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# God's First Discourse: Connected by the Community of Creation in the Harmony Way

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## **GOD'S FIRST DISCOURSE: Connected by the Community of Creation in the Harmony Way**

Randy Woodley

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### **Introduction**

The background for my discussion comes from discoveries I made during my Ph.D. dissertation process concerning a widespread construct of what I refer to as the "Native American Harmony Way." Particularly for this discussion I want to talk about one of the values represented within the Harmony Way which I called "God's First Discourse: Connected to Creation" and an ancillary idea, the "community of creation".

While I won't fully develop the idea of "community of creation" in this presentation, I ask you to begin to experiment with the phrase as an alternative to the translation of Jesus' words as "the kingdom of God." I believe that my theological understanding of the community of creation is broader than simply being a replacement phrase for "the kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven" and may be closer to the meaning understood by Jesus and his Indigenous contemporaries than the popular military juxtaposition. This understanding is also crucial in comprehending the connection between who Jesus was and what role Jesus plays in the Harmony Way construct.

My basic supposition is that the Kingdom of God was rightly understood by Jesus' audience as being separate from the Roman imperial kingdom, but broad enough to be viewed (if Jesus' "kingdom" examples are properly understood) as a whole new community living out God's *shalom* purposes on earth. I believe more than a simple translation is necessary. In our day, imperial representation is affecting the whole planet and perhaps community of creation is a phrase that can encompass Jesus' meaning in our global context and still retain its anti-imperialistic meaning. The phrase is specifically infused with Indigenous meaning because it assumes all of creation is participating in this new community, not just humans. I will argue that only a broader contextualized phrase will help to move Western Christians from provincialism to a point where they understand that embedded within Jesus' Indigenous teachings is a key to saving our world.

### **Background**

I began my dissertation project with a reasonable hunch that there may be a shared life-concept that is widespread among Native Americans related to wellbeing or, living and viewing life in harmony and balance.

During my studies I tried to be intentional not to demythologize nor re-mythologize our Native American life-ways. Like any other people group (in our case many groups) our values are not static. Being Native American has meant many things to Native Americans in different times. There is no universal Native American culture; yet, many share some common values and a Harmony Way worldview. My problem was to discover how wide spread a Harmony Way concept is among North American Natives and what common values are shared within the concept.

I set upon the discovery of the literature by reading from both Native American and non-Native writers in various areas of study, but primarily concentrating on religion, education, psychology and anthropology. I found within the literature that others had attempted to group Native American values in an assortment of ways and by a variety of means. The Harmony concept I sought to learn more about was referenced often in Native American values lists as one of our values and not defined well as a broad binding construct.

Following the integration of the initial literature into what at that time I considered to be core Native American Values, I felt I needed more clarification about the well-being or harmony concept. In an effort to discover whether or not these values would be relevant to the harmony concept I created a survey that would:

1. Query respondents about their familiarity with a harmony concept;
2. Invite respondents to name some of the values that are found within the harmony concepts with which they are familiar, without any prompting;
3. Test respondents' familiarity with the values I had found in the literature with their harmony concept.

One-hundred Native Americans took the survey from forty-five different tribal groups. A preliminary look at the survey data convinced me that my hunch about a widespread Harmony Way concept among Native Americans had merit. Prior to examining the survey data more closely, I interviewed eight Native American elders or spiritual leader types who I knew were familiar with their own tribal traditions and who, to some degree, spoke their own language. I asked them to speak freely about any concept among their own tribe that helped them to keep life in harmony and balance. Again, my hunch about the prevalent understanding of a Harmony Way was confirmed during each of the eight interviews. Not once did I need to clarify my initial question to the interviewees. I then grouped the responses of the interviews into categories of values that emerged from those interviewed. These were broad categories that by and large, substantiated the values found in the

literature. I integrated the values into a single set of ten core Native American values that, I propose, constitute a widespread Native American Harmony Way. I then set about describing these values using the data collected, extant literature and my own recollections and experiences.

Also worth mentioning, a parallel theological construct I sensed early on that made sense in this project and most resembled the Native American Harmony Way was *shalom*, the ancient Jewish construct, particularly as it is understood by Walter Brueggemann.<sup>1</sup> I discovered that in many ways *shalom* and the Native American Harmony Way are interchangeable. Only a broad-based, yet concrete, theological construct in theology would be able to compare with the Harmony Way. For instance, love is broad based but it can be interpreted ambiguously. *Shalom* is broad but not ambiguous.

In their nature as constructs the two systems have much in common. *Shalom*, like Harmony Way, is made up of numerous notions and values with the whole being much greater than the sum of its parts. Both are a way of living life in concrete ways that include more than all the terms found within the concept. They both set forth practical steps included within a vision for living. They both require specific action when the harmony or *shalom* is broken. They both have restoration and right living as their goal, etc. And perhaps most importantly, they both originate as a right path for living and as a gift from the Creator.

### Creation is Really Good!

*Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! (Genesis 1:31)*

First, let us consider the account of creation found in Genesis 1. God created everything and everything God created is called, not just good, but as it is described in Hebrew, "really good!" The writer of the Genesis passage gives us the sense that the Creator is very, very excited about creation. We may relate to this sense in a way similar to how an artist feels after that once in a lifetime song, painting, movie or sculpture comes together perfectly and it feels complete in every sense. It should comfort us to know that the Creator has such strong feelings about the creation.

When God says all creation is good, it is not a misjudgment about the creation. The Creator, rather, is making an accurate judgment

<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Peace: Living Toward a Vision* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

proclaiming that everything is good, right, in order and as it should be. What I like particularly in the Genesis account of creation is that it shows the Creator taking his time. God slowly works his way through the celestial water, space and sky; he then creates the terrestrial waters; the earth follows including the plants, trees, fruits; next he watches the seeds from those plants bear after their own. God then sets the celestial and the terrestrial in rhythm and balance of night and day; summer, fall, winter and spring; months into years. After that he fills the waters with fish and the skies with birds and they increase. Subsequently, animals appear and then the human beings are created.

One gets the sense from this account that Creator enjoyed creating our world. It was not impetuous or hurried but instead, deliberate and thoughtful, stretched out over time in order for the Creator to receive maximum pleasure. Each part of creation is differentiated. Not one created part is the other, nor does it *become* the other. Each part of creation was made unique and after its own kind—special. And yet, each part is incomplete without the whole, and everything is being and becoming in relationship to and with the other. The celestials regulate the balance of the terrestrials. The night dusk compels all creation to rest and it brings refreshing coolness. The day provides new life and opportunities like warmth for plants, animals and humans. The moon regulates the water. The sun regulates the seasons. The seasons regulate all creation on earth and sky in their annual activities. Everything created is in harmony and in balance with each other, and with their Creator.

From God's purview there is an interconnectedness of all God has made. All things are created and beautifully designed by their Creator. Each part of the created whole bears the mark of its Creator. Each works in relationship with the other. Each is connected through its common origin and through its common location in the universe. And afterwards, there is a pause. Not a pause to second-guess, but a pause to celebrate the way it is. The Aboriginal Rainbow Elders in Australia say the Creator sang on the seventh day. The meaning is like that of a gathering or a community "get-together" where celebration is the only priority. The celebration is a party because everything is harmonious as it was meant to be. It is God's creation party. It is the Harmony Way.

The Apostle Paul borrows from the artful exuberance that God has for his creation when referencing the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2:10 by saying, "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." Here the Apostle sees us mirroring the good works of creation with our own good works. We, as humans, are participants of the continuation of creation by creating good in our world. The result of the reconciliation Paul references is "peace" or

*shalom* (verse 14). The idea of God's *shalom* is not divorced from creation but as we can plainly see from the Genesis account, creation is central to understanding *shalom*. Creation (what God does) and *shalom* (what we do) are inextricably interwoven. As Native Americans, each tribe has a word or words describing the Ancient Hebrew *shalom* reality but we may simply refer to it generically as the Harmony Way.

### Jesus as Shalom; Jesus as the Harmony Way

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them.... Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace [*shalom*] on earth to those with whom God is pleased." (Luke 2)

The Creator has never abandoned his plans for the Harmony Way on earth. God certainly never intended *shalom* to be merely an after-earth reality. The Harmony Way is embedded into the created order and is meant to be lived out "on earth" by all creation. It is deeply revealed in Jesus' life, even as a baby, with many of God's creatures surrounding him. He is born among those whom human beings seem to favor least. Perhaps the beasts of burden, the domestic livestock, doves and mice, etc. understood the connection of Jesus and the Harmony Way, as they become the first audience to the most visible demonstration of returning life on earth to Creator's original intentions.

In Luke the lowly shepherds are next on the invited guest list. The shepherds were among those whose testimony was not allowed in a court of law for several reasons. By the time of the Jerusalem temple cult, shepherding was often sub-contracted to Gentile hirelings. After years of struggles against ancient land rights being trampled by urban development, the wealthy developers, and those who had invested into the urban growth system, unjustly won rights over the seemingly insignificant shepherds. The easiest path to secure such illegitimate rights was to prevent shepherds from testifying in court altogether.

This same course of action was pursued by the Americans for centuries beginning with John Winthrop and the earliest Pilgrims who annulled any Native claims to the land. "The Indians," he said, "had not "subdued" the land, and therefore had only a "natural" right to it, but not a "civil right". A "natural right" did not have legal standing."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-present* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 14.



Regardless of unjust laws, in the Creator's court, at least for a time, the shepherds were given exclusive rights to witness an event that even kings were prevented from seeing. The shepherd's testimony is valuable to the Gospel story, becoming central to God's Harmony Way purposes on earth by restoring dignity to the most marginalized of society.

The Wise Men or Magi, who were Gentiles, were also invited to partake in God's special Harmony Way event. Seen by many Jews as unworthy, their pilgrimage is recorded to convey a strong message to the "chosen" of Israel that everyone from every nation is chosen by God—a principle Jesus reaffirmed during his ministry,<sup>3</sup> even to the disdain of his own village (see Luke 4:17ff). Furthermore, the Hebrew Scriptures attest to the idea that each nation has its own relationship with the Creator. For example, Amos 9:7 states, "Are you Israelites more important to me than the Ethiopians?" asks the Lord. 'I brought Israel out of Egypt, but I also brought the Philistines from Crete and led the Arameans out of Kir.'"

Clearly, the message is that no one nation is more important to God than another and that the God of Israel is actively involved in the care for, and plight of, other nations. Jesus understood his shalom ministry on earth in this universal light and "hung" with tax gatherers, the untouchables and Gentiles.

By the end of his life, even the testimony of Jesus' resurrection would depend on women, another group whose word was not trusted in the Judean legal system. Indeed, it was women who were given the power from the Creator to create life, including the life of Jesus, the Christ-child. It was women who Jesus drew around himself to become

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<sup>3</sup> The usual argument for the temporary exclusion of Gentiles from Jesus' ministry includes the direct statement Jesus makes while dealing with the Canaanite woman whose daughter needed healing, by responding to her that he was "sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt.15:22-28). If we miss the irony with which Jesus often spoke during such occasions we might miss the juxtaposition of Jesus' response with that of his disciples, who preferred she be sent away. Jesus' pattern of accepting women, Gentiles and others while others urge him to reject them is clear throughout his ministry. Often Jesus' dialogical bantering comes with his initial resistance but culminates with the person obtaining their request. To understand Jesus' ministry in a light contrary to the inclusion of the Gentiles is inconsistent with his numerous dialogical forays that always resulted in his acceptance of lepers, beggars, prostitutes, Samaritans and Gentiles. An anaemic understanding of Jesus' attempt to put off the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 would be particularly troubling in Matthew, given that the writer begins Jesus' lineage with "an introductory genealogy that includes four foreign women, and the conclusion provides mission discourse that contemplates disciples from any nation." See Mark Brett, *Decolonizing God: the Bible in the Tides of Empire* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 144.

disciples and teachers in God's shalom way. And, it was women who would have the honor to eventually be the first to bring the testimony of Jesus' death and resurrection from the tomb.

Jesus birth and his whole life were connected to all aspects of creation from the animals in the stable, to the wheat in the field to the marginalized of society. His worldview was one that understood the earth to be sacred. As my friend Bo reminded me once, the stories told by Jesus are about creation. Jesus spoke primarily of birds, crops, fields, fish, water, light, trees, livestock, relationships etc. His worldview was *creation-centered* and not mechanistic-centered. Jesus could have just as easily spent his time reflecting on the importance of a mechanistic worldview by sharing stories referring primarily to wheels, chariots, shields, how mills operate, how the legal system operates etc. Our record indicates he spoke from and of the world he related to best, that of creation.

Jesus considered the created world to be sacred, as referenced in the Genesis creation story. According to Jesus, creation was considered so sacred that it was not to be demeaned by using it in an oath as seen in Matthew 5:34b-35a; "Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool."<sup>4</sup> Other accounts throughout the Psalms, Wisdom literature, etc. reveal the sacredness and the value of the creation to the Creator and to humans. Consider just two out of hundreds of examples:

Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and become wise! Though they have no prince or governor or ruler to make them work, they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter. But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep? When will you wake up? A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—then poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber. (Proverbs 6:6-11)

The ant appears to be a continual source of inspiration concerning how we should govern ourselves and manage our lives concerning our economic activities, another aspect of shalom. The point should not be overlooked concerning how closely the principles of this short proverb align with the whole Sabbath system as shown, for example, in Leviticus chapter 25.

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<sup>4</sup> Granted, the context in this excerpt is to not just say you will do something but to actually do what you say you will do. Still, one would have a difficult time arguing that Jesus did not consider the heavens and the earth sacred after examining such a statement.

On the Sabbath day every person, ox, donkey, horse, etc. is to rest. All necessary labor is to be accomplished prior to the Sabbath so people are free to rest. The seventh year was also to be observed as a Sabbath. Israel was to divide the land into seven sections. Each year one section of land was to be left to rejuvenate while edges of fields were left for the poor to glean. As well, sowing and reaping crops were forbidden in the seventh year so the poor and the animals could eat. It was a year of rest for the land. This required a more disciplined and intentional approach to planning. Poor planning for a day may result in temporary hunger from a missed meal. Poor planning for a year could be disastrous for the planter and for the poor since they would ultimately benefit.

Another example of the sacred value of creation is found in Job 12:7-10. The Amplified Version draws us into a clearer understanding of this passage.

For ask now the animals, and they will teach you [that God does not deal with His creatures according to their character]; ask the birds of the air, and they will tell you; Or speak to the earth [with its other forms of life], and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare [this truth] to you. Who [is so blind as] not to recognize in all these [that good and evil are promiscuously scattered throughout nature and human life] that it is God's hand which does it [and God's way]? In His hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.

Job is admonishing one of his accusers:

1. to talk to animals and then be taught from them;
2. to talk to and listen to birds;
3. to talk to the earth and other creation and expect to be taught from them;
4. to listen to fish attest to the truth;
5. and, if you can't recognize God's hand in all creation the implication is that you are blind.

These kinds of images can be disturbing to Western minds which insist on assigning a hierarchy to creation. If a person's worldview negates oneself from being intimately connected to creation then the words of Job appear quite foolish. And yet, there is nothing inanimate about anything Job mentioned. So often people jump to accusations of animism or anthropomorphism when such Scriptures are discussed, but according to the Scriptures, it is the same sacred breath in creation that resides within human beings.

I would suggest that such misunderstandings have something to do with modernity's alienation from creation. As global development and

urbanization continue at an expedient rate, humans are losing their contact with the earth and her creatures. We find ourselves staring out of windows looking at concrete, brick and blacktop more often than we find ourselves standing in fields or forest observing other parts of creation in the way Jesus did. This artificial reality places us primarily in a world where human achievement is heralded as the pinnacle of beauty, wisdom and inspiration or at least seen as the norm. Most Christian churches have adopted the practice of shutting creation out of the services rather than incorporating architectural designs that allow God's first discourse of inspiration, wisdom and beauty to catch the worshipper's attention and inspire them to recognize the Creator through his creation.

As we value the sacredness of creation less, it becomes unfamiliar and even strange to us. Most of the thoughts concerning what we reference as "nature" are now twisted towards chores, hunting excursions, and recreation where we *challenge* nature and ultimately conquer it. As if we could conquer God's creation! Just ask BP and President Obama if nature can be readily conquered.

In such a hierarchical worldview it makes no sense to become intimate with creation. Taking time from our busy schedules to actually try and learn from animals, birds, fish, trees, soil, a river, etc. seems very "unnatural" and artificial in a modern world. To the Western mind, nature is to be feared, conquered, killed or utilized for the material value it has, but it is never to be viewed as intimately related to me nor sacred. While creation may illicit inspirational feelings from people, to the Western mind it is rarely seen as the start of a continuous conversation with Creator. The Western view of creation has proven to be anthropocentric and utilitarian.

### The Futility of Utility

At some level everyone enjoys the beauty found in creation. But even within an "inspired" view I often hear people express a creation theology reflective of a human centeredness. The anthropocentric view of creation—or "nature" as some choose to call it—is often utilitarian. In a utilitarian worldview nature is predominately made for the purposes surrounding human function or pleasure. This worldview assumption can even be expressed in heartfelt thoughts of God for creating our world. No doubt that is a part of God's purpose or we would not enjoy it so much but, at the end of the day, it is more about differentiation over and above relational affiliation.

A friend told me about visiting an artist's store just off the beach in Southern California. My friend spent a great deal of time admiring the artist's work but then he had to admit to the artist that he could not afford any of his beautiful art. "That's okay," replied the artist. "While

it's true I make a living by selling my art, what I really enjoy is watching people admire it."

Undoubtedly, the Creator makes "good stuff" so we can enjoy it. But aesthetic beauty is not the only reason for creation. Regardless of whether one counts days or millennia in Genesis chapter 1, humans are still the final characters to show up in the story. Coming in last place should give us all pause for humility. Obviously, creation was enjoyed prior to our arrival. Consider the fact that there are places in the depth of the oceans, on the highest mountains, and deep in space that human beings have never seen and likely they never will be seen by human eyes. Such unreachable places seem to be reserved for the Creator's enjoyment alone.

Creation exists for far more than our pleasure. In fact, if things continue down the road they are on, it will be easy to imagine a world operating in its fullness, but without the human beings that once inhabited it. Our anthropocentric worldviews can hardly bear the thought of the world not revolving around us. Though it should be said, like all the other parts of creation, humans also have an important place of connectedness to, for and with creation.

By following the Genesis story in its context we can see that there is an obvious relationship between the Creator, earth, human beings, animals, birds, plants, waters, and so on. As I pointed out earlier, the God who took his time to create and observe the goodness in its fullness remains with his creation. God doesn't abandon any of it to be left on its own. After all, why would one hang up a beautiful painting and never take a second look at it?

In a similar fashion to the Genesis 1 account, the writer of Psalm 148 slowly unpacks and enjoys what God has made:

Praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord from the heavens!  
Praise him from the skies!  
Praise him, all his angels!  
Praise him, all the armies of heaven!  
Praise him, sun and moon!  
Praise him, all you twinkling stars!  
Praise him, skies above!  
Praise him, vapors high above the clouds!  
Let every created thing give praise to the Lord,  
for he issued his command, and they came into being.  
He set them in place forever and ever.  
His decree will never be revoked.

Praise the Lord from the earth, you creatures of the ocean depths,  
fire and hail, snow and clouds, wind and weather that obey him,  
mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars,  
wild animals and all livestock,  
small scurrying animals and birds,  
kings of the earth and all people, rulers and judges of the earth,  
young men and young women, old men and children.  
Let them all praise the name of the Lord.  
For his name is very great;  
his glory towers over the earth and heaven  
He has made his people strong,  
honoring his faithful ones—the people of Israel  
who are close to him.  
Praise the Lord!

The Psalmist reflects the Creator's enjoyment by recognizing the many aspects of how God is seen and glorified through his creation. Each line reminds us to be thankful for such great gifts. It is truly humbling to know that God wants to share creation's beauty with us as we take the time to watch the beauty unfold around us.

Native Americans have constructs similar to the scriptural examples of thanksgiving to honor the Creator for what he has done. One of those prayers, the *Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address*, has been formalized and had I the space; I would share it with you. In it you would notice the great similarities in recognizing and enjoying each part of creation. It addresses every element including the people, the stars, the winds, the birds and at the end of each thought says, "now our minds are one."<sup>5</sup>

Apparently, the Psalmists, the writer of Genesis chapter 1 and Native American prayers all agree that the Creator has made a good world in which we are to live and which we are to thoroughly enjoy it. God's first discourse is always present. But the critical question in our generation is how we are to live in God's world. Is the world made for us or are we made as just one part of the creation?

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<sup>5</sup> Available courtesy of Six Nations Indian Museum and the Tracking Project, Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World; English version: John Stokes and Kanawahienton (David Benedict, Turtle Clan/Mohawk); Mohawk version: Rokwaho (Dan Thompson, Wolf Clan/Mohawk.) Original inspiration: Tekaronianekon (Jake Swamp, Wolf Clan/Mohawk). Thanksgiving Address Fund c/o Tracking Project P.O. Box 266, Corrales, New Mexico 87048.

### People Use or People, Us

Could it also be that there is a tendency for those who view creation primarily in a utilitarian way to also view other people in a utilitarian way? This may be a difference between American individualism and our Native way of community. Ultimately, a utilitarian view of creation for the purpose of material gain results in wanton destruction of the earth. A highly individualistic worldview may explain why human life is valued so little in international trade and in the constant propensity towards violence, wars, and genocide. Invariably, the poorest and most marginalized on earth suffer the most from corporate imperialism. If diversity in creation is not understood and appreciated by the West, then perhaps it is not difficult to see why diversity would not be of any value when considering others in humanity.

The North American Indigenous view and the ancient Hebraic worldview find agreement in the understanding that creation is sacred. To the Indigenous peoples of North America, our land and all it contains, is *the Holy Land*. The land is sacred (holy) because it was given to us in a trust relationship by the Creator. The land is holy because God is holy. It is sacred because the land and all creation is a gift from God. Christians ought to be the first ones to realize this—after all, Christ is the creator.

### Salvation Connected to Christ the Creator

According to John 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16, 17; and Heb. 1:1 many of the New Testament writers understood Jesus Christ to be the efficacious Creator. In this great mystery the Incarnational Christ is somehow also the orchestrator of creation. Western theology has a somewhat weak understanding of Jesus as Creator—and I would suggest this leads to a weak soteriology. The basic issue is that Jesus died for all of creation and that redemption is global, for the whole earth.

The type of modern anthropocentric dualism understood in America between material and spiritual reality has fed into the idea of a disposable earth and disposable societies (as long as it is not my society or my beach—think BP—experiencing the ramifications). A modern ecological worldview may not offer anything better. I tend to agree with Pope John Paul II who came to this startling realization: "Over the years I have become more and more convinced that the ideologies of evil are profoundly rooted in the history of European philosophical thought."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Ideologies of Evil," available at Catholicculture.org, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6424>

### Close to Indigenous is not Close Enough

With no time today to expound more on the ills of Western Enlightenment Philosophy, I will simply state that there are a number of hurdles that a Western American worldview must discard in order to preserve creation and find Harmony in the community of creation:

1. The Classic Platonic/Cartesian Dualisms that lead to value reason over experience, the spiritual over "secular" and material, etc., while abandoning the oppressive pedagogies that promote these tenets;
2. Extrinsic categorization over relational categorization that leads to creating false realities removed from the whole;
3. A Progressive view of civilization that understands ancients to be less civilized than moderns;
4. An anthropocentric worldview where "man" reigns over nature;
5. Economic coercion and military violence as a substitute for true authority;
6. Individual greed, expressed through unbridled and unchecked capitalism over the common good, which has led to the commodification of natural resources like land, water and now, even air;
7. And, *Twofold Judgments*:

A special characteristic of Western thinking, fully reflected in American ways, is that of making twofold judgments based on principle. The structure of the Indo-European languages seems to foster this kind of thinking and the negative actions that follow. A situation is assigned to a category held high, thus providing a justification for positive effort; or to one held low, with justification for rejection, avoidance or other negative action. Two-fold judgments seem to be the rule in western and American life: moral-immoral, legal-illegal, right-wrong, sin-virtue, clean-dirty, success-failure, civilized-primitive, practical-impractical, introvert-extrovert, secular-religious, Christian-pagan. This kind of thinking tends to put the world of values into absolutes. Its arbitrary nature is indicated by the fact that modern science no longer uses opposite categories, in almost all instances preferring to use the concept of a range with degrees of difference separating the poles.<sup>7</sup>

The twofold judgment is, perhaps, the most striking cultural value difference when comparing modern Americans with Native Americans.

<sup>7</sup> Conrad M. Arensberg and Arthur H. Neihoff, *Introducing Social Change: a Manual for Community Development* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1971), 210-214.



I should also point out that I do not believe that existing forms of modern environmentalism will suffice, even though there are similarities to Native American ideas and ideologies such as found in Deep Ecology/Ecosophy. For example we agree that:

1. All life is interconnected and is reciprocal;
2. Human beings have a symbiotic relationship with creation;
3. Life is biocentric *in that*, each part has a role to play in the natural relationship of harmony;
4. Creation teaches values—living and learning;
5. Appreciation of quality of life and not movement towards higher standards (progress).

Native Americans also can point to many differences from Deep Ecology such as:

1. Creation exists because of a Creator or Sacred Force, the Great Mystery;
2. Life is intrinsically valuable *because* it is a gift from the Creator and therefore, it is sacred—meaning existence and purpose are crucial;
3. Life is not just bio-centric but also has a seemingly anthropocentric side, in that the role of human beings is unique and humans relate to the rest of creation uniquely. It is perhaps best described as *ministrocentric*<sup>8</sup> (centered on serving creation, maintaining harmony, assuring reciprocity and conducting ceremonies of mediation) to maintain the harmony and restore harmony when it is broken. This includes Creator, humans and creation—gratitude, reciprocity and ceremony;
4. Creation is the Creator's first discourse to humanity and it is continuous;
5. Harmony Way (well-being) is not a philosophy; it is how life operates and the only way that life can continue as Creator intends.

Modernity, in all its forms was “Dead On Arrival.” The industrial age and the era of colonialism and neo-colonialism have written a check to our world that has insufficient funds. We are doomed if we don't change course. Only a worldview encompassing of the interconnectedness between Creator, human beings and the rest of creation is indigenous and biblically in order. Our survival as a people on this planet depends on its adoption. The single conceptual integration of land, history, religion and culture may be difficult for Western minds to embrace. For Native Americans, this integration is often explained as a visceral

<sup>8</sup> *Ministro*: to serve, wait upon, provide, supply.

“knowing” or somehow imbedded in our DNA. This feeling we have of ourselves as a people, including our history and cultures being connected to the land, is perhaps the single most glaring difference between a Western worldview and an Indigenous Native North American worldview. Things must change so that all people sense a similar connection.

In its simplest reduction, the earth is our mother (see Romans 8) and all the creatures on the earth are our relatives in that we have the same Creator. The Harmony Way makes room for the kind of living that allows respect for these relationships to exist. The writers of Scripture had a similar understanding. The entire earth and everything in it was created by God and everything plays a part in the other's existence and well-being. Modern science understands how even the giving of oxygen and carbon dioxide between trees and humanity keep them both living. So, in understanding symbiosis, everything created needs each other to live in Harmony.

Reciprocity is a natural law of the universe. For humans to maintain harmony, they must reflect the created order. There is fluidity between understanding reciprocity between human beings and reciprocity in other creation. For example, when we chose to help each other in our community, it often comes back around. Someone will end up helping us when we need it. The commonality between mutuality and natural reciprocity is found in understanding that all of creation operates according to this principle. Among Native Americans are expressed understandings of opposites and balance. Another way to say this is that in all of life there is a harmonious existence and an existence of chaos. Harmony is what restores the balance and subsumes the chaos.

To remind themselves of the connection and to break dualistic thinking, Western peoples must develop new ways of expressing their thanks through ceremony and they must spend time away from their cities and on the earth as it was first made. Through expressing gratitude in ceremonies Native Americans reveal to others and themselves the connection between the Creator, human beings, the earth and all of creation. The foundation of Native ceremony is gratitude for the relationships that exist. Western peoples need to re-discover what their Indigenous ancestors knew and in doing so, become Indigenous again. To move ahead, we must all be connected to creation in Harmony.