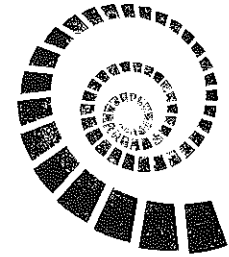


Puritan leanings had dug in on the Eastern seaboard, and African Americans were supplying forced labor to Atlantic Coast English masters.

Five religious groups, broadly conceived, were now present in what would become the United States. Native Americans had been joined by Jews, Roman Catholics, English Protestants, and African Americans. Throughout the eighteenth century, this original religious "cast" would occupy the stage of American history, largely unchallenged by other religious players. Already though, the diversity was impressive, with significant differences, especially, among Native Americans, English Protestants, and African Americans, all inherited from their respective pasts. And already, changes were afoot, and new religious combinations could be seen.



Original Manyness: Tradition and Change among Native Americans

Nicholas Black Elk was a famed holy man among the Oglala, who are probably now the best known of the Sioux nations of the Upper Midwest. In the 1930s and 1940s, his words and descriptions of Oglala religious ceremony and his role in preserving it came to public attention through the writings of others. It also became clear that Nicholas Black Elk had been a leader in bringing religious innovation to the Oglala. He became convinced that the Ghost Dance—which had come from the Paiute nation much further to the west—would save his people as whites were encroaching on them at the end of the nineteenth century. Already, then, he was endorsing both his own native religion and a blended religion that took its roots from another Indian nation. Besides these, though, Black Elk was a Roman Catholic, and a Roman Catholic catechist teaching others at that.

Black Elk was not unusual in his willingness to use different religious practices at the same time. Native Americans, along with many other ethnic minorities in the United States, have been adept at preserving their difference and borrowing from others as needed or desired. Today they enjoy a new vigor as they demonstrate that their cultures have endured and grown in the face of the dominant Euro-American mainstream. In fact, in law courts, in public demonstrations, and in academic life, Native Americans have signaled militancy. Central to these manifestations of cultural strength has been Native American religious life. American Indians are reclaiming sacred places and practices—and they are also expressing their solidarity with an international network of indigenous rights activism allied to essentially religious claims. Meanwhile, record numbers of them are Christians and charting new paths for what it means to be native and Christian.

Tradition, of course, came first, and we start there. The resiliency of Native American religious traditions in the midst of the political battles of our times is

already a clue to something that is apparent again and again. For Indians, traditionally, ordinary religion—the cultural religion within boundaries—and extraordinary religion—the clear attempt to reach beyond them—have been fused. Indian nations typically had no word for religion because they did not separate the ordinary details of living from their sacred ceremonies. They saw their beliefs and activities as part of the same whole.

Native American Diversity

From one point of view, neither Nicholas Black Elk nor any other Native American can stand for all American Indians. About 550 different Indian societies and distinct languages have been identified in North America, and even perhaps a half century ago, about 150 Native American languages were still being used north of the Rio Grande River. Indian languages have been divided into five major groups, a fact that, in itself, suggests the diversity of Indian cultures. Algonkian, Hokan-Sioux, Uto-Aztecan, Athabaskan, and Penutian—the five language stocks—are profoundly different from one another, as different, say, as Italian is from Japanese. And if we include Alaska, a sixth language family, the Eskimo-Aleut, brings still more difference.

Just as languages expressed the diversity of the Indians, so did the geographical areas in which Native Americans lived and so did their cultural characteristics. Some were hunter-gatherers, others were agriculturalists, and still others were various combinations of the two. Some societies were highly organized, while others were loosely knit. Some seemed to absorb elements from the cultures of their neighbors, but others remained more isolated. Some gave prominence to women in kinship organization and in actual responsibility. Others were, as anthropologists say, patrilineal (taking their rights from the man's side of the family) and patrilocal (living after marriage in the man's household, or village/band). Basketry, pottery, and weaving flourished among many groups, but in others, if they existed, they were not too important. Indian peoples erected shelters in various styles, sizes, and materials. Some Native Americans were warlike, and others fought only with great reluctance, regarding the slaughter of another human being as a form of pollution.

In such a picture of manyness, it seems fair to ask if there were as many Native American religions as there were Native American languages and cultures. The question, however, already betrays a Euro-American way of seeing and organizing things. By contrast, Native Americans fused the ordinary and the extraordinary, so that culture was tradition was religion. Thus, one of the strongest points of cultural collision between Indians and whites was in their understanding of what whites called religion. Indians thought that every people had its own sacred stories and rituals on which its world was based. Euro-American Christians argued that their religion was the universal truth for all. Even though in mission practice they spread the values of European culture along with Christianity, in theory

would hardly ride around the country to win converts whom they could not adopt wholesale into their communities. But on their side, Euro-Americans saw converting the "heathen" as one of the reasons they should settle the North American continent.

Common Characteristics in Religion

Although there were as many Native American religions as there were Indian national groups and societies, looking at their common characteristics helps us to see the contrast with Euro-American religions. Because so much of the discussion in later chapters of the text will deal with Euro-American religions, it is important to look at the shared elements in Indian religions. It will be important later in the present chapter to have some sense, too, of the differences among Indian religions and the changes they experienced.

In general, Native Americans have possessed a strong sense of relationship with what they hold sacred. They have seen their sacred realities as very closely linked to their daily existence. Whereas Euro-Americans conceived of space as a three-level universe with God, human beings, and nature on different levels, Native Americans have thought of a world to which they were bound by ties of kinship. There were beings like the Grandfathers who were Thunder Beings, Grandmother Spider, and the Corn Mother. There were animals who took on human form such as Coyote the Trickster or sacred birds or sacred buffalo. There were gifted human beings such as **shamans**—holy people who, as sacred healers, mystics, and magicians in one, were said to fly like birds and talk to animals. The world, in short, has been a huge extended family network, with the Indians existing as younger, less gifted brothers and sisters among their more venerable relations.

When it comes to the dimension of time, Indians have seen themselves as connected to sacred events that occurred before the coming of the present world. These events, shrouded for them in mystery, were the acts of creation that had caused the world and themselves to be. For Native Americans, these events have been enduring models on which life should be based. All events—both what non-Indians might call legendary and what they might call historical—have been considered sacred. For example, when Edmund Nequatewa, a twentieth-century Hopi, attempted to describe Hopi truth for outsiders (in his book *Truth of a Hopi*), he began with Birdmen in the original Hopi underworld and included the twentieth-century founding of the village of Hotevilla. Traditional account and recent event were collapsed because, just as Indian space existed as one whole, so, too, did Indian time.

In such a world—in which ideas of kinship with sacred beings have flourished and tradition has been as real as clashes with the government of the United States—the material world was, above all, holy. While Euro-Americans in their religions tend to separate material from spiritual things and to exalt the spiritual,

matter. The distinction between natural and supernatural worlds, an easy shorthand for describing Euro-American religions, is forced and strained when applied to the traditional religions of Native Americans. Indians have seen awesome and mysterious power at work seemingly everywhere. It has been, for them, personal power, and the forces of the universe could be named as relatives. But it has never or hardly ever been abstract power. Sacred beings, for example, have been conceived as animal and plant guardians who, in pacts long ago, pledged the bodies of their species as food for Indian peoples. Thus, Native Americans evolved elaborate rules of courtesy for hunting or planting, apologizing to the spirits of the life forms they took, offering first "fruits" to these spirits, and being careful to use every portion of what they killed.

Native Americans have also thought of their personal inner worlds as sacred. For them, dreams have revealed holy, hidden things that often would not be known in other ways. For example, the Iroquois had a dream-guessing rite in which individuals presented themselves to the tribal council so that personal dreams could be interpreted. On the Plains, leaders of the hunt were men who prayed for months and had dreams they believed were significant. And sometimes, for native peoples, the free soul traveled in dreams to distant places to learn, while at other times dreams brought visions from guardian spirits.

Meanwhile, bridging the space between inner and outer, the name of an Indian person should indicate his or her kinship with the natural world and also tell something of inner essence. For many Native Americans, names were traditionally changed as significant deeds and happenings etched new marks in their character. So there could be Black Hawk, or Afraid of Horses, or White Rabbit, or Moves from Your Sight Little Red Star. Colors were important here, for each of the four directions had its color, which brought with it certain qualities. The red of the north might be the color of wisdom, while the white of the south might be thought to give innocence and trust.

Changing a name, however, has been only one form of a process that traditional Native Americans have seen all around them. Transformation was almost, in European terms, a law, and Indian lore has been filled with accounts of animal-human changes. **Trickster figures** such as Hare or Raven or Coyote were shape-shifters who could assume any form they chose in the midst of their adventures. They have been seen as beings of creative power who helped to put the present world in order. At the same time, they seem to embody a principle of disorder that continually disturbs the regular workings of society.

The "hero" of the Winnebago Trickster cycle, for example, violated the first rule of a warrior: that he must keep himself away from women, who possessed an alien power capable of interfering with the warrior's power. Trickster, in other words, could change from world maker (he was creator) to world breaker (he was violator) and back again. He could also shift from the sly, cunning creature who could outwit Bear or Coyote to the fool who fought himself because his right arm and left arm did not know that they belonged to each other and who burned his own anus to punish it for not standing guard while he slept. He was male, yet he

became female, married a chief's son, and bore him three little boys. Most of the time, as a male he carried his penis around in a box with him and did not quite know how to treat it. Yet when Chipmunk managed to gnaw most of it up, Trickster used the pieces to make potatoes, artichokes, ground-beans, and rice for the people.

Trickster seemed to live without boundaries, and yet his creative work put boundaries in place. He posed the major issue for Native American religions directly. Continuity and discontinuity, identity and transformation were statements about boundaries. Indians seemed to be saying that the frameworks that bound them together were all-important. At the same time, they were admitting how fragile and, indeed, fictive these frameworks were. Belief in transformations implied a world that was made of one substance and also implied forms that were always disappearing. Trickster figures continually reminded Indian people of these ideas.

Traditionally, Native Americans highlighted the importance of transformation in their ceremonies. Many societies had sacred clowns who were at once funny and frightening. They could do foolish things, such as dressing themselves backwards and acting in a backward and upside-down manner. They could embarrass others by sexual joking or mimicking, and they could tease mercilessly. Yet they were very serious figures, such as the Sioux clown, or *heyoka*, who assumed his calling because of his sense of visionary power that came from a Thunder Being. Sometimes clowns brought retribution to the people, like the Fool Dancers of the Kwakiutl, who threw stones, or the False Faces of the Iroquois, who sprayed hot cinders. Indeed, clowns were to ritual what Tricksters were to cycles of traditional story. By turning the standing order inside out, they pointed to the fragility of boundaries and the necessity, sometimes felt, to destroy them. Creative disorder, they seemed to be saying, could and would regenerate the order on which religion and society depended.

Often, in ceremonies, masked dancers carried transformation further still as they impersonated different Gods and guardian spirits and sometimes, in the course of the dance, felt they became the figure they impersonated. In the Pueblo villages of the Southwest, according to tradition, the *Kachinas* came from the mountains on ritual occasions during the year to perform through the male dancers who assumed their forms. Meanwhile, in hunter societies, people believed that shamans changed diseases into material objects that could be sucked out of their patients. Special dreams became ceremonies by being acted out. Sacred stories became history, and history was changed into sacred stories. Native American religions proclaimed the deceptiveness of appearances. For them, this ordinary world touched another, and sacredness was never far away.

Living in such a world, Native Americans believed their task was to bring themselves into harmony with it. For them, the harmony conferred power in the hunt, in the field, in war, or in government. The solemn recitation of origin narratives became one characteristic way to come into harmony with beginnings. Other rituals also provided ways for Indian believers to harmonize with a larger sacred

world. The sweat lodge, a sun dance, or a sacred game of ball all were examples. Often, in such ceremonies and even in everyday tasks, Indians were preoccupied with the directional points. For example, four—for the four directions—was a privileged number that appeared frequently in story and legend as well as in ceremony. The number five was privileged as well, for it added the center to the four corners. So, too, number seven added a vertical dimension: there was the highest point, the lowest, and the center where the person stood. Understood in this way, religion became a centering process in which Native Americans learned to maintain harmony by living equidistant from all the boundaries.

Standing in the middle with the six directions at equal points, the Native American described a three-dimensional circle. It was like the circles traced by vegetation or the circles that figured so frequently in ceremonies and also in the construction of many dwelling places. Circles were sacred for Indians because they reflected and imitated shapes they saw in the natural world. To be in harmony meant to live as part of the circle, or the medicine wheel, of this world. Thus, in their religions, Native American peoples were living out their own versions of the ancient idea of **correspondence**. Their societies were understood to be small-scale replicas of a larger reality that surrounded them. By looking at the picture as painted on the larger canvas of the natural world, they believed they could better comprehend life's meaning and appropriate work. Because they saw themselves as made of the same stuff as the natural and sacred world, the boundaries could always be easily crossed. Yet because the natural and sacred world was seen as one of centers, circumferences, and directions, Native Americans could plant themselves securely in the middle place, which was the ordinary world.

By contrast, Euro-Americans tended to see the world in more separately defined ways. Their God, they believed, had caused the world to be, and his law governed its movements. In that sense, he could be said to dwell within it. Yet for them he also far transcended it. Meanwhile, as Christianity taught, his human creatures had increased the separation between God and the world by their fall in the Garden of Eden. In this understanding, sin had entered the world, and it had affected not just human beings but all of nature. For Euro-Americans, the world had become a three-level affair. God tried to control human beings, and human beings tried to control nature. If there was rebellion in both cases, it only emphasized the fact that the one creation had been, in the Euro-American view, pulled apart.

Differences in Native American Religious Traditions

For the most part, we have been viewing Native American religious traditions in terms of what they have had in common. But there were also important differences among them, even if this survey can only briefly touch on them. To give some sense of the range, though, we take up briefly the religions of

the distinctive cultures of the Oglala and the Hopi. The first is a Sioux hunter-gatherer society of the Plains, and the second is an agricultural Pueblo culture from the Southwest.

The Oglala

The Oglala, who were victims of the United States military in the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, are perhaps the best-known single American Indian society. They were one of the thirty-one or so Indian nations who in the nineteenth century roamed the prairies of North America between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, setting up temporary camps and moving them as the seasons changed and they pursued the buffalo. More specifically, the Oglala belonged to the Teton division of the Seven Fireplaces of the Sioux family. They dwelled in the western portion of Sioux territory and, along with other nations of the Teton Sioux, spoke Lakota.

Like other Tetons, the Oglala had originated in what is now the state of Minnesota and had come onto the Plains, where around 1750 they obtained horses, an event that changed their fortunes and led to their wealth and fame as buffalo hunters. With horses they no longer had to travel and hunt on foot, carrying their belongings on their backs or with their dog travois. Ironically, the horses had come from whites—from the Spanish of the Southwest from whom the animals had strayed or been stolen or traded. Thus, the beginning and end of the flowering of their culture were linked to Euro-Americans. But in this heyday of their fortunes, the religion of the Oglala reflected the centrality of the buffalo and taught the values of Native American hunters. Like American Indian religions in general, it blended ordinary with extraordinary.

The traditional account of the Oglala's origin, like that of many another Indian people, concerns their emergence from the earth—in this case through the intrigues of a Trickster figure, Inktomi the Spider. Through a wolf, Inktomi wooed the people with food and clothing until a few came to the upper world to investigate its virtues. Here, Inktomi plied them with more gifts and promised them youth, so that they returned to the people in the world below with glowing tales. Although an old chief and an old woman warned of cold wind and the need for hunting, some still came to the upper world. The results were not what they hoped but, instead, pain and misery. The children cried for food while Inktomi laughed. Yet all was not lost, for they met Old Man and Old Woman, who taught them to hunt, clothe themselves, and make tipis. Oglala life had begun.

This is but one of a cycle of sacred stories that explain the origins of things. What is important here is that this particular sacred story tells of Oglala beginnings. It is about a specific people, not about the world in general. Like all sacred accounts, this story is true in the sense that it tells the meaning of existence in the world as the Oglala knew it. We are a people of the earth, the story is saying, and although creation was a kind of trick that was played on us (we did not really know what it meant to be born; we did not really have any choice), still we have learned to take care of ourselves. Our life goes on.

The origins of life, however, concerned not only physical existence. There were origins, too, for the rituals that acted out the meaning of being Oglala. So tradition explained the gift of a **sacred pipe** to the people. **White Buffalo Calf Woman**—a sacred woman in white buckskin with a bundle on her back—approached two warriors with her gift, but only one survived (the other had wrong thoughts). Later, the story told, she entered the Oglala camp and presented the pipe to the chief. “With this sacred pipe,” she said, “you will walk upon the Earth; for the Earth is your Grandmother and Mother and She is sacred.” Since before the beginning of the nineteenth century, the pipe has figured in the rituals of the Oglala—the sign of their felt bond to one another and to the earth. According to the tradition, the pipe accompanied the gift of ritual. For the mysterious woman also offered the people a round stone containing seven inscribed circles, each of the circles representing a rite that they would receive. After she had taught them the first—a ceremony meant to keep spirits of the dead—she walked away, turning into a buffalo calf as she did.

The White Buffalo Calf Woman of the traditional story gave the Oglala a ceremonial repertoire, with the sacred pipe at its center, for the expression of all their religious needs. Thus, in the first rite of **ghost keeping**, the Oglala have been able to deal more easily with death. The soul, or spirit, of a deceased person, it was believed, could be kept for a period of time ranging from six months to two or more years. Elaborate ceremonies surrounded the making and keeping of a ghost bundle, including a lock of hair from the dead person. Members of the family observed ritual taboos, and a special dwelling was built for the bundle. When the day arrived on which they intended to release the spirit, the ceremonies were equally elaborate.

The other rituals of the Oglala have included the sweat lodge ceremony, the vision quest, the sun dance, the “making of relatives,” the girl’s puberty ritual, and a sacred ball game. Each of them has been characterized by minute prescriptions for word and gesture, hinging always on the use of the directional points. Each ritual, in other words, locates the Oglala in a world of meaning by a centering process with regard to space. In the **sweat lodge** ritual, for instance, rules governed the construction of the lodge, the use of space within it, and the roles that those who participated played. The leader had to move sunwise as he entered the lodge. There were seven heated stones (a sacred number) at first, and prayers had to be offered over them before more stones could be added. Later, after the door was sealed, the ritual went forward with attention to the four directions as various gestures and actions were performed.

In the **vision quest**—performed alone on a sacred hill away from the camp, usually for the first time in adolescence—men, and sometimes women, sought a vision in which guardian spirits would reveal their relationship to the seeker and bestow the knowledge/power desired. The ritual was conducted under the guidance of a holy person and involved the smoking of a sacred pipe, preliminary purifications in the sweat lodge, fasting, and prayer. Once the seeker reached the sacred hill, there was the same attention to directions we have

previously seen: four saplings formed poles at the four directions, and the seeker traced a cross by returning to the center from each of the four. Even though the seeker might be alone for one to four days, the vision quest thus began in community. The holy person who guided the quest embodied the spiritual wisdom of the Oglala as a people. When at last the seeker believed that the vision had been granted and returned, he (or she) related the experience in the presence of others and listened as the holy person and guide interpreted its meaning. If there was a place for the individual in Oglala religion, it was a place that was very carefully circumscribed. The gift of the seven rites was conceived as a gift to all the people.

The communal character of Oglala religion was especially evident in the **sun dance**. The only ritual that occurred at a special time of year, the sun dance took place in the early summer after the buffalo “harvest.” Often it was an intertribal affair involving a huge encampment in which many people came together. The ritual extended over four days, and each day had its proper ritual tasks, its formal and necessary ceremonies. A lodge was constructed, a cottonwood tree selected and trimmed according to prescription to form the sacred pole at the center, and the pole painted and decorated with symbolic offerings, among them reminders of the buffalo. In a dance that followed, warriors in their finest attire circled the pole, running to each of the directions to flatten the ground and symbolically “killing” the images of a man and a buffalo at the pole. But the culmination was the actual dance around the pole that gave the lengthy rite its name. The dancers were literally bound to the sacred center, attached by thongs to the pole. They performed either gazing at the sun from morning until night or with skewers digging into their flesh. Under their leader they danced themselves into an ecstasy of sacrifice until they fell exhausted or the flesh was pulled from their bodies and they were released. They fasted for the duration of the dance, demonstrating in this hunting version of a first-fruits festival that, in return for the gift of life they acknowledged, they would offer part of themselves.

Similarly, the remaining rituals of the Oglala did not stint in their prescriptions for careful and symbolically elaborate ceremonial behavior. The “making of relatives” was designed to unite two people to each other in a bond considered closer than that between relatives, committing them to die for each other, if necessary. The puberty ritual for girls, the buffalo ceremony, was performed at first menstruation with the intention of placing young women in the care of the sacred buffalo and of securing for them a relationship with White Buffalo Calf Woman. At their menstrual periods thereafter, women lived temporarily alone, a practice common among Native Americans, who believed that women possessed a power that, if it came into contact with that of the hunter-warriors, could damage it. The religious power seen in women figured in the seventh rite of the Oglala as well. In a ritual that perhaps symbolized the game of life, a young girl threw out a ball to people standing at the four directions. The ball stood for knowledge, and the people trying to catch it were struggling, said the Oglala, to free themselves from ignorance.

The ball used in the seventh rite, like so many of the objects that were part of the rituals, was considered **wakan**, or holy. Wakan was a quality thought to be possessed by meteorological elements such as thunder and lightning, by the animals or plants, sometimes by human beings, and sometimes even by objects. For the Oglala, wakan was that dimension of reality that caused transformation. It was the mysterious force that surrounded them in the world the sacred buffalo had given, and in its culminating aspect it was **Wakantanka**, sometimes equated with the God of Christianity and Judaism. However, Native Americans tend to see sacredness as a quality suffusing all things and to personify their Gods ambiguously so that at the same time they both are and are not separate from the natural world. Euro-Americans tend toward more precision—and separation—in their concept of the supernatural. Finally, if any being was wakan among the Oglala, it was the buffalo. Sacred story and ritual together demonstrated how central the buffalo traditionally was. Oglala religion, like Oglala life, revolved around the being from which, or whom, they drew all of their sustenance—economic, in buffalo meat, hide, and even teeth, but even more, spiritual. The buffalo gave the Oglala a center and an identity. If they were people of the earth, it was because they were people of the buffalo.

The people of the buffalo traveled a long path from 1700 to the twenty-first century. Despite the advances of a Euro-American culture that threatened to take away their lands and livelihood, the Oglala have maintained their identity. No longer depending for their survival on hunters and warriors, present-day Oglala survive as a people because of their religion. The pipe is still an Oglala means of prayer, and prayer today, as in the past, is addressed to Wakantanka. Sweat lodge, vision quest, and sun dance all continue, and in the contemporary Oglala community there is a strong reawakening of religious traditionalism. A **reclamation movement**—for the return of lands, artifacts, and the remains of ancestors—is linked to the resurgence of tradition, and so is **indigenous rights activism**. Meanwhile, traditional religious practices have been joined by others: for some people, the peyote religion, which, in a communion ritual, sees and uses the plant as a sacred power person (see the section “Change in Native American Traditions” later in this chapter); for a few, traces of the Ghost Dance (see the same discussion); and for most, Christianity. Usually, contemporary Oglala belong to one or another Christian denomination, and many traditionalist leaders, like the earlier Nicholas Black Elk, see no conflict in combining Christian adherence and the older ways. By staying in touch with their religious past, the Oglala have also adapted to change.

The Hopi

A much different group of Native Americans from the Oglala, the **Hopi** are

Rio Grande in what is now the state of New Mexico. To the west, in the desert, lay the country of the Zuni (New Mexico) and the Hopi (Arizona). Life in the desert proved to favor cultural continuity, for, with greater isolation from Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo-American conquerors than their eastern cousins experienced, the Hopi for most of their history remained largely untouched by Christianity.

Hopi origins are veiled in mystery. Some scholarship has suggested that their ancestors came into the Southwest over 2,000 years ago. They dug pits in the floors of caves to store their food and eventually began to live in pit houses in the caves or out in the open. Other scholars say that the Hopi came from the California desert to their present-day land from about the years 500 to 700. The Hopi themselves tell of crossing the ocean on rafts or of emerging from the earth. What is clear, though, is that from about 900 to 1300, their culture reached its heights. This was the era of cliff dwellings, carved into the sides of mountains at places that were easy to defend, and of apartment terraces, villages that are still characteristic of the Pueblo peoples. Old **Oraibi**, the ancient ceremonial village of the Hopi, dates back to this time.

In their past, the Hopi combined farming with hunting and gathering, particularly when their crops failed. But hunting and gathering gradually declined, and the Hopi continued to be farmers, growing crops of corn, beans, and squash. They considered tilling the soil a man's job, but social organization revolved around women, with communities organized in matrilineal clans. In the villages, it was clear that ritual life centered on the men, and there the **kivas** were sacred pit houses where the various clans conducted rituals from which women were excluded. Yet, although women had been barred from participation in kiva rites, Hopi tradition reflected the prominence of female symbolism. The Hopi had emerged from the womb of Mother Earth, their most sacred stories told them, and the kiva itself, essentially a large hole dug in the earth, was a forceful reminder. Sacred origin stories named women as creators. In one from Oraibi, two Hard Being women (deities of hard objects such as shells, corals, turquoise, and beads) created birds, animals, a woman, and a man.

In another well-known story of their origins, the people enjoyed a good life in the world below until evil entered into their hearts, sexual excesses grew, and so did hatred and quarreling. In their plight the chiefs tried to find an escape, and they fashioned a Pawaokaya bird, singing over him to give him life. Meanwhile, the chiefs planted a pine tree and a reed beside it to reach the hole into the upper world. The bird flew in circles around the two “ladders,” found the opening but nothing else, and returned exhausted. So, according to the story, the chiefs made a hummingbird and then a hawk who, in turn, repeated the search and also came back unsuccessful and exhausted. Finally, the chiefs created Motsni, who flew through to the upper world, found the site of present-day Oraibi, and also encountered Skeleton. When he heard Motsni's tale, Skeleton explained that he was living in poverty but that the people were welcome to join him. So they came, emerging from their plant ladders to the world above. Later, aided by Spider

became the sun. The people had begun to make their way. They were also given the gift of corn, and small though the gift was, with it the Hopi were also given an identity. After a series of migrations, the clans arrived at their villages, and life, as the Hopi knew it, began. To help them remember, in each sacred kiva of the Hopi was a *sipapu*, a hole intended as an opening to the world below. Most times covered by a stone, it was opened at the initiation ceremonies at the end of the year with the belief that the dead could leave the womb of Earth to participate.

Blending folk memory and folk philosophy, the Hopi narrative fused history with interpretation. Emergence from the earth was historical truth for the Hopi, if their ancestors dwelled in the pit houses that were echoed in the kivas. Similarly, matrilineal organization must have existed for a long time, for it was said that in the beginning the Hard Being women (deities) had created a woman first and then a man. This order of creation was a model for customs in Hopi society by which women owned their houses and household goods and, in a sense, their children, who derived their clan kinship from their mothers. Finally, Skeleton and the small gift of corn suggest the precariousness of life in the desert growing subsistence crops. Yet, as with the Oglala, the truth of Hopi tradition did not depend on historical memory. Its statement of identity made the account true, for in telling who they were, the Hopi were also telling what meaning and significance they attached to their lives. Like the Oglala, the Hopi were saying that they were people of the earth.

Unlike the Plains people, however, Hopis were clearly saying through their religion that they were farmers. While the Oglala possessed only one calendric ritual in the sun dance, for the Hopi every rite depended on the cycle of the seasons. Desire for harmony with the natural world, in their case, was expressed in ritual harmony with its changing seasons: transformation, so central for all Native Americans, here meant following the movements of the natural world through cyclic time. The motivating force behind the calendar of rites was the ever-present need for water to make crops grow in this desert region. Once again, as for the Oglala, religion and everyday economic need were not strangers. Just as the buffalo was central for the Oglala, water was primary for the Hopi. In both cases, ordinary religion and extraordinary religion were traditionally fused. Rituals were ways of maintaining the boundaries so that life could be lived within the safe fences of economic and social organization. Rituals were also ways to cross over these boundaries and experience what these Native Americans felt as the power of the sacred.

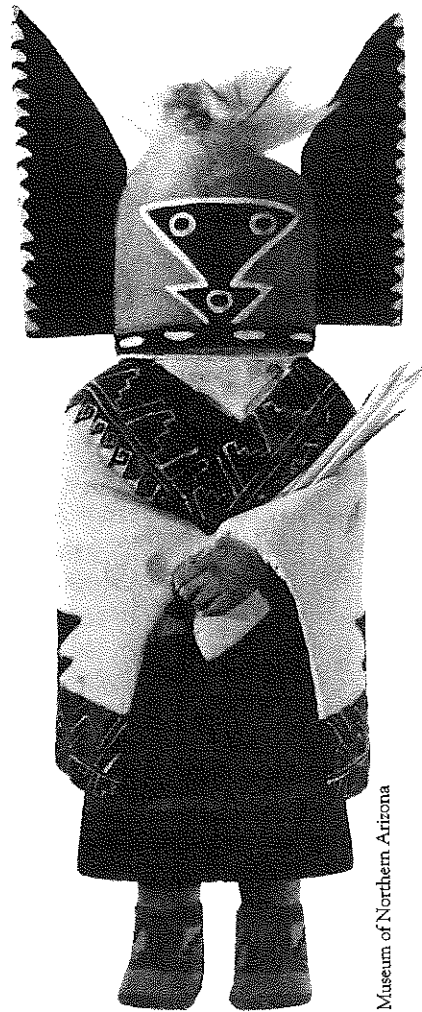
In general, the rites of the Hopi year possessed certain common features. Each of the ceremonies was conducted by one or more hereditary chiefs and clans. Each clan had its specific area of religious responsibility and thus its particular religious lesson and action to teach. All of the ceremonies aimed at the production of rain for fertility and growth. All utilized, as well, similar ritual techniques: the offering of prayer sticks, the building of an altar of sacred objects, the sprinkling of corn as medicine to lead to the transformations of nature that the people desired, the recitation of the emergence story, verbal forms of prayer, attention to

the four directions, and the use of song and dance. Finally, the ceremonies usually followed a similar time pattern with eight days of preparation and then eight days of secret rites culminating in a public dance on the ninth day. With a full calendar of annual ceremonies, traditional Hopi spent roughly one-third to one-half of the year in the *work* of ritual.

The major division in the ceremonial year was—and still is—between the Kachina rituals from December through July and the non-Kachina ones from August through November. Here the word *Kachina* might refer to any one of three different phenomena in Hopi society. *Kachinas*, first, have been thought to be spiritual beings. Inner and invisible forms, they are understood to give a spiritual dimension to outer and physical existence. They have not been considered Gods in the Euro-American sense but have been honored as spirits—of the dead; of minerals, plants, and animals; even of the planets. They are said to be intermediaries from the sacred world who, during the second half of the year, dwell in the San Francisco peaks on the outer edge of Hopi country (the border, once more) and visit the Hopi villages during the first half when the Kachina rituals have been held. Well over 250 in number (some say as many as 600 have been known), the Kachinas were traditionally never worshiped but rather looked upon as friends and endowed with a variety of human qualities. New ones were continually appearing as old ones were forgotten, so that the catalog of Kachina spirits was fluid and variable. So, too, were their personalities, ranging from benevolent, kindly spirits to others who inspired fear by their whippings to punish offenders in Hopi society.

Second, Kachinas are also the male dancers who, during the Kachina ceremonies, impersonate both male and female Kachinas. Wearing masks that represent particular Kachinas and are thought to confer sacred power, the performers seek to dance themselves into a state in which they feel that they become the Kachinas they are impersonating. Third, Kachinas are the exquisitely carved dolls that the Kachina dancers give to Hopi children during the ceremonies to teach them about the Kachina beings. Made in traditional and highly stylized patterns from cottonwood roots, the Kachina dolls have not been toys in the modern American sense, but neither are they sacred objects. Rather, they have perhaps been “show” objects in the Hopi home, reminding all, and especially the children, of the spirit Kachinas the dolls represent. Beings, dancers, and dolls, all the Kachinas point to the extraordinary reality that for the Hopi lay behind the ordinary world.

By now it should be evident that Kachina ceremonies have been those in which Kachina dancers impersonated the spirit Kachinas, and the spirit Kachinas were believed to manifest themselves. The Hopi thought that the dual calendar (Kachina/non-Kachina) was necessary because they believed that, in the world below this one, life corresponded to arrangements in Hopi society. Thus, whatever rituals occurred during the first part of the year among the Hopi were replicated during the second half in the world below. The Kachinas had to be elsewhere in the summer and fall: this was why they could not dance in the village plazas with the Hopi.



Museum of Northern Arizona

Crow Mother Kachina. Kachina doll representing the Crow Mother, known as the mother of the Hu Kachinas. At the February Powamu, or bean dance, the Crow Mother appeared through the performance of a male Hopi dancer.

These Kachina rituals continue to endure and in recent times have received new attention. But earlier, with greater contacts with whites and Christian ways, erosions in the ceremonial life of the villages began to occur. At the same time, witchcraft grew with the spread of anxiety. Beliefs in negative forms of witchcraft and sorcery had, indeed, long been part of Hopi life. The traditional account of the emergence, in its complete form, spoke of the presence of sorcery both in the world below and above. But as time passed, witches and sorcerers seemed to multiply everywhere, and fear and dissension struck at the heart of Hopi society. Old prophecies came to be associated with the contemporary presence of whites and the beginning of a time of purification.

From 1862 on, Mormons, with their accounts of Indian descent from the tribes of Israel (see Chapter 7), became the most successful missionaries to the Hopi. It was not necessary, though, to abandon Hopi tradition and ceremony in order to embrace Mormonism or to follow other Christian denominations. Like Nicholas Black Elk and other Oglala, a Hopi could participate in traditional religion and new (Christian) religion at the same time. In fact, from 1870 on there was no avoiding the cultural presence of the United States. Religious and cultural compartmentalization became a continuing feature of Hopi life, with “blocks” of thinking and acting that remained traditionally Hopi and other “blocks” that accommodated the alien culture and its Christian religion. Like the religion of the Oglala, Hopi religion has sought to preserve and protect the ordinary even as it has linked believers to the extraordinary. In fact, new prophecies from Hopi traditionalists in the twentieth century and after have looked to the changes that befell Hopi society as part of larger changes ahead for America and have predicted a “purification day” to come. Like the Oglala, the Hopi see the religious future in terms of present change and also through the lens of their own particular past. And what is true for the Oglala and Hopi is true for all. Each Native American nation has its traditions of origin, its ceremonial cycle, and its identity as “the people” cherished by sacred powers allied to nature and cherishing them in return.

Change in Native American Traditions

The Oglala and Hopi maintained traditional ways and yet changed, and so did other Native Americans. Even a return to tradition has had new meaning as Indians have used their religious past to support their identity in contemporary times. For example, in 1990 the **Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)** became law, providing a legal framework for the repatriation of human remains and some cultural artifacts from certain institutions receiving federal support. Native Americans needed to show “cultural affiliation” or “lineal descent” in order to repatriate what they desired. Or they could base their claims on the authority of “traditional religious leaders.” Thus, religious tradition took on a new and politicized role. But—perhaps surprisingly—not all Native Americans held similar views about what should be done. In one case among the Cheyenne in 1997, for example, some Cheyenne wanted human remains to *stay* at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., instead of being repatriated. Ceremonial concerns were uppermost in the dispute. These same ceremonial concerns are clear, too, in the National Museum of the American Indian, which opened at the Smithsonian in 2004. Here Native American people represent themselves, and objects are treated with regard for their layers of spiritual meaning that go beyond historical or aesthetic considerations. Meanwhile, claims to **sovereignty** in land disputes have relied, in a number of cases, on traditional religious practice and belief regarding particular tracts of land.

In addition to this self-conscious turn toward tradition, general Native American responses to new cultural forces have been threefold. First, Native Americans might keep up the practices of their traditional religions but add to them elements derived from Christianity. Second, Native Americans might turn to a variety of new religious practices and movements. Third, Native Americans might be converted to various denominational forms of Christianity, either working to maintain their traditional religion alongside the new or renouncing the old, at least on the surface, in favor of the new. In all cases, though, forms of religious **combination**, either clear or subtle, ruled the day. Indian people used elements at hand to create religious responses that filled their contemporary needs.

Clear forms of religious combination occurred in those regions that were missionized by Spanish Catholic priests—that is, in the Southwest and California. In the Rio Grande Pueblos of New Mexico, for example, after the initial period of encounter from 1540, there was little or no contact with Catholic priests in the late eighteenth century and through most of the nineteenth. Thus, the Pueblos for a period of about 150 years were free to modify Catholic rituals to serve Native American ends. The results were ceremonial calendars in the various pueblos that for the most part were based on traditional Native American beliefs and practices. But added to them were Catholic ceremonies meant to satisfy Pueblo needs. There was little interest in Jesus or the Virgin, in heaven and hell, or in the Christian understanding of God. Yet a saint's day became an occasion for festivity, and Holy Week and Christmas, while not historical commemorations of events in the life of Jesus, were times for prayer. Similarly, the Roman Catholic All Souls' Day provided an opportunity to honor departed ancestors with gifts.

Perhaps the most prominent example of new religious practice was the **Ghost Dance**, which swept the Plains in the late nineteenth century. When the old religions seemed to fail as the whites pushed the Indians out of their lands, new religious prophets arose to proclaim rites and ceremonies that would work to end white ascendancy and to restore the Indians to harmony with the earth and themselves. Among these new religious prophets was a Paiute Indian from Nevada named Jack Wilson, or **Wovoka**. He claimed to have died twice and to have seen God. Thereafter, he began to predict that the earth and whites would be destroyed by flood and that the Indians should perform the ceremony of their ancient round dance so that the flood would wash under them and they would survive. Then, predicted Wovoka, the earth would spring to life in a new creation, and the Indians would be reunited with their dead ancestors and dwell together in plenty.

The Ghost Dance, as it was called, spread rapidly among other Native American peoples as delegations from various Indian nations came to learn the ceremony. Indians who practiced the dance claimed to be reunited with deceased relatives and to feel empowered by tokens—like a piece of meat or a feather—they received from the spirit world. But the ghost dance had stark repercussions among the Oglala, who—with Nicholas Black Elk's encouragement—reshaped the dance to suit themselves. They began to wear ghost shirts as they danced—long

white garments that, decorated with red-colored symbols and eagle feathers, they believed were bulletproof. This conviction contributed to their deaths at Wounded Knee. The Oglala, wearing their ghost shirts, thought they could not be harmed by the bullets of the United States Seventh Cavalry.

Other new religious movements among American Indians fared better. For example, the nineteenth-century Seneca religion led by the prophet **Handsome Lake** (d. 1815) resulted in the enduring organization of **Gaiwiio**, the Old Way of Handsome Lake. Indeed, even during his lifetime the religion of Handsome Lake spread from the Seneca to all Six Nations of the Iroquois. Based on claims of visions, Handsome Lake preached the imminent destruction of the world, the reality of sin, and a need for salvation. Later he added an emphasis on moral reform. Beginning in the 1840s, the Code of Handsome Lake combined a traditional account of the late prophet's visionary experience and teaching with both ritual prescriptions for a longhouse (the traditional Iroquois structure) church and moral guidance that underscored the sacredness of the family. In our own time, numerous reservation Iroquois follow the Code of Handsome Lake.

In our own time, too, **peyote religion** flourishes in the **Native American Church** and also independently. A pan-Indian movement, peyotism grew beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century and spread northward onto the Plains. By the early years of the new century, it was carried across the Mississippi River eastward by Native Americans who lived on Oklahoma reservations. Peyote religion now exists from the Plains cultures of the Sioux to the reservations of the Navajo and Pueblo peoples. It has become the most widespread among contemporary Indian religions. The **Peyote Way**, as it is often called, centers on a communion ritual in which believers eat some form of the peyote cactus (*Lophophora williamsii*) in a ceremony usually lasting all night. There are prayer, song, meditation, sacramental consumption of peyote, and—when the communicant is said to be favored by the spirit power of the plant—extraordinary visual and auditory experiences. Communicants say that peyote heals and gives knowledge, and they are also aware of the Christian elements in their religion. But they have actively *used* Christianity to express their own religious vision, and so in their combinatory religion they have strongly bent Christian material to Native American beliefs and values.

The Christian elements in peyote religion point to the fact that the new religious practices and movements discussed here all contain Christian elements. What makes them different from the combinative style of the earlier Pueblo example, though, is the presence of a new vision, even if shaped from older materials. It is a vision borne by the authority of a strong leader or leaders who proclaim a distinctive teaching that transforms foreign material more thoroughly in native directions. It is also marked by organizational commitment and, most importantly, by the introduction of a ceremony or ceremonies that use elements from traditional Indian rituals while integrating the new or borrowed elements.

Different from these forms of religious combination is a third, more subtle one, when Native Americans have turned in a more direct way toward Christianity. **Denominational Christianity** sprang up in various forms with the first presence

of Euro-American Christians who sought to convert the Indians to Christianity. The Spanish and French brought their priests, and the English sent Protestant missionaries. So there were “praying Indians” in colonial New England towns, while later, in California, Franciscan missionaries created mission communities of Christian Indians. Throughout the nineteenth century, with the development of the reservation system, knowledge of Christianity spread among the Indians. Today it would be difficult to find a reservation without the presence of one or more Christian churches.

Take, for example, the **Eastern Cherokee**, who live on the Qualla Boundary Reservation in western North Carolina. In the early nineteenth century the Cherokee lived across a series of southern states, and Christian missionary work began among them in 1801 with a Moravian center and school. Soon the Presbyterians came, and later the Cherokee allowed Baptists, Methodists, and Congregationalists to come. When the federal government forced most of the Cherokee Nation to resettle west of the Mississippi in 1838, a small remnant escaped the deportation to remain in the East. Many of them were Baptists and Methodists, and eventually the Baptists won the most adherents among these Eastern Cherokee. In keeping with the mid-twentieth-century Baptist message throughout the South, it was fundamentalist Christianity that the Eastern Cherokee were taught. Predominating themes were human sinfulness and the need to believe in salvation through Jesus Christ to escape the torments of hell. The Cherokee attended services and listened to the preaching.

But there was more to this Cherokee adherence to Christianity than first meets the eye. The Cherokee could relate to the Christian message of kinship and love because, in their clans and extended families, they already felt they experienced both. Similarly, they could relate to the message of guilt and the need for atonement because in their traditional religion the quest for a rebalancing through purity and purification had been important. The ritual of baptism, so central to the Baptist form of Christianity, echoed, for the Cherokee, their traditional cold baths in streams, the ceremony they knew as “going to water.” Observers of Cherokee worshipers in the later twentieth century reported that, unlike Southern whites, they sat impassively through sermons and revivals and that men sometimes dozed as a preacher reached the emotional heights of his sermon. At death, Cherokee mourners have been reported as keeping to their traditional pre-Christian funeral ceremony. Given this and similar evidence, it is clear that Cherokee Christianity has actually been a blending of Christian and traditional themes. The Cherokee, like other Native American peoples, turn to Christianity in terms of prior beliefs and practices that make the new religion plausible. After conversion, worshipers shape Christianity to their own requirements.

At the same time, Indian Christians have been vigorous in their commitment to the new ways, even as they have worked to assert native control over them. A key example in our time is the Catholic Native Americans who participate in annual **Kateri Tekakwitha Conferences** and smaller **Kateri circles**. Named for Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, a seventeenth-century Mohawk convert to

Catholicism who is now a candidate for sainthood in the Catholic church, the Kateri conferences and movement signal the strength of Catholicism in native circles. Native leadership is important to the conferences, as are native languages, musical instruments, and prayer instruments (such as eagle staffs, feathers, sacred pipes, incense for smudging, and the like). Vestments display native designs, and native ritual traditions are honored. This practice of **inculturation**—the inclusion of native symbols and rituals in official church services—has apparently been successful. In the early twenty-first century, half a million Native Americans in over 300 nations and tribal groups have identified themselves as Catholics. In their midst, the Kateri movement remains perhaps the largest recent religious expression of Indian people.

Kateri Tekakwitha Conferences, with their Catholicism, fare well in gaining general cultural understanding and acceptance by non-Indian Americans. But Native American religions have not always enjoyed such acceptance and respect. The story of the Ghost Dance tells that. So does a history of repression of Native American ceremonies by the federal government until very recently. It was only in 1978 that the nation saw the passage of the **American Indian Religious Freedom Act**, in which Congress resolved that “it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise [their] traditional religions.” Even after that, Indian tradition did not prevail in white America. A series of court challenges by Indian peoples invoked the congressional resolution to little avail.

In these court cases, it is land that typically has been at stake. For Native Americans, this means sacred sites associated with traditional religious beliefs and ceremonies. In the case of *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association*, for example, the United States Supreme Court in 1988 decided against Native American plaintiffs. The United States Forest Service proposed to build a paved road between Gaston and Orleans, California (the “G-O Road”), to be used for logging and other commercial and recreational purposes. This road was to cross land in the Six Rivers National Forest and to pass through an area considered highly sacred by Yurok, Karok, and Tolowa Indians. The Indians argued that important ceremonies required that religious leaders have access to the “high country” and that the proposed road would violate the undisturbed sacredness of the space. The Indians won their case in United States District Court, but the Supreme Court reversed the decision.

However, it was not legal contention over a sacred site that finally brought Indian religious difference and its right to exist to national attention. Rather, it was the practice of Indian peyotism, a Supreme Court case regarding it, and a new federal law thereafter. Indian peyotism became the focus of mainstream public concern in 1990 when a case involving the ceremonial practice made its way to the United States Supreme Court. Two members of the Native American Church in Douglas County, Oregon, had been discharged from their substance abuse counseling positions because of their peyotism. Alfred Smith and Galen Black were subsequently denied unemployment benefits by the state of Oregon. They appealed

at the state level and won their cases in light of the “free exercise” clause of the United States Constitution’s Bill of Rights. They had eaten peyote sacramentally; they ought not to have been refused unemployment compensation for misconduct, said the Oregon Supreme Court. The *Smith* case eventually was appealed to the United States Supreme Court twice, and on the second appeal, in *Oregon v. Smith*, the Court held that a valid—and neutral—state law could be enforced even if that law conflicted with the practice of religion. The free exercise right of an individual did not, according to the Court, exempt the person from a general law.

Non-Indian religious leaders from a broad coalition of groups read the *Smith* decision as a threat. Some sixty-eight organizations, diverse in their theology, their religious practice, and their politics, joined forces in the wake of the Supreme Court case. Their efforts temporarily succeeded in 1993 when Congress passed the **Religious Freedom Restoration Act**, a law that insisted on a “compelling” government interest before the state could intrude on religious activity. The government, said the law, must find the “least restrictive means” to its own ends when those ends came into conflict with religion. Four years later, in 1997, the Supreme Court responded. In a historic decision, the Court struck down the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The Congress had exceeded its powers, the Supreme Court decision said. Ironically, the lower court test case on which the justices ruled had not concerned peyote, but Indian people were obviously affected.

Whether the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was constitutional or not, among Indian peoples peyotism—and other Native American religious practices—continue to flourish. With or without national attention and support, American Indians are creating and combining elements in their own religious responses to the times. Their understanding of sacred space and their political will to express their views and to work to achieve their goals are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Introduction
Chapter 1

In Overview

Native American religious traditions have been diverse, but Indians have held many things in common. Their sense of **continuity with the sacred world** has been expressed in beliefs regarding kinship with nature and in traditional sacred stories that reflect no break between the events of creation and the ordinary history of the people. For American Indians, the outer, **material world** has been holy, and so, too, has the **inner world of dreams**. Moving between the different worlds has meant that boundaries can be breached and **transformations** are important. Holy beings have been seen as shapeshifters, able to assume new form or change the world around them. Living in **harmony with the natural world** has been the great religious requirement, for Indians have thought that the human world should correspond with the natural one.

Among the **Oglala** of the North American Plains and the **Hopi** of the Southwest, different versions of Native American religion gave ordinary and

extraordinary meaning to existence. Like Indian societies in general, both collapsed ordinary and extraordinary religion into one. At the same time, the Oglala, a hunter-gatherer society, and the Hopi, an agricultural people, are case studies in diversity. Their respective traditions show us how American Indian religion really means American Indian religions. Still further, American Indians experienced religious change especially after the coming of Europeans. In a series of different forms of **religious combination**, elements from European Christianity blended with Native American beliefs and practices. Sometimes, “new” religions sprang up, while in still different instances Native Americans became converts to various Christian denominations and put their native mark on Christian expression. Meanwhile, in a series of court cases, despite their losses Native Americans continued to challenge Euro-American views of religion and to insist on the seriousness of Indian sacred ways.

The story of American Indian religions is a microcosm of the religious encounters that would confront each of the immigrant groups that came to the United States. All would come with the ways of their ancestors; all would intend to preserve them. Yet each people was one among many “nations” present in the new country, and the presence of other ways led to changes in traditional religions. Religious combinations characterized American Indians and non-Indians alike. The people of Israel—the Jews—are a case in point. Like Native Americans, for centuries they were sojourners more than settlers, and also like Native Americans, they sought to preserve their traditions even as in America they took and combined religious ideas and expressions from their Protestant neighbors.