

THE WAKAN OF THE COYOTE
Practicing the Spirit

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PREFACE

For several years I have sought to interface theology and ecology. I hope for a theology that is understandable and can serve as a reflection and motivator in our Christian religion. Ecology is a fascination for me, too. How do things work? How is it understood? What do scientists say?

These two disciplines lead to a creative discourse that can enable our theology to be described in a more understandable form, informed by the study of ecology. Also, it is possible that a theological vision can give us some better insights into how to observe and interpret natural phenomena.

I am personally interested that the church tell her story, proclaim the gospel, and report to the world clearly her world view. We must be clear about the church's uniqueness, but we must be equally committed to sharing the faith story with people outside the religious community and with people with different religious persuasions.

When we parallel our thinking and contrast it with disciplines and traditions outside of our own we clarify for ourselves and gain new insights into what we believe and understand and develop respect for others and how they believe. This is what this interplay does for me.

THIS NEXT ITEM IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE READER. PLEASE READ CAREFULLY. The general intent of this resource is to create a dialogue using three areas of study: nature, culture, and the Christian tradition. Specifically the three disciplines for the dialogue are animals and their behavior, the spirituality of Native Americans¹, and the meaning of the Third Article of the Creeds (Nicene and Apostles'), i.e., the person of the Holy Spirit.

I have chosen to include Native People's spirituality² for several reasons. First, the United Nations has designated 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. Second, the 500 year celebration of Columbus has peaked interest in the cultures of Native People. Third, I am a tad concerned about how this emphasis is being used in today's "search" for spirituality. The conservative side of me raises concerns that we are watering down the Christian religion and the spirituality of Native People with some of the exchanges that have been occurring. This would be to the detriment of both traditions. Fourth, I think Christians need to learn how to live in a pluralistic world. This means respect for the religious/spiritual ideas and practices of others. It also means a better, deeper, more cohesive understanding of one's Christian roots. Articulation of this faith is

¹Hereafter the terminology will be Native People. In most cases, "people" is what the Native People call themselves. (See Glossary in Keepers of the Animals.)

²The Native People refer to their way of life as a spirituality rather than as a religion. For them religion is classical, incorporated, sectarian, and evangelical (Beck et al, 5).

vital. Fifth, the spirituality of Native People has depended upon their interpretation and understanding of the natural world and how the natural world works. There is no book on the subject in the same way Non-Native People have written documents. In specific ways for Native People the natural world is their scripture.

Native People's spirituality is grounded in the soul of the Native People. Gifts are brought which can benefit everyone. We can share in their reasons for celebration. Their insights, thinking, and practices can feed everyone in the same way the Christian religion can feed Native People. For Non-Native People we are reminded that everyone has aboriginal roots. Our ancestors can be traced back thousands of years to societies that lived closely with the Earth (Caduto and Bruchac, 4). This interaction with Native People's spirituality can remind the Non-Native people of the indigenous past.

Respect for Native People's spirituality must be practiced. We cannot abuse the "heart" of their very being. We can be sensitized and develop understanding and appreciation. But we must deeply appreciate that their culture and spirituality are one in the same. This spirituality also differs from tribe to tribe. In this resource caution is being taken to receive and acknowledge the gifts and knowledge Native People give to Non-Native people, especially Non-Native Christian people, and be careful about generalizations.

A word about the learning process of this resource. One idea which I have been contemplating is that one thing that distinguishes humans from non-humans is that humans "fix" consciousness.

What is consciousness? It is the capacity of a species or an individual organism to be aware of itself and aware of and responsive to its environment and to act on this information. Species have the capacity to adapt. Adaptation is the means by which a species enables itself to survive and procreate. The species has the capacity as a species to have a sense of itself and an awareness of and responsiveness to its environment. This I am calling consciousness. In some species this consciousness is identifiable in the individual. It can be the tree roots that do not intersect with each other, shying away from each other's roots, to the complex creatures that can avoid their predators by various adaptations, e.g. camouflage, speed, etc.

Consciousness in one form or another exists in all things. It is kind of ethereal, i.e., it is around us. I am suggesting that humans have the capacity to "sponge it up." We have our own self-consciousness, but we can also be sensitive to the consciousness of other organisms. In fact, we can in a sense draw it unto ourselves, ingest it, and spew it out. Humans can adapt all types of things to themselves. Humans read the past, interact with the present, and plot the future. Humans can anticipate, speculate, and project. It is not that humans have more consciousness. It is just that we can gather more in, i.e. "fix" it, and use and disperse it in many ways for good or ill.

The idea for this metaphor comes from the idea of organisms that fix nitrogen. Nitrogen encompasses 80% of the earth's gas. However, in order for nitrogen to serve the environment it must be capsulated in some way. This is called nitrogen fixation, the conversion of atmospheric nitrogen gas into other chemical forms that are useful to plants.

Humans fix consciousness in this way, converting it into something useful, processing, holding, and releasing it for the good of the creation. This is one gift humanity has for the rest of the world. It can be appropriately applied or abused.

Education is intended to stimulate and guide humans in this role of fixing consciousness, i.e., ingesting it, converting it, and using it for the sake of others. One could call education "culture." Persons are prepared through the educational process to hold and to release not just information, but consciousness, awareness, moral action, and goodness into the world.

This makes the role of educator extremely imposing. The teacher does not simply instruct the learner in facts. The educator is key to the learner's development of values in the light of the facts and actions in the light of the values. The concern of education is what materials are gathered, how they are converted, and the way in which they are used.

In the context of the educator's role I submit the following as a method for thinking through the learning process. It is a play on the word "fix." This resource is designed with this process in mind.

FIXING CONSCIOUSNESS a learning process

Fact -

Any type of learning activity

1. Immerse learner in a complex/interactive activity that engages a person's body, mind, and senses.
2. Learner must view experience as personally meaningful and challenging.

Integrate -

Verbalize

1. Share feelings
2. Articulate in own words

Organize

1. Fit activity into one's own experience.
2. Conceptualize:
 - a. Distinguish parts
 - b. Recognize history
 - c. Organize parts into whole

eXecute -

Generalize

1. Identify learnings
2. Relate learnings to other experiences of the learners

Apply

1. Specify situations to which learnings can apply (future)
2. Decide strategies for action

INTRODUCTION

Until Christians practice living ecologically with the Earth, animals, other human beings, and God, the appropriate expression of the Christian faith will not be accomplished and allies of the Earth will be fewer.

How are we related to the Earth? The word "human" comes from the word "humus," dirt that is composed of decaying material. ("Humus" is derived from a word meaning "death.") Decay, amazingly enough, is the way organisms are broken down and nurture other organisms. Humility also comes from this root.¹

Humans are animals? The word comes from *anima* meaning "breath." Humans are referred to as "human animals." However, organisms in addition to animals breathe. Without breath there is no life.

Humans are also related to God. This could be seen from a mystical perspective. For Christians the perspective of God is grounded in water, word, bread, wine, and community. We are not casually related or just tethered to God. There is an intentional bond with humanity initiated by God. When speaking of this aspect of God we generally use the term "Holy Spirit."

The concept of the Holy Spirit is not easy to grasp, but it is central to our faith. The Christian church claims that the Spirit is the Prime Mover of our personal faith, gives us the ability to say, "Jesus is Lord," and gathers the people into Christian community.

The Spirit is God-near and God-at-work. The Spirit is invested throughout and in all of life. The Spirit is God unseen.

This resource intends to help Christians learn that that which links humans with the Earth, animals, and God is found in the words "spirit" and "spirituality."

The sub theme for this resource is "Practicing the Spirit." Christian spirituality is something we do. As the reader will discover later in this paper, Christian spirituality is living in the mystery of all creation within and beyond the obvious. Thus, this type of spirituality requires training as it would be for an athlete or an artist.

The practice of Christian spirituality has three parts. First, there is the knowledge of and trust in the Holy Spirit, the one who guides our lives. Second, the Spirit is in competition with other spirits of our time. How do we know which is which? The Bible, the sacred scriptures of the Church, gives us a key for recognizing the Spirit. Third, we practice the Spirit in three specific ways: the ritual/cultic life of the Christian community, life-styles of the Spirit, and the community of faith itself, i.e., the church.

One of the resources for reflecting on Christian spirituality is the spirituality of Native People. Until recently Non-Native people have perpetuated in one form or another the notion that "Indians" are either brutal savages or innocent children of nature (Brown, 7). The Native People, as we shall discover, are very sophisticated. They developed skills and knowledge that enabled them to live with the natural world.

¹In Hebrew "Adam" comes from *adamah* which means "soil."

It is generally accepted that the Native People were immigrants from Asia 15,000 to 20,000 years ago, near the end of the Ice Age (Underhill, 110). Some say 40,000 years ago. The Native People were usually nomads. They owned what they carried. Yet what carried them, the earth, the water, the sky, also belonged to them.

To think we can learn from the Native People may be a bit perplexing and disturbing to some individuals because the Native People do not demonstrate the type of achievement we see blessed and honored in the Non-Native People's cultures. Where is the wealth of the Native People? Where is their power?

Native People have been measured by many Non-Native People according to their material achievement. How can someone who has not known great material wealth be considered worthwhile for us or having something that would be of value to us? The fact is, the wealth of the Native People is found in their mental and spiritual achievements (Brown, 8-9). What they can share is filled with deep meaning and complex understanding.

The method of learning differs between Native People and Non-Native people in its most traditional sense. One could describe the difference between them as knowledge which focuses on the welfare of the tribe and knowledge that focuses on the welfare of the individual. Learning is by listening and relationships rather than books and libraries. An individual in the tribe learns what must be taught. For Native People, information for living is important for the tribe. Each person is a part of the knowledge bank. Non-Native people tend to want to fill the individual with all the culture.

Joseph Brown wrote in a pamphlet in 1967:

If we can understand . . . the truths which the Indian finds in his relationships to nature, and the profound values reflected by his many rites and symbols, then we may become enriched, our understanding will deepen, and we shall be able to give to the American Indian heritage its rightful place among the great spiritual traditions of mankind (Brown, 27).

Native American tribal spirituality cannot be lumped together. However, these six basic concepts are shared by most Native People:

1. A belief in or knowledge of unseen powers, or what some call the Great Mystery, the Great Spirit, the Creator.
2. Knowledge that all things in the universe are dependent upon each other.
3. Personal worship that reinforces the bond between the individual, the community, and the great powers. Worship is a personal commitment to the sources of life.
4. Sacred traditions and persons knowledgeable in sacred traditions responsible for teaching morals and ethics.
5. Trained practitioners who have been given names such as medicine men, priests, shamans, cacques, and other names. These individuals have titles given them by the people which differ from tribe to tribe. They are responsible for specialized, perhaps secret, knowledge. They help pass

knowledge and sacred practices from generation to generation, sharing what they know in their memories.

6. A belief that humor is a necessary part of the sacred and a belief that human beings are often weak. We are not gods - and our weakness leads us to do foolish things. Therefore, clowns and similar figures are needed to show us how we act and why (Beck et al, 8-9).

There are three basic insights that can assist us in the dialogue of Native People's spirituality and the understanding of the Christian faith.

First, students of world religions use the categories of ethnic religions and universal religions. Native People's spirituality could fit under ethnic religion because of its intimacy with Native People cultures and languages. But Native People's spirituality might better fit under the heading of tribal religion, since the variations are more detailed than the term ethnic implies.

Christianity, on the other hand, is a universal religion. It is found in many cultures and has shaped and been shaped by these cultures. Its language and character will reflect the culture, but the centrality of the Christian tradition is very obvious from culture to culture.

Second, Christianity is unique among the religions of the world in that there is belief in the Incarnation, God becoming a human being, and resurrection, i.e., people die completely and are raised to life solely by the activity of God. This distinction complicates the dialogue of Christianity with other world religions.

Third, there is the distinction between doxological and soteriological types of religion. "Doxology" comes from the root words *doxa* - glory and *logo* - word, i.e. words of glory or worship. "Soteriology" means *soter* - deliverance/salvation and *logos* - word, i.e. the word of deliverance or salvation.

Religions have their own self-understanding. They express themselves in worship (doxological) and their understanding of salvation (soteriological). How does one learn the difference? One simply asks the question: how does the religion work? How do its prescribed practices bring its participants into relation with the ultimate reality defined by its doctrines? (Moore, 17-18)

One could say that for the most part Native People's spirituality is doxological and for the most part Christianity is soteriological by the most part. However, there are aspects of soteriology in the beliefs and practices of Native People, e.g. the Buffalo Calf Women of the Lakota. In some instances one might need to distinguish between specific practices.

These categories of doxological and soteriological are presented in this paper to help with interpreting what we experience and practice and not specific definition and universal application.

Though the ways of expression vary, there is a commonality found in that both the Native People's and the Christian church's traditions have a sense of solidarity with all creation, a format of story, liturgy, prayer, devotion, a life style of peace, and an understanding of Creator.

The Native People's spirituality has become popularized in many circles being used in some aspects of the "New Age" movement. There also tends to be a mixing of the Native People's spirituality and Christianity. This is not new because it has been going on for close to 500 years. This can contribute to more confusion.

I do not want to misrepresent the spirituality of Native People nor do I want to simplify it so that it can be palatable, comfortable, and/or similar to the Christian faith.

There are two themes related to the Native People's spirituality that need to be spelled out: what the Lakota people call mystery (wakan) and "nature persons."

The Mystery

Native People's spirituality is the "spirit of wonder," the recognition of life as power, as a mysterious, ever-present concentrated form of non-material energy, of something loose about the world and contained in a more or less condensed degree by every object (Beck et al, 9). The Lakota call it "wakan." A Teton Sioux man put it this way:

We cannot see the thunder, and we say it is wakan, but we see the lightning and we know that the thunder and the lightning are a sign of rain, which does good to the earth. Anything which has similar power is wakan, but above all is the sun, which has the most power of all (Beck et al, 10).

In Lakota wakan (the mystery, the power filled, the extraordinary) is found within the ikceya (the obvious, the profane, the pitiful) in all of life (Stolzman, 152). The Native People's sacred traditions observe these concepts as one. A great part of their tradition is to respect the power, listen silently, and learn (Beck et al, 11). Each individual entity has wakan.

Ruth Underhill quotes La Fleche:

All life is wakan. So also is everything which exhibits power, whether in action, as the winds and drifting clouds, or in passive endurance, as a boulder by the wayside. For even the commonest sticks and stones have a spiritual essence which must be revered as a manifestation of the all-pervading mysterious power that fills the universe (Underhill, 21).

Wakan Tanka is the "Great Mystery" which is far beyond human comprehension (McGaa, 77). This is the supernatural. Some use the words "the Great Spirit"² and "Creator." However, such a being is not referred to in personal terms by the Native People as it is by Non-Native people (Underhill, 5). The Native People deplore exactness in describing Wakan Tanka. It is felt it should be a mystery.

Traditional Indians believe that attempts to describe to another two-legged an overly defined concept of the mysterious vastness of the Great Provider of all are

²The concept of the Great Spirit is more closely allied with the Christian's understanding of the First Article of the Creed, Creator Spirit, rather than the complexity of the Third Article of the Creed which describes the Holy Spirit.

crude and unmannerly and show lack of humility (McGaa, 44).

That which is wakan can be defined as an animating (moving, vitalizing, life-giving) force or vital principle. It is a will that is unseen and intangible (Beck et al, 5). It is not difficult to see how people close to nature can be sensitive to its flow.

Wakan is also the sacred. For Native People the world of nature is their temple and within this sanctuary they show great respect to every form, function, and power. Reverence for nature is central to their spirituality. Each form in the world around them bears such a host of precise values and meanings (Brown, 16).

It is always a source of wonder that the unseen and intangible tie or hold us to the world that is so visible, filled with different life forms. That is what makes the sacred so difficult to discuss. When you wonder, you are silent. There are no words to express this bond to the Great Mystery (Beck et al, 8). Thus, all life is sacred, both being and action.

Nature Persons

The Lakota reverence for nature is the result of their belief that animals, plants, and rocks have their own "wakan." They are commonly referred to as "persons." (Brown, 43)

For the Native People everything in the world is alive, and everything can help or harm. All creatures are "nature persons." They, like human persons, are to be treated appropriately: courteously, not exploited, favors requested, favors returned. Give and take is a basic rule (Underhill, 40-41).

The range of "nature persons," from the animals to the thunder, the winds, and the heavenly bodies, can be found everywhere. The emphasis, however, is very different with some of the hunter-gatherers in the desert area, the animals seem to be almost the only Powers present in man's thought. In the wide open Plains, the animals bring visions, but ceremonial reverence is offered to the directions - to the earth, the sky, and the four quarters of the world or the winds which personate them. Sometimes the sky power is focused in the sun, as one who is able to see all and can be a witness to behavior. Each of these has mana (wakan) in its own sphere. The world is full of distributed power so that man lives constantly among potential companions and helpers (Underhill, 46-47).

In the non-human world animals³ are the most important "nature persons." There are more rituals for them than the humble rocks and plants. This is probably because hunting is more precarious, and hunters need more help (Underhill, 177).

The Native People make this distinction between human persons and animal people: in their stories it is the animal that comes first. In some instances animals create humans. Animals are considered elders to humans as well as teachers. Thus, it is wise for the human to listen to the animals (Caduto and Bruchac, 4).

"Long ago, back when the animals could talk and people could understand them . .

³Most Native people languages do not have a word such as "animal."

." is the way some stories begin. More than likely animals still talk, but people no longer know how to listen (Caduto and Bruchac, 4).

Another subject for discussion in this resource is the study of animals. We will take the opportunity to look into a world that is often perceived as wild and inherently destructive to the human species.

In some ways we may have been misguided by an interpretation that has been put upon Darwin's "survival of the fittest." Contrary to public opinion this does not mean that one species exercises dominion over others. Also, Darwin's statement, "Nature is red in tooth and claw," has elevated the notion of competition within the non-human world and that animals are "complex bundles of survival functions."

Animals, like all species, are in the process of adapting to their environment. (Actually, those species which have the capability to survive are those who are "fit" to reproduce.) Competition, as well, is more the exception than the rule. Mutualism and cooperation are more the order of the day. There is a mystery about the nature of animals that transcends human explanation (Marten, May, and Taylor, 8). This is not true for all animals, but there are behaviors that indicate animals are courting, performing rituals, caring for the young, cooperating, sacrificing, grieving, and so on.

Of all the animals that could be selected why choose the coyote? Could there not be a better animal, one less profane? Or might its ignoble character be the coyote's appeal? A coyote is an awesome and an ambiguous creature. The coyote is a mystery to us (a wakan), unfortunately, a mystery that can be shrouded in fear.

We might need to remythologize the coyote. The coyote is a part of the ecosystem and yet has been declared by the United States Government a nuisance that can be eliminated.

Hope Ryden, in her book God's Dog, says:

. . . studies revealed the coyote to be an animal indeed more wonderful, more beautiful, and more to be admired than all the logical reasons . . . set forth to demonstrate why he is so vitally important to whole biotic communities. An older and wiser culture understood all of this when they spoke of him as "God's Dog." (Ryden, XIII)

In Native North American stories the coyote appears in many forms: trickster, transformer, and fool. He has a unique way of gaining wisdom through spectacular and superhuman experiences. Coyote can change form and is a smooth talker. In some stories coyote dies, only to return to life. Still, coyote is regarded as having a certain malevolent benevolence and many good lessons are learned by those who listen well to coyote's exploits and the outcomes.

In fact and story the Coyote is not as neatly definable as other animals. Barre Toelken, in the Forward to Barry Lopez's book, Giving Birth to Thunder . . ., puts it cleverly:

Say, if you will (and some have), that Coyote is the exponent of all possibilities through whose antics and actions we see ourselves and the moral ramifications of our thoughts; or say that Coyote is the philosophical embodiment of a native world

view of relationships between mankind and nature; or say that Coyote is a freak of the primitive mind - the impulsive and self-destructive character that proves the savage did not "have it all together." Or say simply that Coyote is a Gemini. All these things are true; all these things are false (Lopez, xii).

The Navajo saw the coyote as a god. The Hopi perceived the coyote as a laughable fool.

In Crow mythology Old Man Coyote's position was supreme. The Northwestern tribe not only regarded him as "First Worker," creator of the earth and all living creatures, but also believed him to be the founder of human customs. Yet because life on earth was so obviously full of error, it naturally followed that Old Man Coyote himself must be fallible and though inordinately clever, capable of being duped. The Crows saw no inconsistency in casting the coyote in various roles of transformer, trickster, and fool. They relished stories in which their hero received his come-uppance from lesser animals. Mankind, then as now, delighted in the fall of the mighty. Nevertheless, the coyote was no less venerated for being vulnerable (Ryden, XIII-IX).

For other tribes coyote was not the supreme symbol of the Universal Principle, but coyote was given a special place in their understanding of creation (Ryden, IX).

Stories about Coyotes, a name that cannot be mentioned in the summer by the Navajos⁴, are funny, but they are not intended to be funny. The listener laughs at the way coyote does things and how the story is told. If the listener hears the real meaning of the story the listeners will grow up to be good (Beck et al, 61).

The Creator, one story goes, could not do everything. Some tasks were left to helpers who were bunglers or just plain mischievous. Coyote, being told to place the stars in the sky in geometric order, dropped the sack that contained them, and they scattered every which way (Underhill, 34).

Perhaps only humans are as capable of change, of adapting behavior, food sources, and rhythms for survival's sake, as our close neighbor the coyote. But we have responded to the coyote and to both the gray and red wolf, by declaring war on them - shooting, trapping, snaring, hunting, gassing, and poisoning these wild dogs not to mention leveling, paving, flooding, and developing their habitat (Caduto and Bruchac, 167).

How vicious is the coyote? There are various opinions. They have not attacked humans in packs. They often will roll over belly-up when captured. Some renegade coyotes do kill sheep. Most coyotes living near farms actually help to drive away potential threats to livestock. Their normal food consists of woodchucks, rabbits, mice, and voles, fruit corn, dead animals, and occasionally, a stray pet (Caduto and Bruchac, 167).

The scientific name for the coyote is canis latrans, wolf prairie. This animal is native only to the North American continent (Ryden, VII).

⁴Words have power. They can invoke and provoke. The art of story telling is precise. This, too, is sacred.

Coyotes are known to be territorial. A male will bring food to his mate when she is nursing the pups. Observers have seen coyotes regurgitate food for a mate (Ryden, 18-20).

The coyote may have moved into the niche of meat eater in some habitats because other predators like the bear, badger, weasel, and wolf have vanished.

A coyote's behavior might be strikingly different if other animals with greater strength were in their ecosystem. The competition would create a different type of response from them (Ryden, 25).

In 1937 Adolph Murie, a game biologist, studied coyotes and published information that the coyote was not a beast intending to destroy humans. He also learned that coyote predation was minimal, selective, and more than likely beneficial to the prey species (Ryden, 35-36).

Coyotes themselves are short lived. They are subject to disease. Starvation is a major cause of death. It reminds us that it is the predator species that hangs in the precious balance and not the prey (Ryden, 40).

Coyotes tend to move purposefully, but they are easily sidetracked to chase down a small animal.

Urine is the coyote's signature. It is used for staking out territory, identifying food, and committing to a mate (Ryden, 51-52).

It seems there is a symbiotic relationship between coyotes, magpies, and ravens. In summer the birds will clean up a carcass left by a coyote. In winter the birds can locate the prey. Another benefit is that the birds can warn the coyotes of coming danger (Ryden, 80-81).

One does not discipline a coyote. One simply learns how to cooperate with him (Ryden, 110).

Affectionate, sociable, and cooperative, coyotes mate for life and remain together as a pair year-round.⁵ When the six to eight pups disperse in the fall or late summer, one young pup remains behind with the parents to help raise next year's litter in the spring, in case something happens to one of the parents before the young are old enough to fend for themselves (Caduto and Bruchac, 167).

The characteristics of the coyote being used in this resource are God's Dog (Day 1), the teacher (Day 2), the survivor/transformer (Day 3), the fool and trickster (Day 4), and the indigenous alien (Day 5).

To be helpful to the reader the following chart is presented to outline the interaction between the study of animals, Native People's spirituality, and the Christian tradition.

⁵Canids are endowed with an amazing capacity for attachment to one another, a quality that enabled men to domesticate the dog and bind this innate devotion to himself (Ryden, 82).

Learned from the Animal/Natural World	Native People Spirituality	Teachings of the Christian Faith	Eco-Evangelical Spirituality	Multi-Cultural Multi-Religious Multi-Gender	Coyote Mnemonic Device
Reciprocity, Balance and Harmony	The Circle Wakan (the Mystery) Respect Give and Take	Holy Spirit Creator Spirit Restoring Spirit Forgiving Spirit Sanctifier	Creating, Redeeming, and Sanctifying God Involved in All Creation	Diversity is acknowledging the wakan in each individual	God's Dog
Life in the tension between sustenance and destruction	Necessary knowledge to live in tension learned from "Nature Persons"	The Word for Life First, Event - Jesus Christ Second, the Proclamation Third, the Written Record (Bible)	Knowledge from scripture and natural world considered sacred and viable	Each person and culture is a source of information	Teacher
Intangible necessities for existence: Cleansing (Restoration), Endurance, and Courage	Ritual and Story	Worship (Valuing) Thanksgiving (Taking Pleasure/Being Pleased with) Sacraments Gospel Stories	The Celebration of solidarity with God and all creation (Erdgebundenheit)	Necessities for mutual living: Self-esteem Trust Willingness to Settle Conflicts Communication Skills	Survivor and Transformer
Each Organism has a Profession (Niche)	Vision (the story line for one's life) and The use of stories for instruction and behavior modification	Gifts of the Spirit Fruits of the Spirit Sanctification	The Vision of Ecological Evangelism that gives to a person identity and profession to make the world a better Place	The treatment of others depends upon mental images of them (Stereotyping)	Trickster and Fool
Habitat Requirements	Community Centered (i.e., Tribe and Family) Sacred Circle Healing	Community of Faith Body of Christ	Life in the community of the spirit and all creation healing the Earth	Inclusivity acknowledges, celebrates, and responds to diversity within the whole	The Indigenous Alien

✓ Captain Pyramid

fridge
self

✓ Octopus

✓ Bib tag
Garbage game

✓ stress challenge

parachute

Earth ball

circle

tag

SPUD

CHAPTER ONE

In the natural world we discover there is reciprocity, give and take, harmony and balance. Creation is intended for the benefit of all equally.

As one studies the ecosystem one understands the interrelatedness and interdependence of all creation. There are various cycles: earth, water, air, etc. The food chain has many links beginning with the simplest forms requiring something to feed it. Though the sun is the source of energy it depends upon various species to transport that energy to other species.

The Native People understand that all life is within a reciprocal circle. At the heart of their spirituality is what the Sioux say in their ceremonies, "Mitakuye oyasin" (we are related to all things) (McGaa, XVII). The world is the property of the One who creates it and holds it together. It does not belong to humans (Caduto and Bruchac, 8).

Everything, though having its own individuality and special place, is dependent on and shares in the growth and work of everything else. This means, for example, that if you take the life of an animal you have to let that animal know why you are doing so and that you take full responsibility for your act. Why? One reason is because it is a way of showing that you understand the balances that exist in all natural systems, or ecology. Another reason (perhaps harder to see) is because human beings and animals have a relationship to one another. Animals, for instance, know why they are in the presence of human beings and they learn to avoid places where one of their own members has been killed. The elders and the oral histories tell us that long ago we once could speak the language of animals and that our survival depends on maintaining the relationship between animals, plants, rivers, feeding grounds, etc. Keeping this in mind, then, the concept of dependency and respect is not difficult to understand (Beck et al, 12).

Vine Deloria, in the introduction to Keepers of the Animals says,

Native North Americans saw themselves as participants in a great natural order of life, related in some fundamental manner to every other living species. It is said that each species had a particular knowledge of the universe and specific skills for living in it. Human beings had a little bit of knowledge and some basic skills, but we could not compare with any other animals as far as speed, strength, cunning, and intelligence (Caduto and Bruchac, XI).

The interconnectedness with nature is the appreciation that in one way or another all things are related to each other, both animate and inanimate. Rocks contain minerals also contained in animals. In a sense the Earth is us. We are all one body. Native People see this within the wonder of the cosmic flow that never ceases (McGaa, XVI). In this way of thinking they do not perceive themselves as passive children of nature, but dynamic personalities of great force, courage, and intelligence who undergo intense suffering and sacrifice in becoming what they are and in preserving what they have (Brown, 21).

Spiritual development for Native People occurs in several ways. First, it is derived from their close contact with nature. Second, the experience of nature is both what is observed and what is mysterious (discussed earlier). Third, Native People rigorously participate in a multitude of rituals and symbols which have for them a

supernatural origin and are very complex (Brown, 20). Fourth, stories are essential. They are used to teach the relationship between people, animals, and the rest of the Earth (Caduto and Bruchac, XVIII).

One could say there are two ways to look at nature, a mechanistic model and a sacred model. What makes Native People's spirituality unique is that life is perceived and interpreted as sacred. For those who choose a mechanistic model it often requires determining what nature is "good for" in order to describe how nature fits into the providence of the Supreme Being. Once that is determined and the ends are beneficial to humans (that is "the bottom line") then it is considered sacred. For the Native People the world is sacred first. In one of his speeches Chief Seattle says, "Every part of this soil is sacred" (Cummings, 3).

For the Christian the word "Spirit" describes the wholeness of God. We meet the Spirit in the first creation story, brooding over the water. The spirit leads the Israelites out of Egypt (Isaiah 53:11-14). The Spirit anoints the prophet (Isaiah 61:1 ff).

The Spirit is God-present and God-at-work. The God of the Hebrews and the Christian is God involved in life.

The Spirit brings into the present God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer. In the Nicene Creed it states that the Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." We can understand this idea in four ways.

First, this ties the Spirit closely to the resurrected Christ. (In the New Testament the Spirit and the risen Christ are hard to distinguish from each other.) Second, the Spirit is the principle of relationship and unity (Peters, 251). Third, the Spirit brings the past of history into the present. Fourth, the Spirit makes the future fulfillment of God's realm present to hope. The Spirit collapses time (Peters, 229-230).

Tom Peters identifies the Holy Spirit with what he calls "the three magnificent virtues (that) imbue the life of beatitude: faith, hope, and love."

In faith the Holy Spirit makes Christ present to us; it unifies what is separated by time and space so that the happy exchange can actually take place in our lives. In hope, the Spirit illumines our consciousness with visions of God's future, with the freeing confidence that the divine promises will attain fulfillment. In love, the Spirit actually releases the power that bears effective witness to the ongoing work of reconciliation. These three magnificent virtues imbue the life of beatitude (Peters, 233-234).

Faith, too, is the work of the Holy Spirit and is the very presence of Christ in one's life. This is what makes Christian faith distinctive.

The concept of faith has many facets. 1) Faith is believing what cannot be proved, i.e., intellectual assent. 2) Faith is trust. We put our lives into someone else's hands. 3) Faith is a response to God's act of grace. God initiates, and we respond. 4) Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. In Luther's Explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed we say, "I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel . . ." 5) Faith is ultimately the very presence of the

risen Christ in one's life.

. . . the presence of Christ is absolutely crucial to an understanding of pneumatology and Christian faith. (The Christian faith says nothing more than that we have been called into the immediacy of the mystery of God himself and that this mystery gives itself to us in unmeasurable nearness (Rahner).) So close is the identification of the resurrected Christ with the Holy Spirit that they are almost interchangeable in the New Testament. Whether it be the indwelling of the Spirit (Romans 8:9) or the indwelling of Christ (Romans 8:10), in faith we become united with God and receive new life (Peters, 235-236).

Another approach is to say "Spirit" is the ecological word for God. God is in relationship with all of creation and also is the force of the relationship.

Thus, the name "Spirit" for God deals with the wholeness of God. God is Creator and Redeemer. God forgives and creates a new creation., God gives faith. God in Christ is present in faith and present in hope. Our senses are roused. We name the Spirit. We acknowledge the Spirit, the very presence and power of God.

The human being must realize that life is not found only in the observable. There is a life force which moves within all of creation. The Lakota people call it Wakan Tanka. The Christian calls it the Holy Spirit.

Spirituality is the ability to live in community with both the obvious and the mystery and thereby find one's own humanity. One lives by faith, i.e., trust in the Holy Spirit, and in the knowledge that Christ is present in one's life. One lives within this reality by one's senses, grasping the world as a whole in a conscious and sensitive way.

CHAPTER TWO

All creatures know that they live precariously between being sustenance and destruction. Humans are also aware how close we are to self-destruction. The fetid world not only nourishes the soil, but can be the cause of death. It is like walking a tight rope.

True, we probably do not pay much attention to the possibilities of being destroyed because we seem to always be nurtured. Humans seeks to make that happen. Yet there are times when we are reminded how near the brink we stand: several years ago the salmonella outbreak, recently AIDS and Hepatitis B. What is in the future? We divine sanitary precautions because of the threat of disease, death, and destruction.

The plant and animal realms know precisely what it means to live in this tension of sustenance and destruction. They cooperate and compete. The prey avoids the predator, but for how long? In the animal world species depend upon finding food and protecting themselves to avoid their captors. Yet, they also reach a point of death and destruction. But not a death and destruction that is purposeless.

Humans have known this problem since the beginning of human life and have found ways to maintain and renew health. We also accept death as a part of the natural process.

How does one survive? There is a source of knowledge. For the Native People there is a source of information on how to live within the tension of sustenance and destruction and within the balance and harmony of the world. This information is through the natural world, namely through animals. It reaches deeply into their spirituality.

In animals Indians see actual reflection of the qualities of the Great Spirit which serve the same function as revealed scriptures in other religions. Animals are intermediators or links between humans and God. This explains not only why religious devotions may be directed to the deity through the animals, but it also helps us to understand why contact with, or from, the Great Spirit comes to the Indian almost exclusively through visions involving animal and other natural forms (Brown, 17).

We need to think in mega years. How have people learned? Who could be the teacher? Knowledge was gained through experiences that date back to the Pleistocene Age, two to three million years ago (Caduto and Bruchac, 9). What is noticeable is the use of totems. Animals are depicted. Universally they are the ones who lead humans in terms of how to live and how to behave (Caduto and Bruchac, 32).

The Native People have made a point of observing the other creatures and in modeling their own behavior after them. The technical skills of birds, animals, and reptiles were such that the Native People could take cues from them for their own welfare. For example, when Native People would go on a hunt they would usually return with information they learned from the animals. Often it was a dance (Caduto and Bruchac, 44).

Being guided and learning from nature is not peculiar to the Native People. The story of the Magi visiting Jesus recorded in Matthew reminds us that an event in the natural world guided them to where Jesus lived, namely a star. It was upon this information the Magi trusted.

Not only is there observed information. Stories are purposeful. Oral tradition teaches and passes on the sacred knowledge of the tribe (Beck et al, 57). There are appropriate times to tell stories. Some stories can be told only once a year. There are stories that can be told by only special persons.

Stories are the way the oral traditions are passed on. A story can be abused and mistold. This is an act against the Native People.

For Native People the revelation of how to live is rooted in nature. The observable and mysterious are grounded in their experience of and in the natural world.

I lift this up as a crucial distinction between the Native People's spirituality and the Christian faith. For the latter the revelation is grounded in history (and you thought I was going to say a book). The Bible reports a variety of things, but it essentially tells us of the God and human encounter in the context of specific events.

Christians understand the brink of disaster upon which all creatures walked. The source of knowledge, the information that is conveyed to us, is through the God who reveals the God-self to us.

When Jesus announces that he will go away he promises to send a paraclete, an advocate, a helper (John 15:15-17). It is not possible for Jesus to tell his followers

all they must know. However, someone will come to guide the believers. This is understood as the Holy Spirit.

In John 15 Jesus clearly states that if one loves God, one is obedient to God, and in this relationship God will be revealed. This has been understood throughout the ages that this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Peters states:

The power of the Holy Spirit makes the words of Jesus effective in our lives. We identify the presence of God through the concept of the spirit. Where the divine breath blows there is comfort, counsel, and truth (Peters, 229).

There is no simple way to describe how the Spirit works in our lives to lead us. The tension is between relying on the Spirit in some mystical way to convey information and trusting in something that conveys the Spirit.

Let me take you through some steps that help me understand the way God's knowledge is conveyed to us. It begins in our experience with faith. We hold that faith comes by the work of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Christian community. Note Luther's Explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed.

This faith, Paul says, comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). Hearing what? We hear the proclamation of the Gospel and respond. This refers particularly to an oral tradition, not a written tradition.

The analogy for me is how the flow of solar energy works in the food chain. This energy that makes life possible is acquired by animals through eating, the use of the mouth. How is the power of God specifically conveyed? It also goes through a chain, a faith chain, from one person of faith to another. Which anatomical part plays a role for the recipient? The ear.

Thus, the proclamation of the Gospel is the way God is conveyed through faith. What empowers us to speak? Paul says that we are able to say Jesus is Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit. (See I Corinthians 12:3 and John 3:34)

Our starting point is a dynamic event in time and space where something happens.

The progression of the Word of God goes like this:

First - there is an event. For us it is the event of Jesus Christ.

Second - there is the proclamation of the event. There is discussion of what occurred. One person tells another.

Third - there is the writing down of the proclamation. We call this the Bible.

What is at the heart of all of this? Peters says:

The gospel is the proclamation of the redemptive act in Jesus Christ, an act of divine grace by which sinners are forgiven and incorporated into the eternal life of the risen Savior (Peters, 57).

We have now returned to the beginning. The revelation of God is within the context of history - God's activity particularly in Christ.

How does scripture fit into the picture? We must see it within the context of God's intention that we receive further instruction, as an expression of faith of others so that we can have faith, as an instrument of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit in the same way faith is inspired and our ability to proclaim Christ is inspired, as a touchstone for understanding how the Spirit works in our lives. Luther would describe the Bible as the manger where the Christ-child can be found.

What makes this topic more exciting is that the Bible has two major functions. First, it is the means by which we discern how the Holy Spirit works in the world and particularly in our lives. Second, the Bible is the way God speaks to us.

First, Paul makes it quite clear in Galatians 4 and 5 that the way we discern the Spirit in our lives is that two things have happened in history and these two things become the norm for our discernment: first, God's son was sent into the world in order to bring redemption and, second, in this redemption we are no longer enslaved to the fates of life but set free. "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1a).

The Bible is that source to which we turn to be able to distinguish how God acts in the world. We call the Bible the norm and rule of faith and life. The Bible is the critical source. It is legitimate to ask of our religious life and our theological musings, "Is it Biblical?" (Peters, 52)

Second, God speaks in the Bible. Too often scripture is seen as a law book, as a proof text, as the predictor of the future (God's tarot cards). When scripture is used this way it speaks of human manipulation and human need to have a material idol, to be absolutely right, and to know the future.

Bonhoeffer puts it in a very insightful way. The Bible is where we go to listen to God speak to us. In a letter to Dr. Rüdiger Schleicher, Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, he says:

This is how I read the Bible now. I ask of each passage: What is God saying to us here? And I ask God that he would help us hear what he wants to say. So, we no longer look for general, eternal truths, which correspond with our own "eternal" nature and are, therefore, somehow self-evident to us. Instead, we seek the will of God, who is altogether strange to us, whose ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts, who hides himself from us under the sign of the cross, in which all our ways and thoughts have an end. God is completely other than the so-called eternal verities. Theirs is an eternity made up of our own thoughts and wishes. But God's Word begins by showing us the cross. And it is to the cross, to death and judgment before God, that our ways and thoughts (even the "eternal" ones) all lead (Bonhoeffer, Meditating on the Word, 45-46).

What is sin? In this instance sin can be described as using the self as the author and authenticator of knowledge. How do we walk the tight rope within the tension of sustenance and destruction? Only arrogance says we know the answers from within ourselves. One thing our genetic codes does not do is relay all knowledge to our brains. Our genes may contain the information, but they do not give us the needed knowledge.

It seems to me that the Christian is called to be attentive to how God has taught the world. There are two essential "documents" as I see them: the Bible and the natural world. In scripture (and by this I mean all the things and processes that go

into making it) we seek out God and how God acts. In the natural world we seek out what God is doing.

This may seem to be an oversimplification, but I think the point must be made. The creation is not God. But it is the arena of God's activity. We need to be attentive to what God is doing.

What has led us to our downfall in the abuse of the environment is that we have neither "read" nor "listened" to the natural world. It is now that we see disastrous results of human behavior and speculate on how this behavior can produce great disasters that suddenly we have prophets of doom and prospects of failure.

One way to say this is that in Christ we are set free to "read" God. This is within the domain of the work of the Spirit in our lives.

One of the positive results of looking at our world this way is that we can realize that in the human community there is a great resource of information. Every once in a while the comment is made that some of the old wives' tales about certain cures are valid. The old folks knew something. They knew a lot.

CHAPTER THREE

Cleansing, endurance, and courage are intangible ingredients for an organism to survive and cooperate. There are struggles with all types of destructive forces and competitive situations. Many organisms are able to cooperate with each other to mutually benefit each other. But others cannot. All eventually succumb.

Every organism that exists has its friends and enemies and needs to develop skills to survive. This process is ongoing; it never stops. The natural world is a dynamic place. Thus, species must constantly adapt to survive or become extinct.

Hope Ryden describes the surviving and transforming qualities of the coyote:

. . . it is to a large extent (the) ability of the coyote to adapt to diverse conditions that makes him so difficult to define. At the same time, this versatility is undoubtedly what has enabled the species to survive man's every effort to extirpate him. For the adaptable coyote not only is capable of bivouacking where he pleases, but seems able to adapt any number of life-styles. He can hunt either by day or night, dine on fresh meat or survive off of carrion, raid town garbage pits or feast on wild fruits and berries, den in burrows or whelp in conduit pipes, run in packs or operate as a loner. Bold coyotes can be observed in the alleyways of Los Angeles. But shy ones may be heard only in the wilderness, where they fill their private haunts with soulful cadenzas. Even the coyote's physical body reflects his protean quality. . . .

It would appear from this that the coyote may still be in the process of becoming, that Nature may not yet have set the successful adaptations the species has made over long ages of natural selection. The advantage to an animal of being in an unfinished state can best be demonstrated by noticing the fates of those North American animals who were better perfected for existence in their special niches. The bison and the wolf were rapidly vanquished when an agricultural and industrial society reshaped their habitats. The coyote, by contrast, met change with change and

survives. Thus, atypical behavior and unique responses, while frustrating to those who . . . look for definitive answers, may in fact be the creative side of the evolutionary process (Ryden, IX-X).

Another characteristic built into the genes of many animals is their ability to perform rituals. They are Oscar candidates for their dramatic courting rituals and luring techniques to protect their young.

For humans, survivability and cooperation are issues as well. We seek ways to make it through the task of living from day to day. In a world with more technological conveniences humans are less dependent upon resources within themselves to eke out life. Of great importance are cleansing, endurance, and courage.

The spirituality of Native People recognizes this need for cleansing, endurance, and courage. There is a constant need to individually and collectively revitalize the emotions and mystical experiences that make up the core of their guiding vision to secure the sacred ways.

Sacred means something special, out of the ordinary. Often it concerns a very personal part of each one of us because it describes our dreams, our changing, and our personal way of seeing the world. The sacred has two sides: the personal and the shared. Sacred ways are inseparable from the "ordinary" (Beck et al, 6).

The purposes of prayer and worship for Native People are:

1. Reinforcement of the bond between individuals and the Great Mystery (as long as it is done in the sacred manner).
2. Making the worshipper receptive to the blessings that are naturally available.
3. A means of giving thanks.
4. The centering of oneself in the world (Beck et al, 22).

Rituals revitalize and put into order the cosmology of a tribe or nation. In it the basic concepts are made possible for everyone to see. The building principles are acted out so everyone can understand (Beck et al, 35).

Ed McGaa says,

Ceremony, to the Indian, is a realization, an experiencing realization of the Spiritual that surrounds all. Ceremony brings both that profound, deeply powerful realization from beyond into the world of the two-legged (McGaa, 47).

Belief in prayer, rituals, and song affirms belief in words (Beck et al, 44). Songs and prayers are articulation of the breath (note connection with animals) and songs are often thoughts sung out with the breath when people are moved and ordinary speech no longer suffices (Beck et al, 42).

Prayer is the way Native People link themselves with the wakan of the world (Beck et al, 42). Tobacco, prayer stocks, feathers, corn meal, and pollen often accompany the prayer offerings. The choices vary from tribe to tribe.

The smoke that emerges from the pipe is breath reaching out in prayer.

The use of pollen as a symbol is significant. Pollen is one way a plant

communicates with another. It is that which makes fruit possible. In prayer that for which is being prayed is thereby also touched. Some of oneself is brought to another (Beck et al, 40).

The contents of prayer are usually requests for health, long life, prosperity, abundant crops, rain, and healthy children.

The objectives of ritual vary with the tribes. The most common denominator is that it is a communal feeling. In this experience the ideals and the practices of the community are strengthened, ties are renewed, and community between Native People and the Wakan Tanka is affirmed.

Rituals are scheduled in terms of important times of the year: solstices, planting, harvesting, distributing food, birth, naming, renaming, puberty, marriage, and death.

Rituals add a dramatic element to worship. They touch the emotions, the imagination, and the intensity of feeling.

Rituals provide two necessary ingredients to the sacred life of Native People:

1. Ordering and systematizing every way human society, the natural world, and the unseen world come together, and
2. Providing a physical expression of mystical experience for the individual and the group. Native People are transported from the ikceya (ordinary) to the wakan (mystery) (Beck et al, 35-37).

Rituals are performed out of necessity, not for entertainment. They help maintain the lives of the people.

According to Standing Bear:

The Indian loved to worship. From birth to death he revered his surroundings. He considered himself born in the luxurious lap of Mother Earth and no place was to him humble. There was nothing between him and the Big Holy. The contact was immediate and personal, and the blessings of Wakan Tanka flowed over the Indian like rain showered from the sky. Wakan Tanka was not aloof, apart, and ever seeking to quell evil forces. He did not punish the animals and birds, and likewise He did not punish man. He was not a punishing God. For there was never a question as to the supremacy of an evil power over the power of good. There was but one religious power, and that was good (Beck et al, 25).

Rituals traditionally involve three parts:

1. Purification - a person makes oneself empty. Sweat baths, smoking, and breathing are methods.
2. Blessing - prayers are offered for power and strength.
3. Sacrifice - a person gives of oneself to acknowledge that all things are interconnected. One suffers momentarily to become aware of self and so someone else will not have to do it (Beck et al, 23).

Central to the Lakota people is the Sacred Calf Pipe. It was brought to the Native People by the White Buffalo Woman. The story has several versions. The essentials of

the story are: Two hunters went out to seek game in a time of famine, and they saw a mysterious woman coming over the horizon. One hunter had evil desires and was reduced to a skeleton. The woman sent the other one back to prepare the people for her coming. The next day she brought the sacred bundle with the Calf Pipe and presented it to the people with instructions. As she left she turned into a buffalo calf from which the original pipe received his name (Steinmetz, 64).¹

The pipe is a portable altar and means of grace. The bowl, or the heat in the bowl, is the sacred center (Brown, 25). Smoke from the pipe represents the visible breath of the participants and stands for truth: truthful words, truthful actions, and a truthful spirit (McGaa, 57).

The pipe is perceived as the mediator between people, the idea of the peace pipe. Some have equated the pipe with Christ (Steinmetz, 37).

The pipe is used with seven traditional rites:

1. The Keeping of the Soul.
2. The Sweat Lodge Ceremony or Rite of Purification.
3. The Vision Quest.
4. The Sun Dance Ceremony.
5. Making Relatives
6. Preparing a Girl for Womanhood
7. Throwing the Ball

What comes as devastating information is that some of the ceremonies were outlawed by the United States Government. The Sun Dance was forbade in the 1800's because of the skewering of the flesh (McGaa, 150). The Keeping of the Soul ceremony was prohibited at the same time due to the influence of missionaries. By law the souls kept by the Sioux had to be released on a certain day (McGaa, 121). This is how the Give Away Ceremony got started.

Through the efforts of missionaries spiritual practices and beliefs of the Sioux were eradicated and outright destroyed. What the missionaries objected to was the reverence for nature and the appearance of the Buffalo Calf Woman. Young Sioux were forced to accept the European Americans' concept of God (McGaa, 126).

One of the significant ritual practices of Native People is based on their understanding of the give and take in the natural world. When a plant or animal is removed from its natural surroundings for use by humans, specific steps are taken to give thanks to the individual, to leave a gift, and not waste or abuse it in its use or in the disposal of it (Underhill, 116).

There is a beautiful story in After Nature's Revolt:

Heavily dressed for the half meter of snow covering the hillside, a small group of people stood quietly around what looked like a perfect, if rather large, Christmas tree. Mostly American Indians from a variety of tribes and all members of an Indian congregation, the people were speaking prayers on behalf of the tree. It could have been most any annual congregational outing to harvest a Christmas tree for their

¹The Sacred Pipe which is venerated as the original one is kept at Green Grass on the Cheyenne River Reservation in northern South Dakota (Steinmetz, 15).

church, except that these prayers were a thorough mixture of Christian prayers and traditional Indian tribal prayers. The two pastors held tobacco in their hands, ready to offer it back to the Creator, to offer it for the life of this tree, to offer it to the four directions, above and below, to offer it in order to maintain the harmony and balance of Creation even in the perpetration of an act of violence. Someone wrapped a string of colorful tobacco tie offerings around the trunk. As four men sang traditional prayer songs around a drum, the people came one by one up to the tree to touch it and say their prayers, some actually speaking to the tree, speaking consoling words of apology, gratitude, purpose, and promise (Tinker, 144).

A very dramatic demonstration of this attitude and practice is in the deer hunt. There are actually several ceremonies involved:

1. The dance - not just imitating the animal, but learned from the animal. The dance was intended to compliment the animal.
2. Hunters were taught animal etiquette from childhood. The first-fruit or the first kill is to be given to the old or needy.
3. Game animals and women were to be separated. The hunter stayed away from his wife before the hunt.
4. The hunter has a vision assuring him of the animal's love especially when hunting a mountain lion or an eagle. It is almost like going to war.
5. Tobacco and prayers are offered for good luck to a sacred object.
6. Songs would be sung. They use the appropriate words which are handed down by tradition.
7. Some use the sweat lodge in advance of the hunt.
8. In some cases, animals showed themselves only if the taboos had been observed.
9. When an animal is caught the Native People apologize to the creature.
10. Parts of the animal were either consumed or disposed of ceremonially (Underhill, 188-123).

The Cree story, "How the People Hunted the Moose," tells of the hunter's cycle as seen from the animal's point of view.²

Circle dances are done to celebrate the gift, to remind Native People of their interconnectedness with all of life, to strengthen the community, and to celebrate the giving circle and the circles of life of which all are a part. Circle dances are important aspects of living in balance with the animals (Caduto and Bruchac, 45).

Involved in the cultic life of Native People's spirituality is the story which is a sacred event. Not only is there observed information. The Native People devised stories about animals and plants that were also sources of information.

Teaching stories does not just tell about physical facts with ordinary events and plots. They also teach abstract notions of behavior, cosmology, and ways of seeing or thinking about things. Sometimes the story is like a code which, the more it is listened to over the years, the more it reveals. . . . This "coding" of knowledge in stories is like asking "why," because you have to listen more closely. Then you also have more of a chance to suddenly discover meanings, concepts, and ideas by yourself. . . . The "coding" has another advantage, the stories appeal to more people (Beck et al, 59-60).

²See Keepers of the Animals, 5.

Memorization is essential for passing on sacred knowledge. It is important for two reasons: 1) it diminishes the possibilities of inconsistencies in retelling stories and information and 2) without this information recorded in memory it may not be conveyed to the future since there was for a long time no written documents (Beck et al, 29-30).

Story tellers receive instruction that stories are meant to be told and not read aloud. They have their specific seasons. Bodies and endings of stories cannot be mixed (Caduto and Bruchac, 61).

There is a story told by the Navajo that highlights the way stories are used. It goes like this: Once there was a Master Slayer which killed all the monsters that preyed on people. However, four of the monsters were allowed to live:

- Poverty - If killed there would be no knowledge of needs. Poverty helps develop compassion for others. It sharpens up one's ability to look for and acquire the things one needs for oneself and what others need.
- Hunger - When your stomach becomes empty you will develop your mind to get food. You will become industrious and stop being lazy.
- Fatigue - Without this there would be a desire to work all the time and not sleep and take time to meditate. One must be replenished both physically and spiritually.
- Body Lice - Without this, one would not bother to be clean. Also, people would not comb each other's hair. This is a time for recreation. Thus, body lice forces people to make an effort to be clean, be sociable, and to play (Beck et al, 26-27).

When we look at ritual, prayer, and stories within the Christian community we must recognize several salient and parallel points.

Worship as expressed in ritual and ceremony identifies a connectedness between the human and God. In fact, one could say that worship is being caught up in the Spirit which is not a static understanding of God, but a dynamic one.

In worship the Christian experiences the Spirit of God in the state of becoming. That may seem disrespectful toward God. By that I mean when we speak in future terms of what God can, would, should, might do. "God is not finished with me, yet," reads one bumper sticker. The Lord's Prayer has several future elements in it, too.

The Spirit acknowledges that God is on the journey with us.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (II Corinthians 3:17).

We even look forward to the fulfillment of creation. (Peters, 233)

Thus, we worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). It is these attributes of

worship that bring cleansing and restoration to us, give us endurance and courage to deal with life. We have been freed from bondage and given a new being. We participate in Christ's death and resurrection as well as our own as a daily event. Our hope is in God, and we trust God's promises. Our worship captures these understandings.

Our connection is with a God who is more than a mystery. This is the God who is Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. We celebrate this Spirit who, according to the Nicene Creed, proceeds from the Father and the Son. As Christians we are specific about our source of energy. The Spirit is the Lord and giver of life.

Worship and thanksgiving have specific meanings within the Christian tradition. Worship comes from "worthyship" which has to do with recognizing value in something or someone else. Thanksgiving is rooted in the Latin word that is the same word used for "grace." The basic word means "pleasure."

Thus, worship and thanksgiving are actions of valuing and expressing pleasure with someone or something. We recount how God does this to the world and how the world responds to God reciprocally. We value and find pleasure in God.

In worship time is collapsed, both the past and the future. It is done through the simple act of remembering. What is discovered, however, in Christian worship is that the remembering begins with God remembering the world.

The contents of Christian worship are the proclamation of the Word, celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, and the gathering of the faithful. All of these elements acknowledge connectedness with God.

The stories of the Christian community are a critical part of the church's life. The Gospel is not just good news, stories needing interpretation. They have their own integrity. Stories are not limited to use in worship and Bible study. They can be told as situations develop where the story is appropriate.

Thus, stories are also integral in the Christian community's self-consciousness and self-understanding.

When concerned with cleansing (restoration), endurance, and courage one can be seduced into an egocentric motif or paradigm. Ritual and ceremony can be the thrust of one's life being done for self aggrandizement.

I propose that eco-evangelical spirituality is grounded in ritual and prayer and stories. With them we fix our consciousness of God and our solidarity with all of natural history. Jaroslav Pelikan uses one word to define spirituality, *Erdgebundenheit*, i.e., being bound to the earth. What are elements of valuing and pleasure between God and humanity are also elements that include all of creation. The connectedness must have a focus, and this focus is worship.

In worship we participate in a vision of a world that God redeems, makes new, and creates. It is a vision that begins with God's saving act, restoring gifts. It is grounded in the blood of Christ.

Christian worship follows a series of events in the human life from baptism to burial. These events become opportunities for remembering God's presence in our lives to do something with all creation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Everything that exists has a place in the ecosystem. Ecologists call this a "niche." This words means profession or role. A niche is also often thought of as a space or location. However, niche has to do with what an organism contributes in and of itself for the sake of the whole.

When an organism neglects to perform in an ecosystem for whatever reason, another organism takes its place.

Not all organisms are equal in their profession. Some are more critical for a habitat's survival than others. These are "keystones." Some of these animals are very large, e.g. elephants, rhinoceros, and other big herbivores. Or they can be the tiny army ants.

Native People understand that humanity's niche is complicated because human behavior can work for good and for ill in the ecosystem.

For Native People the way to live is a way of peace, a way that dares to be in balance and harmony with all of creation and an attitude of respect.

There are two ways with which this is dealt: the Vision Quest and stories for instruction and behavior modification.

The Vision Quest is extremely important because it is the experience that gives direction to a Native person in terms of their role and their identity in the tribe and in the world. It is a story that comes to a person from outside of the self and unfolds as the person grows in years. It comes in some type of dream experience. An elder serves as an interpreter of what the story means. The Vision Quest shapes a person's life.

Not all Native People are blessed with a vision. Some seek it, and it never comes. There is acceptance of this difference in experience.

The way one lives is also influenced by stories. They were meant for instruction as well as to modify behavior.

The virtues of animals are emphasized. Children were admonished to be wise, gentle, brave, and cheerful as expressed by certain animals (Deloria, XI).

When misbehavior occurred children would be told a story rather than be punished. The tales usually emphasized that inappropriate behavior would lead to disaster (Underhill, 31). Humor is also characteristic of the stories.

The coyote stories, as discussed in the introduction, remind us of the role of the clown, the sacred fool. The jester deals with ambiguity better than the sober, serious ponderer. For the jester ambiguity is the way it is. For the somber person ambiguity is their bane and held by them in contempt. The coyote image helps us live with the uncertain, the ambivalent, the obscure, yes, even the mystery.

Luther had a sense of this ambiguity when observing how one should deal with the indistinctiveness of the human condition and the ambiguity created by human evil. He said almost whimsically, "Sin boldly! But," he continues in a less humorous fashion

as an affirmation and confession, "trust God's grace more boldly still!"

In the Christian community we understand that the way a person lives has its basis in the Spirit of God. These are outlined in terms of gifts of the Spirit, fruits of the Spirit, and sanctification.

Paul discusses the gifts of the spirit in I Corinthians 12. In this instance Paul mentions the types of talents and innate abilities that determine how a person functions within the life of the church community. Each person has a gift by which one can give something unique.

People have been given abilities to fulfill a role in the world. It is understood that these talents are also gifts of the Spirit.

In Galatians 5:22-23 Paul talks about styles of life in this way: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law." (RSV) It is significant to note Paul's metaphorical use of fruit and Spirit.

In the natural world, in order for fruit to occur, a flower must be pollinated. There are two basic methods of pollination: animals (birds, mammals, and insects) and wind. Animals do most of the pollinating in the Tropics. As we get further away from the equator we see wind pollination more frequently.

Fruit, by the way, is not simply the type we eat. All seeds are fruit.

Just as fruit depends upon an outside source to be pollinated so we can talk about the Spirit of God as an outside source who touches us and causes good to be done through and by us. (The words ruach (Hebrew) and pneuma (Greek) mean wind, breath, and Spirit.)

To practice the Spirit is to live the sanctified life. This is the process by which a person receives new life having been freed from the power of sin and guilt and given the capacity to live most fully and more selflessly. In love the person makes holy and wholly the other. (I prefer to use the word sanctification rather than spirituality.)

Sanctification has four elements: illumination, regeneration and conversion, obedience and good works, and perfection (Peters, 242-243).

1. Illumination is an experience of the mind. There is knowledge that is given by the Spirit. We know about the God who acts in our lives (Acts 26:18) We have discerned the Spirit.

2. Regeneration and Conversion. This has the nature of being cleansed and renewed in experiences of worship. It also has the nature of opening a person for a change of heart - conversion.

Conversion is the rejecting and turning away from the evils of the past and living a just life. Conversion is not a global experience for the individual. By this I mean that there is not just one conversion in a person's life. It is an event that happens frequently as one discovers instance by instance how the past must be regarded and a new way be taken.

3. Obedience and Good Works. The teachings of God, sometimes called the "law," are seen as constructive for how to live not just what to do. There is a joyful appropriation of God's teachings and God's love. Good works are not deeds done to earn favor, but are behaviors done to make things right.

Such behavior practices the unity we have with God and the rest of creation. "We realize that there is a bond of love that unites all things" (Peters, 243).

4. Perfection. This word makes some people frustrated because we claim not to be able to be perfect. Bonhoeffer said the word translated "perfect" in the New Testament really means "complete." We can quibble over words, but what does perfection mean? It is a life of purging sin, restoring the image of God, and living spontaneously in the love of God.

Perfection is actually the practicing of the Spirit. It acknowledges that we work at being this type of person. There are some gifted athletes that do not need to practice their skills. But it does become obvious that even the most gifted athlete cannot neglect to practice if one plans to play with the rest of the team.

What about sin? What sinful behavior corresponds to what is being said? The answer is simple: self-perfection and human superiority. The idea of self-perfection is that I become the center of the world. I train my body and mind so that I can be my deepest me.

Human arrogance has also demonstrated what can happen. It is believed that 1) humans can control the ways of the natural world, 2) humans can continue to exploit certain natural resources indefinitely, and 3) all mysteries, all uncertainties, i.e. the unknown, can be ultimately conquered (Beck et al, 47).

Humans must realize that the human is a part of the created order. We are a part of the natural event. We need to unlearn what we presently practice.

What is the ecologically environmentally spiritual thing to do? First, we must have a vision of evangelical ecology. Forgiveness and faithfulness are redeeming acts for all to experience. Thus, our ecology is the good news, and the good news is for the whole system. This is our vision which encompasses the past story and thrives on hope. This is a vision that unfolds and needs constant interpretation. It is a vision that comes from without. Second, the vision is important in order to see what God is doing. The Native People have a saying, "I wouldn't see it unless I believe it." This stands in contrast to "I wouldn't believe it until I see it." Third, our profession is to make the world a better place. This means acting respectfully toward all creation. We have our own niche.

CHAPTER FIVE

All species require a habitat. This may seem obvious. But do we really know how strategic a habitat is?

A habitat provides food, water, shelter, and available space. All organisms live in some type of interdependent relationship with other organisms. In various ways, by cooperation and competition, the organisms live with and off of each other.

When species are deleted from a habitat we notice how the habitat is affected. Or when a habitat is depleted or destroyed how species either migrate or die.

The study of habitats includes a study of biodiversity. Habitats must be complex. The more simple they are the greater chance there is for destruction. The more diverse they are the greater the opportunity for the habitat to survive.

The health of a habitat is found in the various species living in a balance. Thus, one could say that habitat and the health of species are closely allied. The habitat must be healthy for the sake of its member species. The habitat gives health and wholeness to its members. The habitat must be maintained in its own right so it can be restorable.

Native People understand habitat in the context of the sacred hoop. Black Elk is quoted as saying, ". . . the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round" (Brown, 13-14). And the Native People are a significant part of it.

For the Native People the tribe is the basic form of existence. It is not what an individual knows that is important, it is what the tribe knows collectively. Individualism is not the essence of being complete. Tribalism or community is the state which must be complete. Thus, the tribe is central.

Some Native People also describe the family as all the creation. One is not within simply a human family with the same last name.

This puts life in a massive circle.

In a sense, we have returned to the beginning of this whole discussion with the circle and balance and harmony and reciprocity. However, life is not just found in a circle. The circle is one of healing and wholeness. It is the sacred.

Native People have developed the circle into a sacred symbol with four sacred parts. If one looks deeply into it it becomes a mirror to lead a person to the deepest awareness of mystery.

For the Christian the work of the Holy Spirit is to establish wholeness, wholeness in community and wholeness in the individual, wholeness in relationships and in how one thinks, physical and mental wholeness. It is the Spirit that unifies, integrates, and mends relationships.

In a world where people want to bring death to life in a wanton fashion the Holy Spirit is God-at-work to bring life to death.

For the person, the Holy Spirit treats sin by remembering it no longer (John 31:34), casting sin behind our backs (Isaiah 38:17), and sweeping them away like clouds (Isaiah 44:22). Forgiveness leads to blessedness (Psalm 32:1, see also Romans 5:10, II Corinthians 5:18-19, Colossians 1:20).

Peters says,

The Holy Spirit proceeds from this work of the Father through the Son to effect this ministry of reconciliation within the world. Reconciliation is a process leading eventually to its consummate fulfillment in the unity of all things in their creative

and redemptive ground, God (Peters, 233)

The Holy Spirit calls Christians together in community. As a matter of fact, it is hard to say when a person is called a Christian because being a Christian and being in the community of faith are one in the same.

Like Native People celebrating the sacred circle, the Christian celebrates the habitat of the church. To think the spiritual life of a Christian can exist outside of this community is preposterous.

The church is an event where the Word of God is proclaimed and the Sacraments administered. It is the gathered people of God, the reconciling community.

The church is very complex in its role because it has some distinctive tasks within the habitat of this world. It acts on behalf of God. It names the work of the Spirit. It celebrates God. It brings life and nourishment to all. And it looks foolish in its style of life.

Foolish, you say? Foolish, yes! Even the gospel we proclaim is that, says Paul.

The church is like the coyote. It has a definite place within the ecosystem, but it is treated as a pest (i.e., the indigenous alien). Like God's dog it also seems a fool.

When the church is seen as the healing habitat and within the context of the circle it is obvious that sin is not being different, but is being estranged. When a person pulls oneself away or the individual is ignored there is sin.

For the Christian person eco-evangelical spirituality is a commitment to life in the circle and community of the Spirit and the world acting to heal the Earth. This means making it possible for all to be whole and working at reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

Who is the coyote? We are!

We are the people through whom God works to continue with creating and restoring. We are people chosen to teach. Though we do not have the role of elder we can still be those who pass on the traditions. We live with life, death, and life. We die to sin and are raised to walk in newness of life. We are political, profane, potentially abusive. In some cases we are the joke. And yet God has chosen to work in us as God's people:

Made by God's Spirit,
Molded by God's Spirit,
Filled by God's Spirit, and
Used by God's Spirit.

Christians are indigenous aliens being of the world with a message from elsewhere. This is the way Christians practice the Spirit.