

God Is Red: A Native View of Religion Study Guide

**God Is Red: A Native View of Religion by Vine Deloria,
Jr.**

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Plot Summary

"God is Red: A Native View of Religion" by Vine Deloria is a non-fiction work detailing the origin, history and doctrine involved in the Indian tribal culture. These beliefs are also compared and contrasted against the beliefs of other cultures, especially those of Western Europeans and Americans. Deloria is a man who is well versed in the Native American culture as he is also Indian.

One of the first things that the reader may notice is that Deloria uses the term "Indian" as opposed to the politically correct equivalent of "Native American." This may be due to the fact that the book was originally written in 1972 and the author did not feel that it was necessary to update the reference in the revised edition. Also, Deloria points out that some people are offended by the term "Native American" since anyone born in the U.S. is technically a Native American. Regardless, Deloria does not focus on the moniker and instead focuses on how the Indian tribal cultures differ from that of other cultures.

It is obvious that the author finds many of the traditions and beliefs in the Christian doctrine to be groundless and often absurd. The majority of the book seems to be focused toward pointing out the superiority of the Indian tribal religions. That is not to say that Deloria believes that the entire concept of the Christian doctrine is pointless and that the Indian way is the only way. Rather, there are many passages in which the author applauds the stalwart faith of the non-violent Christian.

One of the most compelling subjects tackled in the book is the concept of Creation and the Deity. The two cultures have almost nothing in common when it comes to beliefs in this area.

Another compelling subject is the topic of death and religion. This is one area in which Deloria claims that the Christian faith makes little or no sense. In the Christian faith, death is seen as an end to life. The main focus of the afterlife is on Heaven and the fact that the soul will go on to its eternal reward if one has obeyed God's law. In Heaven, the streets are paved with gold, there are angels with harps, and everyone is healed. If the afterlife is so blissful, why is it that the members in the Christian faith are the ones who are most afraid of dying? Deloria delights in using the example of televangelist Oral Roberts. Many years ago, Roberts had announced to his congregation that unless he raised \$10 million, God told him that he would be "called home." Many people were frantic to raise the money to save their revered reverend. If Roberts had believed what he had preached, the thought of going to his eternal reward should have been welcomed. Deloria jokes that he should have told the same congregation that God spoke to him and changed His mind, ordering the people to send the money to Deloria instead.

In the Indian tribal religion, death is nothing to fear. Nothing ever dies, merely transitions into the next phase. Therefore, death is simply a natural progression.

Overall, "God is Red: A Native View of Religion" is a fascinating look at the Indian tribal religions, including the origin and contemporary use and revival of time honored traditions.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary and Analysis

American Indians were an important part of the country's domestic affairs until 1890. From the 1890s through to the 1960s, American Indians became "Vanishing Americans" and most of the populace believed that the majority of the tribes had been exterminated. There were always token Indians represented at key celebrations such as Thanksgiving and Columbus Day gatherings, but for the majority of Americans, Indians were no longer part of the culture.

The 1960s saw numerous Indian protests and the American public began to realize that there were still a significant number of American Indians living in the West, in the areas surrounding the Great Lakes, and the southeastern United States. By and large, people did not understand why the Indians were angry until they discovered that many of the Indian treaties that had been in effect for nearly 100 years were being violated so that the resources could be taken by urban America.

Other so-called ethnic groups were not treated in the same way as American Indians and many people believed that was because the Indians' settlements were often sitting atop valuable resources such as oil and various minerals. The government attempted to convince the Native Americans that they would have the same rights as other people in mainstream society. However, this was proven to be untrue.

In the 1860s, American Indians suffered from neglect imposed by federal and state bureaucrats. The federal government had issued treaties with various communities of American Indians in the West, giving them clearly defined properties that were not necessarily desirable for the whites. However, the Gold Rush had caused many Easterners to immigrate to California. Soon the Indians found that their plains were being infringed upon and subsequently voiced great protests.

According to Deloria, the miners began a program of systematic genocide against the Native Americans, going to such extremes as having "Sunday shoots" that encouraged groups of whites to attack Indian settlements, killing as many people as possible.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was ordered to find areas in which the California Indians could reside. This occurred during the Great Depression when agriculture was struggling and largely subsidized by the federal government. However, the subsidies did not apply to the Indians.

Many Indians traveled to the West Coast to work in various war industries while white veterans were fighting in World War II. However, after the veterans returned to California the Indians were cast aside so that the veterans could return to their jobs.

During the 1950s, the BIA engineered a relocation program so that be reservations could be sold off and the existence of the tribes could be "terminated." As a result, many



Indians were placed in low-paying jobs throughout the cities of California. By the time the 1960s arrived, the combination of California Indians and the currently relocated Plains and Southwestern Indians began to assert their tribal identity.

This behavior did not apply only to the California Indians. The same type of behavior was inflicted upon Indians in many areas across the country, including South Dakota, Oklahoma, Maine, and the Great Lakes region. Indians began to fight for their fishing rights and against government programs that stripped precious timber from Indian forests.

The first great protest was held in the 1968 when a group of Mohawks blockaded the Canadian border at Cornwall Bridge, claiming that the government had dishonored the Jay Treaty of 1774. The government attempted to make the Mohawks pay tolls to cross the border, as well as pay customs taxes on items brought back into Canada from the United States. The group was arrested and appeared in court in early 1969, but the Indians were acquitted. The event was widely publicized and is considered to be the action that caused Indians across the U.S. to take another look at the concept of the protest.

Gallup, New Mexico was the site of the next major protest. Gallup can be seen as an area that was hypocritical in its treatment of Indians. Although the town relies heavily on Indian trade in order to survive, its government continually brutalized the Indian population and also excluded them from participating in civic events. The National Indian Youth Council had previously protested when the Chamber of Commerce held a Gallup ceremonial in which almost no Indians were permitted to participate. The Council attempted to inform the public of the truth regarding their ill-treatment by publishing a pamphlet titled, "When Our Grandfathers Had Guns." Although some of the older Indians were puzzled by the ruckus created by the younger generation, it was considered to be a monumental event in that it was the first time the younger generation stood up for their rights.

Deloria goes on to refer to a number of other protests, particularly when the government was in violation of federal treaties. There were also many incidents in which Indians rights were repeatedly trampled upon, and many were arrested for various offenses. However, many of these arrests were proven to be illegal since the federal government did not have jurisdiction over the areas in which they asserted the Indians had trespassed.

One of the greatest offenses to the Indian tribes was the desecration of their burial grounds. It is well known that the Indians revere their dead and the burial grounds are sacred. Large groups of whites began to defile the burial grounds and in many cases bodies were exhumed and graves were robbed. In one of the most horrific cases, people dug up bodies of Indians and sold their skulls for \$20 apiece.

Over the next few years Indian leaders from many different tribes attempted to preserve their rights by using the system. Many people appeared before Congress and at the White House in order to develop laws to protect their peoples and their lands. One of



the most significant pieces of legislation was the American Indian Religious Freedom Resolution in which the religion and ceremonial rites of Indians were required to be protected.

Chapter two is titled "The Indians of the American Imagination." Deloria states that until the incident at Wounded Knee, Indians were stereotyped by the media and in various literary works. The American Indians tended to fall into one of two groups. Either they were a part of a group of warlike savages or dignified elders sitting out on a mesa spouting wisdom. Deloria states that the malevolent image most likely comes from movie caricatures, while the image of the peaceful elder is derived from pageants, anthologies, and the wish of whites to establish a sense of "Jungian authentication."

The Civil Rights movement brought even more attention to the American Indians. The public tried to convince many minorities, that they were in fact, "good guys." As a result, there were many books released featuring American Indians, including "The New Indians" by Stan Steiner, "Custer Died for Your Sins" by Vine Deloria, and "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee" by Dee Brown.

Although there were many individuals of the non-Indian community that attempted to know the truth about the lifestyles of the American Indian many more quite uninformed and often asked if Indians still lived in tents or if they were permitted to leave the reservation. Deloria recalls an incident when he was being interviewed on a radio show. A listener called in and wanted to know how Indians celebrated Christmas before the whites arrived in America. The host and Deloria had to go to commercial to keep from laughing out loud on the air.

Throughout the early 1960s, and 1970s, the public learned a great deal about the lives and traditions of the American Indian.

Deloria compares the Indian movement with the Civil Rights movement, which exploded in 1954 after the Supreme Court ruled on Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education.

Books on Indian culture and religion began to be released by a variety of authors, some of which had no intimate knowledge of the culture. Finally books began to become available from Indians in various tribes from Sioux to Cheyenne.

From 1972 to 1990 there were two major developments. Many churches attempted to integrate and unite religion along with traditional Christian ideology. The second development was the interest in the Indian movement by non-Indians. Some non-Indians began to adopt the Indian way of life, their beliefs, and practices. While this interest somewhat trivialized the Indian culture there are some factions that are returning to the old ways.

Chapter three, "The Religious Challenge," examines the incident in which Indians ransacked the BIA building. When confronted many Indians say that there was no difference between their ransacking a federal building and the government raping North America.



Beginning in 1968, many of the main Christian denominations began to raise funds to support various social programs. However, it seemed that the only people who were getting attention and were the ones who protested the loudest. Therefore, it took some time for the Indians, who were interested in peaceful protest, to receive any attention from these groups. Eventually the Indians informed these Christian groups that they were guilty of sins against the culture and in return, the congregations of these churches set about to raise money to atone for their sins. It must be pointed out that many protests from the Indians had nothing to do with financial gain.

The author refers to the Nuremberg Trials and how it was proven that it was inevitable that Western nations would eventually become victims of their own intellectual and moral weaknesses. The Civil Rights movement continued to gain strength throughout the 1960s. The author states that there are far too many martyrs of the movement to name, both black and white, who were committed to developing equality among the people. Deloria states that the Civil Rights movement may have promised a better society without examining the complexities involved. Regardless of the efforts of many, the mandates by the government were eventually turned over to smaller communities to create a melting pot of cultures.

In addition to Civil Rights many ecologists turned their eyes to the rapidly deteriorating ecosystem of the continent. Some accuse the ecologists of trying to turn focus toward the environment and away from the Civil Rights movement.

Although many Americans began to take more interest in Indian culture and were more positive in its understanding and representation, both the Americans and Indians were fooling themselves if they believed this was a positive move. It is true that the Indians were getting more positive attention however, many people were simply interested in the representation of what the Indians stood for, rather than what was true.

In the late 1970s there was such a rampant interest in the traditional beliefs and customs of the Indians that many took to these practices without thoroughly examining what they were all about.

Deloria talks about Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and their views on religion in regards to the psyche of the Western world. Over the past several decades, many people who have considered themselves to be traditionally religious were embracing the Indian religion. There were books detailing how the Christian doctrine was becoming secular and how people were more interested in creating their own religions to suit their needs. This also explains the explosion of the New Age culture, numerology, astrology, martial arts, shamanism, and witchcraft.

Despite all of the differences between these groups, there are many that favor the concept of nature as religion. Those who subscribe to history as a great part of religion often attempt to infuse religion into political parties, something that goes against the Constitution. Perhaps most of all, the profound difference between the American Indians and other groups is that the Indian culture is indigenous and does not bear the burden of establishing the right to the land, as well as attempting to fulfill the basic need of



being accepted. This may be one of the reasons why many Americans object to the idea of Indians being referred to as Native Americans since anyone who is born in the United States should be considered a Native American.

Chapter four, "Thinking in Time and Space," analyzes that beliefs are usually based on political persuasion. As a general rule, liberals tend to be more sympathetic to mankind, while conservatives tend to worship the freedom of corporations and philosophies that underscore individual responsibility.

Deloria states that Western European peoples do not understand how to view nature as it is discerned from a spatial point of view. The identity of Western Europeans has much to do with history and the fact that time is linear. The author examines how time and space have affected various cultures through the use of history. Additionally, religion is often seen as being an evolutionary process during which man progresses in his beliefs and conduct. On the other hand, American Indians do not tend to view their history or religion in this manner. Rather, their beliefs and experiences are based on relationships with other living beings. This is one reason why many tribal religions hold a sacred place, as it is related to various sacred happenings.

The author also examines both sides of being committed to a temporal concept. Many tribal religions may be downgraded or dismissed due to the fact that they do not fall into categories that can be defined with accepted doctrine and temporal concept. It is imperative for the survival of both tribal religions and Christianity to acknowledge each other and accept that there is room for more than one religion in contemporary society.



Chapters 5-9

Chapters 5-9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter five is titled "The Problem of Creation." There are many differences between Christianity and Indian tribal religions. One of the most notable is the idea of creation. Christianity puts a great deal of focus on creation and what it means to the religion. Indian tribal religions prefer to think of creation as the environment as it presents itself in a specific place. These beliefs go back to the concept of space and time and the chronology of events.

Christianity and Indian tribal religions agree that there is a significant role in a creator. That may be the only commonality between the two religions. Christians tend to see creation as the beginning of time and the unfolding of a divine plan, which will eventually end in destruction and judgment. In the Christian religion creation also indicates the point at which Adam enters the world. Also tied into the Christian doctrine is the creation of man. Adam and Eve are said to be made in the image of God. In many religions this equates God existing in human form. Because of the wording in the Bible many cultures also perceive God as a man.

Rather than using creation as a starting point, tribal religions tend to view the entire concept as developing an interrelationship with other living things. One of the first distinctions between the two religions is the way in which the supreme being is conceived. The majority of Indian tribal religions refuse to think of the supreme being anthropomorphically. Many tribal religions may refer to God as "grandfather" in prayer. Although the Great Spirit bears a resemblance to the patriarchal role in the tribal religion, there is no call for a personal relationship as Christians require from their own God.

Another main distinction between the two religions is that Christian theology has created a theory of how sin entered the world. Many theologians have failed to explain however, how evil could come to exist in a perfect world. In this doctrine both man and nature have become corrupt.

Indian tribal religions believe in a vital relationship between nature and humans although the concept remains entirely different from the Christian doctrine. For example, the Indian tribal religions believe in creation, but do not include the fall of grace in its doctrine.

Deloria uses both culture and science to explain the differences between the religious doctrines of the cultures.

Chapter six, "The Concept of History," relates religion to the chronological details of events. As it was discussed in earlier chapters, the American Indians had almost no use for keeping track of past events. The concept of keeping the calendar never seemed



important. That is one reason why, when an Indian is telling a story he may have said it took place long ago without any specific date or time frame. Deloria asserts that the Indian tribes have not purposely avoided keeping chronological and historic records. One of the ways in which the Plains Indians used to record the event of their tribes is by keeping a "Winter Count." The Indians used animal hide, usually from a Buffalo, to draw a symbol that illustrated the most significant event of that year. There was no real criterion for the subject matter therefore, the Winter Count does not give a complete and accurate picture of a specific time and place. A similar system was held by tribes in Arizona, who wrote symbols on a "calendar stick." The calendar sticks would allow readers to understand and recite a brief chronology. This lack of chronology and record keeping may also contribute to the great oral tradition of the American Indian tribes.

Another major distinction between Indian tribal religions and Christianity is that there was no religious controversy, because each tribe shared the same basic beliefs and cultural identity. This cannot be said of Christian religions.

Deloria goes on to examine the presence of the Jews and Jesus in Christian history and doctrine and how the chronology is vital to the establishment and maintenance of the culture and doctrine.

Many sects of the Christian religion are married to the idea that Columbus discovered America, while in fact, the concept is absurd. However, Deloria asserts that it may be important for Western man to hold this belief so that he may protect his religious ideals and culture. There have been many people who have questioned the historical accuracy of Christianity and have chosen not to believe that the Bible and like resources are the only believable record of history of man.

Chapter seven is titled "The Spatial Problem of History." In this chapter Deloria addresses the spatial issues involved in traditional chronology. One of the most significant points the author makes is that the Christian religion often asserts that it is responsible for bringing peace on earth. Historically speaking, this is untrue. Not only have Christians attacked other cultures including American Indians; Christians have often attacked their own. A perfect example of this behavior can be found in the Crusades. The author states that there is no sense in re-examining each detail of the history of Christianity as it would serve only to indict the religion. The author discusses how God may reveal himself through various historic events, including the Spanish Inquisition, the Civil War, the Great Depression, and the defeats of Hitler and Napoleon.

Chapter eight is titled "The Origin of Religion." The origin of religion is vague. The Old Testament is full of fantastic stories of the Hebrews' interactions with God. Are these to be believed as actual historic events or are they merely parables?

In the days before man was in possession of sophisticated knowledge about nature, it was a common belief that God ruled the skies and everything was in harmony. However, when many cultures began to witness supernatural phenomena such as meteors and supernovae it made the heavens appear not so stable. While the Christian



religion tended to fear the celestial happenings, the Indian tribal religions tended to celebrate them.

Deloria examines the origins of religion in various cultures from the Germanic myth to the Hopi.

Chapter Nine, "Natural and Hybrid Peoples," asks various questions about the image that is invoked when one thinks of the Supreme Being. This is not only a physical image, but an examination of the deity's character and behaviors. In many instances people have transferred their own personality traits onto the deity. Deloria states that in reading the Old Testament it occurred to him that the supreme being in the Judeo-Christian doctrine was somewhat unstable. The deity was known to throw temper tantrums, act as Big Brother to make sure the Chosen People were obeying his law, and some believe that there was a large book in which every thought and deed was recorded. Deloria compares some of these supposedly divine characteristics to various humans. As the author states, "Having a 'personal relationship' with this Deity is akin to being J. Edgar Hoover's best friend - it is safe, but not satisfying."

The author states that the comparisons may upset some devout Christians. Yet one only needs to read the Bible objectively to see and understand the behavior of the deity during various historical events.

Deloria goes on to compare and contrast various religions in this vein including Near Eastern religions, Indian tribal religions, and the beliefs of primitive peoples.



Chapters 10-13

Chapters 10-13 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10 is titled "Death and Religion." In this chapter, Deloria addresses the concept of eternal life and how it is considered to be the dénouement of the "historical process." The Christian tradition supports two very different propositions regarding a person's life and what happens after one dies. The author states that there is not a clear statement that explains the afterlife. Therefore the concepts of eternal life and afterlife are easily confused and are often seen as being interchangeable. The Greeks believed in the immortality of the human soul. Christian theology promotes the resurrection, the rebirth of the physical form in a glorified state as an award for good deeds. The "newly glorified body" would be healed of any defect or ailment that plagued the person while he or she was alive. It is easy to see how people could confuse the Greeks' concept of eternal life with the hereafter.

Contemporary Christianity tends to borrow a little bit from each side and the concept of the afterlife often depends on a person's denominational preference. However, it does not seem sensible to imagine an existence where the streets are paved with gold and nothing is ever bad or unhappy. If the concept of the afterlife is the ultimate reward and so incredibly pleasing, then why are so many Christians afraid to die? Deloria refers to an earlier example regarding the televangelist Oral Roberts and his claim that unless he could raise \$10 million, he would be "called home." Apparently, Mr. Roberts had no sense of urgency to spend eternity with his maker.

Two of the most unfortunate aspects of death in the Christian religion include judgment and the separation of body and soul. It is said that the soul goes on while the body, also referred to as the vehicle or vessel, is left behind to be resurrected at the Second Coming. Some of the more violent acts perpetrated by Christians took this to mean that no matter what happened to the body, the soul lived on. Therefore, destroying the body of an enemy would be in some ways permissible. The Indian tribal religions, however, tend to see death as merely a transition between planes.

Chapter eleven, "Human Personality," discusses the process and purpose of repentance within the Christian religion. When Christians come to God there is typically a change in personality and behavior. However, the Christian doctrine can be a double edged sword in which the practicing individual can be both victim and victor.

Chapter twelve, "The Group," details the group mentality and how it affects the religious culture as a whole. In the beginning, when Christ walked the earth, gathering into a group of followers was important to spread the word. The same group mentality can be applied to war protesters and other groups that have a common cause or vision. Still, much of the religion tends to be individualized.

Deloria believes that the Indian tribal religions have an advantage in that their religious ceremonies involve the entire community and create cohesion and unity. The tribes also marry their religious beliefs to their political practices, something that is highly discouraged among American Christians. One may be able to break one aspect or the other in the Christian system, but in the tribal culture, one cannot be broken as easily as it is intertwined with the other.

Chapter thirteen, "Christianity and Contemporary American Culture," discusses how many businesses in American have chosen to incorporate the story of Jesus into their corporate activities, whether or not the business is religiously oriented. The largest and best example of this practice can be awarded to Holyland USA, a \$50 million theme park on the coast of Alabama. There would be something for everyone at Holyland USA, from a petting zoo for the kids to a biblical wax museum and chariot rides. There were also plans to erect a statue of Jesus that would top the height of the Statue of Liberty.

Some have become disillusioned with the direction in which contemporary religion is moving and have turned to other religions, including those of the ancients.



Chapters 14-17

Chapters 14-17 Summary and Analysis

Chapter fourteen is titled "Tribal Religions and Contemporary American Culture." In contemporary American culture it is common to find religions that are shaped by the culture. In Indian tribal religions, however, the culture is shaped by their religion. This often poses a problem in modern society when everything is electronic, as this fact tends to change the culture. It is also a problem with some of the tribes that choose not to use modern conveniences. The children go into the outside world and experience these conveniences, such as electricity, and it can cause a lack of harmony in the home.

Another cause for discord for the tribes was when the concept of the reservation was established. It seemed advantageous for the tribes to have their own schools, hospitals, and the like. However, it also allowed missionaries to come onto the reservation and object to the fact that the culture did not separate its political and religious beliefs. The missionaries became the most vocal force behind the movement to suppress religious freedom on the reservations. By 1887, the plan had almost succeeded. Nearly every tribal religious ceremony had been banned. It was not until 1934 when the Indian Reorganization Act once again allowed the tribes to practice their religions freely.

As technology exploded, tribal religion suffered due to the outside world coming into their sacred place and effectively recruiting its younger generations. However, the 1950s saw a regeneration of commitment and belief in the old ways, and the tribal community began to regain some of its strength. Additionally, the modern culture attracted many Indians to convert to Christianity. Because some Christian Indians continued to live on reservations, it became somewhat tricky to respect and accommodate both sets of doctrine.

Deloria examines various historical events that have also affected the influence of contemporary behaviors, particularly the event that took place at Wounded Knee.

There are still two aspects that greatly affect the revival of the tribal ways. Education often lures members away to move in a more modern world. On the other hand, many people have returned to be healed from ailments, the solution to which baffled white doctors. There seems to be an ongoing tug of war between modern conveniences and technology and the proven ways of the past.

Chapter fifteen, "The Aboriginal World and Christian History," discusses the effect of Christian doctrine and egotism on behalf of the Aboriginal peoples. When Western Europeans began to immigrate to the new world, the Church saw it as a golden opportunity to gain back some of the strength it had recently lost to increasingly strong political leaders. The Church said, in essence, that if the settlers in the new world keep the faith, that the Pope would grant those communities entitlement to the land on which



they wanted to live. Apparently, there was a small oversight in that the Pope did not own the land and therefore had no right to give it away to devout Christians or anyone else.

There are people who are worse off. When Canada and Australia broke off from the British Crown, their governments became trustees of Indian and Aboriginal lands. In Australia, the government had carte blanche to do whatever they wanted with the land. Since the Aboriginals were not permitted to appear in court, there was no effective way to battle those who would take away their lands and perhaps even their livelihoods.

Chapter sixteen is titled "Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility." One of the reasons that many of the ceremonies of the Indian tribes were prohibited was that there were great numbers of Christian zealots who were operating as Indian agents for the BIA. In order for the tribes to maintain their own ceremonial rights under the guise of accepted Christian traditions, many tribes altered the ceremonial year in order to coincide with non-Indian events such as George Washington's birthday, Easter, and Christmas.

In 1978, Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. The act declared that Congress was charged with protecting and preserving the inherent right of the tribes to practice traditional religious ceremonies. Naturally, this was not the end of the problem, and in some ways, it created other problems when it was referred to in litigation regarding construction projects and federal land management.

Deloria details conversations held in the Supreme Court regarding this act and its repercussions.

The most familiar type of sacred lands is those that have some particular significance such as the site of a historical event. It is unfortunate that many of these sacred places are related to acts of violence. Two examples of this can be seen in the Gettysburg battlefield and Wounded Knee, South Dakota.

The second type of sacred lands is more profound. These sacred lands tend to be the foundation of religious beliefs such as Buffalo Gap in South Dakota or the waters of Jordan.

The third type of sacred lands is the site of "overwhelming holiness." A good example of this would be the burning bush where the Lord spoke to Moses.

It is unfortunate that many of the Indian sacred places have been commandeered the government for purpose is that have nothing to do with religion. Deloria mentions several of these places and declares that it is imperative that these lands be returned to the people.

It should be realized that sacred places are so important because they represent the foundation of holiness in our daily lives.

Chapter seventeen is titled, "Religion Today." Deloria makes it clear that although the majority of the chapters in the book compares and contrasts Indian tribal religions to Christianity, it is not to say that Christianity is wrong. Deloria does say that when facing



a possible internal collapse in Christian doctrine, one beneficial outside resource is the tribal religious culture.

Finally, the author addresses the need for other cultures to embrace the correlation between religion and nature, as the earth is suffering greatly from neglect and misuse.



Characters

Vine Deloria, Jr.

Vine Deloria, Jr. (1933-2005) was a respected historian, theologian and American Indian author of more than twenty books regarding the Indian culture. Deloria served as the Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians from 1964-1967.

Deloria was born near the Lakota reservation in South Dakota, the son of a theologian who went on to be an Episcopalian archdeacon. Deloria's grandfather, Philip Deloria, was an Episcopal priest. Philip Deloria was also the chief of the Yankton faction of the Nakota Nation.

Deloria's first experience with education took place on in a school on a nearby reservation.

Deloria intended to follow in his father's footsteps and in 1963, Deloria received a degree in theology from Lutheran School of Theology in Illinois before continuing on to get a law degree from the University of Colorado in 1970.

In 1969, while Deloria was still in college, he wrote "Custer Died for Your Sins," which would become his debut and most celebrated book. In the book, Deloria implored Americans to revisit their concepts regarding the American Indian.

Deloria devoted his life to the causes of the American Indian as well as education. Deloria was a professor at the University of Arizona from 1978-1990 before switching to the University of Colorado.

Deloria's work was considered groundbreaking and often controversial.

Jesus

Jesus is the center of the Christian doctrine and the one who saved all peoples from their sins. Before Jesus was born more than 2,000 years ago, there was great discord among the many religions of the world. The birth of Jesus is considered to be a miracle, as his mother, Mary, was a virgin. From the time of His birth, Jesus was considered to be God's son on earth.

According to Christian doctrine, Jesus set out at an early age to teach the people about God and to implore them to embrace the deity and His loving ways. The years of Jesus' travels are told in many different ways, with one of the only common threads being that He had a band of apostles who followed Him as sought to teach and give aid to the sick, dying, and those who did not believe.



Jesus was a threat to the Romans and other factions that wanted to maintain control. As Jesus' following grew rapidly, it was apparent that this new religion was a threat to the old ways. Jesus was captured, tried, convicted by his own people - the Jews - and crucified.

One of the controversies surrounding the life of Jesus is that there is no historical proof that he existed or that his life and experiences are true. Additionally, there are people and cultures who often mistake the messenger with the message. Deloria refers to these people as "Jesus freaks." As the Indian tribal religion does not include the life and teachings of Jesus, it is often considered to be a religion of heathens.

Reverend Harvey Cox

Reverend Harvey Cox - A Protestant minister and writer who protested on behalf of the Indians.

Oral Roberts

Oral Roberts - Televangelist known for his "Tower of Power" and extreme wealth.

Paul Tillich

Paul Tillich - Philosopher and author of "Systematic Theology."

Billy Graham

Billy Graham - highly respected Christian minister who has attended to many presidents as a spiritual adviser.

Crazy Horse

Crazy Horse - Chief of the Oglala Sioux, best known for his battle against Custer.

C.H. Dodd

C.H. Dodd - originator of the movement that attempted to revert to original Christian ideals after World War II.

Chief Luther Standing Bear

Chief Luther Standing Bear - Chief of the Sioux tribe known for his philosophy on Indians as indigenous peoples. Author of "Land of the Spotted Eagle."

Chief Joseph

Chief Joseph - Revered chief of the Nez Perce.



Objects/Places

Wounded Knee, South Dakota

Wounded Knee, South Dakota was the site of the Battle at Wounded Knee Creek, later referred to as the Massacre at Wounded Knee. The event took place in 1890 in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

The basis of the last armed conflict between American soldiers and the Lakota involved the refusal of the Lakota to give up the tribes' land in the Black Hills to accommodate the whites. The government relegated the tribes to five reservations and eventually took away what few rights the Indians still possessed. The rights included government supplied rations which were cut by 50% in order to "persuade" the Indians to give up the land.

The Massacre began with an order to remove the Lakota from their land, peacefully, or if necessary, through force. There was a meeting between soldiers and the Lakota. The soldiers were ordered to disarm the Lakota before the meeting began. One of the Indians who was deaf refused to give up his rifle unless the soldiers were willing to pay for it. Chaos ensued. At the end of the conflict, more than 300 Lakota were dead.

Bureau of Indian Affairs

Established in 1824 to protect the rights of Indians, the Bureau of Indian Affairs is the oldest federal agency still in operation under the auspices of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The purpose of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is to provide services to American Indians and Alaskan Natives. Currently, there are more than 560 American Indian tribes and Alaskan Natives residing in the U.S. today. These tribes are collectively comprised of about 1.7 million people. The BIA holds ten of millions of acres of land in trust for the Indian tribes and Alaskan Natives.

The BIA was not always helpful to the Indians as its purpose dictates. According to Deloria, many of the Indian agents in the late 1800s were Christian zealots and were responsible, at least in part, for the launch of the campaign to suppress Indian tribal religions and ceremonies.

California

California - Site of many Indian tribes that were part of the first major relocation program.



Arizona

Arizona - Site of many tribal communities.

Alcatraz

Alcatraz - Island off the coast of San Francisco commandeered from the Indians.

Australia

Australia - Home to the Aboriginal tribes.

North America

North America - Continent on which the American Indians lived before, during and after the "discovery" by the white man.

Buffalo Gap, South Dakota

Buffalo Gap, South Dakota - Site where the buffalo emerge each spring.

Reservations

Reservations - plots of land allocated to the Indians.

American Indian Movement

American Indian Movement - The movement in which Indians began to speak up for their rights through protest and changes in legislation.

Themes

Greed

One of the most common themes in "God is Red: A Native View of Religion" by Vine Deloria, Jr. is greed. Ever since Columbus "discovered" America, it has been the practice of many settlers and pioneers to take land away from the Native Americans and to persecute, torture, and/or murder in order to profit from that which belonged to the Native Americans.

Deloria gives a great number of examples in which the American Indians were forced off their land in order to make way for the settlements of whites. The theme of "forced relocation" is seen frequently in irrefutable historical fact, such as the Massacre at Wounded Knee as well as the relocation of many of the Native American tribes in California during the California Gold Rush. Other examples of forced relocation can be seen in Oklahoma and New York.

The times when the Indians refused to give up land, weapons or rights, there were often confrontations in which the government permitted many Indians to be killed and their land and property was commandeered.

Greed went beyond the possession of material goods. It can also be seen in the way the Indians were treated in regards to their religion. There were many zealots who were greedy in wanting everyone to practice as they practiced, believe as they believed. Deloria believes that this behavior comes from the absurd notion that the Western Europeans felt the need to conquer everything and everyone in the new world.

Christianity vs. Indian Tribal Religion

The main theme in "God is Red: A Native View of Religion" by Vine Deloria, Jr. is the difference between Christianity and Indian tribal religions. Deloria spends the majority of the time comparing and contrasting the broad concepts of each religion and how they apply in a theological, metaphysical and historical sense.

Deloria holds a degree in theology from the Lutheran School of Theology in Illinois and is descended from a line of clergymen who were well versed in both Christian and Indian tribal religion. The devotion to theology led Deloria to get his degree in the study of religion while his beliefs and personal sense of injustice led him to earn a law degree from the University of Colorado.

There are more discrepancies than not between the doctrines and practices in Christianity and Indian tribal religion. One of the main differences between the two, according to Deloria, is that the Christian religion is shaped by various cultures while the Indian tribal religion is what shapes the culture of the Native American. The concept of political and religious is separate in the former, while the latter view those concepts as



two parts of a whole. The belief that the two are the same has often created much discord within the Christian community, particularly when it comes to law versus moral responsibility.

It is clear that Deloria finds many aspects of the Christian religion to be historically inaccurate, often humanly impossible, hypocritical, and absurd. On the other hand, Deloria examines the Indian tribal religion as being a true, accurate and sensible way of life.

History

The majority of Christian doctrine is based on belief and interpretation rather than on irrefutable historical fact. As a historian, Deloria points out many of the flaws in this practice. It is also clear that the history books are written by the victor in any battle and that there are a great deal of errors in the recording of the history of the Native American, particularly when it involves conflict with non-American people.

One of the most absurd references in history is the fact that Columbus "discovered" America. Many people overlook the fact that one cannot discover a new land when there are people already living there, who have been on the land for centuries. Still, it is the egotism of Western Europe that allows the culture to believe that because they are superior to the savage people, they deserve the accolades and credit for discovering a new land.

Much of the history disputed by Deloria involves the Christian religion and the fact that there are few historical certainties that can be tied to the faith. For example, there is little to no proof of the existence of the Virgin Mary, Jesus or the Apostles. There is no reliable proof that Moses of the Ten Commandments ever existed. Additionally, many tend to take various experiences and parables in the Bible as irrefutable fact when there are no supporting documents or artifacts.



Style

Perspective

Vine Deloria, Jr. was a member of the Oglala Lakota (Sioux) tribe, born near a reservation in South Dakota. Deloria came from a long line of religiously oriented and learned people. Reverend Philip Joseph Deloria was the author's grandfather, a man who served as an Episcopal priest as well as the chief of a group within the Nakota Nation. Vine Deloria, Sr. was also a member of the clergy, a theologian versed in the studies of English and Christian doctrine who later became an Episcopal archdeacon. Ella Deloria, a noted anthropologist, was aunt of Deloria, Jr.

Deloria, Jr. sought to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors and become a member of the clergy. In 1963, Deloria received a degree in theology from Lutheran School of Theology in Illinois before continuing on to get a law degree from the University of Colorado in 1970.

In 1969, during the beginnings of the historical Indian Movement, Deloria published "Custer Died for Your Sins," a book that would become a well respected tome that implored non-Indian Americans to revisit their beliefs about Native Americans and the history surrounding the culture.

Deloria continued to write more than twenty books, focusing on a number of issues vital to the Native American community. Deloria also spent many years teaching at universities in Arizona and Colorado.

Deloria's life experiences led him to create the revised version of "God is Red: A Native View of Religion," a book that had been first released in 1972.

Tone

The tone used in "God is Red: A Native View of Religion" by Vine Deloria, Jr. switches between objective and partisan. In discussing irrefutable historical fact, Deloria is objective. This tone can also be seen in reference to certain philosophical works and their creators.

The balance of the book exhibits text that is clearly partisan in nature, sometimes to the point of being defensive. It is clear from the outset the Deloria is a member of the Oglala Lakota Sioux tribe and holds fast to the beliefs of his people.

There are many controversial topics in the book, particularly when it involves incorrectly recorded history. Some of Deloria's views have caused him to receive a great amount of criticism, while others have succeeded in enlightening other cultures to the plight of the tribal religions of the American Indian.



It is also clear that the tribal religions and those who practiced them were often persecuted for their beliefs and were abused so that non-Indians may gain.

One good example of Deloria's partisan tone is when the author ridicules televangelist Oral Roberts for his hypocritical stance on death in religion. Another example can be seen in the examination of cleverly altered historical fact.

Deloria is able to use his knowledge in theology, law, history and Indian affairs to present a complete overview of the Native view of Religion. However, some of the text makes the author appear as if he were a zealot.

Structure

"God is Red: A Native View of Religion" by Vine Deloria is a non-fiction work comprised of 292 pages broken down into 17 chapters.

The shortest chapter is 10 pages in length; the longest chapter is 21 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 17 pages.

Chapters 1-2 focus on the history of the Indian culture.

Chapters 3-5 detail the "religious challenge" between cultures and how each factors in the concept of creation.

Chapters 6-7 establish the issues of history in religion.

Chapters 8-10 deal with the origin of religion, its effect on various peoples, and how each views religion and death.

Chapters 11-12 focus on the psychology of the personalities of individuals and groups.

Chapters 13-14 examine contemporary culture in mainstream America as well as in the tribal communities.

Chapter 15 returns to focus on Christian history and that of the Aboriginals.

Chapter 16 discusses sacred places and the moral responsibility of various peoples.

Chapter 17 examines religion as it is viewed today.

Altogether, the book examines every aspect of the various Indian cultures and how it relates to what most people consider to be "traditional" religion. By examining the history of each culture as well as their beliefs, Deloria offers the reader a full and complete picture of the tribal religious mentality.



Quotes

"It is difficult to describe just how America began to embrace Indians again in recent years."

Page 4

"In almost every other part of the nation, Indians are treated with disgust and disdain by the whites of their region."

Page 6

"The grave robbing can be seen in another, more profound, and very disturbing light."

Page 17

"Until the occupation of Wounded Knee, American Indians were stereotyped in literature and by the media."

Page 25

"The communal nature of Indian personal existence is further supported by the presence of a large body of literature on the histories of the respective tribes."

Page 27

"If we compare at the image of Indians projected in literature and somewhat in film with that of the Indians who marched on Washington one thing stands out clearly - underneath all of the symbols and ideologies is a religious context and religious motivation."

Page 38

"Many Lutherans were ecstatic when informed by Indians that they were guilty of America's sins against the Indians, and they embarked on a massive program of fund-raising to pay for their alleged sins."

Page 47

"Non-Indian America has fragmented during the past two decades"

Page 56

"The vast majority of Indian tribal religions, therefore, have a sacred center at a



particular place, be it a river, a mountain, a plateau, valley, or other natural feature."
Page 67

"At best we can conclude that the Christian doctrine of creation has serious shortcomings."
Page 87

"Which religious atmosphere, Christian or Indian, would appear to be more compatible with contemporary scientific ideas?"
Page 92

"We are faced today with the concept of world history that lacks even the most basic appreciation of the experiences of mankind as a whole."
Page 108

"Christian religion and the Western idea of history are inseparable and mutually self-supporting."
Page 112

"Perhaps the closest approach that any Christian community has made to the type of behavior described by countless observers of Indian religion, is that of the Amish communities of the Midwest."
Page 201



Topics for Discussion

What religion do you think has the most historically-based accuracy? Why?

Do you think it is fair for contemporary religion to discount the Indian culture's religious beliefs? Explain.

Why does the Indian culture's concept of creation make more sense to Deloria than the traditional Christian concept?

Why do you think the Indian view of religion is not widely accepted among non-Indian culture?

What are your personal feelings regarding the basis and structure of the Indian concept of God?

Do you feel that historians have made the facts of the past fit in with Christian culture? Discuss.

Do you agree with Deloria's concept of Moral Responsibility? Explain.

Name a sacred place that is revered for its historical significance. What makes it sacred, and to whom? Discuss its relevance in the history of the religion.