

Jesus Christ and Christian saints; it also substituted the sacred pipe for the wine and wafer during celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

The best-known example of Indian syncretism was the Native American Church, whose tens of thousands of adherents blended Christian symbols and beliefs with peyote-produced visions. Peyote "beans," derived from a cactus found throughout northern Mexico, contained the drug mescaline, a narcotic capable of producing mild hallucinations. Peyote users claimed that mescaline induced visions of unity with God and the universe, and a sense of closeness with fellow peyotists. The ritual use of peyote began in northern Mexico and spread rapidly to dozens of tribes in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1918 the Native American Church was formally established, a loose collection of peyote groups whose members adhered to an ethical code promoting brotherly love, honesty, diligence, family responsibility, and abstention from the use of alcohol.

State and federal officials, and also many Native Americans, opposed the use of peyote. By 1923 fourteen states had outlawed the use of peyote as a dangerous drug, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was asking Congress to ban peyote nationwide. Full-bloods and traditionalists in many tribes opposed peyote because they believed it tended to undermine established tribal religions, and Christian Indians denounced its use by the Native American Church as sacrilegious and blasphemous. In 1940 the Navajo Nation tribal council, led by Christians, prohibited the importation, possession, and use of the drug anywhere on the reservation. The Native American Church responded by suing the tribal government, claiming a violation of its constitutional right to the free exercise of religion. In 1959 a circuit court denied the church's claim and affirmed the tribe's right to prohibit the drug.

In spite of such opposition, the use of peyote continued to spread among Native Americans. By 1960 members of more than eighty tribes were practicing some form of peyotism. Opposition to peyote diminished somewhat in the aftermath of a celebrated decision by the California Supreme Court, *People v. Woody* (1964). John Woody was among a group of Navajos who had been arrested near Needles, California, while participating in a peyote ceremony. Woody was convicted of possessing a controlled substance, but the state supreme court overturned his conviction and held that the state could not prohibit the use of peyote when it was taken as a sacrament similar to the eucharistic wine used in many Christian churches. Leaders of the Native American

Church praised the decision as a major victory in the movement for cultural self-determination. They also welcomed the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978 but soon were disappointed to learn that its provisions did not extend to the use of peyote.

The greatest setback for the peyotists came in the widely criticized case of *Employment Division of Oregon v. Smith* (1990). Alfred Smith and another member of the Native American Church had been fired as alcohol and drug counselors by the state of Oregon for taking small amounts of peyote at church. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld their dismissal and ruled that states may ban even the religious use of peyote without violating the constitutional right of free religious exercise. The Court acknowledged that its decision would "place at a relative disadvantage those religious practices that are not widely engaged in." Fearing that the decision threatened the religious liberties of all Americans, groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals, the National Council of Churches, and the American Jewish Committee joined with Native American spiritual leaders to ask the Court to reconsider the case.

The remarkable resiliency of Native American religions was recognized in 1993 at a joyous celebration of the Parliament of World Religions. Meeting in Chicago, 6,000 delegates from more than sixty countries greeted a contingent of Indian spiritual leaders with an overwhelming ovation. A Navajo medicine woman told the other delegates that the religion of her people long had been misunderstood. "We speak of animals as our brothers," Jennie Joe explained. "We point to sacred places as having special meaning to us because our deities live there." She recalled that many of her people once had been ashamed of their beliefs, but Native American spiritual traditions were now flourishing again. To be accepted as equals among the world's faiths, she said, was an important victory for all Native people.

TRADITIONAL LANGUAGES AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Paralleling the revival of Native American religions was a resurgence of interest in the preservation of traditional Indian languages. The challenge was an enormous one because many of the several hundred languages once spoken in North America were extinct, or nearly so.

(The exact number of indigenous languages is impossible to determine because linguists disagree about what comprises a separate language rather than a dialect.) By the mid-twentieth century, most Native languages were spoken only by the older generation; few children were interested in mastering the complex vocabulary and grammar of the language of their ancestors. Michael Krauss, a linguist at the University of Alaska, estimated in 1993 that children were learning only thirty-eight of the 187 remaining Native languages in the United States.

According to the 1990 census, the American Indian language with the most speakers was Navajo (148,539). There also were thousands of speakers of the Algonquian languages (Delawares, Cheyennes, Kickapoos, Blackfeet, Shawnees); the Iroquoian languages (Wyandots, Oneidas, Mohawks, Senecas, Cherokees); and several other major language groups. Typical of many tribes, however, were the Mandans and the Osages who had only a handful of Native speakers left.

One of the major causes of the decline of Native languages was the policy of enforced acculturation pursued by the federal government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prior to the administration of Indian Commissioner John Collier in the 1930s, Indian languages were brutally suppressed on reservations and at off-reservation boarding schools. In 1868 a federal commission on Indian affairs recommended that the Indians' "barbarous dialects be blotted out and the English language substituted." Pomo elder Elsie Allen recalled being beaten with a leather strap for speaking her Native language at a boarding school in California in 1910: "I'd lay awake and think . . . 'I'll never teach my children the language.' I didn't want my children to be treated like they treated me."

In the later decades of the twentieth century, more subtle pressures diminished the transmission of Native languages from one generation to the next. The advent of instant communications and mass media took a heavy toll on the number of Native language speakers. As linguist James Crawford observed in 1993, "Nowadays it hardly matters that Bureau of Indian Affairs schools have stopped suppressing Indian vernaculars because students often prefer the language of Teen-Age Mutant Ninja Turtles to that of their ancestors."

The resurgence of interest in Native American languages began in the mid-1960s and grew stronger in later decades. On reservations across the country, the younger generation of Indians came to realize that an essential part of their cultural heritage was about to disappear. If they failed to learn the language of their parents and grandparents

part of their own identity would be lost. Dozens of community-based programs and initiatives were begun to revitalize languages that were on the brink of extinction. David Francis (Passamaquoddy) worked with a linguist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1973 to compose a dictionary of his people's language. He and others developed a collection of Passamaquoddy learning aids, including bilingual textbooks and language-lab tapes. They offered language classes at the tribal museum and placed ads in the tribal newspaper. Their message was simple and direct: "You adults are not too old to learn to read what you speak; young folks . . . if we don't use it we'll lose it. . . . Come and be a part of the renaissance of our language." Similar programs were developed in the 1980s by the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs reservation in Oregon. The Warm Springs Culture and Heritage Office published training materials for teachers of the Warm Springs and Wasco languages and developed bilingual preschool curricula. "The languages damn near died out," observed tribal leader Jeff Sanders, "but they're still spoken here, and we're working with elders to rebuild them."

The federal government encouraged the revival of Native languages with the passage of important (if largely symbolic) legislation in the early 1990s. A report issued by the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs in 1990 formally denounced the historic policy of suppressing Native languages. That policy, the report said, made children "feel like foreigners in their classrooms and homelands." Also in 1990 Congress passed the Native American Languages Act, declaring that the federal government should "preserve, protect and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice and develop Native American Languages." Two years later, additional legislation was approved authorizing federal grants to revitalize Native languages through classroom instruction and the recording of oral histories.

The situation was especially critical in California, where about half of the state's nearly 100 indigenous languages had completely disappeared by 1990. Most of the languages still in use were spoken fluently by only a handful of elders. All along the central California coast, from San Francisco to Los Angeles, there were no longer any fluent speakers of the languages of the Ohlones, Esselens, Salinans, and Chumash. University of California linguist Leanne Hinton and anthropologist Yolanda Montijo (Chemehuevi) reported in 1994 that "not a single California Indian language is being learned by children as the primary language of the household."