerned. It doesn’t matter whether or not one person meets another’s heightened sense of “civilized” behavior. If anything, less technologically advanced peoples have exhibited a far greater genuine humility in the face of natural forces beyond their control than many “civilized” people. The latter’s desires for self-esteem and for material possessions have resulted in more suicides and in being institutionalized for cracking under the strain of everyday life.

That said, it is important that we consider from a biblical perspective those areas of American Indian culture that are incompatible with the faith of American Indian Christians. But we must preface our remarks with the understanding that much of what is today known as American Indian culture has been influenced to some degree by western customs adopted through intermarriage and association with white culture. To many American Indians, the customs and traditions to which they adhere are little more than a dim memory of times past. Even so, the basic tenets of American Indian culture remain alive, and are making their way into western society through the New Age Movement. This has created a hybrid belief system that is somewhat christianized, but is not far removed from the spiritism of the past.

### BASIC BELIEFS

American Indian religious beliefs cannot be so easily summed up in the popular concept of a Great Spirit and a Happy Hunting Ground. Professor of anthropology, Ruth M. Underhill, an expert in American Indian religion, capsulizes the subject thusly:

...In former days, there were many small groups, with no autocratic chief, to whom the idea of a ruling deity, a Great Spirit, would be meaningless. They applied for help and comfort to their fellow beings on earth, the animals, the plants, even the rocks. Other groups did speak of a Being in an upper world, but this deity ranged all the way from a Great Holy Flame of Life to the California condor. As for the Happy Hunting Ground, that was obviously a concept only for hunting people and there were many even of them who had never heard of it. Some tribes thought of the afterworld as a shadowy village, where the departed were homesick for their relatives. Fortunate dead of the Alaskan Eskimo could be seen in the aurora borealis playing their version of football. Navajo dead disappeared in the infinite, like drops of river water poured back into the stream.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of American Indian ritual was, in its origins, not worship as West Europeans might define it. Rather, it was performed for the mutual benefit of both men and the spirits they invoked. With American Indians

all power was one, whether used for good or for evil. It is the same concept of an impersonal force as that found in Hinduism and other esoteric eastern religious systems, and popularized in the *Star Wars* trilogy of motion pictures. Yet while the powers were neutral and impersonal, the means to appropriate those powers were through personal entities, whether gods, demons, ancestral ghosts, animal spirits, or other nature spirits found in plants, trees and even rocks.

As with most primitive societies, the customs and traditions of the American Indian are intrinsically linked to religious beliefs. Ceremonies related to birth, coming of age, survival, marriage, human relationships, death, all carry religious connotations.

Yet no Indian group considered its own religion complete and final. With most groups, ideas about the Supernatural were still fluid. A new item of ritual learned from an enemy or friend during trade or marriage added to the current equipment like a new weapon in an arsenal. Especially was a new art or property felt to need its own ritual so that it might be used successfully. Often its owner or priest came with it. He would naturally be jealous of his status and would guard his art from becoming public knowledge. Thus the various Hopi clans tell stories of arriving at their mesas each armed with its own particular rain-bringing ceremony. This was the clan’s passport to citizenship. So, during the summer, the Hopi have ceremony after ceremony for rain, each the property of a special clan priesthood. Ceremonies have been arranged in a standard order, but there has been no attempt to place them all under one leadership as might be done in a centrally organized church. On the contrary, if a clan priesthood dies out, its ceremony is lost and its place in the calendar left vacant.<sup>8</sup>

### Myths

Mythology of creation, life and the relationship of man to his environment are intrinsic to every American Indian society. The myths and religious traditions of American Indians vary from tribe to tribe, although there are many consistencies that point to a common root lost to antiquity. In some cases, similarities are distinguished merely

by the application of different names for the same spiritual, animal or human entities. In other cases, there are no similarities to be found, suggesting that, over time, each tribe developed its own unique cultural myths. There are also distinctions of myths between types of tribes (e.g., hunter-gatherer vs. agricultural).

Some anthropologists suggest that similarities in myths are more pronounced among different tribes that have lived in close proximity to one another, rather than among those that share a similar language.

Mythology forms the basis for science among American Indians, and accounts for the origin of creation, the constellations, and the solar year, among others. Bierhorst states that, in general, Indian myths assume a three-level universe, consisting of sky, earth surface and underworld.<sup>9</sup>

The American Indian concept of man's relation to nature is virtually the opposite of that established by God's Word. In Genesis we learn that God commanded man to have dominion over the earth and everything on it:

*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*

*And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26-28)*

By contrast, American Indian religion generally regards all life—animal, plant and human—as interrelated. If anything, animals are regarded as superior to humans because of their heightened senses. Legends of a myth age, when humans were animals, are common among many American Indian tribes. The prehuman condition existed in the underworld before man emerged upon the surface of the earth.

To the American Indians in the eastern woodlands, the earth was a

source of power, and man was subjected to that power by virtue of his inability to control it beyond providing basic sustenance. Male and female distinctions were revered, and formed the basis for tribal myths and interaction. As with most American Indians, those in the eastern woodlands held a tripartite concept of nature. The human realm was bounded above by a superior world ("populated by the sun, the moon, and the archetypes of all the creatures on earth"), and an inferior world beneath the waters, inhabited by monsters and spirits.<sup>10</sup> The earth was believed to float upon the sea.

Many myths assume that the earth was formed by some type of animal—an "earth diver"—who brought up a portion of mud from the ocean to form the earth. While myths of different tribes revolve around different earth divers—turtle, duck, water-beetle, etc.—never is an earth diver human. Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody, noted authors of books on American Indian traditions, explain:

The assumption of the myth is that human beings are debtors of such simple, familiar animals. We share a single world with them, and they are closer to its basic structure than we. The traditional myths reflect an intuition that human beings are the odd species out in creation. By our reflective consciousness, we stand apart from the simpler, more instinctual species. They have wisdoms that we lack, just as we have powers that escape them. Even though the myths frequently celebrate such wisdoms, and even though they tend to personify the turtles or water beetles that figure in the creation accounts, an ambivalence remains. The world belongs to the simple animals more than to human beings. They had more to say about its original formation than we, and they move through it more naturally, with fewer hesitations.<sup>11</sup>

### Spiritism

Like most earth-centered religions, that of the American Indians derived revelation from spirit sources through dreams and visions. Ancestors—usually recent and known personally—were believed to appear in dreams with warning, consolation and advice. If the person appearing was

unknown the dreamer would consult with an elder or a shaman to learn his or her identity.<sup>12</sup>

In the native American world, the boundaries between past, present, and future were more permeable than they tend to be in modern cultures. Similarly, the boundaries between human beings and animals, birds, and fishes were more permeable. The dead could speak in dreams or visions, and so could denizens of the far future. Birds could cry forth a message from heaven, and bears could promise to be helpers. As we saw with the Inuit [Eskimos], the world was alive with spiritual powers—souls, divinities, localizations of manitou.<sup>13</sup>

Communication with the gods is made through intermediaries or messengers, because humans and the gods are so different from each other that they cannot communicate directly. It is through the natural world that communication is effected, the spirits inhabiting the natural world being the intermediaries. Spirituality is found within creation, not apart from it. In this regard, American Indians tend toward a form of sacramentalism, attempting to achieve grace through physical activities and physical things. Totems, fetishes, medicine wheels, spirit medicine bundles, certain types of jewelry, ceremonial masks—these and other physical things are used to effect American Indian medicine.

### Medicine

The traditions of virtually all American Indian tribes are heavily steeped in medicine. The term medicine, to the western mind, conjures curative methods of treating illnesses. While this is part of the medicine of American Indians, the overwhelming emphasis—and the primary meaning—is on the acquisition of spiritual power. Adherents of American Indian religion believe that vitality, energy and power are signs that they are in harmony with the sacred forces that control their world.<sup>14</sup>

A modern practitioner of American Indian medicine explains her personal "Spirit Medicine" that she received in a vision as a child:

The purpose of Spirit Medicine is to open the door to the quest for the spirit self. Spirit Medicine is a teaching from Rainbow Medicine. Rainbow Medicine is teachings

from the Rainbow Medicine Wheel, which comes from the vision of the sun, moon, and seven stars that was given to me, Wolf Moondance.

I am Osage, Cherokee, and English, born and raised in Oklahoma. I walk the medicine way. I live in two worlds—native and white. When I walk in the Native world, I'm white. And when I walk in the white world, I'm Native. There came a time in my life when I didn't know where to walk, so I walked my vision. It brought me through Rainbow Medicine, through listening to the stars, to a place known as the Quest for the Whole Self. In this classroom setting people achieve mental medicine; they achieve emotional medicine; they achieve physical medicine; they receive Spirit Medicine.

Within Spirit Medicine we walk the teachings of memory and listen for the voice of the spirit. We build bundles, honor our tools, learn how to have visions. Since I received my vision as a child, in the form of the sun, the moon, and the seven stars, it has guided every moment of my life, for I am dedicated and committed to visioning. I am a visionary, a way of Wisdom—one who teaches the Way—the Wolf.<sup>15</sup>

American Indians invoked the spirits of their animal familiars to empower them for living, prospering and warding off evil. Wolf Moondance invokes the wolf for her totem through which she receives her "wisdom."

The totem animals or plants of particular American Indian cultures were generally indicative of the species indigenous to their locale. Hunting societies especially adopted as their totems those animals that they most depended upon for survival. Medicine societies functioned according to the animals most connected to the tribe. For example, the "Company of Mystic Animals" of the Iroquois was a convocation of smaller, specialized groups such as the Buffalo, Bear, Otter, and Eagle societies.<sup>16</sup>

#### Masks

The wearing of masks associated with a particular society was believed to carry special power to invoke the medicine desired. Masks hide the identity of the wearer, thus offering a kind of anonymity, and allowing for the release of inhibitions. Agricultural socie-

ties might wear masks that represent the spirits of the fields they cultivate, thus drawing power from those spirits in ensuring good crops and a healthy society.<sup>17</sup>

In some societies masks of totem animals are worn as a means to infuse in the wearer the qualities of those animals. The masks act as fetishes to draw the spirits of the animals into the person, thus enduing them with those animal's positive qualities they desire to receive. Negative qualities transfer to those of impure heart who wish to use them for evil purposes.

#### Spirit Bundles

Spirit bundles are another means to walk the medicine way. These consist of blankets into which are wrapped sacred objects that relate to one's vision, which may change at different times. The sacred objects may be rocks, feathers, and other natural or manufactured objects. A popular fetish among new age adherents today is the dreamcatcher—or spirit catcher—made from a small green tree branch fashioned in a circle and webbed with colored cotton string tied off at the bottom with a feather or beads. These are often hung from rear view mirrors.

#### The Sacred Pipe

One of the most precious of rituals among many American Indian tribes is that of the sacred pipe, as the Carmody's tell us.

The pipe, usually filled with tobacco, mediated intercourse with the Great Spirit. The smoke that drifted heavenward could carry the thoughts and intentions of the smokers....

The pipe, like the buffalo, the corn, and other staples of plains life, is a gift from the holy powers running the world....What it is made of, what is carved on it, what it burns, where its smoke rises, what adorns its stem, and all the rest draw into the rituals in which it is employed the whole of creation.

In fact, Lakota Indians used the sacred pipe on many different occasions. In fact, it served social uses, reconciling enemies, uniting tribal members, and expressing good fellowship, as well as naturalistic uses. The pipe reminds us of the mythopoeic mentality of traditional peoples. Their tendency was to invest the items they used again and again in their rituals with cosmic signifi-

cance. Thus the clay of the pipe could stand for the earth, and the earth called to mind all the bounties of creation. The buffalo calf and the spotted eagle stood for all the animals and birds who shared the world with human beings. To walk on the earth, one's Mother, was ideally a prayer. Every deed and thought ought to ascend to the heavens, where the Great Spirit dwelt.<sup>18</sup>

As misplaced as such ritualism is, there is found in it a humility that suggests total dependence upon outside forces. In smoking the pipe, American Indians express their desire to have everything in their lives ascend to God. Yet, as with all of man's religions, we find a works-related attempt to approach the unapproachable. It is only through the shed blood of Christ that any man can approach the heavenly Father.

#### The Sweatlodge

The Carmody's also reveal that the rituals associated with the sweatlodge is another form of spirit medicine that demonstrates one's dependence upon the spirit powers that guide the tribe.

The ritual use of the sweatlodge was another way that plains Indians acknowledged the realities of their condition gratefully. The physical foundation of the ceremony was the experience of building an enclosed space, heating stones to high temperature, pouring water over the stones to generate steam, and feeling one's body cleansed by perspiration. This physical cleansing became a metaphor for spiritual cleansing and renewal. As the body felt emptied of all impurities, so the mind and heart might be emptied of everything defiling, might be turned again to the holiness of the Great Spirit.

Though this was the simple gist of the ceremonies that transpired in the sweatlodge, native Americans tended to embellish it considerably. The materials from which they constructed the lodge, the stones from Mother Earth, the steam arising to Father Sky, the pipe that might be smoked, the bonding with brothers (and sometimes sisters) in the lodge, and much more entered into the ceremonial attitude, so that, once again, all of life and creation was caught up into the participants' prayer. Certainly, the main motif

remained purification. Certainly, in the “sacramental” system of the seven Oglala Sioux rites, *inipi*, the purification in the sweatlodge, was akin to other religions’ penitential rites. But the complete immersion in such symbols that one finds in Black Elk, a narrator of the traditional Oglala rites, made any of them a summary of the entire Lakota way of life. So the purifications of the sweatlodge could not be separated from the gift of the sacred pipe, or the gift of the buffalo, or the rite for consecrating a young woman just come of age, or even the sacred ball game through which the Oglala represented human beings’ place in the universe. Always and everywhere, Oglala thought was holistic and cosmic. In every case, people prayed, or danced, or sacrificed with a profound sense of association with the four-legged and winged “persons,” as well as with others of their own kind.<sup>19</sup>

We find that all American Indian medicine is essentially spiritual and connotes a universal oneness with all things, man being but a small segment of the greater whole which is considered divine.

### Dancing

For American Indians dancing is more than a social engagement. Although there are occasional secular dances to express emotions, for the most part, the dance entails empowerment from spirits and/or attempts to appease the gods. It is only since the advent of European influences that social dancing has made even small inroads into some American Indian cultures, and that minimally.

American Indian dancing, as such, is a form of medicine. Among the tribes that lived within the area known as the northwest plateau (bounded to the north by the Fraser Plateau of British Columbia and to the south by the Bitterroot Mountains of Idaho), the winter season was highlighted by a series of “spirit dances.” The Carmody’s describe the purposes of these dances:

This area sponsored spirit-quests, for both boys and girls, at the time of puberty. The goal was to secure a personal spiritual helper. Children were removed from the group, sent out to fast, bathe in cold streams, endure solitude, and in general afflict their bodies

so as to prepare their spirits for revelations. This could be a kind of boot-camp or rite of passage. But the goal was not merely to survive. The goal was to offer the priming that the ascetical preparation created to the spirits, so that they might grant one a vision by which to direct one’s life. The vision might come in a dream, and usually it was of an animal spirit who became one’s guardian or helper. Typically the young person who received a vision encoded it in a distinctive song and/or dance. This song and/or dance became a personal signature. The winter festival offered the chance to express this personal signature and watch it blend into the overall self-expression composed by all the signatures of members of the group.

Some groups counseled the young person to forget the dramatic experience of consummating the spirit quest, hoping that it would go underground and return at the threshold of maturity (about age twenty-five), when new responsibilities came into play. Men could become sick about that time, apparently as a way of gaining a moratorium on ordinary activities, so that they might contemplate their responsibilities as adults. Shamans would help such sick people remember the vision they had received at the time of puberty, easing the way for the vision to take possession of the adult with full vigor (now that the person might understand more of its symbolism and implications). On the plateau the spirit dances frequent during the winter months allowed many people to update or reinvigorate the visions that had formed them since their youth.<sup>20</sup>

There are many forms of dancing that are peculiar to different tribes. The Sun Dance is a generic name applied to similar dances among diverse tribes. The purpose of the Sun Dance is to renew communion with the earth, sun, and the spirits, especially the winds, so that the tribe might have health, fertility and success in hunting.<sup>21</sup>

Dances for virtually every aspect of human life and existence are performed as a means to invoke the blessings of the spirits associated with those various aspects, whether hunting, farming, gathering, marriage, puberty, death, etc.

Ruth M. Underhill reveals the true nature of the ceremonial dance:

The ceremony was a means of making contact with the spirits and the motions were such as the spirits had dictated in that particular locality. Thus a long line of Pueblo dancers, in what we might almost call a uniform, trod the earth in a stately parade. They represented the rain spirits who had always danced in that way. The eagle dancers represented the mating eagles, and the more beautifully they did it, the more the eagles approved. It was the eagles who had to be pleased, not the spectators.

In the Plains, the jostling herd of men in buffalo skins was providing a model which the buffalo must surely follow. In the Northwest the shaman, in mask and cedar bark fringe, ran around the fire like a mad thing. He need not invent the motions of an exotic dancer. He was possessed by a spirit and could not help himself. There were, too, dances of a more secular kind, for dances were one of the chief Indian ways of expressing emotion. So a crowd of people might have leaped and shouted or joined hands in a ring. Or warriors might have reenacted their scouting for an enemy and the final kill. Here there was more chance for invention, but the emphasis was always on the idea to be conveyed, not on the beauty of the motions.<sup>22</sup>

### Psychotropic Drugs

The use of psychotropic drugs was common among some American Indian communities. The purpose of these drugs was to enhance one’s consciousness of the spirit realm as it related to one’s personal beliefs. While in trance, a person might make contact with animal helpers or other spiritual entities who would give guidance, or facilitate that person’s vision for life. Says Underhill:

The Toloache portion of California culture was one of the four significant sub-foci of ritual life in that area. This ritual sub-set could sponsor the use of psychotropic drugs such as jimsonweed (toloache in Nahuatl), which was ingested to facilitate visions of animal helpers. Toloache tribes could also sponsor severely testing physical ordeals, and the ar-

tistic among them might become fascinated with painting, as a way to represent complex tribal lore in vivid symbols reminiscent of what they had seen under psychotropic influence. Toloache people formed special groups or guilds, focused on such projects as learning the drift of the heavenly bodies. The drugs approved for religious use tended to heighten the prestige of astrologers, who had ready explanations for what was going on in the tribe, based on supposedly inside knowledge of current social tensions and other factors shaping how people tended to fashion their ideas about God. However, some Toloache groups stressed dreaming more than taking drugs.<sup>23</sup>

Peyote, a mushroom that produces hallucinogenic reactions, is another common drug that is used in rituals as a means to commune with “ultimate reality.” It was used in pre-Columbian Mexico and is used today primarily among American Indian tribes in the southern plains. Not all American Indian tribes use hallucinogens, but all have some means—whether through dreams or other methods of inducing trances—to contact the spirit realm for guidance.

### Shamanism

Shamans are a class of people who obtain special powers of contact with spiritual forces to effect American Indian medicine. They are also known as medicine men.

The main function of shamans is to cure disease. Since it is believed that disease is the result of a malignant or malfunctioning spirit, shamanism involved a complex of relations with the world of spirits.<sup>24</sup>

Shamans could inherit their office or acquire it through a vision. Generally, shamans came into their vocation involuntarily, receiving it as a task imposed upon them by fate or the gods. Their duty was to bear this fate generously, for the sake of their people. Being a shaman did not make one a chief, give one an impressive title...or bring one wealth. But it did carry prestige: one was a spiritual person, fighting a good fight for the sake of one’s people.

Shamans tended to work their cures by going into trance and extracting the foreign substance (bit of bone, or stone, or the like)

that had caused the disease. This foreign substance represented the body of the spirit who had caused the illness. The implements that shamans used and the movements they made during a curing ceremony represented their efforts to direct good spirits to cure the disease. The good spirits, guardians to the shaman, would fight the evil spirits responsible for the disease. The typical shamanic curing session was a theatrical performance, complete with singing, dancing, and even feats of illusion.

In a broader perspective, shamans were intermediaries between their people and the spiritual world. Most people thought shamans had special powers: to foresee the weather and the future, secure success in hunting or battle, restore souls stolen by witches, and above all cure sickness. They interacted with their retinue of helping spirits, both obeying and controlling them. To retain their powers, shamans had to stay in fighting trim: maintain their contacts with the spirits, follow a regimen of sexual and dietary control, keep their psyches able to travel into trance, sustain moral power—good reputation, good conscience.<sup>25</sup>

Shamans who used their powers for evil or selfish purposes were considered witches. To test a suspected witch, or to rid a witch of his evil, he may have been tortured or put through some other ordeal.

### A HYBRID FAITH

Recent developments among some American Indian tribes have blended ancient traditions with modern “Christianized” forms of worship. One such movement that is spreading rapidly is that of the Native American Church, which is not a Christian sect.

The Native American Church is a phenomenon of the twentieth century. The remote origins of this movement lay in pre-Columbian Mexico, where many tribes used a hallucinogenic mushroom to facilitate visions and intense experiences. Known as peyote, this mushroom, or similar plants, became a sacrament—a way of communing with ultimate reality. The Native American Church is a pan-tribal organization dedicated to cele-

brating the powers of peyote to reconnect native Americans with their religious traditions. Most of the members come from the southern plains, but scatterings live elsewhere.

Although the Native American Church seeks to preserve and revitalize native traditions, in fact many Christian notions have entered into its beliefs and rituals. So, for example, one branch of the Native American Church, the Cross Fire, uses the Bible in its ceremonies. Still, native symbols, such as feathers and drums, adorn the rituals, and prayers ascend to such deities as the Morning Star. In some branches, worshipers wear blankets of red and blue, red standing for day and blue for night. Singing and dancing, the participants revere “Chief Peyote,” who brings their spirits to life and quickens their dreams. Members may also pray to Christ, and their consumption of the peyote buttons is likened to a communion ceremony.<sup>26</sup>

The influence of the Native American Church is gaining inroads into American Indian Christian communities with an appeal to return to the cultural roots of the people as a means to offset the effects of the white man’s influences. A form of tribal pride induces many to attempt to blend their faith in Christ with American Indian religious practices, either unaware or unconcerned that there can be no compatibility between the two.

### CONCLUSION

In order to achieve the ultimate goal of establishing a homogeneous world citizenship, it is necessary for the forces behind the globalist agenda to dismantle the power base of West European supremacy that has created the industrial and commercial prosperity of modern society. It seems contradictory, at first, to think that the financial and political powers behind the globalist order would want to destroy its own power base. But the dismantling is not targeted toward the supernational financial and political powers; it is targeted toward national and individual power. Ultimately, the goal is to bring as much power under the control of a few international mega-corporations and financial institutions that will control a world society by controlling the money supply of each nation. This



has already come a long way through the privatization of virtually every nation's monetary system, vesting the financial power in privately-owned "federal reserve" banks. This, of course, is a subject unto itself, and is only mentioned as a prelude to the subject matter at hand, which is the melding of Christianity with other religious philosophies, the intent being to establish a world religious system.

To accomplish this task it is imperative that biblical faith be replaced with an ecumenically-spirited "Christianity" that will embrace all "truth" as God's truth. For this reason, political correctness forbids the preaching of the Gospel of faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation. It may be presented as a means of salvation for those who wish to believe it, but it cannot be the only means of salvation. Nor, for that matter, may it stand apart from other religious philosophies; it must be tolerant and even accepting of other religious philosophies, even to the point of redefining those philosophies so that they may appear compatible with the Faith. At the root of the redefinition is the idea that all faiths are merely different paths to the same God, which is the politically-correct stance for today's "enlightened" man. For if it is true that all paths lead to the same God, then it doesn't matter what form one's religious beliefs and practices take. It is perfectly alright to practice any form of spiritual worship within the context of the new Christianity.

This, of course, is not new. It has been the tactic of Roman Catholicism from earliest times to allow the mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs and practices in order to establish the supremacy of the papacy over various cultures. For a time, this solidified the political and religious dominance of the Roman aristocracy (and later the Roman papacy) over society.

But that dominance was limited to the countries colonized by those European powers that had sworn allegiance to the Pope of Rome (e.g., Spain, Portugal, France, etc.). The papacy's goal of world dominance was dealt a severe blow through the Reformation. With today's ecumenism that is striving to break down denominational barriers comes a blending of truth with error, and a move back toward accepting all

philosophies and practices as compatible with the Faith.

As mankind continues this inexorable trek toward the globalist order, he is at the same time reaching back in time toward ancient mythologies to form the basis of a New Religious Order—an Order predicated upon a mysticism which exalts the human spirit to the stature of deity. Today's "Christianity" has been primed for this compromise through experiential religion, which bases its "truth" upon spiritual experiences and the redefining of biblical truth to support those experiences.

One area in which this compromise is increasing is that of blending ethnic cultural traditions with Christian beliefs. We are told today that the Gospel must be presented within the context of the native culture to which we take it. Thus, we must incorporate those cultural materials and practices with which the people are familiar, lest we offend them or hinder their self-esteem.

Ethnically-oriented Christians are encouraged to take pride in their cultural roots and to blend them with their professed faith in Christ. This was apparent at the October 4, 1997, Promise Keepers "Stand In The Gap" assembly in Washington, D.C. There, American Indian representatives displayed "cultural" (read, religious) trappings which included animal fetishes and full-dress war bonnets.

But this phenomenon is not limited to Promise Keepers. There is a move afoot to meld cultural/religious practices and materials with Christianity as a means of taking the nations for God. (This will be the focus of a very important writing that is in the works.) Prominent within this movement are many well-known and influential Christian leaders.

God's Word commands that we separate ourselves from the religious traditions of the world:

*And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone. (Ezekiel 20:32)*

*And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the*

*LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. (2 Kings 17:15)*

*But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*

*Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (Matthew 6:7-8)*

*But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.*

*Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.*

*Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:20-22)*

My appeal is to American Indian brethren in Christ who are sorely tempted or even coerced by their tribal peers to adopt the customs and traditions of their ancestors. At the root of that coercion is a hatred of the white man's ways and of what they consider the white man's God. While we cannot change the past and the injustices that were foisted upon the American Indian societies, we can come into the unity of the Spirit based upon love of the true God and His only-begotten Son. When we are in Christ we learn to be content in whatever state we are, recognizing that God has ordained our existence and our relationship with Him. The things of earth are fading away; we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, wherein will dwell righteousness. In the meantime, we must be faithful to our Lord who has told us of His requirements for our lives:

*And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

*Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.*

*And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.*

*And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:59-62)*

Regardless of our personal desires and how we wish to please others, the Lord requires that we sacrifice all for

Him. This includes not only our sins, but everything and everyone that may hinder our walk with Him:

*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

*For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.*

*And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*

*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

*And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*

*He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 10:34-39)*

The requirement that we give up all to follow Jesus includes our very lives:

*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*

*And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26-27)*

Though this may seem harsh and unloving, the Lord was really saying that, if we choose to follow Him without compromise, those who formerly loved us will hate us because we will necessarily break from their traditions that offend the Lord. We will have to choose whom we will love and whom we will "hate"—or love less.

If we are not willing to break from those traditions because we love them or those who practice them more than we love the Lord, then, regardless of what we profess, our actions betray the real love of self and others above Jesus.

On a pragmatic note, we must never regret what has transpired throughout history, regardless of the material state in which we find ourselves because of it. This is so, simply because, were it not for the events of history that have led us to where we are today, we would most likely not even exist.

Each person is the unique product of two specific people coming together at a specific time to consummate a relationship. Had history taken a different turn, in all likelihood, those two specific people would never have come

together to produce our specific great-grandfather or great-grandmother, or our specific grandparents or parents. Thus, someone other than we would be occupying our space today. But God in His wisdom and foreknowledge chose to set each of us here for His purpose:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:*

*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*

*Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,*

*To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

*In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;*

*Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;*

*Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:*

*That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*

*In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*

*That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3-12)*

The religions of the world cannot offer eternal life in an eternal universe. All are predicated upon fear rather than faith; all elevate the creation rather than the Creator. Any religion that places emphasis upon the works, words and traditions of man over the Word of God elevates the creature over the Creator.

We must choose whom we will follow. It is my prayer that American Indians who read this attempt to bring truth to their situation, as well as those of other beliefs who recognize their love of tradition over God's Word, will choose Jesus Christ alone. ❖

## NOTES

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