World Religions in America

An Introduction

Fourth edition

JACOB NEUSNER
Editor

WJK WESTMINSTER JOHN KNOX PRESS
LOUISVILLE • KENTUCKY

CONTENTS

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

The publication of a fourth edition of this textbook responds to the acceptance of the first three editions and also to the passage of time. We realized that the story of what has happened to world religions in the USA has opened a new chapter and requires amplification. We are serving two audiences here, those interested in religion in America and those interested in world religions compared and contrasted.

For this new edition we have commissioned three completely new chapters, which are on the Unification Church (popularly known as the Moonies), New Thought, and Women and Religion in America. In addition, all the existing chapters have been revised and updated to take account of recent developments and trends.

The entire textbook has been reorganized to take account of a more logical sequence of topics. In addition we have added timelines of important events and persons, sidebars on key movements or controversies, sidebars with personal stories from members of various faiths, and lists of suggested websites, books, and topics for further study. The editor thanks the contributors both old and new for their participation in what has become a long-term project, and also the following people at Westminster John Knox Press: editors Gavin Stephens and Jana Riess, who supervised the changes and additions for this edition; production professionals Julie Tonini and Erika Lundbom; and marketing director Jennifer Cox.

Jacob Neusner

Introduction

JACOB NEUSNER

This book introduces you to the world's religions in the United States today. Such an introduction is important because to understand America,* you have to know about religion. Most, though not all, Americans say they are religious, and the world's religions flourish in today's America. Most Americans would agree that "in God we trust." But each does so in his or her quite special way, and that is what makes religion in America interesting. This book does not advocate religion, or any particular religion. Its purpose is only to describe and explain religion as an important factor in American society.

Americans Are a Religious People

Most Americans are religious. They believe in God. They pray. They practice a religion. They explain what happens in their lives by appeal to God's will and word and work, and they form their ideal for the American nation by reference to the teachings of religion: "one nation, under God." This statement, from the Pledge of Allegiance, describes how most Americans view our country. Americans act on their religious beliefs. A 2008 Pew study found that nearly all Americans (92 percent) profess belief in God. More than half pray at least once a day. Most Christians go to church every week; nearly all Jews observe the Passover festival and most keep the Days of Awe (New Year, Day of Atonement) and other religious celebrations. Religiosity is a fundamental trait of the American people and has been from the very beginning.

The Religions of the World Flourish in Today's America

Americans are not only a religious people. We also are a people of many religions. Most of the religions of the world are practiced in America, and the number of people who profess to be Protestant is decreasing. According to a study released in 2004 by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, about 52 percent of the American people are Protestants, down from 63 percent in 1993. Another 25 percent are Roman Catholics, a figure that has held steady through the years. Slightly less than two percent are Jews. "Other" religions—which the study defined as including Islam, Buddhism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Hinduism, among others—clocked in at seven percent, more than triple its 1972 share of 1.9 percent. Another growth area

*Although Canadians, Mexicans, and Latin Americans of South America also are Americans, this work concentrates on the United States in particular, and in these pages we use "Americans" to mean residents of the United States.

is nonbelief; nearly fourteen percent of the American people profess no religion at all, double what it was thirty years ago.

One cannot understand America without making some sense of its diverse religious life. The marvel of America is its capacity to give a home to nearly every religion in the world, and the will of the American people to get along with one another, with the rich mixture of religions that flourish here. This book presents not only the better-known religions of America, Christianity and Judaism, but also the religious world of Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic or Latin Americans, as well as the old religions newly arrived in this country, such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

America Began Because of Religion: Religion played a fundamental role in America's development by Europeans. The eastern part of this country was settled by people from Great Britain as an act of religion. The Southwest was founded by people from Spain and Latin America as an act of religion.

New England was settled by British Puritans from the East Anglia; Virginia and the Chesapeake area, by British Anglicans (Episcopalians); Pennsylvania and New Jersey, by British Quakers; and the Appalachian South, from West Virginia and western Pennsylvania south through Piedmont North and South Carolina, by British Presbyterians from the area around the Irish Sea, the border regions of Scotland and Northern England, and the Irish counties of Ulster, in particular.

The first European settlements in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California were established by Roman Catholic missionaries and soldiers coming north from Mexico, who wanted to bring Christianity to the native peoples. Many of the place-names in the American Southwest were given by Hispanic pioneers, who acted in the name of Jesus Christ and the Roman Catholic faith. The earliest European explorers and settlers from Detroit to New Orleans were Roman Catholic missionaries and traders from Quebec, in French Canada.

From colonial times onward, many groups that joined in the adventure of building the American nation brought with them their religious hopes and founded in this country a particularly American expression of religions from all parts of the world: Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Entire American states and regions took shape because of religiously motivated groups—for example, Utah and the intermountain West through the Latter-day Saints ("Mormons"). So our country is a fundamentally religious nation, and in our country today, nearly every living religion is now represented in a significant way.

Is America a Christian Country?

Some people think America is basically a Christian country because different forms of Christianity have predominated through its history and have defined much of its culture and society. The vast majority of Americans who are religious—and that means most of us—are Christians. But to be a true American, one can hold another religion or no religion at all. The first religions of America were those of the Native Americans. And although Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity laid the foundations of American society, America had a Jewish community from nearly the beginning; the first synagogues date back to the mid-seventeenth century. Today this country has become the meeting place for nearly all of the living religions of the world, with the Zoroastrian, Shinto, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu religions well represented. Various religious groups from the Caribbean and from Africa and Latin America likewise flourish. What you learn in this book is that nearly every religion in the world is practiced by some Americans.

America Is Different

Other countries have difficulty dealing with more than a single skin color, or with more than a single religion or ethnic group, and

nations today break apart because of ethnic and religious difference. But America holds together because of the American ideal that anyone, of any race, creed, color, language, religion, gender, sexual preference, or country of origin, can become a good American under this nation's Constitution and Bill of Rights, its political institutions and social ideals. And while religions separate people from one another, shared religious attitudes, such as a belief in God, unite people as well.

America is different because, except for Native Americans, it has always been a land of immigrants. From the very beginning, but especially before World War I and after World War II, people have come to this country from all parts of the world. Today the great religious traditions of the world are practiced in America, where many of them have become distinctively American. This book presents the world's religions both as they flourish universally and also in their distinctively American forms.

Why Study the World's Religions in the American Setting?

America is the right place in which to study the religions of the world because nearly all of them can be found here (and in nearby Canada). But America is religiously more interesting than most countries in another way. Not only do we have Judaism and the various kinds of European Christianity, we also have Christian traditions deriving from places besides Europe, for instance, from Africa, China, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific islands. To give one example, the Unification Church, which began in Korea, flourishes in America today. Distinctive forms of Christianity from Latin America, both Pentecostal and Roman Catholic, have also become part of the tapestry woven by world religions into the fabric of American society. All of these important components of religion in America are described in this book.

What You Will Learn in This Book about Religions in Particular

This book first examines religions one by one, and then religion in America in general. Part 1 starts with the first set of religions to exist in America, the diverse faith of Native Americans. We turn next to the Christian foundations of American religion in Part 2. Protestant Christianity is addressed first, because the founders of the earliest American settlements, in Virginia and Massachusetts, were Protestants. Because Protestants form the most complex and also the largest single component of religious life in America, Protestant Christianity is treated in a chapter twice as long as those devoted to the other American representatives of the religions of the world. African Americans have formulated a distinctive religious expression within Protestant Christianity, and they were among the earliest settlers, so we turn then to African American religious life.

Next we discuss Catholic Christianity, represented in the eastern part of the United States nearly from the beginning, and also the foundation religion of the great Southwest. Because Hispanic Americans today comprise nearly half of all Roman Catholic Christians in the United States, we take up Hispanic religious life in America, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. We round out our section on Christian foundations by addressing Orthodox Christianity, especially as it came to America from Russia and Greece.

Part 3 explores the other major monotheistic traditions in America. We first turn to Judaism, a most ancient religion that has produced a strikingly contemporary and distinctively American statement of its own. We learn much about America from how Judaism has evolved within this country's open society. Next, we encounter Islam, a fast-growing religion in America, and the Bahá'í Faith, an offshoot of Islam that emphasizes unity and harmony of religion.

Part 4 takes up some American religions that have achieved importance on the national scene in our own day—newer religions of this country, but older religions of humanity, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and East Asian faiths like Confucianism and Shinto. We pay particular attention to the religious traditions brought to the United States by Japanese, Korean, and Chinese immigrants, many of whom are Christian but some of whom practice other religious traditions of the eastern shores of Asia.

Part 5 introduces some religions made in the United States such as Mormonism, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientology, as well as those that did not begin here but have taken a remarkable foothold, like the Unification Church. This section also explores the growth of Wicca and nature religions in America.

Each chapter in Parts 1 through 5 treats its subject in accord with a single plan: How do we encounter this religion today? What is the definition and history? In what ways does the American expression of this religion teach us about religion in America and what being religious in America means? In answering these questions, the authors tell you about world religions in general and also about world religions in America in particular. Having mastered the contents of these chapters, you should be able to make sense out of the great religions of the world as America knows them, and also the diverse meanings of religious life in America.

What You Will Learn in This Book about Religion in General

To make sense of our country's complex life—its politics, culture, society—we need generalizations, which brings us to the final section of this book. Part 6 promotes an understanding of religion in general, and not just particular faiths, that sheds light on these aspects of American life. We therefore consider three questions that pertain to all religions. The first concerns how religion is shaped in this country by women: What do we learn about religion from the ways in which women are religious? Next, we turn to the immediate question of politics: How does religion affect the political life of this country? Our political system carefully distinguishes state from church, so that no governing body may favor or discriminate against a particular religion or religion in general. But religious people—that is, nearly all Americans—bring to politics important religious beliefs and commitments. How religion comes to expression in American political life teaches us much about religion. Finally, we undertake the relationship between religion and society: How does religion shape American life?

Why This Book Differs from Other Books about the World's Religions in American Life

In general, up to the end of World War II people defined the three religions of the United States as Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism. The other great world religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, were not broadly represented here. In addition, it was not widely recognized that African Americans had formed a powerful and distinctive statement of Protestant Christianity, and that Latin Americans had formed in this country an equally important and distinctive expression of Catholic Christianity. Also, the importance of Pentecostal Christianity in Latin America was just then emerging. So chapters on other world religions, besides Christianity and Judaism, or on how other non-European formulations of great religions flourished in America, would not likely have been written just a few decades ago.

And, if the truth be told, half a century ago chapters on Catholic Christianity and on Judaism might also have been left out, since not a few people saw America as not only Christian, but also—and exclusively—Protestant. According to this school of thought, "others"—not white, not Protestant, not Christian, not European, not English-speaking, or not from the northeastern part of Europe (Britain, excluding Ireland, Germany, or Scandinavia)—really were not authentic Americans at all. That is what made them different and somehow abnormal, just as in that time people thought it was "normal" to be a man and not "normal" to be a woman. But that narrow conception of what it means to be an American—and normal—is no longer taken seriously. We now accept that Americans come in all colors, shapes, and sizes, in both genders, and from every corner of the world. We now know that anyone can become a real American. And America has the power to make its own all the religions of the world. In America, there is no "other." Everyone is one of us. That is the message of this book: we all belong. Therefore, all of us bear the same tasks and responsibilities to make this a better country.

How to Study about Other Religions

The future of America depends on the answer to the question, How are religions going to relate to one another in this country? Shall we refight in our own country the world's religious wars, Protestant against Catholic, Christian against Jew, Muslim against Hindu, and so on?

Religions think about outsiders, that is, other religions, in four ways.

1. *Exclusivist:* "My religion is not only true, but it is the only truth." This view of religious truth is natural to many believers, whether or not their religion officially takes such a position. If I believe something about God, how can I imagine any other belief is valid?
2. *Inclusivist:* "My religion is true for me; your religion is true for you." This position is common in a tolerant society, such as, in general, America. It is sometimes called "relativism," meaning that truth is relative to the person who holds it; if you think up and I think down, for you it's up and for me it's down. Religious beliefs can be true only for those who hold them.
3. *Pluralist:* "Every religion has something true to tell us." God works in ways we do not always understand. We had best try to make sense of each of those ways. One way of doing so is to realize that different religions ask different questions, so you really cannot compare the statements of one religion with those of another.
4. *Empathetic Interest in Other People:* The way taken in the pages of this book concerns not whether religions are true (which in the end is for God to decide) but how all religions are interesting and important. We maintain here that every religion has something to teach us about what it means to be a human being. Here we take a different path from the one that leads us to questions about religious truth. It is a path that carries us to a position of empathy for our fellow Americans, in all their rich diversity.

We are trying to understand others and to explain ourselves in terms others can understand. That is the American way: to learn to live happily with difference, and not only to respect but to value the other. We teach the lesson that religion is a powerful force in shaping society, making history, and defining the life and purpose of individuals and entire groups. That is why we want to understand religion—and, among the many true and valuable things about religion that there are to comprehend, that is what we in particular want in these pages.

How Will You Know Whether This Book Has Succeeded?

If, when you meet someone of another religion, you find yourself able to understand what is important to that person about the religion he or she believes in, then the course in which this book has been used is a success for you. The goal of this course is to help you better understand the world you live in, which means understanding the people you meet. America is a huge and diverse country, and the secret of its national unity lies in its power to teach people to respect one another, not despite difference but in full regard for difference. We like one another as we are, or, at least, we try to. And when we do not succeed, we know we have failed our country. A good American is a person who cares for the other with all due regard for the way in which the other is different.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that most Americans are religious persons? If yes, explain why you think so, and give specific examples of persons "being religious" or "acting out" their religion to support your answer. If no, explain why you think so, and give specific examples.
2. Why do you think that America has such religious diversity? Is this a positive and/or negative feature of American society?
3. Why would Christians tend to describe America as a Christian nation? Why should persons be careful in defining America in this way? Should we/Can we talk about "being religious" in America and include everyone, Christian and non-Christian?

Part One

In the Beginning

Native Americans and Their Religions

SAM GILL

When Americans are asked to say what distinguishes our country from all other nations in the world, it isn't long before we begin to talk about Native Americans. When talking about Native Americans it isn't long before we say something about dances, rituals, ceremonies, spirituality, and stories. Today people the world over, but especially Americans, look to Native Americans to find inspiration, a spiritual centeredness, a religious connectedness to the land and to nature. Native American religions frequently play a role in film, television, and literature. Native American religions are important to the way we think about America. Significantly, Native American dancers represented the United States in the festivals that opened the 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles, as well as the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City. The Vancouver Olympics in 2010 have designated three mascots based on First Nations culture and heritage.

There are four predominant categories of Native American religions in today's America, categories that native practitioners may or may not recognize. Each category is distinguished not only by its form but also by its history. 1. Today many Native American religions are identified with specific cultures. We will call them *tribal traditions*. These religious cultures have distinctive histories running for hundreds, often thousands, of years. Each tribal tradition has its distinguishing character and history, but we find some common traits and attributes among them. For example, all of these traditions have a strong attachment to the specific landscape they designate as their place of origin and where they continue to flourish.

2. Missionaries were often successful in introducing various forms of Christianity to Native Americans. Today Christianity is their most widely practiced religion. Native American Christianity has taken on characteristics distinctive to specific Native American communities. There are fascinating surprises here.

3. Native Americans have developed new religious forms that extend beyond specific tribes, yet are distinct from European American religions. The most common of these is *peyote religion,* practiced in a variety of traditions and institutionalized as the Native American Church.

4. When Native Americans of different cultures talk to one another they often emphasize how they and their cultures differ. But when Native Americans of different cultures talk about their histories, or find themselves joined together to deal with the U.S. government or with Christian missionaries, they talk about an identity they hold in common, whatever their tribal identities. This "Indian" identity is often expressed as an alternative to the modern, technologically

based, capitalistic, and materialistic character of much of America. Though this identity is political, it is also religious in that it strives to recover ancient sensitivities, particularly those that connect people religiously to the land, to nature, and to all living things. This Native American religiousness, called *Indian spirituality,* is at once old and new. It is the form of Native American religion publicly most observable in today's America.

The following presentation of Native American religions in today's America will explore each of these four categories more fully. Most Native Americans inhabit more than one of these categories either serially or simultaneously.

Tribal Traditions

Since a time thousands of years before Columbus, hundreds of relatively small groups of people have lived on the lands we now know as the Americas. Many of these groups continue to exist today. It is difficult to know in much detail the religions of these peoples before Europeans began to write descriptions of them, and even these records are rather sketchy. There are some clear defining traits, however, that are present today as in the past.

The peoples of these cultures self-consciously distinguish themselves from their neighbors. They speak different languages than other tribes around them. They have distinctive houses and styles of clothes. Every tribe or nation has rules defining marriages. Some tribes are patrilineal—that is, they transmit lineage through the father as we do when we receive our father's family name. Many other tribes are matrilineal—that is, a woman and her daughters and granddaughters are the lineage of the family. All of these many cultures tell their own stories, perform their own rituals, and have ritual leaders or medicine societies. These various factors, and many other things, make each of these cultures distinctive. So we must always think of Native American tribal traditions as many and varied and constantly changing. Today in North America there are still more than one hundred Native American tribal traditions. Most Native Americans now speak English, but many also speak their native languages. Many Native American communities understand that keeping alive their own native language is important to the survival of their culture.

Oral Traditions

While there are many Native American languages, none of them are written. You may have heard about a Cherokee man named Sequoya who developed a way to write the Cherokee language, but this is an exception and is not even much used by Cherokees. Native American tribal religious traditions are shaped by the fact that these languages are not written. Just think about how important scriptures, written histories, and interpretive writings are to Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other religions in America. Native American tribal traditions are composed of stories told orally by one person to others and of rituals passed from one generation to the next.

Though the lack of a written tradition may involve some shortcomings, it also ensures that the religious lives of Native Americans have a sense of immediacy, urgency, and relevance. Native American traditions are always on the edge of extinction because what is not remembered, kept vital, or seen as important enough to pass on to the next generation is irrevocably lost. The wisdom, experience, knowledge, and achievement of a people gained throughout their history must be borne in the memories of the living members of the culture. Story and narrative are essential vehhicles for exclusively oral culture. Every person bears some responsibility for the history and wisdom of her or his culture.

America is obsessed with the development of literacy, the very emblem of civilization and the measure of superiority in the world. The verbal SAT score is a primary measure of our secondary educational system. Native

Americans are not unaware of literacy. Some have even suggested reasons for resisting it. A member of the Carrier tribe in British Columbia told anthropologist Diamond Jenness, "The white man writes everything down in a book so that it might not be forgotten; but our ancestors married the animals, learned their ways, and passed on the knowledge from one generation to another."[1] An old Inuit (Eskimo) woman told the Danish ethnologist Knud Rasmussen, "Our forefathers talked much of the making of the world. . . . They did not understand how to hide words in strokes, like you do; they only told things by word of mouth, . . . they told many things . . . which we have heard repeated time after time, ever since we were children. Old women do not fling their words about without meaning, and we believe them. There are no lies with age."[2]

The Zuni in New Mexico tell stories of their origins. In the earliest era the ancestors of the Zuni people lived in dark, crowded caves deep within the earth. The Sun Father sent his two warrior sons to lead the people out. When they emerged as "sunlight people" the Sun Father told them to travel in search of their home, "the middle place of the world." During their travels the people found a rain priest. Their own rain priest prayed with him, and together they made it rain. A water strider, an insect that skates on the surface of the water, came along and stretched its legs out to the edges of the earth. Where its heart touched the earth marked the middle. The Zuni had finally found *itiwana,* the middle place of the world.

Today, as in the past, the Zuni see the world as divided into sections corresponding mainly with the four cardinal directions, but they also consider the regions above and below as important. The Zuni are matrilineal. Each person is born into her or his mother's family and receives her clan, a named social designation. Each clan is associated with one of these directions. For example, if your mother's clan is Evergreen-oak, this is your clan. Evergreen-oak, green even in winter, is associated with the north and with winter. Yellow, the color of morning and evening light in winter, is associated with northern clans. One's clan determines the range of occupations and religious activities one has. Because the north correlates with war and destruction, a person in the Evergreen-oak clan would be encouraged to engage in war-related occupations and religious activities. One must always marry outside of one's own clan.

The Zuni priesthoods stand at the pivot and meeting place of all these divisions. For the Zuni the center represents totality and summation. The Zuni annual calendar is divided at the solstices into two halves, each containing six lunar months. Around the time of the solstices are twenty-day periods of intense religious activities, known as *itiwana,* marking the center or turning places within the yearly cycle.

The Zuni village, known also as *itiwana,* bears the prestige and power of a center place, of being at the conjunction of all places in the universe.

The Seneca, who live in upper New York State, tell stories about a woman who fell from the sky into this world. A flock of birds caught this woman. The world was then covered by water, so the only support they could find for her was on the back of a turtle swimming in the water. One by one, many animals tried to dive to the bottom of the water to get a bit of earth from which to make the world. After many failed, one finally succeeded, and the Earth Maker, a creator, expanded this bit of soil into the present earth, which is supported on the back of the turtle.

The woman who fell from the sky gave birth to a daughter. The daughter was the mother of corn as well as of twin boys who represent the negative and positive forces constantly at struggle in life.

We may think that no one could really believe such a fanciful story, and we might even be a little suspicious of anyone who claimed they believed it. These stories are, however, quite interesting, and they are among the ways Native American people

express such important things as what they understand to be good and bad, how the world came to be, what makes life meaningful, and how to relate to one another. These stories tell how members of a particular Native American culture strive to understand the world.

This kind of story, which we call a myth, can be used in very serious ways. For example, for decades the Navajo and Hopi peoples have been in conflict over lands declared for their joint use by a U.S. government treaty. Though there have been many court battles and efforts made by the federal government to resolve the situation, the peoples themselves remain unsatisfied. Several years ago the Hopi and Navajo tribal chairpersons met in public to discuss this conflict. Both appeared dressed in business suits. Both were well versed in the law and government policy. Each, when it was his time to speak, told the story of the creation of the world. Each showed how the particular landscape in question is essential to the identity of the people in his tribe.

The Hopi tribal chairperson described how the Hopi people were led out of the lower worlds onto this surface of the earth through an emergence hole (*sipapuni*) in the canyon of the Little Colorado River. From there they migrated in clan groupings to their present homes atop the mesas in northeastern Arizona.

The Navajo tribal chairperson told the story of how, before the Navajo world was created, the Navajo ancestors traveled through worlds below this one. Eventually they emerged at a location somewhere in the four corners region, where present-day Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico meet. The Navajo world was then created, bound by four mountains, one in each of the four cardinal directions, each identified with a mountain that Navajos can see in their land today.

While expressed in a political and legal setting, these stories are no less religiously significant today, for they continue to perform the cultural work of defining people to themselves and to others around them, including the federal government and the broader public. Both cultures depend for their very lives on the land they occupy. Each culture's identity depends on its creation story and on living in the landscape created for it. These stories are the basis for a meaningful life for individuals and cultures.

Mother Earth

Contemporary Indians refer often to the figure "Mother Earth" (sometimes connected with Father Sky). The frequency of this story across native cultures is remarkable. Comparative academic studies of the ideology, symbology, theology, mythology, language, ritual, and history of the hundreds of cultures that comprise native North America show that the differences among the cultures are so vast as to exclude almost anything held in common that is not also common to all human beings (one might think of archetypes). Yet Native Americans have increasingly identified Mother Earth as distinctive to Indian belief and identity, particularly as opposed to Americans with European ancestry. Studies of the historical record of the emergence of these references indicate that the figure known by the English term "Mother Earth" emerged from the discourse of Native Americans attempting to defend their ancestral lands against claims made by those of European heritage. Today, in broad terms, Mother Earth has become a powerful figure that is actively used to demonstrate Native American distinctiveness.

Art and Architecture

Native Americans' homes are commonly models of the universe. This makes homes religiously important. Every architectural feature, every way a house is used, reflects something meaningful. The way Native Americans build, divide up, and use parts of

their houses correlates with their way of life. Many Native Americans perform ceremonials in the home. Yet there is also specialized religious architecture. *Sweat lodges,* found in many styles throughout North America, are small houses in which people go to purify themselves, to learn religious information, and to talk about serious things. Pueblo people use *kivas,* partly underground rooms, for performing rituals. Large Eskimo ceremonial houses called *qasgiq* are entered through a tunnel and a hole in the floor. These houses contain marionettes; for use in dramatic performances there are screens, behind which the performer can dress or otherwise prepare; even the entry tunnel and the skylight window are used to dramatic effect. Enormous clan houses of the Pacific Northwest have elaborately painted fronts and doorways that represent an orifice of the body of a mythic ancestor. Just imagine that every time you enter your house you step through the mouth or vagina of a mythic ancestor!

The designs on clothing, pottery, baskets, and tools frequently correspond with images from stories, features of the landscape, and clan symbols. By wearing clothing and using pottery and baskets, Native Americans are reminded of their stories; they are surrounded by the patterns that they associate with what makes their life and culture meaningful. For example, Navajos believe that closed circles constrict movement and thereby life. To bring harm to another, one need only draw a closed circle around her or his house. Navajos insist on openings in all encircling designs. The characteristic design woven into Navajo wedding baskets is always open, and the opening corresponds with the beginning and ending coil at the center and perimeter of the basket. The border designs in Navajo weavings always have a thread carried from the interior to the outside signifying the opening for the movement of life. A personified rainbow surrounds sandpaintings (discussed below) on three sides, being open on the east.

It is more appropriate to think of Native American art as a verb, as "arting," to focus attention on the creation process and the use of the objects produced. In Eskimo carving, the carver picks up the raw material, a piece of ivory or stone. Turning it about, the carver tries to see the shape contained within. To assert one's will upon the material is not the goal of carving. Rather the carver serves as an agent to reveal or release a shape already in the material—a seal, a bear, a whale.

Navajo sandpainting, so commonly known in the craft or fine art form, is always a part of a ritual process in traditional Navajo culture. Sandpainting is a ritual act of curing performed as a part of healing ceremonials that often last many days. These pictures are associated with stories about heroes or heroines who are cured of some illness they suffer. Sandpaintings are made on smooth, clean sand bases on the floors of Navajo *hogans* (houses). They are often ten feet or larger in diameter. The elaborate designs must be produced accurately, but none of the hundreds of paintings that can be prepared exists anywhere in permanent form. Their every detail must be remembered by the medicine people who know these ceremonials. When the painting is finished, the person to be treated walks on and sits in the middle of the painting. The medicine person or a masked spirit being known as *ye'ii* begins to treat the person. The medicine person's or the ye'ii's hands are moistened with an herbal medicine lotion and placed on the story figures in the picture. Particles of sand are transferred from the body parts of each figure in the sandpainting to the corresponding body parts of the suffering person. This identifies the person with story. The painting is smeared in this process. After the ritual is performed upon the sandpainting, the medicine person destroys and removes it from the hogan. For Navajos, a sandpainting functions less as a work of art than as a tool to make a healthy human being and world. What a sandpainting helps create is beauty of the highest order.

For Native Americans, art and arting have a religious aspect. By making and using art, Native Americans continue the

creation process begun so long ago by gods and ancestors.

Rituals

The rituals of Native American tribal traditions are rarely performed simply to celebrate or commemorate some event or time. Native American rituals are performed to bring something about—a stage of life, a successful hunt, a change in season. In other words, rituals do more than celebrate something already done.

Girls' puberty rites are performed throughout the region west of the Rocky Mountains. The Apache people call their girls' puberty rite the Sunrise Dance. After an Apache girl begins menstruation, her family may sponsor a Sunrise Dance involving not only the extended family but the whole community. After days of preparation accompanied by social dances in the evenings, the formal ceremonial begins. In an elaborate buckskin dress, the initiate dances to songs that tell the stories of creation. The girl is identified with White Shell Woman, and through her dance she reenacts the events that created the world, when White Shell Woman had sexual union with the Sun. During this rite the pubescent girl is identified with the powers that created the whole world. Contact with her, even being present at the ceremony, promotes health and life. Near the end of the ceremonial, baskets of fruit and candies are poured over the girl's head. Everyone present scrambles for the goodies, made powerful by their contact with the girl.

The Apache, and similarly the Navajo, are exceptional in their approach to female coming-of-age. Many cultures, in contrast, consider menstrual blood a pollutant, and menstruating females are isolated from the community.

Among tribes throughout the northern Plains and Northwest, males come of age by fasting for a vision. A Lakota (Sioux) male wishing to complete his passage to manhood seeks a vision through a period of ritual and fasting. Isolated on a hilltop, he fasts and offers prayers using a pipe and pointing its stem in each of the four directions—north, south, east, and west. He humbles himself before the powers of the world; he cries for a vision. Visions are described by visionaries as sequences of images strong in their potential for meaning. After a vision, the visionary consults with medicine men who help him discover the possible meanings of the vision. These images serve as a guide to be consulted throughout life. When a man must make decisions at the crossroads of life, he will look to his vision for help. The vision thus serves as a guardian spirit or a spiritual helper available in times of need.

A fascinating example of the transformative powers of ritual is the Hopi initiation of eight- to ten-year-old children, who thus begin their formal religious lives. Much of Hopi religion involves the frequent appearance of masked dancers, known as *kachinas,* representing spiritual messengers. For more than half of every year dancing and performing kachinas are common in Hopi villages. Before their initiation, children do not see either unmasked kachinas or unoccupied masks. When they undergo their initiation rites, the children hear stories about the kachinas, especially about their origins. They go to a nighttime kiva dance from which they have always been excluded. The kachinas enter the kiva where the children await. What is important is that these kachinas do not wear masks. When the children see that what they thought were spirits are actually their uncles and fathers, they are shocked, angered, and disenchanted. They wonder if they will ever be able to trust adults again.

This seems harsh treatment for children, and it is. But the children learn something very important through this experience. They have until now seen the world naively, believing that the world is exactly as it appears to be. This disenchantment gives them the experience that there is more to the world than meets the eye. As they begin to participate in their religious lives, they listen to the stories with greater care. This initiation by disenchantment opens the children

to the world of mystery, beauty, and power that can only be known through devoted participation and can only be experienced with a sensitivity attuned to the reality that surpasses the merely physical.

The Sun Dance was prohibited in the late nineteenth century by U.S. government regulation. It returned in the mid-twentieth century, especially among tribes in the northern Plains. The Sun Dance is an annual ritual involving many in the community. The world is re-created and renewed in this new year's rite. All the people are released from grievances and social strife. Everyone is rededicated to his or her role as woman, man, leader, hunter, warrior, or child. The Sun Dance provides an opportunity to perform vows made in return for favors asked of spirit beings. These vows often take the form of physical suffering. After the ritual construction of a Sun Dance lodge, dances are performed by individuals attached to the center pole of the lodge by leather thongs and skewers, which are inserted through the flesh above the dancer's pectoral muscles. These dances are central to the Sun Dance ceremonial. The dancer's suffering fulfills a vow made in promise for some spiritual favor and serves to humble the dancer before the spiritual powers.

The Sun Dance innovatively combines features from old fertility rites of corn-growing peoples who lived along the rivers in the central and eastern Plains with the hunting rituals of cultures that hunted buffalo and other game on the Plains. For thousands of years physical survival of Native American peoples depended on some combination of successful hunting, gathering, agriculture, and fishing. It is little surprise that animals and plants are central to the religions of tribal traditions. Not only are such animals and plants used as powerful ritual objects, they express central religious concepts. The buffalo, whose head adorns the center pole in the Sun Dance lodge, designates the source and power of life itself.

Corn, corn pollen, and cornmeal are used ritually by agricultural Native American tribes. Corn, in a personified form, plays a major role in ritual and story. The Cherokee tell a story of Selu, a woman who is corn, who provides food for her family by rubbing epidermal waste from her skin or by defecating. When her children discover how she produces food, they consider it witchcraft and decide to kill her. Knowing of their plans, Selu instructs them to plow an area of ground and to drag her bleeding body over the upturned soil after they kill her. They do as she asks, and where her blood touches the soil corn plants grow. Many Native American cultures tell stories of a corn woman who magically provides corn to feed her people. When mistreated she leaves, and her departure marks the beginning of the human cultivation of corn. In some southwestern tribes, at initiation a child is given an ear of corn, known as a corn mother, as a guide and protector. Pollen or cornmeal strewn or sprinkled is a blessing and an act of prayer.

Even though the horse was introduced to North America only with the coming of the Spanish in the sixteenth century, it has become central to many tribal traditions. The most respected of Navajo songs are the horse songs, which depict its cosmic dimensions:

> Its feet are made of mirage
> Its gait is a rainbow
> Its bridle of sun strings
> Its heart is made of red stone
> Its intestines are made of water of all kinds
> Its tail of black rain
> Its mane is a cloud with a little rain.[3]

From the circumpolar region southward throughout much of North America, bears have played a religious role for thousands of years. Along the Pacific Northwest Coast, Raven is a creator and major culture hero who brings light to the world and shapes culture. Tobacco is widely used in the rituals of Native American tribal traditions as a potent spiritual "medicine." The list of plants and animals with religious significance could go on and on.

Here is what must be remembered to this point: Native American tribal traditions, though different from one another, are nonetheless similar in some respects. These traditions are directed toward the creation of a meaningful life for the people within a specific landscape that has been sanctioned by a tradition based on primordial events recorded in stories. Native American tribal traditions foster a closeness to and respectful interdependence with the natural world.

Shamanism

Health and healing are common concerns of tribal traditions. Some of these traditions, such as the Navajo, use health and healing to address almost all concerns. Some traditions, especially those in the Arctic and down the Pacific Northwest Coast into California, practice shamanism. Caution is needed when using the term *shaman*. Many have used it to name any religious or spiritual specialist. The term comes from tribal cultures in Siberia and refers to individuals who use ecstatic techniques—that is, it designates those who know how to enter into a trance. Through trances shamans enter the spiritual world to seek help in resolving human problems, most often illness.

The Pomo, a California tribe, is one group that continues to use shamans. These individuals, often women for the Pomo, sing and shake long rattle staffs in preparation for entering a trance. Kneeling beside the sick person, the shaman then breathes rapidly while blowing incessantly on a bird-bone whistle. Eventually the shaman's body begins to quiver and convulse, showing that she or he has entered into trance.

After entering a trance the shaman examines the body of the sufferer by passing a quivering hand over it. This locates the illness, believed to be a malevolent object—a bone, a worm, an arrow, an insect—that has intruded into the body. These objects are often thought to be "shot" by witches. The shaman sucks out this evil object. As it enters the shaman's body, there is a noticeable convulsion. The shaman spits the object in the fire or in a bowl of water to destroy it. In some cultures the Shaman actually displays for all to see the object that has been removed.

Another form of illness treated by shamans is conceived as the loss of the life form, sometimes called the soul. The Salish people of the Pacific Northwest engage troupes of shamans who ritually paddle canoes in search of the lost life form; that is, they dramatize this journey by sitting in a canoe in the healing lodge. They recover the life form in dramatized ritual battles and then paddle back to return it to the sufferer.

Ecstatic techniques are used in North America to find lost objects or relatives, to learn of the future, to ensure success in hunting, and to conduct the deceased to the land of the dead. Shamanism always involves the use of ecstatic techniques by an individual to call upon forces in the spiritual world to intervene in human affairs.

An individual is often called by a powerful vision or dream to enter a shamanic career. A persistent theme in these dreams, as well as in the initiatory rituals, is the aspiring shaman being stripped to a skeleton and reconstituted as a shaman. This theme suggests that a shaman gains power through a death and rebirth experience. Still, shamans require extensive training beyond these initiatory experiences.

Perhaps because Native American tribal traditions are shaped by an essential connection with a specific landscape and by an authority structure based on telling stories of primordial events, it may appear that these traditions do not change, that they do not have histories. But extensive changes often take place in these tribal traditions. Native Americans are not helpless recipients of changes brought on by others. Because many of their traditions bear the responsibility for the ongoing creation of the world, Native Americans often creatively manage their own histories. There is no greater evidence

of this than the fact that so many tribal traditions not only have survived but continue to thrive in the face of half a millennium of almost constant onslaught by powerful visitors from other lands.

Native American Christianity

When Columbus met Native Americans, all their religions were tribal traditions. One of his first observations of these new peoples was that he believed they could be easily Christianized. Missionaries soon began their work in this new land. Today not a single tribal tradition has escaped the influence of Christianity. Many Native American communities today are primarily Christian. Many other communities have extensively incorporated Christian elements into tribal traditions. Others, particularly those forced to become Christian, secretly continued their own tribal traditions while publicly practicing Christianity. The discussion of several cultures will exemplify these several types of Native American Christianity.

The Pueblo Peoples of the Southwest

Though it is often thought that American history moved across the continent from east to west and that American religious history began with the founding of Jamestown in 1607, one of the first meetings between Native Americans and Europeans was at Zuni in present-day New Mexico. The conquest of Mexico led to explorations north into the American Southwest. The first Franciscan missionaries attempted to establish themselves among the pueblo peoples by 1580. Santa Fe was a provincial capital city in 1610, a decade before the *Mayflower* sailed. Franciscan missionaries accompanied Spanish explorers, and by the early seventeenth century, mission churches had been built in pueblos throughout the Southwest. These churches are the largest buildings in most pueblo villages. The church in the village of Acoma, which sits high atop a mesa, required the forced labor of hundreds of pueblo people to hand-carry the building materials to the mesa top, including many enormous roof support beams from trees cut as far away as a hundred miles. Pueblo peoples were forced, sometimes on punishment of beatings or even death, to be baptized and to practice Christianity publicly. Missionaries discouraged the practice of the tribal traditions and even destroyed pueblo ceremonial paraphernalia such as altars, costumes, and masks. Little wonder this treatment did not endear Christians and Christianity to pueblo peoples.

Although the people were forced to practice Christianity, the tribal traditions of these pueblos survived and persisted by going underground. These practices became so secret that almost nothing is known about the religions of several pueblos still apparently quite vital today. This public practice of Christianity complemented by the secret and private practice of tribal traditions is sometimes called "compartmentalization."

As the centuries have passed, missionaries have become far less oppressive of Native American tribal traditions. Although the compartments remain, with less pressure the pueblo antagonism toward Christianity has diminished. Christianity has earned a meaningful place in the lives of many pueblo people today, complementing their tribal traditions.

The Yaqui

Among the most creative interactions between tribal traditions and Christianity are those of the Yaqui, who currently live in several Arizona communities. The Yaqui lived in present-day Sonora at the time of the conquest of Mexico. For a long time they effectively resisted Spanish influence. Finally, in 1617, they invited Christian missionaries (who were Spanish) to live among them. Almost overnight the Yaqui willingly transformed their culture and

religion, taking on many Christian forms. In 1767, after more than a century, under pressure from the Mexican government, which was demanding economic and social change and rejecting everything Spanish, the Yaqui asked the missionaries to leave. In the century that followed, however, even without the presence of missionaries, they continued to practice and develop traditions that had distinctive Christian forms.

The Mexican government finally conquered the Yaqui in fierce military engagements and dispersed the culture. Some formed communities in southern Arizona. By the beginning of the twentieth century they began once again to practice their traditions. Central among these is the elaborate ritual process that unfolds during the forty days of Lent. Elements of the Christian Passion can be recognized in this ritual, but they are interpreted as representing the universal struggle between good and evil. The evil forces are portrayed by soldiers dressed in black known as *Pilates* and by groups of masked figures known as *Chapayekas*. Holy Week, the climax of this ritual season, includes the capture of the church by the evil forces, the crucifixion of Jesus (represented as an icon), and the return to the church of the good. The final struggle between good and evil occurs on Easter Saturday. An effigy figure of Judas is placed in the center of the plaza that extends in front of the Yaqui church. Midmorning the Pilates and Chapayekas march into the plaza in two long lines, prepared to assault the church and return to power. At the signal of the ringing church bell, the evil forces rush the church, which is defended by children and old women armed with flower petals and green leaves representing the transformed blood of Christ. These prove to be stronger weapons, and evil is repelled. The masked figures leave their swords, daggers, and masks at the foot of the Judas effigy and rush to the church to rededicate themselves to Christ and the good. Judas is torched, and as he, along with all the masks and swords, explodes into fire, the whole Yaqui village erupts into fiesta.

Native American Christian Communities

Throughout America today there are Native American communities that are primarily Christian, peoples who have little or no practice of tribal traditions. These Christian communities often have distinctive tribal designations. Others are identified generically as Indian, without tribal designation, especially in the large Native American communities in many cities. Although Americans of European ancestry introduced Christianity to Native Americans, Native American clergy and leaders have increasingly taken over the leadership of churches in these communities. Many young Native Americans have trained for Indian ministry in institutions such as Cook Christian Training School in Phoenix. Native American Christian communities are frequently fundamentalist in their theology, conservative in their practice, and often revivalistic and evangelical.

As Native Americans became Christian, they gained a certain freedom from being the objects not only of missionization, but also of academic scrutiny. As Christians they no longer seemed unknown or exotic. As a result very little is known about most of these communities. What are these religions? How are they related to tribal traditions? A scholar named Thomas McElwain did a study that gives us some hints. He studied Christian hymns that had been translated from English into Seneca for the 1834 publication of a Seneca Christian hymnal. He simply translated the Seneca back to English, examining especially the words in Seneca used for God. He found that the hymns express the religious ideas of Seneca tribal traditions much more than those of Christian theology.[4]

Many Native American Christian communities have responded innovatively to the pressures of Christianization, being able at once to continue older tribal traditions or ideas in new forms (and forms that have little compatibility with their own), to incorporate some aspects of the invading traditions, and

coincidentally to diffuse the pressures of conquest and the intrusion of academic studies.

New Religious Movements

For Native Americans, religion is essential to life and cultural identity. In performing rituals and telling stories, Native Americans discover and create the meaning of life in the world. Religion provides some of the tools needed to go through the cycle of life, to hunt and grow food, and to deal with life's crises.

Throughout American history Native Americans have suffered wars, epidemic diseases, and forced displacements. They changed their way of life when horses, sheep, and new weapons were available from Americans. A never-ending progression of technologies, from electric appliances to pickup trucks, has introduced irreversible change to Native American cultures. The way Native Americans govern themselves has changed too. When they were forced as nations to negotiate with U.S. federal and state governments, Native Americans were compelled to develop new political and legal organizations, tribal councils, and governments that have little resemblance to former tribally distinct methods of governance. Literacy, schooled education, missionization, and the ceaseless treatment of Native Americans as objects of academic study, often motivated by the belief that these cultures were soon to become extinct, have forced many changes. Often outsiders invented images of Native Americans that served as standards by which the lives of actual individuals have been measured. These images, whether negative (the bloody savage) or positive (the noble savage) were always inventions. Notably, Native Americans have often consumed and reproduced these discourses, shaping Native American cultures to correspond with what others expect of them.

Crisis Movements

Sometimes the cumulative pressure of these intruding forces reached crisis proportions, and the Native American response often took the religious form of crisis movements. These movements, led by a visionary or prophet, helped strengthen threatened cultures. They commonly required Native clothing, language, hunting, and cultivation, while consciously rejecting American clothing, English language, schooled education, Christianity and missionaries, the use of alcohol, metal tools, and firearms. Finding themselves living in strange territories, with no way to continue practicing the ways of life that distinguish them, Native Americans have followed visions of those who saw the cataclysmic end of this world and the return of a former world, a world before European influences.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Seneca culture was facing a major crisis. Seneca people had been drawn away from Seneca ways through Christianization, education in schools, employment for wages, and the use of alcohol. A Seneca man named Handsome Lake typified the people at the time. He was an alcoholic and no longer knew how to be Seneca in a traditional sense. He fell ill, and many thought he had died. As he lay motionless in his bed he had a vision in which he received good news about the future. He brought new life to the Seneca by introducing a new religion based on his vision. Though there were difficult times ahead for Handsome Lake and for the Seneca, this religious movement, born of crisis, eventually became established and continues to serve the Seneca people.

During the nineteenth century many Native American cultures were pushed to the limits of their abilities to survive. The transcontinental railroad was completed. The great herds of buffalo were destroyed. Native Americans were confined to reservation lands on which they could not hunt or farm. Many Native American cultures began to face the possibility of extinction.

Throughout the northwestern United States during the last half of the nineteenth century, many crisis movements arose.

Among the most widespread was the Ghost Dance movement of 1890. A Paiute man named Wovoka had a vision that foretold the cataclysmic end of the world as it had become, followed by a return of the world that existed before the Europeans came. Those Native Americans who practiced the rituals of the movement and lived according to its tenets believed they would survive the cataclysm, that the dead humans and animals would return, and that the land would be renewed. The Ghost Dance ritual was a circular dance in which dancers fell into trances and often saw visions of the dead journeying back to the world of the living.

The Ghost Dance movement ended in the tragic massacre by U.S. troops of hundreds, including many women and children, at Wounded Knee at the end of December 1890.

The Native American Church

Peyote, a small hallucinogenic cactus, has long been used in ritual in Native American cultures in Mexico, especially in the area where the cactus grows. Late in the nineteenth century, a new religion with distinct ritual forms involving the ingestion of the cactus began to spread northward into Texas and through the Plains. Early in the twentieth century, in an effort to use this hallucinogen legally, the religion was formally constituted as the Native American Church. Comparing the use of peyote to the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist, Native Americans, though not at the time considered U.S. citizens, mounted a legal defense based on protection under the law of the free practice of religion. Though the legal battles continue, the Native American Church has thrived and by mid-twentieth century was widely practiced not only by Plains tribes, but also by many others.

Native American Church meetings are all-night singing and prayer meetings. They may be held in any form of lodge, although the Plains *tipi* is the most popular. Built on the floor of the lodge is a crescent-shaped altar carved from tip to tip with a design of the peyote road. This road represents the life lived according to the direction of the peyote spirit. A large peyote button, representing Chief Peyote or the peyote spirit, rests on the center of the altar. A water drum provides the rhythmic accompaniment for the singing. A beaded staff, feather fans with beaded handles, and gourd rattles are other ritual implements used in the meetings.

The meetings begin at sundown and end at dawn. Meetings are called for specific purposes: the illness of a member of the community, the celebration of a special event, even the preparation of a student for school examinations. A leader, known as the road chief, begins by stating the purpose of the meeting and inviting everyone to direct prayers to this need. Throughout the night peyote songs are sung—often in a Plains language, regardless of what tribe is singing the songs—to the accompaniment of rattle and drum. The beaded staff is passed around the meeting, and the person holding it becomes the singer. The drum, fan, and rattle are also passed. Periodically peyote is passed and eaten by the members. While members may experience visions, particularly increased intensity of colors and other sensations, the primary purpose is to increase concentration and the sense of community. It should be noted that peyote is not eaten to induce intense individual hallucinogenic experiences. Native American Church communities are often very conservative. The Native American Church is effective in the treatment of drug and alcohol abuse.

The Native American Church is distinct from tribal traditions in that it is practiced by Native Americans from many tribes. It can incorporate elements of Christianity; for example, the peyote spirit may be identified as Jesus. Passages from the Christian Bible may be incorporated in the ritual. Unlike Native American Christianity, however, peyote religion was not introduced by Europeans. Like tribal traditions, the Native American Church is distinctly Native American. The Native American Church need not threaten individual cultural identities. Indeed, there are often

tribal variations in the ritual practice. The Native American Church links Native Americans together, forging a common identity out of their shared history of oppression.

Native American Spirituality

Early in the nineteenth century, faced with the displacement from ancestral lands by the American westward expansion, a Shawnee man named Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa fought for Native American survival. They believed that cooperation among the various native cultures would provide more effective resistance than the separate efforts of many tribes. Military and political strength was the foremost concern, but there was also a vision of a common Indian religion. This perspective marks a shift from trying to accommodate the European American presence to the acknowledgment that Native Americans, despite significant cultural differences, held more in common among themselves than they did with those who were threatening their existence.

Especially since the middle of the twentieth century leaders have described what distinguishes all Native American peoples. These distinctive traits are religious in character, but the term *spirituality* will be used here to emphasize that the view is self-consciously anti-Western. The term *religion* denotes Christianity to many Native Americans; the term *spirituality* avoids this connection while suggesting an attitude of respect and reverence toward every aspect of life.

Notably, the rise of Native American spirituality has been associated with the print medium. Those who have shaped it are those who have written, or at least whose words have been written and published. There is perhaps some irony in this, but it has also made Native American spirituality the most known and accessible of all forms of Native American religions. The movement has served to mediate between mainstream American culture (whose primary access to other cultures is through print) and tribal cultures (which remain exclusively oral). No single book has been more important to the rise of Native American spirituality than *Black Elk Speaks,* recorded and developed by the non-Indian author John Neihardt. The extent of Neihardt's contribution has given rise to considerable controversy (see sidebar), yet many Native Americans see this book as equivalent to a holy book. *Black Elk Speaks* is complemented by *The Sacred Pipe,* in which Black Elk tells Joseph Epes Brown about the seven rites of the Oglala Sioux. Many other Native Americans have participated in the development of Native American spirituality. Vine Deloria Jr., schooled in Christian theology and the law, has written books widely read by Native Americans and other Americans alike. The fiction of Leslie Silko, N. Scott Momaday, and Sherman Alexie has shown that one of the spiritual centers of Native American traditions is storytelling.

Those Native Americans most influential in developing Native American spirituality

Black Elk

The Lakota man called Black Elk became a Christian after a traditional childhood that included visionary experiences. John Neihardt, a poet, traveled the northern plains looking for material to enrich his epic poem "A Cycle of the West." In 1930 he met Black Elk and they talked. Based on those conversations, yet heavily shaped by his own view of Native Americans as tragic figures willingly sacrificing themselves to the progress of U.S. expansion, Neihardt wrote *Black Elk Speaks* (1932). While scholars have shown that much of this work is Neihardt's construction and the book conveniently omits mention of Black Elk's life and work as a Christian, many Native Americans have embraced it as a sacred narrative. The late Vine Deloria Jr. referred to it as the Native American holy book. Hundreds of college classes throughout the United States use this book to teach traditional Native American religions.

have retained close contact with their specific tribal traditions. In describing their own tribally based spirituality, they have seen themes, images, and concerns common among all Native American peoples.

Native American spirituality encourages the continuity of tribal traditions, but more so the embracing of a common Indian identity. Native American spirituality exists in an arena of intense awareness of the crises and difficulties Native Americans face. Native Americans share a history of oppression and a pride and confidence in their heritage that has given them the strength to survive.

Understandably, the tenets of Native American spirituality are expressed largely in opposition to majority American culture. Native American spirituality condemns the very things its proponents identify as distinctive of most Americans: capitalism and the accompanying materialism, rational thought and literacy, political and economic policies that encourage the exploitation of the land and peoples, and Christianity. Native American spirituality builds upon its ancient roots in the American soil and a spiritual way of life that reveres the land as a mother, often formalized as Mother Earth, and respects as kin all plants and animals, indeed, all of nature. This perspective strongly holds that Native American spirituality not only is superior to the religion and culture of most Americans, but that it also holds the promise for saving the whole of America from a course of destruction.

Native American spirituality encourages the continuity and revitalization of the stories and rituals of tribal traditions. It has virtually no distinctive mythology apart from tribal traditions, though in its place is an extensive body of anecdotes, stories, and literature about Native American oppression and mistreatment by European Americans, and about the apparently foolish and destructive ways of these oppressors. Native American spirituality has embraced pipe ceremonies and sweat lodge rites. The dancing, singing, drumming, and ceremony of powwows have become the principal form of expression for many Native Americans.

Native American spirituality is widely popular among non-Native American peoples. This popularity is at once a backlash against what are considered negative aspects of our American heritage and a sign of respect for Native American religions.

Though it may seem that Native Americans are largely gone, a people of movies and books, it must be remembered that today millions of people identify themselves as Native Americans. Further, as we have learned in this chapter, Native Americans have rich and diverse cultures, including many forms of religious practice.

Notes

1. Diamond Jenness, "The Carrier Indians of Bulkley River," *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin,* no. 133 (Washington, D.C., 1943): 540.
2. Knud Rasmussen, *The People of the Polar North: A Record* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1908), 99–100.
3. Adapted from Pliney E. Goddard, *Navajo Texts,* Anthropology Papers, vol. 34 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1933), 164.
4. Thomas McElwain, "'The Rainbow Will Carry Me': The Language of Seneca Christianity as Reflected in Hymns," in *Religion in Native North America,* ed. Christopher Vecsey (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1990): 83–103. See also James Treat, *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the stereotypes often associated with Native American religious traditions. How has reading this chapter changed your understanding of Native American religious traditions?
2. What are the four predominant categories of Native American religions in today's America? How do they function? What do you see as the important characteristics distinguishing these categories? How are they similar?
3. Native American languages are not written languages, at least not in their original forms. What do you see as the implications, positive and negative, of an oral tradition versus a written tradition? What would you gain from your religious tradition if your language were only oral? What would you lose from your religious tradition?
4. What is a story? Why is "story" important for any religious tradition? The Native American tradition? Describe or create a religious story from your religious tradition that functions like a story in the Native American religious tradition.
5. Explain how Native American art can be described as having a religious function. Give examples of Native American art and describe its role in the religious lives of its people.
6. Religious ritual plays a significant role in the lives of Native Americans. Define ritual. How would you distinguish ritual from habit? Describe at least two rituals from Native American religious traditions and discuss their functions.

ESSAY TOPICS

The Role and Function of the Shaman in Native American Religious Traditions

Native American Art: Exploring a Religious Tradition through Images

Native American Religious Traditions and Christianity: Conflict and Compromise

WORD EXPLORATION

The following words play significant roles in any discussion of Native American religious traditions and are worth careful reflection and discussion.

Tribe	Native American	Peyote
Oral Tradition	Medicine Person	Shaman
Sacred Rite of Passage	Ritual	Crisis Movement

FOR FURTHER READING

Beck, Peggy V., and Anno L. Waiters. *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life.* Tsaile, Ariz.: Navajo Community College Press, 1977.

Capps, Walter H., ed. *Seeing with a Native Eye.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1976.

Gill, Sam. *Native American Religions: An Introduction.* Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1982; rev. ed., 2004.

Silko, Leslie. *Ceremony* [a novel]. New York: Viking, 1977.

Talayesva, Don C. *Sun Chief. The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1942.

WEB SITES

http://www.hanksville.org/NAresources
Index of Native American resources on the Internet

http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/NAINRES.HTM
The Native American Anthology: Internet Resources

http://www.sacred-texts.com
The Internet Sacred Texts Archive