Christ and the Cactus: A Study of Peyotism among the Canadian Sioux[1]

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the religious phenomenon of peyotism as it originated and developed among the Sioux people of Western Canada. Peyotism is a relatively recent "new religious movement" whose study raises important questions about religious syncretism and colonization. This study examines in some detail Canadian Sioux peyotism in terms of its history, its relation to Christianity at a doctrinal and institutional level, and its variations (with especial regard to the past and present American peyotism). Specific attention is given to the status and character of the Native American Church of Canada, an association of institutional peyotism that came to Canada from the United States in 1954. Presently, peyotism is in danger of disappearance among the Canadian Sioux; the reasons for this decline, and the prospects for a future of peyotism, will also be addressed. Finally, the study concludes with some examination of whether peyotism can be classified under the term "new religious movement," and what such a classification implies.

Peyotism is a relatively new religious phenomenon with origins in a peyote cult among Native Mexican peoples. Peyote is a small desert cactus (*Lophophora Williamsii*) that contains several powerful alkaloids, one of which is mescalin, a hallucinogenic substance with powerful visionary properties. For centuries the Mexican tribes who were in contact with the cactus used it as a medicine, and occasionally as a means to visionary revelation or trance-induction. In the mid-nineteenth century the peyote cult was introduced to the Plains peoples of the southwestern United States, where, with the surrounding presence and pressure of Christianity and "White" culture, the so-called Old Peyote Complex of Mexico was transformed into what is now more commonly known as peyotism. Essentially, peyotism is a result of the fusion of traditional forms of Native American ritual, the borrowed use of peyote, and much of the doctrine and ethics of (Protestant) Christianity. The resulting form has had numerous variants, but in general, peyote is employed as an intermediary between the individual and the Great Spirit, God. The emphasis in all forms of peyotism is clearly on personal revelation: God's words are delivered through peyote, which has come to be identified (or analogized) variably as Jesus, the Holy Spirit of Christianity, or as a kind of Native-Jesus, a parallel, but distinctly Native, savior. The ceremony takes place in a tepee, where the peyote button is chewed, prayers are chanted, and songs and sung over an eight to ten hour period, usually at night.

Peyotism came to the Canadian Sioux in the early twentieth century, and fourished up until the 1960s, when it began to decline in prominence. Today there are very few practicing peyotists among the Canadian Sioux, although the reasons for this decline are as yet unknown. The fortunes of peyotism have been invariably linked with social and political dynamics, and the Sioux themselves are no strangers to crisis and confrontation with non-Native authorities. Perhaps the reasons behind the decline of Canadian Sioux peyotism are of a political sort, or perhaps it is simply the result of changing values and beliefs among the Sioux themselves. Though this question may remain unsolvable, we will explore various possibilities below.

It has now been over thirty years, a full generation, since the last study was done of the Canadian Sioux. Obviously, much has changed in that time, in terms of Native as well as non-Native Canadian and American life. The use of drugs, while still very much with us, has a different cultural understanding than it did in the years of Timothy Leary, the hippies, and Woodstock. The time is ripe for a full ethnographic study of the Canadian Sioux, particularly in relation to this remarkable peyote phenomenon that has waxed and waned within this society. This topic reveals so much about the process of religious syncretism in a situation where—as it often the case—the playing-field is not even; where one culture or religion has a virtual monopoly on political, cultural, and legal power.

It is my conviction that, as the world grows increasingly small, the religions and cultures of the world will continue to "clash." I am not, however, as pessimistic as Samuel Huntington, who popularized this phrase in his already-classic work on *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996). Indeed, one of the flaws of Huntington's work is that while giving important place to the major religious traditions in shaping cultural identity and fomenting conflict, he neglects the growth of *diversity* within civilizations, as well as the phenomenon of religious syncretism and new religious movements.[2] What Lionel Trilling called one of the significant mysteries of humankind's life in culture may also be one of humankind's, and certainly the comparativist's, greatest assets: "How is it that other people's creations can be so utterly their own and so deeply part of us" (Geertz 54).

There are four primary aims and for more general goals which I hope to accomplish in this study. First, to analyze the character of the religious phenomenon of peyotism as it presently exists among the Canadian Sioux. Several related questions arise here: What forms (or variations) does peyotism among the Canadian Sioux take, in comparison with peyotism in the United States? How does Canadian Sioux peyotism fit with the more traditional theological and doctrinal beliefs of the broader North American Christian society today? What are the political and ethical problems involved in the peyote movement as a syncretistic religious phenomenon? Discovering the make-up of Canadian Sioux peyotism in the late twentieth century may shed some light on the questions of its importance to the culture as a social group, and to each particular participant.

Second, and necessarily attached to the first question, is the oft-neglected historical aspect of ethnography. The history of peyotism among the Sioux of Canada must be examined, as well as the larger milieu in which it developed. This is important to the question of causality, or (in less structured terms), those influences that bolstered and hampered the peyote phenomenon as it developed, particularly among the Canadian Sioux. How does present-day Canadian Sioux peyotism compare with past Canadian and American variations? What roles have politics, demographics, and socio-economic conditions played in the emergence (and decline) of Canadian Sioux peyotism.

The third and perhaps central aim of this project is to discover the reasons behind the recent decline of Canadian Sioux peyotism. The peyote phenomenon continues to thrive in the United States—what are the reasons for its comparative difficulties north of the border? For the most part, the legality of peyote is protected by the governments of both countries, as long as it is used within the context of "ritual." One important factor may be the difficulties of importation of the cactus, but mescalin, now a synthesizable substance, is much easier to obtain than it was fifty years ago. Perhaps, as mentioned before, there are definite social and political dynamics at work here, which have acted to virtually eliminate peyotism in Canada. On the other hand, perhaps it is the Native Canadians themselves who have, for whatever reasons, rejected peyotism and its promises of mystical enlightenment, either to return to more strictly indigenous religious forms or to embrace mainstream Christianity.

Finally, the status and character of the Native American Church of Canada will be investigated, specifically with regard to how these relate to the fortunes and character of the Canadian peyote movement as a whole. The Native American Church is an organization that was incorporated in Oklahoma in 1918, to legitimize and institutionalize the new peyote religion. Earlier that year, there had been a determined effort by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to have an anti-peyote law passed by Congress. Thus, this pan-Indian peyotist association was developed, and quickly gained many adherents. In 1944, the N.A.C. became a truly national organization under the new name of the Native American Church of the United States. In 1955, with the growth of peyotism in Canada, the name was changed again to the Native American Church of North America (Labarre 217). The N.A.C. of Canada, though only a small affiliate of the larger American body, immediately held councils and began to draw members from Native reserves in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta. Little has been reported about the N.A.C. of Canada since the 1960s; their present status is difficult to determine. The N.A.C., though nominally Christian, cannot exist without a strong, or at least a moderate base of popular peyotism, and peyotism, as a cultural phenomenon, cannot flourish and spread without the institutionalized body of the N.A.C. One interesting point raised by this inquiry into the N.A.C. is the following: How closely do Canadian Sioux peyotists identify themselves with Canadian Christian churches and communities? It is not uncommon for practicing peyotists to be Catholic or Episcopalian/Anglican in the United States, and if this is the case in Canada, perhaps the Native American Church is not as necessary to the *existence* of peyotism as it is for its *spread* and *growth*.

These are the four specific aims of the study, as well as some of the important points to be covered with respect to each. At a more general level, there are several secondary undercurrents which will surface throughout this study, and which are of particular interest in terms of the larger scope of comparative religion and ethnography. These themes will be touched upon periodically, but never in detail, because of their breadth and somewhat tangential nature. They will, however, serve as reference points in order to contextualize this work in theoretical and methodological terms.

The first general theme is the phenomenon of religious syncretism, including the reasons behind this process, and the benefits, problems, and implications involved. Second, the entire process of cultural fusion and the effects of socio-cultural collision (and colonization) will be relevant, particularly in the forms of cultural imposition, assimilation, and marginalization. How does peyotism among the transplanted Sioux of Canada relate to these larger questions of concern, which have characterized Native-White relations from the very beginning? The third and fourth frames of reference are of a more philosophical (or para-psychological) nature. Many references have been made, within the field of the "history of religions," to the possibility of a universal, pan-human, religious quest for what is variously called "ultimate reality" (Tillich), "the Holy" (Otto) or "the sacred" (Eliade). The Quest for Unity, that desire for self-transcendence through revelation and mystical experience, is of the sort produced by peyote. There has also been conjecture as to the possible universality of drug or substance use in religious or quasi-religious ritual and ceremony. Certainly the late British novelist and mescalin enthusiast Aldous Huxley supported this view, harking back to the ancient Greeks, Teutons, Celts, and various peoples of the Middle and Far East as historical examples: "always and everywhere, human beings have felt the radical inadequacy of their personal existence, the misery of being their insulated selves and not something else, something 'far more deeply interfused'" (Huxley *Moksha* 47).

Whether either one of these is actually a pan-human phenomenon is debatable, but there is no doubt that substance use in the religious quest for transcendence has a long and varied history which predates both the Native peyotists and sixties deadheads. For fear of digressing, let us conclude by pointing out the other side of the issue; that is, non-Native peyotism. Peyotism does not seem to be a popular religious movement among non-Natives, although it probably does exist in varying forms in isolated circumstances or very small groups. During the drug revolution of the 1960s, championed by erstwhile Harvard professor and LSD guru Timothey Leary, recreational drug use no doubt substantially, particularly among the younger generation of White North Americans, but for the most part, despite Leary and Huxley's own intimations, drugs of the psychedelic nature were used for pleasure and "recreation," without explicit aims of transcendence in the religious sense (though the lines between religious and recreational ecstasy blur here). Thus we can reasonably conclude that, as of yet, peyotism has not developed in any substantial form outside the Native world.

The Sioux (or Dakota) of North America are a people with a rich, diverse, and oft-discussed society and culture. Sioux religion, in itself, has been the topic of countless books, articles, and dissertations. However, there is one wayward child of this great Sioux nation, of which very little has been

written, despite its obvious anthropological interest as a "splinter society" that has forged a distinct social and cultural path from its parent society, under different conditions and circumstances—the Canadian Sioux.

After the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876, the famed Sioux defeat of General Custer and his men, a small group of northern Sioux, part of the Dakota tribe, headed north, crossing the Canadian border into the province of Manitoba (MacGregor 96). This group joined a small number of Dakota who had migrated to Canada within the previous twenty years. Initially feared, and offered little assistance, these early Canadian Sioux were eventually accepted in their adopted land as "non-Treaty Indians"[3] upon the creation of the province of Manitoba in 1870, and this made it easier for the Little Big Horn refugees to migrate to Canada. The early years of the displaced Sioux were ones of constant struggle and hardship, and many returned to the United States. Those that persevered established a new Sioux society, obviously similar to that of the American Dakota, but one that became increasingly distinct over time, due to the environmental, economic, religious, political and linguistic structure of the fledgling Canadian nation. James Howard, who has thus far made the only comprehensive, systematic anthropological study of the Canadian Sioux, has this to say of the great interest of the Canadian Sioux from an anthropological perspective:

> [T]he refugee Sioux were enabled, both by the slow expansion of Canadian agriculturalists and the delaying actions of the Métis, to retain their freedom longer than the tribes south of the international border. Thus many aspects of traditional Sioux culture, some long forgotten by their relatives in the United States, are still practiced [by the Canadian Sioux]" (Howard xiii–xiv).

Thus, the Canadian Sioux experience has been a unique one, and after one hundred and thirty years of separation, these people are not simply another tribal branch of the American Sioux nation. They are a distinct and separate Sioux society.

"[W]e rejoiced that we were counted worthy to be messengers of Good Tidings to these neglected ones, who, having lost faith in their old paganism, were longing for something better" (Young 29). So reads a passage from the diaries of Egerton Young, an Evangelical missionary sent to the Natives of mid-western United States in the nineteenth century. This attitude, a popular one, was borne out of the colonization and gradual take-over of the New World by European settlers from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. This so-called "Columbian Exchange" brought two very different civilizations into contact, and the ensuing interaction was, we can say without fear of understatement, less beneficial to the Natives than to their European brethren, the result being their subjugation and marginalization, at best, genocide at worst. In a devastating conquest, the newcomers unscrupulously turned the Amerindians into outsiders on their own land.

Along with their European social, cultural, philosophical and political heritage, the conquerors brought with them their theological baggage, in the form of Protestant (and, to a lesser degree, Catholic) Christianity. Soon after making contact with these "primitives" and "savages," they "recognized" a people in great need of the Word of God. The Natives, of course, had their own rites, ceremonies, rituals, spirits, and gods, and they declined the generous offer of salvation given to them by White missionaries like Mr. Young. Since this initial confrontation of Christianity and the Native peoples with their religions, numerous transformations have come about on both sides. Changing circumstances as well as changing attitudes modified the religious beliefs and customs of both sides, and some interesting developments ensued as a result of syncretism: peyotism is one example of such.

Essentially, peyotism is a Native American religious phenomenon based on personal contact with the Great Spirit, or God, through the medium of visionary experience induced by the ritual consumption of peyote, a small desert cactus with hallucinogenic properties. All twentieth century variations of peyotism have their roots in the so-called "peyote cult," a ritual performance with a long history among certain Mexican Indian tribes. In the mid to late nineteenth century, this cult, otherwise known as the Old Peyote Complex (Slotkin *Peyote* 27), was introduced to the Plains peoples of Texas and Oklahoma.

Peyote has been described as a "small, unpretentious cactus, a plant without beauty or (apparent) utility" (Benitez 17). Yet this unassuming cactus is the source of several powerful alkaloids, including mescalin. As of yet, there has been insufficient clinical research on the effects of mescalin, however, we know that as a hallucinogen, it is a "drug"[4] that dramatically affects perception, emotions, and mental processes. Hallucinogens "distort the senses and can cause hallucinations—sensory images similiar to dreams or nightmares" (SFADA 8). Known today as "psychedelic" drugs, hallucinogens also include LSD, PCP, "magic mushrooms" (Psilocybin), and several others. One important fact about mescalin, however, is that, unlike its sibling pyschedelics such as LSD and PCP, it has not been proven to be harmful in any way, and quite possibly has no physically degenerative properties at all. The extraordinary visions produced by peyote (mescalin) also differ from those of LSD and PCP in that, by all accounts, they seem to be more pleasant on the whole, and result in very few "bad trips." The spiritually uplifting qualities of mescalin ingestion are vital to the religious phenomena that have developed around it.

The Old Peyote Complex of Mexico was a cult based on the use of peyote, primarily as a medicine. The curative powers of mescalin, which have yet to be fully documented by Western biomedicine, continued to play a secondary role in modern peyotism. Visionary experience and trance-induction were also involved in the Mexican peyote cult, and it is these ritual aspects that were to form the basis of American and Canadian peyotism. Forms of the peyote cult survive in Mexico, though they are quite distinct from the North American varieties of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[5]

One of the earliest reports of the peyote cult, from a White perspective, comes from a decree by the Catholic Church in seventeenth-century Mexico, which brought the Inquisition against peyote as "an act of superstition condemned and opposed to the purity and integrity of our Holy Catholic faith" (Stewart 21). Thus, relations between the Mexican peyote cult and the Church got off to a difficult start. Around 1850, the cult was diffused to the Plains tribes of Texas and Oklahoma. James Mooney, an early American ethnographer, did extensive work on this new phenomenon,

and came under much criticism because of his sympathy with the quasi-religious cult. The history of this early period of development, of peyotism as a native religious movement without Christian elements, is uncertain, but within twenty-five years, the borrowed complex of Mexico had become a quite different, full-fledged religious phenomenon among the Plains tribes of the south-western United States. Omer Stewart in his *History of the Peyote Religion* stresses the influence of Christianity, not just on the form of the new religion, but also on its rapid growth and spread: "We know that the movement of people for food gathering, for conquest, war or plunder; for indoctrination; for friendship and curiosity—or for whatever reason—leads to new ideas, new inventions, new problems, new institutions…. The peyote religion was a result…albeit small, of the conquest of the New World" (51).

Between the years 1850 and 1875, the peyote cult in the United States was transformed into a new religious phenomenon, a prime example of the process of religious syncretism. Much of the doctrine, ethics, and dogma of the Christian church was assimilated into the Old Peyote Complex. The infusion of Christianity, however, was not as formally difficult as it was often practically difficult. Immediately, the new peyotists were attacked from all sides: many Natives, including some hard-line peyote cult leaders, condemned the incorporation as a deviation from traditional Native religion and as another step towards total acculturation into White society. On the other side, the heat was no less severe from Christian leaders, particularly those of the more conservative Protestant denominations, who denounced the association of Christ with this "diabolic root" as nothing less than the work of the Devil (Petrullo 1).

Despite these problems, the new peyote religion was generally more acceptable to Whites than the old peyote cult, as it was at least nominally Christian, and it became popular with the Natives themselves, who embraced the new practice as a kind of escape and possibly as a defence against the continuing process of socio-cultural marginalization: "Under conditions when no naturalistic adjustments seemed adequate, and when other supernaturalistic adjustments were prohibited, the religion provided a form of adequate supernaturalistic adjustment by establishing dependence upon a supreme being (the Great Spirit/God) and an intermediary spirit (Peyote, Jesus, or both)" (Slotkin *Peyote* 35). However reductionistic this view may appear, it cannot be disputed that the politics of the period had a profound effect upon the development of peyotism.

The actual form of the new syncretic movement was very different from that of the Old Peyote Complex of Mexico, or even its immediate progeny in the south-western states. Although a "civilizing influence" (Stewart 51) played by the inclusion of Christianity can be debated, there is no doubt that the infusion of Christianity gave peyotism a more formalized basis and structure. Bloodletting and ritual dancing disappeared from the ritual itself, replaced by singing and praying as the new central features. The ritual acquired a "high moral tone" to its participants and could be said to have incorporated a certain Christian ambiance. The points of syncretism are many, but the main analogies can be seen in the realms of ethics and the spirits. The Great Spirit familiar to many Native American "theologies" came to be identified with the Christian God; the Peyote-Woman, an interesting mythical mother/founder of peyotism is often identified with Jesus Christ, whether by analogy or as a separate, but equal, Native Messiah; peyote itself is also often identified with Jesus, or as the Christian Holy Spirit of the communal bread and wine. In the realm of ethics, peyotism developed what came to be known as the "Peyote Road," an ethical life-plan which combined traditional ritual ideas with rural White Christian mores. The Peyote Road is revealed by peyote, and the ritual enables one to follow this ethical path. The four primary aspects of the Road are "brotherly love," "care of family," "self-reliance," and avoidance of alcohol (Slotkin *Peyote* 44). The eschatology and rites of the new peyotism were also affected by their Christian equivalents, but to a lesser degree. It seems that most of the Christian influence was Catholic, due in large part to the fact that Roman Catholicism is more ritualistic in nature than Protestantism.

From 1880 up to and continuing into the early twentieth century, peyotism experienced a great period of growth and development as it spread northward and eastward throughout the western United States. There was much modification along the way, of course, to fit with various cultural patterns and social circumstances, yet the syncretistic elements remained and were strengthened by accelerated inter-socialization and acculturation.

According to J. S. Slotkin, peyotism became the basis for a pan-Indian nationalist movement in the mid-twentieth century (*Peyote* 49). Despite its variation, peyotism was a widespread and popular Native movement, and served as a form of super-naturalistic confrontation. Rather than rebel against the dominant Whites, says Slotkin, the Natives used peyotism as a superior, "perfected" version of the White person's religion.[6] Whether this thesis is viable, peyotism certainly became an important element to Native cultural survival, and cannot be viewed in terms of simple accommodation by Natives to the White worldview, as it has sometimes been portrayed.

As peyotism spread, it gathered as many opponents as adherents. A number of attempts were made to suppress the movement, no longer considered the work of the Devil but, in terms more fitting with the dominant Protestant and rationalized language of the day, as an "evidently injurious" custom, utilizing drugs which were "obviously" harmful (Slotkin *Peyote* 50). The ethnocentrism of such views becomes apparent when we contrast peyote—of which there is no evidence of harmfulness—with such European-American cultural staples as alcohol and tobacco, which continue to be massively imbibed despite widespread evidence (and awareness) of their degenerative affects.

In the 1920s or 1930s, peyotism finally made its way across the Canadian border, half a century after the Sioux followed a similar migratory path. Stewart reports that in 1926, Yankton Sioux Johnson Goodhouse visited the Canadian Sioux at Griswold, Manitoba, where he held enough peyote meetings to feel assured that the peyote religion was established there (181). James Howard writes that it was a Yantonai by the name of Tom Ross who introduced the peyote way to the Sioux in Canada. Indeed, the dearth of available information[7] on the history of peyotism in Canada renders a complete explanation of its development nearly impossible. Peyotism in Canada, and among the Canadian Sioux, seems to have reached a peak in the 1940s, followed by a gradual, but steady, decline in prominence up to the early 1970s. In 1963, Weston LaBarre reported on the diminishing number of

peyotists in Canada: "N. reports that, around Griswold, about eight families are peyotists, as are three more families at Oak Lake and Pipestone Reserve" (Stewart 259).

The reasons for such a marked decline in Canadian peyotism, and particularly with respect to Canadian Sioux peyotism, have yet to be fully explained. By 1969, Alice Kehoe found that "the Saskatchewan Sioux did not seem to be peyotists but…there were rumours that the Sioux at Griswold (Manitoba) supported meetings from time to time" (Stewart 259). The latest evidence comes from Omer Stewart, who reports that in 1972 he learned that a group of urban Indians from Winnipeg often travelled to Long Plains reserve (Manitoba) to hold peyote meetings (260). Thus, peyotism was not at this time dead among the Sioux of Canada, but it had suffered a marked decline in popularity, such that its very existence in Canadian Sioux culture seemed precarious.

Traditionally, the two institutions most opposed to peyotism have been the Government (American, Canadian, federal, state, and provincial) and the Church (Protestant and Catholic). Both of these groups have shared one major concern about the peyote phenomenon: the element of "drug use" within the rite itself. Drug taking has become a great taboo in North American society since WWII, as evidenced by the US government's decades long (and rather unsuccessful) "War on Drugs." However, as noted above, the category of "drugs" is by no means as clear-cut as it may sometimes seem. What is it that makes a substance a drug? Further, why are some drugs, such as alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine, accepted and even promoted while others, even some with fewer discernable negative effects, made illegal and subject to a "war" by the federal government of the United States? This question is a difficult one, and unfortunately requires additional study that would go beyond the bounds of this article. It seems, however, that anything outside of our "safe" drugs, such as the big three mentioned above, must be condemned both legally and morally (indeed, despite the ostensible privatization of religion and separation of Church and State in North America, these two realms are virtually indistinguishable when it comes to drug use). Thus, in the 1960s, when the use of psychedelic drugs became a huge phenomenon among the younger "hippie" generation in the West, they were condemned outright by both Church and State authorities. Initial study on these drugs reinforced the condemnation, as the degenerative effects of LSD and PCP were discovered.

Psychedelics, however, do not begin and end with these two substances. Of the eight hallucinogens appearing in the Canadian Health and Welfare booklet entitled "Straight Facts about Drug Abuse" only two (LSD and PCP) have any verified evidence of degenerative effects. Six labels of "insufficient research" appear on this page, despite the continuing illegality of all these substances, and the preceding summary on drugs "such as PCP" warns, "To use them is to abuse them" (SFADA 3). Once again, this bias seems hypocritical, considering the clear evidence revealing long-term degenerative effects of alcohol, tobacco, and even caffeine. There is no denying the fact that mescalin, the psychoactive ingredient in the peyote plant, has been automatically (and uncritically) associated with LSD and PCP, labelled as "dope," and thus placed in that seemingly boundless and intractable category that mainstream North American culture holds so dear.

There is one reason why even the moderate use of peyote in the peyote ritual is seen as different from, say, the drinking of wine in the Catholic mass, which also has huge symbolic significance to the communicant. Unlike the drinking of the "Blood of Christ" in the Mass, the ingestion of peyote has as its goal a sort of inebriation, or a transformation of consciousness. Indeed, the main Christian argument against peyotism has been the *centrality* of the peyote substance in the ritual. The assumption has been, and is still often made, that peyotists have merely deified their pleasure-producer, as a drunk may deify the Bottle (and thus taking Karl Marx's dictum about all religion to its literal extreme: "an opiate of the people"). Yet it must be clarified that though a "higher state of consciousness" may be the goal of the peyote ingestion, the framework is not one of "pleasure" but one of "transcendence" or, to use terms favoured by countless mystics, "rapture" or "ecstasy." Thus, peyotists do not *worship* the cactus, but rather *utilize* it in the way Christians do prayer, fasting, confession and communion—as a means of somehow getting more in touch with God (and one's own soul/self).

In the past few decades, culminating in the 1970s and 1980s with several violent clashes between Natives and both the US and Canadian governments, White-Indian relations have been strained, due in large part to the birth of a large and popular nativist movement based on a pan-Indian call to action. The N.A.M. (Native American Movement) along with polemicists like Vine Deloria, has become a vital force in the Indian quest for recognition and greater power. The Sioux of the United States, especially, have played a large role in this movement. Peyotism and the Native American Church have been at the centre of the religious pan-Indian movement, and thus have provoked some unease within the U.S. government.[8] Peyotism in the United States, despite its Christian elements, has become very much a part of nativist revivalism. Seeing themselves as a "New Israel," the peyotists (or at least, many of them) hold that their religion is the true form of Christianity, or Christianity taken to its higher, Native level: "The White man goes into his Church and talks *about* Jesus; the Indian goes into his (peyote) tepee and talks *to* Jesus" (Slotkin *Peyote* 112).[8] Despite this popular feeling, there is also a strain of peyotism which seems to long for acceptance, or at least recognition as a legitimate religious movement without the above touches of superiority:

> The second coming of Christ is the only way to salvation. So I want you to know me and I want you to understand my Church. There are some Christians who don't know our Church, who may even think we are uncivilized. I want the N.A.C. to be recognized by other churches. And I want people everywhere to pray for us, too. (DeMallie and Parks 209)

Since the 1960s, Western social sciences in general and the field of anthropology in particular have been reeling from charges of ethnocentrism, orientalism, cultural colonialism, sexism, and racism. Is anthropology merely an outdated survival from the colonial periods of European conquest and expansion? What are the real goals of anthropology? Does it involve a genuine concern for, or a desire for knowledge about, these "others," or is it a narcissistic quest for Western self-affirmation and self-understanding? These and similar questions remain a sore spot for the anthropological field. The

reaction to some of these fundamental problems in the 1960s and 1970s, following in no small part on the work of scholars like Foucault, Said, as well as numerous feminists and "post-colonialists" was important and necessary, as it has helped to bring to light many ethical and political implications of so-called "objective scholarship" that hade been ignored or conveniently overlooked.

However, with the subsequent emphasis on extreme cultural relativism and political correctness in academia, many have the feeling that the balance has swung rather too far in the other direction, and that, combined with more general academic trends towards specialization, good scholarship is being undercut by political interests once again. One result of this swing is that comparative studies are rendered suspect; cultural phenomena are deemed relevant only to the culture or society within which they are found. Processes of cultural fusion or syncretism that, whether rightly or wrongly, wear down and blur cultural and social distinctions between neighbouring peoples, are understood solely in terms of political dynamics (usually in set in neo-Marxist terms of exploitation and dominance). In the early twenty-first century, there are very few isolated social groups left. This is by no means a condemnation of those who favour the retention of traditional ways and beliefs, but merely a reminder that cultural segregation has, throughout human history, proved less sustainable that cultural fusion, and certainly no more likely to end cultural or ethnic conflict. Two or more societies, of a different cultural make-up, cannot expect to maintain complete cultural isolation while practicing a certain degree of physical integration. Cultural change is not necessarily a bad thing, and cannot be seen exclusively in terms of the imposition of White Western cultural standards upon passive "others." Exotification, in the name of relativism, is no better than orientalism, and is, in fact, merely the "left" branch of the same colonial tree. Peyotism is a prime example of the way a specific cultural group responded to the "meeting" of their own values and belief systems with those of an alien culture, not by pandering to the ways of the "colonizer" but by pragmatically and functionally adopting certain elements within their own tradition.

Alton Becker sees the need for a "new philologist" to interpret and investigate cultural texts as well as the process of "text-building" within a culture. Becker's new philologist, when transplanted onto the larger cultural realm, reveals the four main orders of connection in society for the "new cultural scholar" to deal with: "the relation of its parts to one another; the relation of it to others culturally or historically associated with it; the relation of it to those who is some sense construct it; and the relation of it to realities conceived as lying outside of it" (Geertz 32). Thus, this holistic mode of research can be used, without invoking the anti-universalistic sentiment that usually accompanies a relativistic paradigm. As Clifford Geertz adds: "The truth of the doctrine of cultural relativism is that we can never apprehend another people's or another period's imagination neatly, as though it were our own. The falsity of it is that we can therefore never genuinely apprehend it at all" (44).

Notes

1. This paper is dedicated to the memory of the late Professor Roger M. Keesing (1935–1993), under whose direction it was originally written.
2. Some of these limitations have been pointed out by Harvey Cox in "Afterward and Forward," *Religion in a Secular City: Essays in Honor of Harvey Cox*, edited by Arvind Sharma. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001).
3. That is to say, they were not identified as being indigenous to Canada, and thus could not benefit from any treaties signed with the Canadian government. However, they seem to have been treated much the same as the Treaty Indians.
4. I am intentionally highlighting the term "drug," in order to point out its highly normative use in contemporary North American society. To classify something as a drug (like marijuana or cocaine) renders it culturally suspect, despite the loose use of the classificatory scheme (e.g., tobacco and caffeine, though technically drugs, are almost never referred to as such in popular parlance). The validity of the Western category of drugs will be questioned below.
5. Barbara G. Myerhoff, in her *Peyote Hunt: The Sacred Journey of the Huichol Indians*, discusses the Mexican peyote cult in one form: the modern peyote cult in Mexico usually involves a Peyote Hunt, a symbolic journey to gather the plant which "provides a version of the fulfilment of a pan-human quest—the desire for total unity among all creatures and all people" (16).
6. Apparently, rumors spread in the 1940s that: a) Jesus was to be reborn to the Natives as an Indian saviour, and b) a big wind was going to destroy the Whites and save the Indians.
7. Alluded to by both Howard (179) and Stewart: "Without having had an opportunity to do either ethnographic or archival research on peyote in Canada, one relies on chance bits of information" (262).
8. Although in the United States, as in Canada, peyotism is completely legal, the N.A.C. itself remains somewhat of an underground association, despite its nearly 200 000 person membership across North America. Indeed, information on the N.A.C. seems to be virtually non-existent, and what little exists is difficult to come by.
8. This "supercessionist" attitude bears striking resemblance to that of the fledgling "Jesus cult" in the Near East of the first century C.E., with regard to Judaism and the Jews.

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