

Native American Church: The Half-Moon Way

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# Native American Church:

## The Half-Moon Way

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by Vincent Catches, Lakota

There are many ways of spiritual belief and practice among the Sioux people: Yuwipi, Sweat Lodge, Sun Dance and the peyote way are some of them. Sometimes the different ways kick against each other. Within each of these traditions, it is the same: there are different ways. This paper is about the way of the Native American Church, and within that, about the "Half Moon" way. Emerson Spider's discussion of the Native American Church in *Sioux Indian Religion* (Ray DeMallie and Doug Parks, eds.) is about another way within the Native American Church, the "Cross Fire" way.

I went to school with Emerson Spider, Sr., at Holy Rosary Mission which is now called Red Cloud Indian School. At that time, I was not too well acquainted with Emerson. Later on, a few years or so, I was in peyote meetings with Emerson and his father. I must say that his father was a remarkable man. He was clear eyed and young looking. Right after World War II, I went to a lot of their meetings (Cross Fire), mostly around Wounded Knee and Porcupine. Once in a while I'd go to other places like Rosebud or other communities on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

There were times I remember that people made fun of him because of peyotism, and it wasn't much later when I, too, was made fun of for the same thing. I suppose it was because my step-father and my mother who lived just down the creek a mile or so were involved in peyotism. Even when I was very young, I used to hear a lot of talk about the peyote and its users. The things I used to hear were on the bad side. There's no use going into all that. Even some people who have used it have turned against it and have some very negative feelings about it.

Criticism of peyote and its users has been written in various places. In Omer Stewart's book (1987:p. 198), the 1916 criticisms by Gertrude Bonnin, a Sioux, are quoted. They are:

1. It excites the baser passions and is demoralizing--similar in its abnormal effects to that of opium, morphine, and cocaine.
2. It creates false notions in the minds of the users, preventing sound logic and rational thought with which to meet the problems of their daily lives. Believing that peyote is the comforter sent by God, they reject the teachings of the Church.... Believing peyote a cure-all for every human ailment, they ignore the advice and aid of physicians. Attending peyote meetings, the people waste time, strength and money.
3. It has spread with alarming rapidity within the last two years...
4. It appears to have been the direct cause of the deaths of 25 persons among the Utes within the last two years.
5. ...it appears to us that an unscrupulous organization, through its agents is promoting the Peyote Cult under a religious guise, solely for the easy money gotten from their superstitious victims.
6. Since the use of peyote is spreading rapidly... we do implore all earnest citizens of America for a Federal law to protect us against the traffic in the indiscriminate use of peyote.

Of course, in and around the communities where peyote meetings are practiced, there is usually a lot of talk against the peyote--a lot of exaggerations and just plain outright lies. One commonly heard is that after midnight, when a certain song is sung, the participants would blow out the lights and the men would crawl over to the women's side and, well... I think that one is the biggest lie about peyote meetings.

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Most of my involvement with the Native American Church was in my younger years. I was deeply involved in the Half Moon way, but after my wife died, I seem to have wandered a bit. I went to San Francisco where I worked in a steel mill for about a year and then went home. I stayed there until the summer of 1958 when I was asked by the relocation officer at Pine Ridge if I would like to come to Chicago and I readily accepted. I came to Chicago August 5th, 1958. That was a long time ago, and the wear and tear of the many years have taken their toll in that I have forgotten a lot of things. I forgot some of my native tongue; I used to know an abundance of peyote songs, most of which I forgot--also pow-wow songs, and the way of the peyote tipi.

I got into peyote because of my mother and my step-father. My step-father came along and started to organize the peyote Half Moon way. I'd say it was sort of starting from scratch. My step-father had a winning personality and people were attracted to him. There were my mother's cousins, whom I called uncle in the Lakota way, and other cousins of mine and a couple of my real uncles who made it possible to get the peyote going around there. Of course, there were others who came to the meetings. We even had a state charter. There was no baptizing, we only signed our names on the charter. We had quite a lot of members. My real involvement was in the Half Moon way. I even owned a good-sized tipi at that time. Being young, with all the benefits of youth, I was enthusiastic in my involvement with our religion.

Peyote is described as a spineless carrot-shaped cactus. It contains nine narcotic alkaloids of the isoquiniline series, some of them strychnine-like (Weston LaBarre, 1987). The origin of peyote, according to Omer Stewart, was Mexico, but it also grows in Texas and the southwest and in Oklahoma. One of my uncles had a little truck and he used to talk of his trips down to the "Holy Land" to get peyote. He used to name places which I don't remember down in old Mexico or even Texas. He may have talked of New Mexico, but I don't remember it. He brought back gunny sacks full of green peyote which he would dry out in the sun. (The "Holy Land" is also mentioned in LaBarre's book, p. 99, where he notes that a Cheyenne named Bear Track and his Osage wife went to the Holy Land). Peyotists who make pilgrimages to get peyote call that place the Holy Land.

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Of course, they had a special way of picking it. One way was to eat the first one they found and wait for some sign, or maybe they would see others around the area. They say that they peyote is hard to see, but after picking the first one, the others start appearing like stars (LaBarre, p. 57). LaBarre describes the practice of talking to the plants that are not visible, saying they need the peyote to cure people, and of spreading tobacco out in the area. The next day, the pilgrim returns, and if he hears a snake, he grabs it and puts it aside, and picks peyote from that place.

The Kiowa, Comanche and Caddo were the chief agents in the spread of the peyote way throughout the plains region to southern Canada and parts of the Great Basin.

The word "medicine" is used by every tribe pertaining to the peyote. In my tribe, we call it *pejuta*, which means "medicine," of course. And that is what it is used for.

To each leader or road man, a way is given. It may be handed down through each generation from a father or maybe a grandfather. It doesn't mean it's a complete change in the way of running the meeting; it just means that there are slight changes in some places. The meeting consists of the leader or road man; his chief drummer, who sits at his right; the cedar man, who sits at his left; the fire chief, who sits at the entrance of the tipi; and the assistant fire man, who sits at the right side as you enter. Each of them has certain duties to perform which I think are self-explanatory. The chief drummer takes care of the drum. The cedar man takes care of the cedar; he has to sprinkle cedar in the fire place at the appropriate times. The fire man makes sure the fire is going and that there are embers for the cedar.

At some time, even up to a year before a very special occasion is to take place, the man or woman who is putting up (sponsoring) a meeting takes Bull Durham or Indian tobacco to the road man of their choice (called "offering" or *opaqi* in Lakota) and implores him to conduct their meeting. A meeting may be held to celebrate an anniversary, a birthday, or to give thanks for something.

The procedure of the meeting goes as follows: The fire man prepares the tipi in advance. The people line up at the entrance. There is a fire going in the tipi which the fire man had started after praying. The road man is first to enter, then the drummer and the cedar man, and the people line up behind him. The sun is almost setting. The road man blows his bone whistle and then goes in. He stops directly across from the entrance of the tipi, which is his place. The people file past him to his left and to the door. When the single file is completed back to the door, then the meeting is filled. He tells the people to sit down. Here is one place the procedure may vary according to the road man. They usually cedar themselves, fanning towards themselves the smoke from cedar sprinkled on the hot embers by the cedar man after his

prayer. Concerning the fan used in this, I never learned the interpretations of the feathers and plumes suggested by Emerson (p. 202); this may be his individual belief. There may be other interpretations, particularly of the plumes. I was mostly taught that the feathers were used to pray with.

The road man then addresses the congregation. He tells them the purpose of the meeting, after which the tobacco is cedared and passed around clockwise. Everything is done clockwise. Then, when the people have rolled their tobacco into cigarettes, the fire stick is passed around and the road man prays aloud. Anyone who wishes to may also pray aloud while the road man is praying.

When the road man is done praying, he places his tobacco stub beneath the chief peyote ( a large peyote button placed in the center of the half moon altar in front of the road chief) angled towards him. Then the fire man collects stubs from all the people, starting at the door and going to the drummer, while the assistant fire man collects the stubs from the door moving counter-clockwise to the cedar man and then places them by the tips of the moon, on their respective sides.

After that, the road man cedars his staff, feathers, gourd, etc., and the drummer cedars his drum. (In the half-moon way, what Emerson calls *sagye*, we call *wa-ho-ke-za*, "staff.") Then the singing and drumming starts. The road man sings a starting song, according to his way. Sometimes, the drummer sings next and then the cedar man and on down the line. Each man sings four songs, going clockwise, of course.

At various times throughout the night, peyote is eaten by the people in the tipi, starting with the road chief, who decides how much and when it should be sent around and what form it should be. Usually it is eaten at least four times during the ceremony, sometimes more. An individual may ask for more from the road chief. I guess it would be possible for someone not to take the peyote, but I have never seen that happen. Peyote may be eaten dry in the button form, ground and eaten dry, ground and mixed with water into a paste, or made into tea. In the Cross Fire way, it is given as a very thin paste which is spooned to each of the participants by the fire man, starting with the road chief. How you eat it is not important; what is important is that you do it prayerfully.

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There are four stations through the night: the beginning, midnight, about 3 a.m., and closing. At midnight, the fire man is supposed to go to a spring near which the tipi is purposefully pitched. If there's no spring around, then a creek or river is used; if there is no river or creek, then the tipi is placed near a well or whatever water source is available.

The fire man fetches a bucket of water and brings it back to the tipi and at the whistle on the fourth song, he brings in the water. The tobacco is passed to him and he prays with it over the water. He then passes the tobacco to the road man who in turn shares it with his drummer and cedar man, and then he too prays over it. Then the water is passed from the door and each man and woman drinks. When it reaches the drummer, he sprinkles it on his drum and then drinks. The road man dips his feathers in the water and sprinkles the chief peyote. Then he sprinkles his paraphernalia and then he sprinkles the people. The cedar man sprinkles his cedar bag, etc., drinks, and passes it on. After everyone has drunk, the fire man takes the bucket out. After the water bucket is taken out, the road man prepares himself to go out with his feathers and whistle to pray to the four directions--East, South, West, and then North. In the Half Moon way, each direction represents a season--spring, summer, fall, winter--and each season represents parts of our life--childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. This is the way I was told, anyway. The medicine is always passed around after midnight, when the road man returns.

The next station in the tipi or Half Moon way is considered the main part of the meeting: it is called the main smoke, where the one putting up the meeting prays with the tobacco and makes his request to the Great Spirit, for whatever the meeting was intended for. Of course, it follows a ritual pattern. The staff, which circulates to the road man during the evening, is stopped, usually after the chief drummer sings, or whatever is the way of the particular road man. Then the tobacco is cedared and passed on to the sponsor. After he rolls the tobacco, the fire stick is passed to him with which he lights his rolled tobacco smoke. Then he prays for the purpose of the meeting, giving thanks to all the time for blessings and for the people who came, even though they may have had to travel through bad weather to get there. Then he passes the smoke to the road man who shares it with his drummer and cedar man. Then he prays, and after a few minutes the singing continues.

The closing is in the morning, around dawn. A woman who is to bring in the water prepares herself. When the staff gets back to the leader, he tells the people that it is time for the morning water call. Then he starts his singing and on the fourth song, the cedar man usually cedars the whistle and blows it for the entrance of the woman and her bucket of water. Some leaders will blow the whistle themselves.

*A woman who is to bring in the water prepares herself.*



The tobacco is passed to the woman, who then rolls a smoke. This is done after she has cedared herself and the water. She prays for everything and especially for the life-giving water. After everyone drinks the water, the woman goes out.

The leader will again cedar his staff, etc.; the drummer cedars his drum and the closing songs are sung. Some call these songs "quitting songs."

The whistle is blown on the fourth song and then the road man will again, after making the closing prayer, cedar his gear and put it away. Breakfast food is then brought in and lined up at the entrance of the tipi. It is also blessed. Sometimes the leader having some distinguished visitors in the meeting will give them the privilege of saying the closing prayers. There are variations on the way these things are done. I guess that's why they call it a "way." The breakfast includes four foods: the water is first; then the meat, corn and fruit." Again, some may put the corn ahead of the meat.

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The fire man usually takes a bit of each food and takes it out and puts it somewhere. This is in remembrance of those who have passed on. (I have understood the food offerings in this way rather than, as Emerson describes them, to "feed" (p. 207) those who have passed on.)

Throughout the meeting, the road chief and others pray for everyone and everything on God's earth, including, without fail, the president of the United States, the armed forces, all tribal members, and particular individuals. All through the night, the peyote drum is going. From what I know, it is the heartbeat of the meeting. Without it, I don't think there would be anything. There is a skill in taking care of the drum: you have to know how to tie the drum. There are a couple of ways of tying it, but the basic idea is the same. When the drum is going good, the meeting goes well and vice-versa. I think it is all in the way the road man leads the meeting. If he is a good man and his prayers are good, one can feel it in the meeting. I know it is holy when it is used right.

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This description of a Native American Church meeting in the Half Moon way has many similarities with Emerson Spider's description of a Cross Fire meeting. There are some differences, however, which I will mention.

Emerson talks about how peyote was introduced in Pine Ridge and how they came about organizing their church with ministers. Jim Bluebird, whom he mentions as among the main starters, said he first used peyote in Oklahoma in 1902 at Calumet, and meetings began at Pine Ridge in 1904. I knew a lot of those "old timers" as we used to call them. They were involved in the Cross Fire way.

The Half Moon way was introduced later--perhaps in 1914, perhaps in 1924 (Stewart, 1987: p. 175). It was a Winnebago who introduced it as well, a man named James Seymour.

The Half Moon or Tipi way was probably used a lot in Wounded Knee, Porcupine, Allen and other districts of Pine Ridge and also Rosebud but I don't think it was organized until about the latter part of the 1930s. A Rosebud man named Phillip Broken Leg was the man who organized it in Pine Ridge in the Calico district hall. He had gotten a state charter on which many members were listed. (Steinmetz (1980:82), who mentions me in this context as well, mistakenly says that Phillip White Bear worked to get the state charter. It was Phillip Broken Leg, not Phillip White Bear.)

At that time, there was no baptizing, as Emerson describes in the Cross Fire way, only a commitment made by signing your name to the charter, which I did. This must have been around 1936 or 1937. Since that time, things have changed. According to Steinmetz (1980:85), Emerson Spider baptized two Red Cloud children in a Half Moon ceremony, and thus introduced baptism to the Half Moon way.

Steltenkamp (1982:58) argues that the Half Moon way has "tended to retain a religious emphasis more in keeping with their tribe's earlier spiritual tradition. Rather than refer to the leader as a 'minister' (as Cross Fire people often do), this fireplace is presided over by someone called a 'road man.' No sign of membership, other than presence at ceremonies, is insisted upon. Likewise, meetings are conducted in which much singing, little talking, and few interruptions occur. The road man orchestrates the eating of peyote and the general flow of the gathering (if practical, in the native language). The pipe tradition (and other elements of the earlier belief system) is reconciled with certain fundamentalist themes of Christianity which characterize the group's creed." The author's description of a peyote meeting, however, based on his own participation in one, shows that he had no prior experience. He reports his own reaction to the newness rather than providing an interpretation based on experience. The road man he mentions is an uncle of mine with whom I attended a lot of meetings when I was home.

There were others prominent in the Half Moon way who traveled around the country, probably learning and teaching. One such person was Joe Sierra who, with his family and a Winnebago named John

Butler, traveled to the south and southwest. He probably used peyote in the Half Moon way long before--who knows when. He was also prominent in and around Pine Ridge in the Half Moon way. He was well known all over in peyote circles. I had a brother, Eugene Catches (also known as "Jiggs"), who was with them a lot at that time.

Another family who also traveled around a lot was the Oscar Two Eagle family, another good peyote family. They were responsible for a lot of peyote meetings in and around Pine Ridge. These people were very prominent around Scotts Bluff, Nebraska. I have a cousin around there, too, who was active in the peyote way. His name was Everett Mousseau. His step-father was my uncle Joe Catches. There were a lot of others who came around the Scotts Bluff. There were Omahas who came like Charlie Edwards and his sons. Alfred Bird and Silas Grant came there too, and there were others whose names I can't now recall.

Today, it seems that the Cross Fire way is stronger on Pine Ridge (Steinmetz, 1987:83), as it was in 1963 (Feraca, 1963:48). But years ago, more people followed the Half Moon way. As Steinmetz explains, "The conditions of the Native American Church can be visualized as a tidal wave that crests and ebbs. Today the Cross Fire is cresting high, being the stronger of the two fireplaces, while the Half Moon has ebbed quite low with the death of prominent members such as Silas and Helen Grant and Bernard Ice at Wounded Knee and Joe Catches at Pine Creek, and family troubles among a few of the members. But, this could change in a few years time. From the list of families I collected I estimate the number of active members from between 300 to 350 as a high and 200 to 250 as a low for both fireplaces." (1987:83) I think it also depends a lot on the community: the western part of the reservation, from Wounded Knee west has more Half Moon than Cross Fire meetings. Many people attended both kinds of meetings, the Half Moon way in the tipi where tobacco is used and no baptism is expected, and the Cross Fire way which focuses on Christianity and includes a Bible placed beside the altar.

There are a lot of differences between the Half Moon and the Cross Fire. I think the main difference lies in the use of the Bible in the Cross Fire and its absence in the Half Moon. ("Half Moon members say (Steinmetz, 1987:85) that Cross Fire people go to meetings just to read the Bible while Cross Fire people say that Half Moon members go just because they are out of smokes.")

In the Half Moon way, there are certainly Christian elements: Jesus Christ is neither denied nor ignored; prayers commonly end with "in the name of Jesus, Amen"; and meetings are held to celebrate Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Some of the Christian elements are recent additions. It is certain, moreover, that the moral values underlying the Half Moon way existed long before Christianity came to Indian people. Indians knew good from evil, right from wrong before Columbus. Feraca (1963:49) was wrong to suggest that the moral teachings of the Half Moon way are "definitely Christian."

Commenting upon the difference between Half Moon and Cross Fire meetings, Omer Stewart (p. 182) states that the Cross Fire way, since it uses the Bible, has rules of conduct which apply all the time, not just in meetings, while the Half Moon way, which does not use the Bible has not guide for conduct outside of meetings. But this, too, is mistaken. The Half Moon does have its rules and regulations. All the values of each tribe are visible in the tipi meeting. The peyote is a good teacher. When you are right, living a good, clean, decent life, you need not fear the peyote for I think it is God's power working through the Peyote. But if you are wrong in some way, the peyote will expose you in the meeting, whether right away or in the long run.

There are ways one can misuse the peyote. One is to use it to attract women. There are stories about what affect it has on one's life if he does this: your face starts breaking out, or your nose becomes big and porous, or if you keep it up, maybe you'll pay for it with your life. Perhaps the peyote warns them--I feel sure it does warn them--and if they do keep it up, they probably will pay with their lives. There are other ways peyote can be misused, like cheating with peyote to get funds for one's own use.

The testimony of Pete Blackbird in Omer Stewart's book (p. 164) is a good one. "...I found that their belief is that this peyote and the Bible are the same thing." Sam Gilpin and Thomas Walker, both Omaha Indians, remarked too that "this religious use of peyote is on the same line as the white people's use of the Bible. What we learn from the Bible is true in Peyote."

There is a term I used to hear when I was at home, and I suppose they are still using it--"peyote work." It means that the peyote works through an individual in ways that are not so easy to describe. The peyote manifests itself and works wonders through individuals in ways that are sometimes unbelievable.

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Confessions are usually made in the Cross Fire way. There are other differences like the Cross Fire does not have a midnight water call, though the morning water call procedure is almost the same in both ways, the woman bringing in the water. (Even this was apparently changed with time. According to Steinmetz (1987:84), Emerson Spider introduced midnight water call into the Cross Fire.) The water call songs are not the same and there is no tobacco used in the Cross Fire way. The Half Moon meetings have a starting, midnight and morning water call and closing songs which are probably Kiowa-Comanche songs and are used in most of the Half Moon meetings.

The use of tobacco is associated with the Half Moon and not the Cross Fire way. In reading the Bible, nowhere have I found anything said against tobacco, *per se*. There is wine and strong drink mentioned in the Bible and it also mentions drunks. Like tobacco, alcohol was revered in the old days and now it is totally abused. The Half Moon way prohibits alcohol abuse. If a person is drinking, he is not allowed in the ceremony. Not everyone is alcoholic; whether it is caused by drinking too much or not is still a mystery. I state this because I am an alcoholic. I know it is what kept me from going back home. When I sobered up in May, seventeen years ago, I began to get involved in a lot of things which kept me from going home and going back to the tipi way.

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I would like to add something that was important in the way of the Half Moon when it was first started around home by Phil Broken Leg. There was an Arapaho named Timothy Goggles who stayed at our house and who was a major teacher in the Half Moon way. I used to think he knew all the peyote songs because I don't think he sang any one song twice in a long period of time. He was the road man in many of our meetings, so we had a good instructor in the tipi way. We know the chief songs--the songs used to start midnight water call and morning, and the procedure of the meeting with all its paraphernalia.

There are certainly differences between the Cross Fire and the Half Moon ways, but the two ways have influenced each other over time. Also, while people tend to identify with a particular fireplace, they can attend meetings of either kind, and some people, like Emerson, conduct both kinds of meetings. Emerson is quoted in Steinmetz (1987:85) as "insist[ing] that the Native American Church is one Church with two fireplaces. If you don't live a good life, neither fireplace will do a person any good. But if a person lives for Christ, both fireplaces are good."

I'd like to tell of some spiritual experiences I had in peyote meetings. In 1954, the woman I married was sick with cancer, afflicted with TB and pregnant. She was suffering. After she had the baby (caesarian), she was transferred from the Pine Ridge Hospital to the Rapid City TB sanitarium where she started to take radiation treatments. This was the end of September 1954. She lived through the fall and almost all the winter. She died March 19, 1955.

I was by her side when she died, holding her hands. This is one of the experiences I have had. The moment she died, I felt an actual pain in my chest. It seemed to draw my shoulders in and it stayed with me. I was stuck in Rapid City because the ambulance from Pine Ridge had gone to Omaha with a patient or had gone after a patient there. I was there for about four days. While I was waiting there a couple of old school mates of mine (married) volunteered to take the body back to Pine Ridge. After we buried her at Holy Rosary Mission, Pine Ridge, I got an invitation from her people at Porcupine to attend a peyote meeting which was being put up for her. When I went to the meeting, I still had that pain in my chest.

During the meeting, I ate as many of the peyote as I could. I never kept track. Everything was going well. The drum was good and the praying was constant. It was a Cross Fire meeting. About 3:00 a.m. all of a sudden all sound ceased. I couldn't hear anything. Then I heard footsteps as if coming down a hallway with echoing sounds. Everything was still. Then again, all of a sudden, her face appeared to me just as if she was remade. Behind her I sensed other people. I looked and I saw two nuns with their habits on. Just as suddenly, the vision disappeared. It seemed like my ears were unplugged and all sound returned to me. That pain in my chest was gone and I felt at peace. A load was lifted off my shoulders. I felt a serenity and there was no sorrow in my heart. Next morning, I was able to help around like chopping wood for the stoves. There was snow outside and it was cold, but I didn't mind.

I had another experience a year later. This one happened at Wounded Knee in a tipi meeting at Alex Ice's place about half a mile from the Wounded Knee store. This one was a Half Moon meeting. Like the other one, this experience happened about 2 or 3 in the morning. Again, I don't know how much peyote I ate. There seemed to be plenty of peyote in those days. Everything was going well and it was a good meeting. In the peyote circle, I used to hear the elders say that there is a time or a moment one has



somewhere when something is manifested to him which gives him a chance to ask for and receive what he most wants. I have wrestled with this in my mind, whether to reveal my experience of this, because I have never told anyone about these things. I know people, especially those who don't use peyote, will be skeptical about or just plain won't believe it. But I think, in fact I'm sure, that I experienced my moment and let it go by because I was too slow.

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My moment was in the meeting. Toward morning, I had a vision in which there is no doubt in my heart that I saw Christ. He appeared to me and looked at me. It was in that moment that I should have done something. Should have asked for forgiveness anyway for the things I have done. But I was dumbfounded and I just looked at Him. For a moment then his eyes twirled and he was gone. After that, for a long time, I couldn't focus my eyes. Instead, they seemed to twirl during and after a peyote meeting.

I thought of that many times and I knew that I blew my chance. Maybe, I think, that is why I am over here instead of over there where my heart is. Certainly, I never forgot my Indian (peyote) way of life.

Over here I've always had tapes or peyote records which I play once in a while. So it has always been with me.

I'm revealing this although I know there are skeptics and disbelievers. I would like to mention that I also believe in the Bible and the word of God. Somewhere in the New Testament, Christ said that whoever is ashamed of Him and whoever denies Him, He will also deny Him in front of His Father. That is what inspired me to write of what happened to me.

When I was going to my first and second year of college in Detroit, I had an instructor named Joseph Brant, a well-known scholar of Mohawk descent who taught anthropology. He told us that the "Happy Hunting Grounds" was a white man's invention that would not be found in any Indian culture.

Of course, every tribe has their own beliefs concerning the hereafter and we all have our various ways of worshipping the "Great Spirit" and each tribe has their own way of addressing him. For instance, in the Sioux way, we say *Wakantanka* which means "Great or Holy Spirit," or we say *Tunkashila* which means "Grandfather" which is used in some or all of our various rituals, such as the Sun Dance, Yuwipi, Sweat Lodge and Vision Quest and other ways I don't know. Of course, in the peyote meetings, *Wakantanka* is used most frequently (although I have heard *Tunkashila* used occasionally as well.) In all these the principle instrument used is the "peace pipe." Perhaps each tribe with their own beliefs has been praying to the Spirit of the Universe. So it seems that they would be praying to the same God, very much like the Catholics and Protestants who use a common book, the Bible, but who are fighting each other in Ireland right now.

Whoever has negative ideas about the peyote way of worship is not a member of it. They have picked up their negative ideas from non-members or they form their own ideas without adequate experience, in which case they are usually wrong.

There are those who still wish to see this way of worship destroyed. They forget the First Amendment.

One evening recently I turned on the TV just in time to hear some peyote singing. It was about the peyote as a religion and about a case in the Supreme Court which has not yet been decided. They showed an old man who was talking of the government trying to stop the peyote way of worship. I can't quote his words exactly, but what he said was that if the white man stops our way of worship the Indian will be gone, and if the Indian is gone, so will the white man be.

*There are those who still wish to see this way of worship destroyed.*

When I was quite young, I heard an old man say that when the Red man is gone, this world will be no more.

## Epilogue

After reading *Pipe, Bible and Peyote Among the Oglala Lakota* by Paul B. Steinmetz, S.J., I realize how much has happened since I left my homelands. Maybe in my mind I thought that things were the same as when I left home. Thirty-one years is a long time and I have forgotten more than I realized. I apologize for any misunderstandings I may have created in my writing. I didn't know there was such a great improvement from what the Good Father has done for the Native American Church. Fr. Steinmetz has even been involved in the Sun Dance and Yuwipi.

When I do go home, there are no active peyote men or women to whom I can go to fill me in on these happenings. I don't go to meetings because I feel like an outcast when, really, it is I who have alienated



myself from my people or relatives, my Peyote people.

I know all the people whose visions are reported by Steinmetz except for American Horse, whom I can't remember. All the rest I know, and I know they are true.

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