

“Native Spirituality “Renewal” & the Emerging Church”

by Nanci Des Gerlaise

While those practicing Native Spirituality may believe they are practicing a completely unique form of spirituality, originating with them, they couldn't be further from the truth. Native Spirituality is just one part of a vast movement that is creating a paradigm shift in our present-day culture away from biblical Christianity and replacing it with an all-inclusive interspiritual global religion that relies heavily upon mystical practices. The results will create a “Christianity” that has no resemblance to biblical Christianity whatsoever.

As part of this massive global shift, many Native American or First Nations tribes are exploring the renewal of their ancient spiritual traditions and reinstating ancestral and mystical practices. Natives involving themselves in this pursuit see this as an opportunity to bring recognition to the forgotten and once persecuted Native American religion. They fail to realize that they are actually participating in a mass deception spreading throughout the world in the days prior to Christ's return.

One example of this “awakening” among Native Americans took place on July 30th, 2007, when the Lummi Nation in Washington State sponsored the Paddle to Lummi Canoe Journey 2007 for six days. Its motto was Traveling the Traditional Highways of Our Ancestors, and its theme was Xwialken etse Tl'aneq—Lummi for the Return of the Potlatch.¹

Salish canoe families from around the Northwest Coast gathered to celebrate their first potlatch since 1937. Potlatches, a distinctive tradition in the area, focused on stabilizing relationships among tribes, feasting, celebrating, and giving gifts. The call was to celebrate “as the Lummi Nation Reawakens, Renews and Revives their ancient traditions.”²

Many other examples exist, as well, that show how this spiritual “renewal” is taking place within the lives of Native Americans and First Nations people. Richard Twiss,* (see * below) of the Lakota Sioux tribe, looked for this renewal or awakening among Native people. In his book, *One Church, Many Tribes*, Twiss states:

This is a time of transition in ministry among indigenous believers around the world—a time of exploration and sincere inquiring of the Lord for new perspectives and approaches to Native ministry. Around the globe among indigenous Christians, cultural identity is surfacing as the key dynamic in this emerging new Native ministry paradigm and spiritual awakening.³ (emphasis added)

Twiss adds:

Christians are debating the use of Native American drums, gourds, rattles and dances as legitimate expressions of godly faith. In the next decade or so, this controversy will also subside and we will hear and see indigenous sounds and movements in church services across the land in glorious worship to Jesus Christ. Indeed, that day is already dawning.⁴ (Emphasis added)

What Twiss is saying is very scary because a lot of people will be deceived into thinking that what he is proposing is a good thing. But while many Native American Christians, like Twiss, are looking for a great spiritual awakening within the First Nations and Native American groups—primarily by incorporating Native Spirituality cultural practices into their Christianity—right under their noses, a massive worldwide deception authored by Satan is incorporating Native Spirituality into its plan and is surging forward, ultimately forsaking the purity of the Gospel message.

Native Spirituality Incorporated into Society

While Native Spirituality is being introduced into the lives of countless Native people, at the same time, Native Spirituality is being incorporated into contemporary culture: in popular forms of interspirituality such as goddess worship⁵ in public schools where teachers are requiring their classes to study Native religion as part of multiculturalism; throughout the environmental movement;⁶ and in the work of prominent politicians such as former Vice President Al Gore.⁷ Even the movies *Pocahontas* and *Dances With Wolves* have given mainstream culture a “crash course in Native spirituality.”⁸ Partly in overcompensation for very real injustices committed against Native Americans, Native Spirituality has become politically correct inasmuch as traditional biblical Christianity is on a fast track to becoming politically incorrect. Sadly, in the process, the Gospel which is “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16) is being pushed aside, as if it were to blame—leaving countless numbers of people—both Native American and non-Native—without the sure hope that only comes through knowing Christ.

Native Spirituality and the Catholic Church—“A Natural Fit”

The Catholic Church has joined the ranks of those embracing Native Spirituality. In a November 2006 article by Western Catholic Reporter titled “Catholic School Makes Room For Native Spirituality,” the principal of Ben Calf Robe Catholic School in Alberta states that the school, made up of 200 native children, “combines the teaching and Gospels of the Catholic Church with the various aspects of native spirituality.”⁹ The article states:

There are four sacred drums in the school and some 60 drummers. Drumming is the sacred heart beat of Mother Earth, Richardson said. “When the drum is beat upon, we believe that all of the prayers within the children are lifted to God.” . . . In their monthly liturgical celebrations, the school uses the Catholic rite but they bring in native spirituality in the methods of smudging and the prayers to the Creator.¹⁰

The principal of Ben Calf Robe Catholic School says that the “similarities between Catholicism and native traditions and processes are evident.”¹¹ He adds:

[W]e believe Catholicism and native spirituality are equal . . . We don’t see one being more important and we don’t see them being entwined. We do see them over-lapping at times.¹²

In another article “Native Spirituality Celebrated in Catholic School System,” a Native Studies teacher in the Canadian Catholic school system “is very serious about joining two strands of his Métis heritage—Catholicism and Native spirituality—something he sees as a natural fit.”

¹³ This resonance between Native Spirituality and Catholicism isn’t strictly limited to Canada either. It’s happening in the United States too. In an article in the *News of the Northwest Jesuits*, a Montana Jesuit novice says he has found “a beautiful marriage between Catholic and Native Spirituality,” and is encountering “new light” in the sweat lodge.¹⁴ The article describes what transpires in a sweat lodge ceremony:

The space eventually is packed with Nakoda and White Clay tribe members of every age, surrounding the awestruck Jesuit guest. Three young men bring rocks from the blazing fire outside and drop them into a pit. The holy man—whom Herman describes as entirely Indian and entirely Catholic—douses his flashlight and begins splashing water and tossing sweet grass on the smoldering stones. Red sparks dance, intermittently lighting up the many Native faces. The people chant sacred songs in their native language, calling on their local saints, the ancestors.¹⁵

Native Spirituality Embraced by Mainstream Christianity

Within the evangelical/Protestant church, Native Spirituality is cropping up more and more all the time. For instance, the Mennonite Church Canada offers on their Resource Centre website a Medicine Wheel Poster. It states:

This poster is a tool for living in harmony with God, each other and creation.

It's a part of the Reaching Up to God our Creator resource box which highlights the common ground of Aboriginal Sacred Teachings and the Bible, in the hope of fostering respect and understanding among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.¹⁶

Also on the Mennonite Church Canada website is a booklet titled Teachings of the Sacred Tree "to compare Aboriginal Sacred Teachings about the Sacred Tree and the Bible's use of trees."

¹⁷ The site also offers several resources by Native American Richard Twiss, a leader in the Indigenous People's Movement (IPM), as well as several other resources on Native Spirituality, the emerging church, and contemplative mysticism.

The ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) is another Protestant denomination that is embracing Native Spirituality. In Lutheran Woman Today magazine, the president of a Lutheran seminary wrote this in an article titled "Dream Catchers: The ELCA Commission for Women":

Beside the bed of my now-teenage daughter hangs a dream catcher, one of the many treasures of Native American culture. According to legend, the dream catcher filters dreams, sending good ones to the sleeper and trapping bad ones until they evaporate at dawn's first light.

I thank God for the past 15 years of history during which the Commission for Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has been a dream catcher for thousands upon thousands in our church and beyond.¹⁸

You can find examples all over the Internet of mainstream Christian groups and denominations that are integrating Native Spirituality. Medicine wheels, circles, dream catchers, sweat lodges, and shamanism—it's all there.

The Emerging Church, The New Age, and Native Spirituality

The emerging church is a movement that is said to be a new way to do Christianity, a way that is supposed to reach out to the postmodern generation in a more relevant way than traditional Christianity. In reality, the emerging church, which is really a merging church, is a full-scale ecumenical effort to unite all religions against biblical Christianity by using mystical practices to accomplish this. In the emerging church, doctrine becomes unimportant while unity at all costs becomes the most important thing.

Richard Twiss talks about "heal[ing] the rifts"¹⁹ between Natives and Anglo-Saxons, Democrats and Republicans, men and women, rich and poor, etc. and asserts how we can "all have a part to play in the healing of our nation [America]."²⁰ This is exactly what the emerging church is proposing to do. But the healing of the nations (America, Canada, or any part of the world) is not going to happen before Jesus Christ returns. The teaching that we can, in and of ourselves, usher in the Kingdom of God on earth now before His return is heretical. Our focus, as Native or non-Native Christians, needs to be the preaching of the Gospel according to the Holy Scriptures. It is not the earth we are to save but rather men, women, and children's souls.

When Twiss tells us to “imagine Native believers enjoying the fragrant aroma of burning sage, sweet grass or cedar”²¹ or “smudging,”²² I believe he is misleading many. Galatians 3:28 tells us, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” In other words, our focus as born-again believers isn’t to practice rituals from the cultures we were born into. We are born again, into a brand new culture—God’s culture. The one “culture” that God has bestowed on all mankind is the Gospel; it is the one heritage passed on to us by God, yet we are destroying it today.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

In 2010 at the Emergent Village Theological Conference, Richard Twiss was part of this emerging church event. A blog for the event states:

Richard Twiss . . . began by blessing us with sage incense and having a member of his team dance a healing dance. . . . He moved from rejecting his reservation upbringing, to re-discovering his heritage and hating white people, coming to faith in Christ through evangelical churches, walking away again from his heritage, to re-re-discovering his Native culture and integrating it into his faith.²³

The emerging church fits in very well with Native Spirituality and Catholicism. Icons, incense, earth-based spirituality, ushering in the kingdom of God, and healing for the earth through ecumenical unity, mantras, and chanting—these are all elements they have in common with each other.

In *One Church, Many Tribes*, Richard Twiss echoes Rob Bell, a leader in the emerging church. Twiss talks about removing the barriers between the “sacred” and the “secular.”²⁴ He says that “Native people do not have a split view of reality.”²⁵ On Bell’s national tour, *Everything is Spiritual*,²⁶ Bell tells his audiences that God is in everything and no gap exists between the secular and the spiritual. Twiss says that “Western Christians struggle with . . . a dualistic belief”²⁷ with regard to the secular and the spiritual. Whether Twiss realizes it or not, he is describing a core viewpoint in the New Age and occultism, according to the maxim “as above, so below,” where the secular (the flesh or carnal man) and the spiritual (God) are one. I think this explanation by Christian author Ray Yungen demonstrates the subtleties that lie within bridging the gap between the secular and the spiritual (i.e., man and God) in his book *A Time of Departing*:

Satan is not simply trying to draw people to the dark side of a good versus evil conflict. Actually, he is trying to eradicate the gap between himself and God, between good and evil, altogether. When we understand this approach it helps us see why . . . Jack Canfield said he felt God flowing through all things. . . . Such reasoning implies that God has given His glory to all of creation; since Satan is part of creation, then he too shares in this glory, and thus is “like the Most High.” . . .

If the all-is-one view were true, then salvation through a Redeemer would become unnecessary and Jesus’ death on the Cross would be rendered altogether futile and pointless. In order for the Cross to make any sense, there must be a separation between God’s perfect nature and Man’s sin nature.²⁸

The Native view, which maintains there is no division between the secular and the spiritual, goes against what the Bible says about the wretched carnality of man. God is so holy and so pure that He cannot even look upon such sinfulness. It is only through the perfection, sinlessness, and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, and through being washed clean by His blood that anyone can be saved.

There is a gap between the sacred and the secular, and there is only One mediator who can rectify that. Native Spirituality, Catholicism, and the New Age—none of these belief systems can do it nor can they eradicate that huge chasm that has been fixed between God and man. This may be hard for us to understand because the Bible also says

“God so loved the world . . .” and is “not willing that any should perish” (John 3:16 and 2 Peter 3:9). But yet, by the same token, John 3:16 also makes it very clear that only “whosoever believeth on Him will not perish but will have everlasting life.” He has bestowed upon every man and woman the ability to believe upon Him in as great a measure as He has also given every man the ability to reject Him. Thus, we are all without excuse.

The plan of the emerging church is to see the earth “healed” by bringing in a global, all-inclusive kingdom of God that would include all religions and all people. The problem with an all-inclusive “kingdom” is that there is no room for a Savior who proclaims there is only one way to Heaven. One very popular New Age/New Spirituality proponent who believes man is on the threshold of enlightenment and healing for the earth says this:

It will take an unprecedented act of courage, on a grand scale. You may have to do something virtually unknown in the annals of human history. . . . You may have to give up some of your most sacred beliefs. . . . let me make something clear. The era of the Single Savior is over. What is needed now is joint action, combined effort, collective co-creation.²⁹ (emphasis added)

How is the world going to grab hold of this “collective” effort to unite together and save the world? Through mysticism and occult practices. And because mysticism is such a major component in Native Spirituality, the emerging church, and the New Age, it is easy to see how these three spiritualities are really on the same path. And it is a path that excludes the single Savior of the world.

These are perilous times for all Bible-believing Christians. Jesus said that if we follow Him, the world will hate us, and we will suffer persecution. Many have gone before us who have paid dearly with their very lives. May God give us that kind of faith.

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. (John 15:19)

* * * *

* On February 9, 2013, Richard Twiss (58), co-founder and president of Wiconi International and author of One Church Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You died of a heart attack.

To order copies of Native Spirituality “Renewal” & the Emerging Church, click here. There is also a bonus section in the booklet: “New Age Elements in North American Native Spirituality.”

Notes:

1. Lance Dickie, “The Pull of History and Healing” (The Seattle Times, July 27, 2007, http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/opinion/2003807813_lance27.html).
2. Lumni Nation (http://www.whatcomvolunteer.org/HOC__Organization_Profile_Page?Oid=001800000t9HvPAAU).
3. Richard Twiss, One Church Many Tribes (Ventura, CA: Regal Books from Gospel Light, 2000), pp. 20-21.
4. Ibid., p. 21.
5. For an excellent article on contemporary feminism and goddess worship, see Berit Kjos’ “Welcoming the Goddess,” chapter 5 from her book, Under the Spell of Mother Earth (online at <http://www.crossroad.to/Books/UnderSpell/5-goddess.htm>). The chapter also features an informative chart, “Common Practices of Earth-Centered Religions,” which shows the common practices of pagan religions: trance states, dreams and visions, divination, spiritism, magic/sorcery, charms/amulets, solstice rites, serpent worship, and sacred sex.

6. There is an excellent article about earth-based spirituality called "Native, Indigenous, and Nature Religion" from Dave Hunt's book, *Occult Invasion* (ch. 8, online at <http://www.ankerberg.com/Articles/new-age/NA0201W2.htm>).
7. See "Al Gore's Vision of Global Salvation: Quotations from his 1992 best-seller: *Earth in the Balance*" by Berit Kjos (<http://www.crossroad.to/text/articles/Gore7-99.html>).
8. Philip Jenkins, *Dream Catchers: How mainstream America discovered Native Spirituality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 5.
9. Bill Glen, "Catholic School Makes Room for Native Spirituality" (*Western Catholic Reporter*, November 6, 2006, <http://wcr.ab.ca/old-site/news/2006/1106/bencalf110606.shtml>).
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Pamela Sexsmith, "Native Spirituality Celebrated in Catholic School System" (*The Aboriginal Multi-Media Society*, 2006, Vol. 4, Issue 5, <http://www.ammsa.com/node/14133>).
14. Pat Walsh, "In Montana a Novice Finds 'a Beautiful Marriage Between Catholic and Native Spirituality'" (*News of the Northwest Jesuits*, Spring 2008, http://www.nwjesuits.info/news/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=32:in-montana-a-novice-finds-a-beautiful-marriage-between-catholic-and-native-spirituality&catid=8:vocations-a-formation&Itemid=14).
15. Ibid.
16. Mennonite Church Canada website's Resource Centre (<http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/5/10786?userref=0>).
17. Ibid.
18. Michael L. Cooper-White, "Dream Catchers: The ELCA Commission for Women" (*Lutheran Woman Today*, March 2004, <http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org/back/04issues/0304article3.html>).
19. Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, op. cit., p. 23.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., pp. 132-133.
22. Ibid., p. 133.
23. Emergent Village Theological Conference, <http://iowaemergent.blogspot.com/2010/11/emergent-village-theological-conference.html>
24. Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, op. cit., p. 92.
25. Ibid., p. 91.
26. For more information on Rob Bell's *Everything is Spiritual* tour, see the DVD *Quantum Lie* with Warren B. Smith and Bob DeWaay at www.lighthouse trails.com.
27. Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes*, op. cit., p. 93.
28. Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2nd ed. 2006), pp. 108-109).
29. Neale Donald Walsch, *The New Revelations* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2002), pp. 175, 157; as quoted from *Deceived on Purpose* by Warren B. Smith (Magalia, CA: Mountain Stream Press, 2nd edition, 3rd printing), pp. 61-62.

To order copies of *Native Spirituality "Renewal"* & the *Emerging Church*, click [here](#). There is also a bonus section in the booklet: "New Age Elements in North American Native Spirituality."

Native Spirituality "Renewal" & the *Emerging Church* written by Nanci Des Gerlaise is another one of our Lighthouse Trails Print Booklet Tracts. The booklet tract is 18 pages long and sells for \$1.85 for single copies. Quantity discounts are as much as 50% off retail. To order copies of *Native Spirituality "Renewal"* & the *Emerging Church*, please visit http://www.lighthouse trails.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=LTP&Product_Code=BKT-NW-

[EMG&Category_Code=BKT](#). There is also a bonus section in the booklet: “New Age Elements in North American Native Spirituality.”

Discounts

Quantity	Price Each
1-5	\$1.85
6-25	\$1.57
26-50	\$1.39
51-100	\$1.20
101-150	\$1.02
151+	\$0.92