

Part II

A Modern American Indian Revitalization Movement: The Indian Ecumenical Conference

The Indian Ecumenical Conference (IEC) is an important example of contemporary American Indian religious expression taking place in the context of the social activism present among Indian communities since the late sixties. First held in 1970 on the Crow Reservation of Montana, the IEC was moved in 1971 to the Stoney Reserve near Morley, Alberta, where for most of the seventies it enjoyed a "trendy reign as Canada's national Indian gathering, . . . 'the' place to go during the summer."¹ The annual conferences consisted of week-long encampments where Indians from all over Canada and the United States met with Indian religious leaders and elders for conversation, instruction, counseling, and ceremonies. Though non-Indian observers were present at various times, the conferences were "designed to heighten cultural, spiritual and self awareness in the traditional, time-honoured way"² among Indian people.

¹"Religious Conference Fizzles in the Drizzle," The Native People 12 (August 17, 1979), 5.

²Dianne Meili, "Lightning kindles return to spirituality at Morley," Windspeaker 5/18 (July 10, 1987), 1.

The conferences formally opened with the lighting of the sacred fire, which symbolized "the presence and blessing of the Great Spirit on all that will be said and done at the conference."³ Each day began with a sunrise ceremony led by spiritual leaders from various tribal traditions, and other ceremonies involving the pipe and the sweat lodge were conducted throughout the week. Roman Catholic and Protestant worship services led by Indian priests and ministers were also held, as were Native American Church ceremonies. Even traditional weddings were held from time to time. Many people attended in order to "share religious experiences, make contacts and learn ceremonial traditions from religious leaders,"⁴ as well as to exchange knowledge of Indian history, culture and medicine. Participants camped in tepees and feasted on traditional foods like moose, elk and buffalo. Each evening offered opportunities for intertribal powwow dancing, and the last evening included a time for honoring special guests and outstanding leaders. Each conference closed with a final ceremony to extinguish the sacred fire.⁵

³Indian Ecumenical Conference, "Indian Ecumenical Conference 1976," 1 p. manuscript.

⁴"Oneness with nature describes aim of conference," Canadian Churchman 101/8 (September 1974), 26.

⁵"The Indian Ecumenical Conference," 4 pp. manuscript, 1977(?), 1.

As an intertribal phenomenon drawing participants from all over Canada and the United States (see Appendices 1 and 2), the IEC was an important influence in the lives of many Indian people, even some who did not attend the conferences. It is worthy of study as a movement because it illustrates and exemplifies the relationship between social activism and religious identity that is characteristic of many Indian movements, both historic and modern.

History of the Movement

As an expression of the resurgence of cultural identity that has been evident among American Indians since the late sixties, the Indian Ecumenical Conference was marked by many of the same concerns and strategies common to other examples of "Red Power" activism. Red Power

demands, rather than pleads for, self-determination: the right of Indians to decide programs and policies for themselves, to manage their own affairs, to govern themselves, and to control their land and its resources. It insists on the inviolability of their land and on the strict observance and protection of obligations and rights guaranteed the Indians by treaties with the federal government.⁶

What made the IEC unusual, and what distinguishes it from many other historical and modern social movements, was that the initial impetus for it originated from within a Western religious institution, the Anglican Church of Canada. As with any social movement, the goals and objectives of the

⁶Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 5.

IEC changed over time, as did the level of enthusiasm of those participating in the movement. Several important events in the history of the IEC make it possible to identify four distinct periods of development: organization, growth, decline and revival.

Organization, 1965-70

Leaders and members of the Anglican Church of Canada publicly expressed their concern over problems affecting American Indians at least as early as 1965. A resolution by delegates to that year's General Synod called for a pilot project that might "discover effective means of working with Indian communities within the context of community development."⁷ Two years later, a "Centennial Profile of Indians and Eskimos" was presented at the General Synod,⁸ prompting a motion that initiated a three-phase project to include conducting a study, recommending action, and implementing specific programs.

In 1968 Dr. Charles Hendry, director of the School of Social Work at the University of Toronto, began work with three associates on the first phase of this project.⁹ Their report, published as Beyond Traplines: Does the Church

⁷"Report first step in Indian program," Canadian Churchman 96/5 (May 1969).

⁸Hugh McCullum and Karmel McCullum, This Land is Not for Sale (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1975), 180.

⁹"Man who challenged church to change is United layman," Canadian Churchman 96/5 (May 1969).

Really Care?, was completed in 1969. Several months later, Rev. John (Ian) MacKenzie, president of the Ontario Division of the Indian-Eskimo Association and "one of the few persons in Canada the Indians can trust,"¹⁰ was hired as a consultant. He conducted a series of 20 consultations with Indian leaders and organizations in order to solicit feedback on "the Hendry Report", which was presented at the 1969 General Synod. Beyond Traplines is a carefully researched account of the problems facing Indians and the involvement of Christian churches and missionaries in these problems, and concludes with nine specific recommendations for attitudinal and programmatic changes. The first recommendation suggests that

Top priority must be directed to changes in basic attitudes, especially attitudes toward native peoples, . . . The most fundamental need in this realignment of attitudes, which calls for an explicit reformulation of goals, is to find effective ways of respecting and releasing the resources of indigenous leadership.¹¹

General Synod delegates responded by approving the report and budgeting \$40,000 to fund Indian self-determination programs.¹²

¹⁰"Indians ask churches stop dividing people," Canadian Churchman 97/8 (September 1970).

¹¹Charles E. Hendry, Beyond Traplines: Does the Church Really Care? (Ryerson Press, 1969), 91.

¹²"Report first step in Indian program," Canadian Churchman 96/5 (May 1969).

Following the 1969 General Synod, the National Executive Council of the Anglican Church appointed Canon Trevor Jones to coordinate implementation of the Hendry Report recommendations. He was assisted by a committee of church and Indian leaders including Canon Andrew Ahenakew, Rev. Redfern Loutitt, and Carol Wabigigig, founder of the Nishnawbe Institute.¹³ Meanwhile, MacKenzie held planning meetings in Manitoba, Missouri and Oklahoma and organized the Steering Committee for the IEC: Dr. Robert Thomas, Wilfred Pelletier, Rev. Ernest Willie, and Ernest Tootosis.¹⁴ One of the first actions by the Steering Committee was to call on Canadian churches to recognize June 21st, "the day in which the sun is longest and the highest in the sky, therefore closest to God,"¹⁵ as a national Indian Day of Prayer. Both the Anglican Church and the United Church responded affirmatively to this request.

The first Indian Ecumenical Conference was held at Crow Agency, Montana, in August of 1970, at the same time as the annual Crow Fair. The conference was in session for four days (a sacred number for many tribes, representing the

¹³Hugh McCullum, "NEC moves to implement Hendry, Coalition Reports," Canadian Churchman 96/11 (December 1969), 8.

¹⁴Chief John Snow, These Mountains Are Our Sacred Places: The Story of the Stoney Indians (Toronto: Samuel-Stevens, 1977), 144.

¹⁵"Indian prayer day June 21, Canadian Churchman 98/6 (June 1971), 1.

four directions), and medicine men were responsible for selecting and consecrating the conference site.¹⁶ About 150 Indian religious leaders--Christian ministers and traditional medicine persons--attended, along with many more Indians from throughout Canada and the United States.¹⁷ A series of ten resolutions were agreed upon at the conference (see Appendix 3); they emphasize the need for religious and cultural freedom as the foundation for addressing a variety of social problems. An observer noted that "what is encouraging is a sense of renewed hope," that these Indian religious leaders had found "a community of interest."¹⁸ One of those present was Chief John Snow, elected leader of the Wesley Band of Stoney (Assiniboin) Indians and a former United Church minister; after the conference he wrote that

I returned to my home reserve with a feeling of encouragement and realization that there were many Indian leaders who were concerned with the revival of our cultural, spiritual and religious heritage.¹⁹

Growth, 1970-78

While still at the 1970 conference, Snow invited his colleagues to hold the next conference at the Stoney Indian Park on his reserve near Morley, Alberta. Snow's invitation

¹⁶John A. Price, Native Studies: American and Canadian Indians (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), 109.

¹⁷Allan Campbell, "New hope discovered by Indian priests, medicine men," Canadian Churchman 97/8 (September 1970).

¹⁸Campbell 1970.

¹⁹Snow 1977, 144.

was accepted, in part because many present felt that the festive, noisy environment of Crow Fair was not conducive to a spiritual gathering. The Stoney Indian Park is situated next to the Bow River and in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains--a very quiet, pristine location. And so the 1971 conference was held on the Stoney Reserve, which became the permanent home for the IEC.

From 1971 until 1978, Snow functioned as host of the IEC, with administrative matters handled by the Nishnawbe Institute, a Toronto-based educational and cultural center. Major funding during this period came from the Anglican Church and the United Church, as well as from private foundations and the Canadian government.²⁰ Attendance grew during the early seventies; the 1973 conference was increased to seven days to allow more time for religious retreats, and in attendance were "over 150 Native religious leaders" and "about 1000 Native people from various tribes ranging from Florida to California, Nova Scotia to British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Alaska."²¹ Robert Thomas commented that "these people are grasping for

²⁰Edward B. Fiske, "Indians reviving religious heritage," New York Times, August 23, 1972, 43

²¹"Alberta's Stoney Reserve to host Fourth Indian Ecumenical Conference," The Indian News 16/2 (June 1973), 11.

some kind of structure and identity. . . . It may end up creating a new Indian religion."²²

In 1974 more than 1,500 people attended the IEC, 95% of them Indian,²³ and in 1976 attendance peaked at 6,000, with approximately 70% between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five.²⁴ This rapid growth strained the ability of the Stoney hosts to provide camping space, meeting facilities and meal service, and minor controversies also began to surface. Anglican Primate Ted Scott was presented with a peace pipe at the 1974 conference, but that same year "most white observers left with conflicting emotions, . . . affected by some hostility and rejection."²⁵ In 1975 film crews from the National Film Board of Canada were on hand filming "People of the Sacred Circle," a half-hour documentary on the IEC, and their presence offended some people at the conference. "When it rained every day, as never before in six years, some saw this as an expression of displeasure by the Creator because the sacred things were being filmed."²⁶ The American Indian Movement was

²²Fiske 1972.

²³"Oneness with nature describes aim of conference," Canadian Churchman 101/8 (September 1974), 26.

²⁴Indian Ecumenical Conference 1976.

²⁵"Oneness with nature describes aim of conference," Canadian Churchman 101/8 (September 1974), 26.

²⁶Hugh McCullum, "Indian Ecumenical Conference - Morely [sic] Alberta, 1975," 4 pp. manuscript, 4.

represented at the 1976 conference and requested that the IEC memorialize Nelson Small Legs, Jr., who had committed suicide earlier that year to protest the treatment of Indians by the Canadian government.²⁷ But conference leaders refused to honor their request, not wanting to encourage that kind of action because "it wasn't the Indian way."²⁸

Decline, 1978-86

Controversy surfaced again in 1978 when Snow refused to allow Alanis Obomsawin to film an interview for her award-winning documentary "Mother of Many Children" on conference grounds. Though Snow's refusal was probably related to the problems encountered with film crews in 1975, the ensuing dispute led to division among conference organizers. The Nishnawbe Institute ceased its involvement with the IEC sometime in 1978, an action that may have been related to changes in the IEC's focus and goals. Some maintained that it

was first started with the cross cultural learning concept in mind. It was slated as a meeting of the spiritual minds from Indian and white society. A good concept, however, it broke down after a few years when some of the white ministers stopped

²⁷Wendy Gray and Sam Erasmus, "A.I.M. Leader Stages Protest Suicide," The Native People 9/1 (May 21, 1976), 1.

²⁸Gary George, "Morley . . . Different Things to Different People," The Native People 9 (August 13, 1976), 8. 1976.

attending because they were being continually scolded by the Indians.²⁹

By 1979 Snow was not only conference host but also its primary organizer and fund raiser.

The 1979 conference "was plagued with low attendance, rain and disorganization,"³⁰ and the minutes from a Steering Committee meeting in October of that year indicate that the Morley Band provided \$15,000 in funding, one-fourth of the overall budget. Fund-raising methods and sources were the primary topic of discussion at that meeting, and a sub-committee on funding met a month later.³¹ By 1981 the IEC was also being called the "Morley Conference for Indian Spiritual Life", and it relied on "an extensive volunteer staff" for coordination and organization of its activities.³² Attendance dwindled until 1983, when the conference was held for the last time until its revival in 1987.

Revival, 1986-89

After three years without holding the annual conference, a lightning strike in the summer of 1986 led to

²⁹"Religious Conference Fizzles in the Drizzle," The Native People 12 (August 17, 1979), 5.

³⁰"Religious Conference Fizzles in the Drizzle," The Native People 12 (August 17, 1979), 5.

³¹Indian Ecumenical Conference, "Minutes of Steering Committee, Indian Ecumenical Conference, Williams Lake, B.C., October 5-6, 1979," 3 pp. manuscript, 2.

³²"Morley for a spiritual life," The Native People 14 (August 7, 1981), 15.

the revival of the IEC. It had been the custom in years past to kill a buffalo for a celebratory feast at the conference. When three buffalo in the Stoney herd were killed during an electrical storm, at the time when the conference had been held in the past, it was interpreted as "a sign from the Creator that the conference is needed again."³³ The 1987 conference was reduced to a four-day schedule and guests were responsible for their own food, and organizers expected attendance to be low. But on the second day "attendance swelled" and "large crowds gathered" to begin "the momentum of a massive return to spirituality."³⁴

Snow hoped that the conference would grow to the point that once again Indian people "from all over the continent" would be attending.³⁵ But only 50-75 people were present for the 1988 conference, and in May of 1989 there were still no definite plans for the conference that summer, even though conference organizers were hoping to plan separate camps for Indian youth to run concurrently with the IEC.³⁶

³³Meili, "Lightning."

³⁴Dianne Meili, "Elders urge a return to nature," Windspeaker 5/21 (July 31, 1987), 9.

³⁵Meili "Elders".

³⁶Conversation with Ken Tully, Economic Development Co-Ordinator, Goodstoney Band, April 12, 1989.

Ideology of the Movement

A wide range of religious and social issues were of concern to those participating in the Indian Ecumenical Conference. Though the ideology of the movement was modified over time in accordance with changes in leadership and participation in the IEC, the same comprehensive scope present in the 1970 conference resolutions is also evident in the 1988 conference announcement (see Appendix 4). Four major areas of concern can be identified: inter-cultural dialogue, inter-religious cooperation, Indian communities and youth, and environmental responsibility. The common theme running through each of these areas was the passionate concern for recovering and renewing a sense of "Indianness" in the modern world. Participants sought to explore the possibilities for a personal and communal sense of Indian identity. "People have returned home from Morley bringing with them a sense of pride, knowledge and understanding of what it is to be Indian."³⁷

Inter-Cultural Dialogue

Although the Anglican Church originally intended to support Indian self-determination and community development, there were still those who saw in the IEC the possibility for dialogue between Indians and non-Indians, particularly white Christian ministers and missionaries. At one level,

³⁷"The Sixteenth Morley Ecumenical Conference," 1988 conference announcement.

most Indians involved in the conference would have agreed that "they have a message that the world needs."³⁸ But a "meeting of the spiritual minds from Indian and white society" seems never to have been the primary focus of the IEC. Perhaps this was partly due to the fact that the churches, having done most of the talking for the past several centuries, need to assume a stance of listening. It was undoubtedly also related to the reluctance of white Christian leaders to participate voluntarily in an event where they would encounter hostility and rejection.

Whether or not whites participated, it is clear that the Indian religious leaders involved in the IEC were issuing a challenge to white society and its churches.

My colleagues (in the United Church) could never understand why I wanted to be independent, to live as an Indian with my own language and my own culture. The majority of society is collapsing under the weight of its own materialism. If the church is going to say anything to us, it has to stop conforming to that majority society, just as its founder had to. The church has always been political but on the wrong side. Maybe now, if it will side with us and support our causes, it will still mean something to my people.³⁹

Inter-Religious Cooperation

Providing a safe place for Indian people wanting to explore questions of identity, especially with regard to the difficult issues raised by religious and spiritual concerns, seems to have been the dominant concern throughout the

³⁸Fiske 1972.

³⁹McCullum 1975, 3.

history of the IEC. It was certainly the issue addressed most directly by the nature and format of the conferences. Though the popular connotation of "ecumenical" refers to Christian inter-denominational cooperation, to IEC participants the word "means finding again their unity in their religion and culture."⁴⁰ The history of religious oppression forms the context out of which the IEC grew, oppression affecting not only traditional tribal faiths and intertribal groups like the Native American Church, but also Indian Christians through the missionization process. "If nothing else," the IEC brought "Christian and tribal religious leaders together for the first time and provided a sense of unity to Indian religious life across tribal lines," while also allowing tribal faiths to come out into the open.⁴¹

A sense of shared religious identity, of spiritual unity, formed the basis for cooperative efforts undertaken through the IEC. Indian spiritual leaders found that certain elements of religious belief and practice are common to many tribal traditions, including belief in a Great Spirit responsible for creating all things, tolerance for the beliefs of others, and respect for all creation. Dreams and visions as a source of insight and traditional medicine as a source of healing are also important shared

⁴⁰McCullum 1975, 2.

⁴¹Fiske 1972.

practices.⁴² Perhaps the most inclusive statement about Indian religious identity made by IEC leaders was that "all Native people in the Americas have contributions in relation to their personal experiences."⁴³

Despite the unifying effect of these common affirmations, the question of the relationship between tribal faiths and Christianity remained a controversial subject for the IEC. Attitudes toward the Christian churches were very diverse, with a wide range of opinions represented even on the Steering Committee. At one extreme were those who saw no value whatsoever in Christianity. In 1972 Earnest Tootosis argued that "we must go back to the way our forefathers worshiped. We must pray to the Great Spirit the way he wanted us to."⁴⁴ Yet Tootosis, while believing that Christianity is for whites alone, also recognized the possibility for cooperation with Christian churches on some issues, like the environmental crisis.⁴⁵ Another major viewpoint represented a more pragmatic approach to the question. Rev. Andrew Ahenakew, a retired Anglican priest, pointed out that the road from Christianity

⁴²Fiske 1972.

⁴³"Alberta's Stoney Reserve to host Fourth Indian Ecumenical Conference," The Indian News 16/2 (June 1973), 11.

⁴⁴Fiske 1972.

⁴⁵"The Indian Ecumenical Conference," 4 pp. manuscript, 1977(?), 4.

to tribal faith is not an easy one: "I'd like to go back 100 per cent, but I just can't. . . . The two must live in harmony."⁴⁶ The third main position argued that no essential differences exist between tribal faiths and Christianity. As Snow suggests in his history of the Stoney people,

Our religion, the religion of this Great Island, is not contradictory to the teaching of the great rabbis of the Hebrews, nor is it in conflict with the great Christian teachers.⁴⁷

However each individual may have resolved the question of spiritual heritage, all shared the common experience of doing so within the context of a personal search for identity. Ahenakew recalled his own journey:

I spent all my life working for my people and serving my Lord Jesus Christ. I worked hard for the Anglican Church. I still believe all that. I am still a priest. But about 10 years ago I began to realize as my life grew closer to its end that something was missing. I didn't know what.

Five years ago I came to Morely [sic]. Three years ago I knew for sure what was missing. I didn't really know what it meant to be an Indian. Now I know. I am retired and now I can be an Indian and a Christian, too, and I'm proud to be an Indian.⁴⁸

Indian Communities and Youth

While inter-religious dialogue among the "world religions" often consists of nothing more than theologians and philosophers exchanging pleasantries, inter-religious

⁴⁶Fiske 1972.

⁴⁷Snow 1977, 146.

⁴⁸McCullum 1975, 2.

cooperation among American Indians is motivated by and oriented toward the social problems present in their communities. Problems affecting Indian communities include alcohol and drug abuse, the processes of urbanization and education, and government policies on land and treaty rights. These problems affect all Indians but are especially harmful for the youth, who represent the future of Indian communities. For many of the youth who participated in the IEC, "it was an attempt to find their identity after years of trying to live in a society where the white man calls all the shots."⁴⁹

The religious leaders and elders participating in the IEC sought to address many of the social problems present in their communities. Yet they realized that helping the youth overcome obstacles and recover a sense of Indian identity is not a simple process. When more than 4,000 Indians between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five attended the 1976 conference, IEC leaders commented that

Our hopes and aspirations have finally been achieved, the bringing together of the young so that they may receive instruction from our elders. Yet we must be cognizant of a question of communication that has still to be answered. Our elders learned the old Indian way while our young were taught in residential schools and both sides need to understand where each other is in terms of effecting a good teacher/learner situation.

The young who have caught on to the difficulties made apparent by two schooling systems have gained a

⁴⁹McCullum 1975, 2.

measure of their own worth which has made the dream of the conference all worth while.⁵⁰

For many involved in the IEC, the process of assimilation is Indians' most pressing social problem. Indian identity involves more than outward appearance; being Indian requires a commitment to a way of life that is very different from that practiced by many in the modern world. As Andrew Dreadfulwater said in 1973 (see Appendix 5), without this commitment the day may come when "We'll still dance, sing--have feathers in our hats--but we won't be no Indians."⁵¹

Environmental Responsibility

A sense of responsibility for the natural environment formed the foundation on which concern for inter-cultural dialogue, inter-religious cooperation, and Indian communities and youth rested. Whites will never fully understand Indians until they appreciate Indians' relationship to the land; this relationship also forms the basis for any authentic revival of Indian cultural identity. The 1973 conference invitation summarized the position of many IEC participants:

As you know, this gathering grew out of a concern about the pollution of the Americas. As we have observed, the influence of the technological age has polluted our waters and our air, has raped the land, has destroyed our brothers the animals, and it appears now that all life is in danger. When our old wise men chose to come together it was hoped

⁵⁰Indian Ecumenical Conference 1976.

⁵¹Andrew Dreadfulwater, "We'll Have Hats With Feathers In Them, But We Won't Be No Indians," Interculture 17/4 (October-December 1984), 24.

that maybe once again we will have to make a contribution for the preservation of all life on this Island. The Great Spirit placed the Native people here to be the keepers of this Island and we are failing in carrying out our mission.⁵²

Though whites may be responsible for much of the damage inflicted on the environment, Indians are still subject to a divine calling by virtue of having been placed in the Americas by the Creator.

Effects of the Movement

The activities of the Indian Ecumenical Conference may have been limited to an annual week-long gathering, but the influence of the IEC extended to affect many American Indians year-round and throughout Canada and the United States. As religious leaders and participants experienced cultural and spiritual renewal during the conferences, they not only returned home with an increased level of self-awareness but also effected changes in other movements and in their own tribal communities.

Individual Indians

Rev. John Hascall, the Ojibwa pastor of an all-Indian Roman Catholic parish in Michigan, encountered resistance from his local bishop when he tried to introduce innovations such as holding mass outdoors and using the Indian language. Through his involvement with the IEC, Hascall found others who shared his desire to see "the Christian Church come

⁵²"Alberta's Stoney Reserve to host Fourth Indian Ecumenical Conference," The Indian News 16/2 (June 1973), 11.

forth and blend with the way our people have been doing things for thirty thousand years."⁵³ Following the 1972 conference Hascall planned to take a two-year sabbatical in the mountains, studying Indian medicine and spirituality. "The white ways are crowding in on me. I've got to get away for a while."⁵⁴ Another who found the IEC helpful on a individual level was Glen Douglas, a veteran and a recovering alcoholic who attended the 1987 conference. In speaking to other participants, Douglas emphasized that it was the teachings of his elders that helped him regain his physical and mental health. "I was excited to come here. This is my first time at this ecumenical conference and it won't be my last."⁵⁵

Intertribal Movements

Throughout its history the American Indian Movement (AIM) struggled to make connections with tribal religious leaders and elders who could give them guidance and support--and also legitimate their presence in reservation communities. So when members of AIM participated in the IEC in 1976 (and probably other years as well), it was undoubtedly a valuable experience for them and an important influence on the movement. The success of the IEC also led

⁵³Brad Steiger, Medicine Power: The American Indian's Revival of his Spiritual Heritage and Its Relevance for Modern Man (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 74.

⁵⁴Fiske 1972.

⁵⁵Meili "Elders".

to the organization of other annual intertribal gatherings, including regional conferences held during the summer in southern Manitoba and northern Ontario. These conferences provided additional opportunities for involvement to those who were unable to travel to conferences on the Stoney Reserve.

Tribal Communities

One person who attended the regional conference in Ontario was Buck Drywater, chief of the Cherokee Corporate Society. Inspired by this gathering of Indian religious leaders of all persuasions, Drywater returned to his home in Long Valley, Oklahoma, "with renewed hope for his Cherokee Corporate Society," which had recently lost much of its influence in the local community. He intended to organize

an ecumenical medicine council which will reunite Cherokees in all communities and work for common concerns as the real representatives of the Cherokees. . . . in 1984, give or take a few years, we are likely to see the flowering of a "Cherokee Ecumenical Council," . . .⁵⁶

Navahos also received indirect benefit from the IEC, according to Steering Committee member Stewart Etsitty. In 1979 he reported that the IEC "is going in the right direction" and that the conferences were having a positive

⁵⁶Janet Etheridge Jordan, Politics and Religion in a Western Cherokee Community: a Century of Struggle in a White Man's World, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut (anthropology), 1974, 384-85.

effect among his own people, who had "revived pow-wows and sweats."⁵⁷

The IEC was an important event on the annual calendar of the host Stoney tribe and provided a forum for the discussion of issues being addressed by other tribally-based programs. The Stoney Cultural Education Program was started in 1972 as an effort to develop Indian-specific curriculum for use in the local school system. Its organizers hoped to establish a higher level of Indian control over the education of Indian youth.⁵⁸ As Snow explained,

The primary objective of SCEP is to provide a learning environment in which Stoney children may develop a deeper understanding of their culture, history, language and individual potential. We are concerned with finding answers to such questions as: "What does it mean to be an Indian in today's society?"⁵⁹

SCEP brought much-needed employment to the local community and encouraged many students to pursue college degrees, while also producing "a general increase in pride of culture among the Stoney people at Morley."⁶⁰ Another Stoney milestone was marked in 1981 with the opening of Nakoda Lodge, a center for educational and spiritual activities

⁵⁷Indian Ecumenical Conference, "Minutes," 2.

⁵⁸"Morley Reserve Progresses Through SCEP," The Native People 10 (July 29, 1977), 12.

⁵⁹Odhiambo Okite, "A Talk With Chief John Snow," International Review of Mission 63 (April 1974), 182.

⁶⁰"Morley Reserve Progresses Through SCEP," The Native People 10 (July 29, 1977), 15.

that was constructed solely with band funds.⁶¹ In 1984 the Nakoda Institute published, through the University of British Columbia Press, the first of its "Occasional Papers" series: As Long as the Sun Shines and Water Flows: A Reader in Canadian Native Studies. "The Institute recognizes the importance of encouraging Indian people to achieve self-determination and to enhance their economic, social, and cultural development."⁶²

Theoretical Analysis

The preliminary research represented by this paper would seem to indicate that there has not yet been any scholarly study of the Indian Ecumenical Conference. While a number of scholars have been aware of its existence and have made passing reference to it in articles and books on other subjects (see Bibliography), it has yet to be examined for its significance as a contemporary American Indian social movement possessing important religious characteristics. The unusual history and nature of the IEC make it a unique case study, with important implications for several different constituencies. For American Indian communities, the IEC modelled an approach to inter-religious

⁶¹Martin Thompson, "Nakoda Lodge . . . majestic setting" and "Politics, friendship it's assembly time," The Native People 14 (June 19, 1981), 5, 8.

⁶²Chief John Snow, "Foreword" in As Long as the Sun Shines and Water Flows: A Reader in Canadian Native Studies, edited by Ian A. L. Getty and Antoine S. Lussier (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983).

cooperation that addresses a wide variety of community needs. For Christian churches, the IEC challenged their oftentimes passive understanding of inter-religious dialogue and demonstrated that there are ways for churches to be supportive of Indian communities without relying on the missionary paradigm. For academic scholars, the IEC highlighted the limitations of all disciplinary theoretical approaches and the need for inter-disciplinary synthesis, as this discussion will demonstrate.

A strong sense of shared religious identity--one is tempted to add, shared religious destiny--was the basis for the truly ecumenical focus of the IEC. As an intertribal social movement, the presence of religious pluralism at the conferences was seen as a strength rather than a weakness, precisely because those doing the sharing were all Indians. But activities at the conferences were both intertribal (e.g., powwows) and tribal (e.g., ceremonies); behind the common consciousness of intertribal solidarity was an awareness that tribal identity constitutes an inescapable dimension of the Indian experience. No matter how "acculturated" or "assimilated" they may be, each Indian person will continue to refer back to their tribe of origin as a people possessing a unique history, language and culture. Many scholars might describe the IEC as a "pan-Indian" social movement, but the term is problematic in several ways. Apart from the fact that "pan-" (meaning

"all-inclusive") is simply the wrong prefix, there is a question of signification present here; Indians do not use the term pan-Indian to refer to themselves. The IEC was an intertribal phenomenon.

As an intertribal movement emphasizing religious pluralism rather than homogeneity, the IEC is not particularly susceptible to analysis using Wallace's revitalization movement theory. Although it may also be arguable that his theory assumes a degree of cultural homogeneity that did not exist even in earlier historical periods, it certainly has limited usefulness when applied to intertribal phenomenon. One must also question the value of talking about "contact situations" involving two idealized societies when the environment facing the IEC was a diversity of subcultures enmeshed, to varying degrees, with a dominant Euro-American culture. Nevertheless, the questions implied in Wallace's conceptualization of the various stages that revitalization movements pass through provides a useful framework for considering other theoretical perspectives.

What Caused the Movement?

Wallace's model of the processual structure that characterizes revitalization movements is founded on the concept of the steady state, that baseline condition that is marked by sociocultural health and harmony. It seems clear that his use of the concept relies on an arbitrary--even

contrived--definition, since the steady state for any society or culture can only be identified in relation to other, non-steady, states. There is no absolute, value-free sociocultural condition that can serve as the reference point for any effort to measure the steady state. Wallace's argument is thus somewhat circular, because the only thing that can really be said about the steady state is that it is the period of time without a revitalization movement. This point is supported by Aberle's observation that there is no simple, predictive relationship between relative deprivation and revitalization movements; the most that can be said is that, during a revitalization movement, the steady state is not present. Is an ideal, theoretical steady state even possible in any real, concrete situation? Wallace's use of the steady state concept thus does not involve empirical observation so much as it does historical interpretation. It is worth pointing out the similarity between Wallace's steady state and the Collective Behavior theorists, who understood radical movements to be examples of social dysfunction when compared to the established institutions of a normal, healthy society.

It is also important to note that the concept of increasing individual stress and cultural distortion has little meaning in the American Indian context, unless one is referring to that early period for each tribe when they first experienced the impact of European trade, disease,

land dispossession, and military aggression. Virtually all American Indian communities and cultures have been in a continual state of traumatization since that initial contact, and yet revitalization movements have occurred sporadically and under widely varying conditions of relative deprivation. Anthropological theorists from Herskovits to Wallace to Aberle agree that relative deprivation plays a critical role in the precipitation of revitalization movements, though what they mean by that term is no more value-free than Wallace's steady state. Aberle, for example, defined it as a discrepancy between legitimate expectation and actuality; but legitimacy can be evaluated only on a subjective basis and is the political rhetoric of kings, not peasants. Indian communities have been and continue to be deprived of basic needs, both in an absolute sense and relative to any other segment of American society. Rising but unfulfilled expectations during the post-war era also affected Indian communities, just as they affected other marginalized communities in American society. The social contexts out of which the organizers and participants of the IEC came were all marked by problems endemic to Indian country for generations.

Wallace remarked that, for almost all of the movements he reviewed in developing his theory, the process of revitalization began with the religious inspiration of an individual. Rather than present this observation as a

common feature of revitalization, Wallace should have acknowledged that it is another part of his definition of a revitalization movement. Clearly, the IEC did not begin with the inspired teachings of a prophetic individual, though Snow certainly provided the charismatic leadership necessary to maintain a movement involving people with very diverse tribal, educational, and religious backgrounds. Aberle suggested that religious movements are irrational responses to cultural crisis, which sounds strangely similar to Collective Behavior theorists who labelled them as irrational, spontaneous expressions of crowd excitement. It may be more useful to consider Marx's and Weber's emphasis on the rational quality of leadership, which was provided by Snow along with the religious leaders and elders, who might be described as a kind of collective leadership resource. McLoughlin's observation that the revitalization process does not need to originate in a single event or person, but can extend over a long period of time, is also helpful here.

While many Indian communities have shared the common experience of deprivation, many have also maintained a strong sense of identity despite this experience. In some cases the affirmation of cultural distinctiveness has persisted after nearly 400 years of cultural contact and even intermarriage. This amazing history of cultural survival fits well with Touraine's observation about postindustrial society, that its most dynamic aspect is the

critical need for identity and community. Theorists of the identity-oriented paradigm are examining the ways in which modern social movements create and defend identity in their conflicts with the economic and political elite, and this was certainly a central thrust of the IEC; more will be said on this later.

Nevertheless, the presence of deprivation and the maintenance of identity do not explain what caused the IEC to form when it did, and raise questions about why it did not form at an earlier time. We must look to resource mobilization theory for insight into other factors that may have led to the formation of the movement. Freeman argued that social movements require a cooptable communications network and either an unplanned crisis event or an intentional organizing effort. The "moccasin telegraph" is a powerful communications medium, as anyone familiar with life in Indian country can attest to. In the absence of an identifiable, highly-visible crisis event, it may be that access to the political, social, and economic power of the churches allowed Indian religious leaders to organize the kind of movement they might have wanted to organize for some time. This is consistent with other resource mobilization theorists, who suggest that movements form because of long-term changes in resource availability, organizational structure, and opportunities for action.

Our understanding of the causes that led to the formation of the IEC would not be complete without acknowledging the influence of social context, both within Indian communities and in American society. Perhaps the willingness of Indian religious leaders, Christian and traditional, to work together in a cooperative approach to social problems is a recent phenomenon; perhaps it is not. Nevertheless, it is important to note that certain changes have taken place in Indian communities since World War II, especially through the process of urbanization and through expanding educational and economic opportunities. These changes may have facilitated the organization of the IEC and may have also increased the need for such a movement. The social context in American society was also an important factor; the churches' willingness to support the IEC was just one expression of the social progressivism of the period. McCarthy's and Zald's "conscience constituency" for the IEC was the Anglican Church, which provided the financial resources for a movement from which it received no direct benefit; indeed, the self-determination sentiment endorsed by the IEC was in direct opposition to the Church's historic, institutional interest in missionization.

Why Did the Movement Grow?

Wallace explicated the process of communication, organization, and adaptation that characterizes the normal process of a revitalization movement. In the absence of a

clearly defined prophetic revelation (in psycho-social terms, the "mazeway resynthesis"), the IEC is not well suited for analysis along these lines. Though communication, organization, and adaptation were important for the growth of the movement, Wallace intended something different by his use of these terms. Resource mobilization theory is more appropriate for attempting to understand the factors that led to the growth of the IEC.

Having received its initial impetus from within a Western religious institution, the IEC raises interesting questions about the origin and development of social movements. While Anglican Church officials accomplished much of the early organizational work for the first conference, they seem to have turned things over to Indian religious leaders in a fairly swift and effective manner. This would confirm Freeman's observation that the organizers of a movement do not also need to be its leaders, that the two roles often have very different functions. It is also worth pointing out that the Indian Christian ministers who were instrumental in establishing the link between the Anglican Church and Indian communities seem to have been successful in also involving a variety of traditional religious leaders in the process. Had they not acted intentionally in this regard, the IEC might very well have developed into another gathering for Indian Christians,

along the lines of the "camp meetings" and revivals already popular in Indian country.

Resource mobilization theorists have observed that effective movements are facilitated by different kinds of resources: participants, financial support, professional expertise, and legitimation by outside authorities. As Nagel pointed out, American Indian movements are hampered by the fact that some of these resources are available only within the confines of federal Indian policy. Whether subject to government control or not, all of these resources were important for the growth of the IEC. In terms of the three-tiered organization pattern that Nagel observed in American Indian movements, the IEC provided an intertribal forum for addressing the problem of Indian identity while reaching out to impact tribes and communities.

By not including or excluding people along religious, cultural, tribal, or linguistic lines, the IEC drew from a broad cross-section of the Indian population. More complete information on conference attendance would allow for the kind of quantitative and demographic analysis that was demonstrated by Carroll and Thornton. Financial support also came from a wide range of sources, with various Christian churches, private foundations, and even Canadian government agencies providing funding. Both the Anglican Church and the Nishnawbe Institute were primary sources of professional expertise, alongside the contributions of

individuals like Dr. Robert Thomas, the Cherokee anthropologist who served as a member of the original IEC Steering Committee. The fact that the IEC was acknowledged by Indians and non-Indians alike as an important part of the American Indian cultural renaissance was largely due to its connections with so many other organizations, which provided the movement with outside recognition and legitimation.

What Type of Movement Was It?

While Wallace suggested that most revitalization movements change their emphasis over time, beginning with religious revival but taking on a more political orientation as the movement becomes more pragmatic and goal-oriented, this was not the case for the IEC. If any noticeable shift took place, it was probably in the other direction, with less emphasis on the kind of sociopolitical agenda present in the 1970 conference resolutions and a more direct focus on the questions of personal spiritual identity raised by the presence of religious pluralism. The IEC also maintained a rather consistent, if not always explicit, critique of activist movements like the American Indian Movement, suggesting that Indian spirituality must be the foundation for Indian activism. "Any Indian liberation movement must be totally rooted in religion and culture."⁶³

As those involved in the IEC understood it, the source of this religion and culture could be found among their

⁶³McCullum 1975, 3.

elders, the knowledge base for Indian communities. Despite problems of communication between the elders and Indian youth stemming from very different educational and social experiences, the importance of oral tradition in the transmission of knowledge--the "rules" of culture--remains. Any effective revival of Indian religious and cultural traditions will look to the elders for guidance and strength and to the youth for promise and hope. Thornton's research on the 1890 Ghost Dance demonstrated how this movement was an attempt at demographic revitalization among tribes that had suffered threatening population losses. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to suggest that when leaders of the IEC expressed concern for Indian youth, who were being "lost" to Indian communities, they were attempting their own form of demographic revitalization.

Linton's contention that nativistic movements concern themselves only with particular elements of culture and not with culture in its entirety is not descriptive of the IEC; indeed, it is difficult to imagine a movement that would not perceive itself to be addressing the need for holistic renewal. Linton's typology of revivalistic vs. perpetuative and rational vs. magical movements, along with Aberle's classification of individual vs. supra-individual and partial vs. total orientation, are also not helpful in understanding the IEC. But Voget supplied a useful alternative to these dualistic categories with his

formulation of the reformatory movement, which seeks to arrive at a synthesis of the old and the new by assuming a critical perspective toward both. Snow described the situation facing the Stoney tribe in 1969, when self-government was finally re-established, in a passage that also reflects the philosophy behind the IEC:

The basic problem, we realized, was to rebuild the shattered Stoney tribal society. It was a must to rebuild our once proud society if we were to be successful in the new venture.

Part of the solution to this was that the harsh realities of the twentieth century had to be faced squarely by our people. We could no longer hide behind the none-too-benevolent dictatorship of the Indian Affairs Department and accept our miserable lot while bemoaning the loss of our traditional nomadic life. Alternatives to the traditional economy had to be found and programs planned and instituted that would provide a good future for our children.

But, although we had to accept the dominant economy, technology, and legal system surrounding us, we did not have to accept all its cultural assumptions. The Stoney Indians' culture, language, and religion have been threatened ever since the whiteman arrived on this Great Island. With his excessive dependence on technology, restrictive legislation, greedy individualism, and smug certainty that he knows all the answers--even in religion--he has been a real and constant threat to our cooperative communal outlook, our respect for nature, and our value system. With the coming of self-government and a measure of self-determination, we did not have to accept this.

In other words, we came to understand that it was not an either/or choice: acculturation to the dominant society or clinging to our old ways in a world where they could no longer offer us and our children a good life. We came to understand that there was a third way--the way of biculturalism. We came to understand that we could still follow Stoney tribal custom but, at the same time, adjust to a technological age on our own terms. Our hope was (and still is) to retain the best in the Stoney culture and to take the best in the dominant culture.

We had no illusions that this would be an easy task, or a short one. We would have to take an embittered, despondent, confused people and point them toward rediscovering, recapturing, and revitalizing our cultural philosophies and values, while adapting this traditional culture to modern times.⁶⁴

What Snow described here is the sorting process Wallace called "mazeway resynthesis," though accomplished in a more conscious, rational way than Wallace theorized. Brightman argued that religious experimentation and innovation is a distinctive dimension of American Indian cultural history; this view is consistent with Snow's philosophy and supports the interpretation of the IEC as a reformative movement.

Why Did the Movement Decline?

Wallace asserted that the process of adaptation that all revitalization movements go through, whereby the prophet and followers make various modifications of movement teachings in order to achieve broader acceptance, naturally leads to cultural transformation. As the cultural "mazeway" incorporates the movement's perspective, the movement itself becomes less distinguishable from the other institutions of culture. While the adaptation process may partially account for the decline of the IEC, it seems more likely that shrinking resources, especially the loss of outside financial support, was responsible. It is not surprising that the movement began to decline in popularity when its funding base began to erode.

⁶⁴Snow 1977, 123-24.

The social context clearly played a important role in the demise of the IEC, just as it did at the inception of the movement. The decline in the movement coincided with an important ideological shift during the late seventies, the resurgence of political and social conservatism in a variety of forms. Perhaps the institutionalization of other social programs initiated during the sixties and early seventies led to increased factionalism within Indian communities, particularly as funding resources shrank and became less reliable. Religious and community leaders otherwise willing to participate in cooperative ventures may have had to devote increasing amounts of time and energy to maintaining their own programs. The IEC certainly did not decline because socio-economic deprivation or Indian identity ceased to exist, for both are still very characteristic of Indian communities.

Was the Movement Successful?

Wallace defined a successful revitalization movement as one which ran the full course of the processual structure, eventually routinized into an organized institution of cultural life. Freeman suggested that four typical patterns of decline are success, cooptation, repression, and failure, which are not mutually-exclusive options. The IEC was not routinized into the cultural life of its constituency, and it experienced a combination of success, cooptation, repression, and failure with respect to

its own stated goals and objectives. But it seems important to point out that the IEC, as a periodic event rather than an ongoing process, was inherently limited in its ability to change tribal societies. It was an example of what Cohen called "self-limiting radicalism," oriented more toward the problem of identity within an indifferent or hostile society rather than toward the transformation of that society. Touraine's argument that modern social movements are less sociopolitical and more sociocultural than past movements is also descriptive of the IEC.

LeVeen observed that American Indians are doubly marginalized in American society, both institutionally and culturally. In light of current socio-economic, political, and demographic realities, this may always be the case, unlike regions such as southern Africa, where the introduction of democratic forms of government will be sufficient to protect the natural rights of indigenous people. The presence in North America of a white population possessing an overwhelming numerical majority in the context of a democratic society constitutes an apparently permanent negation of indigenous political, social, economic, cultural, and religious rights. Nevertheless, LeVeen is correct in saying that organized activism by marginal communities, even when it fails to achieve concrete goals, leads to significant improvement in personal self-esteem and

political consciousness; this was certainly an important contribution of the IEC.

In the final analysis, the Indian Ecumenical Conference is best understood as a movement of religio-cultural renewal. Its purpose and history might be summed up in a single phrase: Indians helping other Indians to discover what it means to be Indian. The recovery and affirmation of identity was always at the center of concern for those involved. Perhaps the spirit of the movement was best captured by Wilfred Pelletier in his autobiography No Foreign Land, written in 1973:

Last summer in the Alberta foothills, there was an Indian Ecumenical Conference. It took a lot of effort and money for that to happen, but there they were, 130-odd Indian religious leaders from every part of North America. Medicine men and some Indian clergy. After nearly five hundred years of persecution, the old-way-of-life religions were still very much alive.

For me, that conference meant many things. But there was one thing about it that was very personal: I had the feeling that I had come full circle and had finally made it. It felt like at last I was back home.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Wilfred Pelletier and Ted Poole, No Foreign Land: The Biography of a North American Indian (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), 56.