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# The Gospel of the Redman

Commemorative Edition

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## THE GOSPEL OF THE REDMAN

There is no Indian Bible written by an Indian, just as there was no Pentateuch written by Moses, no Tripitika by Buddha, no Dialogues by Socrates, no Gospels written by Christ. All these records were made long after by those who knew their Master in his lifetime, or at least received the traditions of his teachings from those who were privileged to hear his voice.

I have never yet had an Indian tell me fully and frankly the details of his faith; but by respectfully questioning the old men, by assembling their traditions, by noting their customs, by observing their lives, by gathering the records of their prophets, by consulting living Whitemen who knew the Indian in primitive days, and especially by conferring with Indians who were educated as Whites after spending their youth in the ancient way of their people, we have achieved something like a comprehension of the Indian's creed, of his unwritten laws, of his sense of relationship and duty to the Great Oversoul, the Creator and Ruler, as well as to his neighbor and to himself.

In a Continent of this size, with hundreds of different Tribes and variants of culture, there are very different details of established thought. Among these, I have selected the highest and best that were native; and, as a whole, adhered to the philosophies of the great Tribes such as the Sioux, the Cheyenne, the Ojibway, the Iroquois, the Shawnees, the Pueblos, the Navahos, the Aztecs, and the Mayans.

# THE SOUL OF THE REDMAN

## HIS SPIRITUALITY

The culture and civilization of the Whiteman are essentially material; his measure of success is, "How much property have I acquired for myself?" The culture of the Redman is fundamentally spiritual; his measure of success is, "How much service have I rendered to my people?"<sup>1</sup> His mode of life, his thought, his every act are given spiritual significance, approached and colored with complete realization of the spirit world.

Garrick Mallery, the leading Smithsonian authority of his day, says: "The most surprising fact relating to the North American Indians, which until lately had not been realized, is that they habitually lived in and by religion to a degree comparable with that of the old Israelites under the theocracy. This was sometimes ignored, and sometimes denied in terms, by many of the early missionaries and explorers. The aboriginal religion was not their [the missionaries'] religion, and therefore was not recognized to have an existence or was pronounced to be satanic."<sup>2</sup>

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“Religion was the real life of the tribes, permeating all their activities and institutions.”<sup>3</sup>

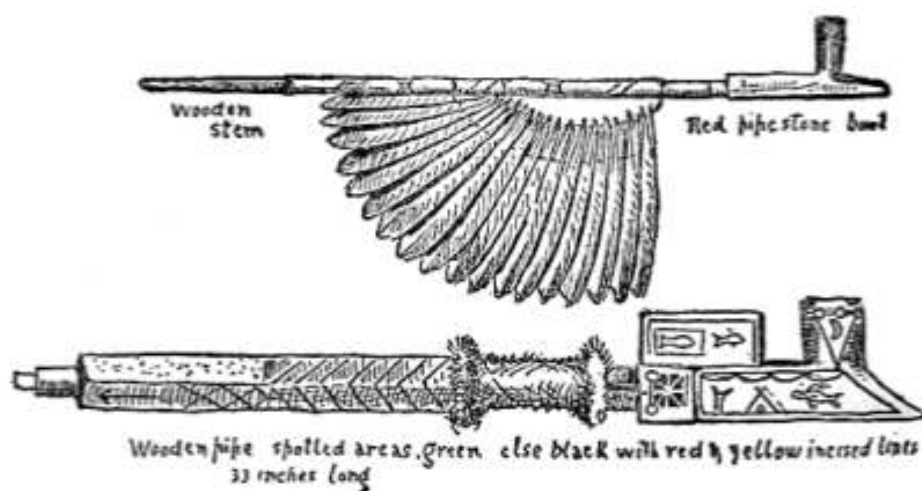
John James, after living sixty years among the Choctaw Indians of Texas, writes: “I claim for the North American Indian the purest religion, and the loftiest conceptions of the Great Creator, of any non-Christian religion that has ever been known to this old world....

“The North American Indian has no priests, no idols, no sacrifices, but went direct to the Great Spirit and worshipped Him who was invisible, and seeing Him by faith, adored Him who seeketh such to worship Him in spirit and in truth, who is a Spirit and planted a similar spirit in His creatures, that there might be communion between the two.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1834 Captain Bonneville visited the Nez Percés and Flatheads before they had been in contact with Whites, either traders or missionaries, and sums up these wholly primitive Indians: “Simply to call these people religious would convey but a faint idea of the deep hue of piety and devotion which pervades their whole conduct. Their honesty is immaculate, and their purity of purpose and their observance of the rites of their religion are most uniform and remarkable. They are certainly more like a nation of saints than a horde of savages.”<sup>5</sup>

Tom Newcomb, my mountain guide in 1912 and 1914, was an old scout of the Miles campaign, who lived with the Sioux under Crazy Horse for some years in the early '70s. He said to me once (and not only said,

but dictated for record): "I tell you I never saw more kindness or real Christianity anywhere. The poor, the sick, the aged, the widows and the orphans were always looked after first. Whenever we moved camp, someone took care that the widows' lodges were moved first and set up first. After every hunt, a good-sized chunk of meat was dropped at each door where it was most needed. I was treated like a brother; and I tell you I have never seen any community of church people that was as really truly Christians as that band of Indians."



## RELIGION

The idea of one Great Oversoul is widely spread among the Indians; not universal, perhaps, but much more widely spread than in the Old World.

All of our best Indians believe apparently in one Great God. From among many recorded statements, I quote the following by Grinnell. In his discussion of the Pawnee belief in the Great Spirit, whom they call Tirawa, he says: "Tirawa is an intangible spirit, omnipotent and beneficent. He pervades the universe, and is a