

Chapter 3
The Indian Ecumenical Conference
as a
Religious Movement

The Indian Ecumenical Conference involved native people and their religious leaders from throughout Canada and the United States, bringing them together for annual summer gatherings where they could begin healing the religious divisions in their communities. In working to revive essential native religious traditions, Conference participants sought a comprehensive solution to the social problems facing many native people and to the crisis of identity behind many of these problems. Conference leaders and elders asserted that this religious revival must combine a return to "the old ways" with a recognition of the value of new insights on the modern situation. Many native people live in a "fragmented sacred world," but religious revival is still possible because of "the historic continuity of time-honoured Indian values and philosophical concerns." Religious change and innovation can take place because "a few dedicated native religious leaders and medicine men and women from many reserves and communities have kept our sacred fire going" (John Snow), and because "many of us are now getting important messages--God is telling the Indian people what they should be doing and how they should be conducting their lives" (Ernest Tootoosis).

It is true that the most important activities of the Indian Ecumenical Conference were its annual summer gatherings; the impact of these meetings, however, was felt throughout the year and far beyond Stoney Park. Many Conference participants saw themselves not only as attending a beneficial event but also as involved in an influential movement. Ernest Willie predicted at the 1970 Conference that "this is just the beginning of [a] more general religious movement. I feel a religious mood growing, especially among the young." Seven years later, at the height of the Conference's popularity, John Snow wrote about it in a chapter titled "The Indian Religious Movement." Tootoosis said in 1974: "The whole movement is to revive the Indian culture and spiritual life."

Scholars and other observers have been even more inclined to describe the Conference as a movement rather than just an annual event. Sam Stanley, the "official historian" of the Conference and a regular participant in Steering Committee meetings, called it "a North American Indian Ecumenical Movement" and described it as a movement throughout his 1977 article on the Conference. Janet Hodgson used the Conference's official name but also described it as "the pan-Indian ecumenical movement." Harold Turner called it "a significant new independent religious movement," and John Price described it as "a new religious revitalization movement, although it is occurring in a very modern form."¹

Native Religious Movements

Understood as a religious movement, the Indian Ecumenical Conference bears a number of similarities with other native religious movements that have taken place both historically and in modern times. The European invasion of the Americas during the past five hundred years has been a traumatic experience for native people, who have responded to the process of land dispossession and population destruction in a variety of ways; they have engaged in adaptation and accommodation as well as opposition and resistance. Native strategies for survival have been diverse and multi-dimensional; many of these organized, deliberate efforts at social change have been initiated, motivated, and guided by fundamentally religious considerations. Movements of religious and cultural revitalization have been important features of this history of oppression and survival.

Anthropologists and historians have documented hundreds of native religious movements, and many more were undoubtedly suppressed by over-zealous missionaries and over-anxious agents, who often misunderstood the intentions of many of these movements and censored them just as southern whites quieted slave rebellions for fear of a widespread uprising. Anthony Wallace documented the eighteenth-century decline of Iroquois society and showed how Handsome Lake, through a series of visions beginning in 1799, was able to bring about a renaissance among the Iroquois. The Old Way of Handsome Lake survives today as a vital expression of Iroquois religious life. It revolves around the *Gaiwio*, the Code of Handsome

Lake, which is passed on by word of mouth and includes "history and prophecy, commandment and exhortation."² A contemporary of Handsome Lake was the Shawnee prophet Tenskwatawa, who worked with his brother Tecumseh in forging an intertribal confederacy opposing United States aggression in the Old Northwest. Handsome Lake and other Iroquois leaders opposed Tenskwatawa's political agenda, but the two prophets experienced similar visions and preached similar doctrines to their followers. David Edmonds acknowledged that both the conditions facing the Shawnee during this period and Tenskwatawa's teachings "fit into a pattern of Native American revitalizations."³ Perhaps the best-known historic revitalization movement is the 1890 Ghost dance led by the Paiute prophet Wovoka, who prophesied the resurrection of native ancestors in a regenerated aboriginal paradise. Wovoka's teachings quickly spread throughout the western United States and the Ghost dance was performed by dozens of tribes before the movement slowed a few years later.⁴ Scholars have also analyzed the religious orientations of modern native movements including the occupation of Alcatraz Island, the American Indian Movement, and "American Indian spirituality."⁵

These and other native movements are commonly referred to as "revitalization movements" after the terminology first suggested by Wallace.⁶ This particular theoretical approach reflects Wallace's anthropological and psychological orientations and thus revolves around the idea of cultural revitalization. Religious considerations are often implicit, however, when applying this method of

interpretation to native movements. Wallace developed his theory of cultural revitalization through studying hundreds of tribal movements around the world, and his schema for the revitalization process seems to be most applicable in situations where tribal societies are experiencing colonial exploitation. In recent years it has also been applied to movements arising in cultural contexts that have not traditionally been the subject of anthropological study. Scholars studying religious movements originating among African Americans⁷ and in Jewish and Christian history,⁸ for example, have begun using revitalization movement theory.

The scholarly literature addressing the empirical and theoretical study of revitalization movements is voluminous, to say the least. The various social scientific disciplines which emerged during the last century have understandably concerned themselves with these movements, which constitute some of the more unusual expressions of human social behavior. Anthropologists and sociologists have been joined in the study of revitalization movements in recent years by historians of religion and others, who have expanded the multidisciplinary scope of this effort.

One measure of the dimensions of this literature is provided by the Project for the Study of New Religious Movements in Primal Societies, a major bibliographic effort begun in 1973 and reorganized in 1981 as the Centre for New Religious Movements at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, England. What was originally planned to be a multidisciplinary four-volume bibliography has been expanded, with a volume now devoted to each of six major

geographic/cultural areas: Black Africa, North America, Oceania, Europe and Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. "The religious movements dealt with in this bibliographic series are defined as those which arise in the interaction of a primal society with another society where there is a great disparity of power or sophistication". The volume on North America (defined as northern Mexico, the United States, Canada, and Greenland) contains more than sixteen hundred citations.⁹

The availability of so many different theoretical perspectives on religious movements makes it difficult to determine which one(s) will be appropriate for the study of any particular movement. Theories developed by anthropologists, especially the revitalization movement theory articulated by Anthony Wallace, along with sociological approaches, particularly resource mobilization theory and the more recent identity-oriented paradigm, seem to be the most useful formulations. Other disciplinary interpretations might be employed and deserve at least brief mention. Some sociologists have applied quantitative analysis to the Ghost dance phenomenon in order to investigate the circumstances surrounding the rise of revitalization movements. Russell Thornton suggested a theory of "demographic revitalization," in which he argued that the Ghost dance prophecy concerning the resurrection of native ancestors addressed the need for demographic recovery among depopulated tribes, a new insight on an aspect of movement ideology which might otherwise be dismissed because of its supernatural nature.¹⁰

Historians have contributed to the study of revitalization movements by suggesting new historiographical approaches. William McLoughlin examined a series of nineteenth-century religious movements among the Cherokees; eight distinct cultural crises during this period marked "continual, though sporadic, efforts to reconcile old and new religious perspectives," which suggests that "revitalization need not be associated with a single prophet or doctrine or result from a single watershed."¹¹ Robert Brightman surveyed a number of recent works on native religions which emphasize processes of religious change and recognize the dynamic nature of religious traditions among native people. There is "nothing 'non-Indian' in the *event* of religious change," so religious movements are just one aspect of the "religious experimentation and innovation" that characterized native religious traditions even before European contact.¹² Historians of religion have also shown some interest in religious movements.¹³

The Indian Ecumenical Conference was a contemporary native movement that was intertribal and interreligious in nature; accordingly, both anthropological and sociological theories are useful in interpreting it as a religious movement. Anthropological approaches are useful because of the historic relationship between native societies and the development of cultural theories, because of the persistence of native tribal identities, and because of the essential religious orientation of the Indian Ecumenical Conference. Sociological approaches are useful for their interest in modern movements in a heterogeneous society, where native people

encounter diverse intertribal, interreligious and intercultural experiences. Both disciplinary orientations also highlight the struggle for communal and individual identity in the context of an oppressive or alienating dominant society, which was a central concern for the Indian Ecumenical Conference.

Revitalization Movement Theory

James Mooney's important work on the Ghost dance is commonly acknowledged to be the first empirical study of a major revitalization movement.¹⁴ Mooney was a young fieldworker with the Bureau of American Ethnology, and he found that his initial investigation into the Ghost dance and its relationship to the "Sioux outbreak" of 1890 indicated that "there was more in the Ghost dance than had been suspected". After six trips to the West involving twenty-two months of fieldwork, Mooney published what remains a classic in the history of American ethnology.¹⁵

The importance of Mooney's study, however, goes beyond its value as an early, contemporary report on the Ghost dance phenomenon. Anthony Wallace omitted it when he published an abridged edition of The Ghost Dance Religion, but Mooney's study contains an extended discussion of other American Indian religious movements and of "parallel" movements in Jewish, Islamic, and Christian cultures. When he chose to examine "the primitive messiah belief and . . . the teachings of the various Indian prophets . . . together with brief sketches of several Indian wars belonging to the same periods," Mooney was implicitly recognizing the connection

between oppression and revitalization. Wallace acknowledged his own indebtedness to Mooney in observing that

Mooney anticipated those later formulations which posit an essential processual similarity in revolutionary religious movements diverse in form and philosophical basis. Furthermore, Mooney regarded such movements as adaptive responses of peoples to intolerable stresses laid upon them by poverty and oppression. In this restricted sense, he was an early proponent of the "cultural deprivation" school of thought, which interests itself in the function of such movements as more or less effective expressions of social dissatisfaction. In these senses, Mooney foreshadows later theorists.¹⁶

Acculturation

Mooney had provided an outline of the empirical and theoretical basis for a more comprehensive study of revitalization, but four decades passed before the subject was taken up in any kind of systematic fashion. Nineteenth-century American anthropologists had devoted themselves to the reconstruction of "dead" cultures and "to gathering data for tracing the extent of diffusion of cultural elements in the past."¹⁷ This focus of concern continued into the early twentieth century; ethnology in the tradition of Franz Boas was "an exactly idiographic description of tribal cultures, preferably as 'untouched' as possible, and the 'detrIALIZED' or 'deculturated' society was not a legitimate subject matter for study." As late as the thirties a Yale dissertation proposal on acculturation was rejected on the grounds that it was "not a subject for anthropology."¹⁸ The widely-held conception of "primitive" cultures as static objects gradually gave way,

nevertheless, to a more dynamic understanding of the processes of cultural change. Anthropologists began to recognize that diffusion in the past and acculturation in the present are really just two sides of the same coin. The modern study of revitalization movements grew out of this expanding vision of cultural change.

A research committee consisting of Robert Redfield, Melville Herskovits, and Ralph Linton was created in 1935 to formulate a systematic approach to research in acculturation. Herskovits described their attempt "to define and orient the study of culture contact" by developing an "Outline for the Study of Acculturation." Their definition of acculturation synthesized previous efforts in a broad but concise statement:

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.¹⁹

Linton, meanwhile, presented seven case studies in American Indian acculturation and suggested an outline guide for the collection and reporting of field data.²⁰

Both Herskovits and Linton recognized that religious movements are an important product of cultural contact. For Herskovits, their prominence stems from

the striking nature of the revivalistic movements that have arisen among primitive peoples in contact with whites, which has caused them to stand out in bold relief against the background of their respective cultures, and has thus made them ready subjects for research.²¹

Linton also observed that what he termed "nativistic movements" are the most obvious of the phenomena associated with acculturation. He pointed the way for future study of these movements by suggesting that they originate out of "states of disappointment and of disillusionment with the new order" and that they rely on supernaturalism "in the hope of enlisting supernatural aid to change the current conditions."²²

Bernard Barber focussed on the relationship between "Acculturation and Messianic Movements" in an important early article. He described the "messianic doctrine" common among American Indian religious movements as fundamentally "a statement of hope" about the future, requiring (1) an immediate return to "the aboriginal mode of life" and (2) the adoption of special ritual innovations. Barber located the "ideological basis" for messianic movements in the widespread North American belief in the future appearance of a culture-hero. These movements arise, however, due to situations of cultural and economic disorganization and deprivation; a messiah's function is "to proclaim a *stable order*." Deprivation comes about through the loss of valuable sociocultural items and activities (such as the buffalo hunt) as well as through the introduction of harmful influences from white culture (such as intoxicating liquor). Barber's emphasis on deprivation played an important role in his understanding of movement causality:

Despite the positive correlation of the messianic movement and deprivation, there is no one-to-one relation between these variables. It is here suggested that the messianic movement is *only one of several alternative responses*. In

the other direction, the relationship is more determinate; the messianic movement is comprehensible only as a response to widespread deprivation.²³

Nativistic Movements

Barber had considered messianic movements as one possible response to acculturative pressure (deprivation); Linton attempted a more systematic analysis of the ethnographic data. His definition of a nativistic movement as "any conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture" was broader than Barber's. Linton's definition seems to contradict his own system of classification at points (the "perpetuative-rational" response would seem to be common and usually unconscious), but he did provide the first working taxonomy while establishing the phenomena as an area of anthropological study.²⁴

Linton asserted that "nativistic movements concern themselves with particular elements of culture, never with cultures as wholes," and that these elements are selected and given symbolic value on the basis of their distinctiveness and practicability. He described movements according to two sets of polar positions--revivalistic vs. perpetuative, magical vs. rational--yielding a fourfold typology. Suggesting that these movements "have as a common denominator a situation of inequality between the societies in contact," he went on to describe the relationship between cultures in contact with another dual polarity: dominant vs. dominated, superior vs. inferior. Linton's own explication of these

contact situations and the types of nativistic movements they produce may be confused and incomplete, but he at least recognized that "the troubles [contact situations] usually involve can be traced, with few exceptions, to two factors: exploitation and frustration."²⁵

The forties and fifties witnessed a gradual increase in the literature on revitalization movements, and several important articles were published in the April 1956 issue of the American Anthropologist. Barber had considered movement causality and Linton had formulated a movement typology; Fred Voget sought to explain how certain movements function during periods of cultural transition. He extended Linton's definition of nativistic movements by identifying three types of nativism: dynamic, passive, and reformative. Dynamic (Linton's "revivalistic") nativism is an active protest against domination and deprivation that draws freely from traditional beliefs and practices, while passive nativism adopts an apathetic stance toward both traditional and alien cultural resources. Voget argued that American Indians, however, have produced religious movements that "bring a new meaning to life" while also assuming "an attitude of critical appraisal toward the past." This reformative nativism, in contrast to both dynamic and passive nativism, is

a relatively conscious attempt on the part of a subordinated group to attain a personal and social reintegration through a selective rejection, modification, and synthesis of both traditional and alien (dominant) cultural components.

Gaiwio (Handsome Lake), Peyotism, and Shakerism are three examples of this "third way" that eschews both purism and apathy in favor of accommodation. Voget evaluated the elements common to these three reformative movements and concluded that they are stable and enduring, in contrast to revivalistic movements like the short-lived Ghost dances, because of several factors: they fulfill long-term needs; they provide a basis for a new sense of dignity and self-worth; and they "pave the way for a more secular, pragmatic, and accommodative adjustment."²⁶

Revitalization Movements

The same issue of the American Anthropologist that Voget's article appeared in also featured Wallace's highly influential work on "Revitalization Movements." Wallace included in this more general category what others had called "reformative," "nativistic," "messianic," and "revivalistic"; he believed that "all these phenomena of major cultural-system innovation are characterized by a uniform process." He viewed revitalization, like many before him, as "a special kind of culture change phenomenon," and like Linton he defined such a movement as "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."²⁷ Wallace repeated "the defects of Linton's concept and [added] the overrationalistic";²⁸ nevertheless, his outline of the processual stages that revitalization movements go through has assumed a kind of canonical stature.

Wallace relied on two important theoretical sources-- Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic dream theory and Max Weber's theory

of charismatic leadership--in his interpretation of the process of religious inspiration and organization that characterizes most revitalization movements. His "biocultural" model of group psychology employs an "organismic analogy":

A human society is here regarded as a definite kind of organism, and its culture is conceived as those patterns of learned behavior which certain "parts" of the social organism or system (individual persons and groups of persons) characteristically display.

A society responds to stress (danger) by attempting to preserve its own homeostasis (equilibrium); in order for this to happen it is "functionally necessary for every person in society to maintain a mental image of the society and its culture, . . . in order to act in ways which reduce stress at all levels of the system." Wallace called this mental image the "mazeway."²⁹

Religious inspiration of a prophetic individual normally takes place in the context of increasing individual stress and cultural distortion. One major intellectual and emotional dilemma needs to be resolved during this period of "mazeway disintegration" and before "orderly social life and individual comfort" can be resumed: the problem of identification.

The cultural crisis . . . appears to imply a collapse of cultural identification, with attendant depression and deterioration of behavior; the crisis is resolved by a re-affirmation of identification with *some* definable cultural system.

The prophet's role, then, is to accomplish a "mazeway resynthesis," which Wallace described as a sorting process; in the case of the Seneca reformer Handsome Lake, his "mission in life was to destroy,

or modify, objects belonging to the bad system, and to bring into dominance the good system." The process of revitalization improves the "health" of a society and it may also heal the prophet; many prophets exhibit dramatic recoveries from illness or disease. Religious inspiration in the context of cultural revitalization is thus a therapeutic, not a pathological, experience. Wallace formulated another definition on the basis of this conceptual development:

The effort to work a change in mazeway and "real" system together so as to permit more effective stress reduction is the effort at revitalization; and the collaboration of a number of persons in such an effort is called a revitalization movement.³⁰

Wallace's methodological approach to understanding revitalization movement process is the principle of event-analysis. "Events or happenings of various types have genotypical structures independent of local cultural differences." These events may be considered as "behavioral units," whose "uniformity is based on generic human attributes, both physical and psychological."³¹ The processual structure that this analytical method reveals seems to fit the religion of Handsome Lake remarkably well. Wallace made use of published research documenting several hundred revitalization movements around the world, but it seems clear that his extensive study of Handsome Lake played a central role in his theoretical formulations. His schema has remained a useful model of revitalization:³²

Pre-movement phase**Steady state****Period of increased individual stress****Period of cultural distortion****Movement phase****Mazeway reformulation (prophetic revelation)****Communication****Organization****Adaptation****Cultural transformation****Post-movement phase****Routinization****Steady state**

Wallace also discussed "four of the many possible" variables that can be considered when trying to classify revitalization movements: choice of identification, choice of secular and religious means, nativism, and success and failure. His debatable conclusions on these points may serve no other purpose than to reinforce how difficult it is to establish a meaningful classification of revitalization movements.³³

Wallace believed that his study of revitalization movements and their causes had implications for the study of religious phenomena in general. "It can be argued that all organized religions are relics of old revitalization movements, surviving in routinized form in stabilized cultures." His provocative book Religion: An Anthropological View developed a "psychological and cultural approach" to the study of religion and employed his revitalization theory as a central theme. Revitalization movements grow out of the context of struggle, "the dialectic of disorganization and

organization," and this dialectic "is what religion is all about." Religious ritual constitutes a form of revitalization because it is concerned with a crisis of identity having both personal and social dimensions. A religious revitalization movement must address both areas of need and thus has two aims: "to provide immediate personal salvation to the presently afflicted and to reorganize the culture in such a manner that a better way of life is brought into being to take the place of the old."³⁴

Relative Deprivation

David Aberle developed yet another typology of movements (including, but not limited to, religious ones). He referred to two dimensions of the change that social movements seek--locus of change (individual vs. supra-individual) and amount of change (partial vs. total)--yielding a fourfold classification. His analysis focussed on two of these types, transformative (supra-individual, total) and redemptive (individual, total), considering both constant characteristics and variable features for each type.³⁵

More important than his classification of movements is Aberle's exploration of the experience of relative deprivation that precedes them. He defined relative deprivation, a social and cultural phenomenon, as "a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectation and actuality, or between legitimate expectation and anticipated actuality, or both." Any situation of relative deprivation can be met by one of only a few possible responses. Aberle implied that a religious movement is an unrealistic, even irrational, response: "Where individual solutions fail and no realistic group

solution to the deprivation is possible, magical and religious movements are a potentiality." He did recognize, however, that understanding the severity and type of deprivation does not "make it possible to predict when, where, and with what ideology a social movement [will] arise." Relative deprivation is only one contributing factor in the genesis of social movements.³⁶

A suitable way to conclude this section is to consider Weston La Barre's bibliographic essay on the history of the study of what he called crisis cults. He believed this term is preferable because it is general and does not imply a theoretical prejudgment; "a 'crisis cult' means any group reaction to crisis, chronic or acute, that is cultic." In another context he stated that he

adopted the simple term "crisis cult" both for its brevity and its inclusiveness, intending only to imply the insight of Malinowski that there is no cult without crisis. That is to say, there must be an unresolved problem or crisis, chronic or acute, and unresolved by ordinary secular means, before there is cult response. The term "cult" also implies a distinction from ordinary secular actions or social movements such as war, legal or fiscal reform, economic, technological or other social change.

La Barre surveyed empirical studies (by continent) and synoptic surveys (from a variety of disciplines), then engaged in an extensive, critical review of the diverse theories of causality put forth by anthropologists and others. Are crisis cults the result of purely political, military, or economic factors? Are they generated by hopes for the arrival of a messianic culture-hero or by the leadership of a charismatic prophet? Are they the response to acculturative pressure in society or to psychological stress

experienced by individuals? La Barre was on target when he observed that "reductionism is rampant in crisis cult studies," and when he concluded that "no particularist explanation can exclusively or exhaustively 'save the data' of any single crisis cult."

Rather than expect all theory to be true, we should recognize that in scientific inquiry all theory need be is useful; hence anthropologists should grasp at each and every theory that they can find from whatever scientific discipline. . . .

The most that one can concede is that, in some cults, certain components seem relatively more salient; in other cults, other components appear to be; but all components are likely, in some degree, to be implicated in any cult.³⁷

Social Movement Theory

The study of social movements has played an important role in the historical development of sociological theory. Karl Marx understood revolutionary movements to be rational, inevitable responses to the inequity and disillusionment created by capitalist societies. Max Weber also saw these movements as positive forces for social change, inherent to the social structure.

Collective Behavior

In contrast to Marx and Weber, theorists in the collective behavior school have emphasized the cyclical nature of social change and have often viewed social movements as examples of social dysfunction. Robert Park and Ernest Burgess were the first to survey collective behavior, which they defined as "the behavior of individuals under the influence of an impulse that is common and collective, . . . the result of social interaction." They viewed "social

unrest" as a product of the radical changes taking place throughout the modern world. The resulting "new and strange political movements . . . represent the groping of men for a new social order."

In modern times religious sects and social movements have had their origin in crowd excitement and spontaneous mass movements. . . .

Existing institutions represent social movements that survived the conflict of cultures and the struggle for existence.³⁸

Herbert Blumer pointed out that most of the literature on social movements from the first half of this century addressed either of two themes: movement causality or participant personality. This focus on the systemic origin of movements and on the motivation and behavior of their participants reflected the conservative political environment of the period. Neil Smelser and others followed the lead of Emile Durkheim in formulating what has been called "structural-functionalist analysis."

These theories have in common the basic assumption that sociopolitical systems tend inherently to be orderly, that the disruptive and political turmoil to which movements give rise are due primarily to the discontent generated by societal disequilibrium, and that such instabilities are normally short term or transitory in nature, at least within modern pluralistic societies.

Social movements, for Smelser, are caused by "structural strain" in the social order; they are made up of irrational actors engaged in "short circuited" thinking. As a group, collective behavior theorists

ignore what seems to be so essential to social movements deliberately seeking change, namely, the intricate play of factors which must be skillfully employed to forge and

direct a movement, as well as the fortuitous circumstances that facilitate their use.³⁹

Resource Mobilization

The dramatic increase in social protest activity that occurred during the sixties led to an equally dramatic change in the study of social movements. Sociologists began to frame their analysis with the concerns that are of more immediate interest to movement organizers themselves: formation, mobilization, organization, strategy. What came to be called resource mobilization theory

emphasized the continuities between movement and institutionalized actions, the rationality of movement actors, the strategic problems confronted by movements, and the role of movements as agencies for social change.⁴⁰

Social discontent created by structural strain is only one of several factors responsible for movement formation and growth. Jo Freeman's anthology represents scholarship emphasizing the resource mobilization approach.⁴¹

Freeman argued that the formation of a social movement requires the presence of a co-optable communications network and either a series of crises or an organizing effort to bring people together. She also pointed out that the organizers and the leaders of a movement are often not the same individuals; the roles they play are different, but both are important for movement success.⁴²

Others have suggested that "movements form because of long-term changes in group resources, organization, and opportunities for collective action." The specific factors contributing to the formation of movements may vary but, it seems clear that a

"multifaceted" approach to analysis is necessary. "Movements are formed through diverse routes depending on the [resources] absent in the premovement situation."⁴³

Resource mobilization theory, as the name suggests, focuses on determining what resources are needed and how movements go about obtaining them. Movements must recruit, maintain, and utilize participants, but they also need financial support, professional expertise, and legitimation by outside authorities.⁴⁴ The cultivation of group solidarity and commitment is a major concern, but mobilization is as much a logistical problem as an ideological one; there is no clear consensus among scholars, however, as to which logistical concerns are important. "The most significant contribution of resource mobilization theory has been to emphasize the significance of outside contributors and the cooptation of institutional resources by contemporary social movements".⁴⁵ McCarthy and Zald argued that movements in the sixties and seventies were facilitated by a "conscience constituency" made up of people willing to contribute important resources without receiving direct benefits from the movements they supported.⁴⁶

The organizational structure suitable for a particular social movement depends on its context and its goals. Preference for a centralized, bureaucratic structure or for a segmentary, informal one is a central point of debate, with each model possessing certain functional advantages over the other. The choice is an important one, because a movement's structure "determines its ability to deal with its environment, to mobilize members, to formulate goals, to

focus its energies, and to deal with internal problems." It also "makes a great deal of difference in its success." The success of movement strategy is an important question, the evaluation of which depends on the goals and objectives of a particular movements. Four typical patterns of decline can be identified: success, cooptation, repression, and failure. As Freeman observed, "success is a primary cause of movement decline and is sometimes consciously avoided by movement leaders, who deliberately alter their goals to avoid achieving them."⁴⁷

Identity-Oriented Paradigm

At the same time that resource mobilization theory emerged in the United States as a response to the inadequacies of the collective behavior approach to social movements, a new theoretical framework also developed in Europe, one that Jean Cohen called the identity-oriented paradigm. Both resource mobilization and identity-oriented models are concerned with the way social movements function as normal expressions of collective action and assert that these movements are composed of rational participants. Identity-oriented theorists, however, attempted to go beyond the focus on strategic action that characterizes resource mobilization theory. Their goals:

- (a) to look into the processes by which collective actors create the identities and solidarities they defend, (b) to assess the relations between adversaries and the stakes of their conflicts, and (c) to analyze the structural and cultural developments that contribute to such heightened reflexivity.⁴⁸

Cohen asserted that the "new social movements" found in "postindustrial" societies are new in some significant ways; he called them examples of "self-limiting radicalism." Their discontinuity with previous social movement patterns stems from the fact that postindustrial society is itself a "new societal type characterized by new locuses of power, forms of domination, modes of investment, and a 'reflexive' cultural model."⁴⁹ Alain Touraine, the leading theorist of the identity-oriented paradigm, asserted that "the most dynamic representation of social life [today] . . . is the call for identity and community." "New social movements are less sociopolitical and more sociocultural" than movements in the past. He proposed a "sociology of action" that is organized around the study of social change, particularly as it is made evident by social movements.⁵⁰

Touraine defined a social movement as "an agent of conflict for the social control of the main cultural patterns." Important to his definition is his contention that the economic and political elite must be analyzed in these same terms, as a social movement, rather than be identified with sociocultural norms. A social movement consists of an interrelation between three components: the actor, its opponent, and the stakes ("the cultural totality which defines the field of conflict").⁵¹ The "logic of collective interaction" thus concerns not only strategic rationality but also collective identity formation. "Collective actors strive to create a group identity within a general social identity whose interpretation they contest."

The new dimensions of the identity of contemporary actors, and what makes them radically discontinuous with earlier movements, are thus not their action repertoire but the level of reflexivity and the changed locuses and stakes of struggles that correspond to the emergence of a new societal type.⁵²

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This brief survey of the scholarly literature indicates that although anthropologists and sociologists often think of their disciplines as distinct fields of study, their perspectives on some subjects converge at a number of points. In the development of movement theory, both disciplines have distinguished between the "steady state" of "social equilibrium" and "conscious, organized attempts" at social change. Both disciplines attempt to place movements in their historical and social contexts in order to explain why movements begin when they do and why certain individuals become involved in them. Both suggest models for understanding the process of organization, growth, decline, and institutionalization which many movements go through over time. And both recognize that movements are an important means by which people formulate and maintain communal and individual identities in the face of material deprivation, social marginalization, and cultural conflict.

The Indian Ecumenical Conference

Touraine's description of postindustrial, pluralistic societies as a field for cultural conflict fits well with the historical and social context for the formation of the Indian Ecumenical Conference. Native communities have undergone fundamental

changes since World War II, especially through the process of urbanization and as a result of expanding but still limited educational and economic opportunities. These changes may have stimulated the need for an identity-oriented religious movement and may have even facilitated the organization of the Conference, but they do not explain why the movement began when it did. Wallace's theory of cultural revitalization, which is based on the concept of the steady state, also has limited explanatory power on this point. His use of this concept relies on a somewhat arbitrary assumption, since the steady state for any given society can only be identified in relation to other, non-steady states. No absolute, value-free sociocultural condition exists which can serve as a reference point in an effort to identify the steady state. Wallace's argument is thus somewhat circular, since 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 (and Barber's before him) that there is no simple, predictive relationship between relative deprivation and revitalization movements; in a situation of deprivation, a movement is just one possible response. Aberle defined relative deprivation 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. Native communities have been and continue to be deprived of basic needs (food, shelter, health care), and they have also been affected by rising but unfulfilled expectations during the post-war period.

The native leaders who organized the Conference faced endemic social problems and political struggles which have produced "individual stress" and "cultural distortion" in their communities for generations. John Hascall said:

We had a very religious people before the whiteman came. Now our children are disobeying their parents; they are committing suicide; they are doing all kinds of evil things which they never did before when we had our own religion.

The Conference did not originate in the teachings of an inspired prophet or the commands of a charismatic leader, though a number of people did play a part in its founding. John Snow commented that "an Indian Ecumenical Conference had been talked about in the late 1960s by several Indian leaders," and a shared desire for religious cooperation and revival seems to have guided these initial efforts. The Steering Committee and the elders functioned as a kind of collective leadership resource for the movement. Many of these religious leaders asserted that supernatural revelation (visions, dreams, guidance) is a continuing reality, so it is not unreasonable to suggest that they performed Wallace's "mazeway resynthesis" on a collective level. Andrew Ahenakew received the ability to heal, and John Hascall said that for him, dreams and visions come "through contemplation. [God] will speak when he wants to speak. It is not something I force." McLoughlin's observation that a revitalization movement need not be associated with a single person, idea, or event is also helpful in understanding the Conference, which was initiated by a number of individuals and guided by a variety of goals. Some resource

mobilization theorists have argued in a similar manner that movements form because of long-term changes in resource availability and opportunities for organization.

Indispensable resources such as funding and organizing expertise played an important role in the formation of the Conference. As John Snow said about his own tribe,

there are numerous areas of practical life in which the Church could fulfill its social mission to the modern Indian. We need expertise in economic development and development in education materials. We need advice on modern technology, business, and social and cultural development programs.

The willingness of various denominations to support the Conference was just one expression of the social progressivism of the period, but it was a very important factor in the movement's formation. Newfound access to the political, social, and (especially) economic power of the Anglican Church of Canada allowed native religious leaders to initiate the kind of movement they might very well have started years earlier. The Anglican Church along with other denominations became what McCarthy and Zald called the "conscience constituency" for the Conference; they provided funding for a movement from which they received no direct benefit and which even thwarted their historic institutional effort at missionization. The Anglicans also led the way in legitimating the movement outside native communities, particularly among non-native Canadians. Ian MacKenzie, Robert Thomas and Wilfred Pelletier brought invaluable organizational abilities to the Conference along with John Snow, Ernest Tootosis, Ernie Willie and

Adam Cuthand, who also functioned as religious leaders. Freeman argued that social movements also need an effective communications network, and anyone familiar with life in Indian country can attest to the efficiency of the "moccasin telegraph."

It takes a variety of resources to initiate a movement, as Freeman pointed out, but an effective movement must also recruit and maintain participants. Several hundred people were present for the 1970 Conference at Crow Fair; attendance tripled the next year at Stoney Park and continued to increase until 1976, when more than six thousand participated in the gathering. Considering that most of the movement's participants were directly involved for only a few days each year, this rapid growth seems to indicate that the Conference met some important needs among native people.

The Anglican Church had initiated the process of planning the first Conference, but a Steering Committee of grassroots native religious leaders assumed control at the 1970 meeting. Freeman observed that the organizers of a movement are not necessarily the best people to continue as its leaders, that the two roles often have very different functions, and this seems to have been true for the Conference. It is also worth pointing out that the Christian ministers on the initial Steering Committee (John Snow, Ernie Willie and others) were instrumental in maintaining the link between native communities and the resources of the denominations, but they were also committed to involving a variety of traditional religious leaders in the movement. Had they not acted intentionally in this way, the Conference might very well have developed into another

gathering for native Christians, along the lines of the camp meetings and revivals already popular in Indian country. By not excluding native people along any religious, cultural, tribal or linguistic lines, the Conference was able to draw from a broad cross-section of the native population.

The Conference was guided by a number of central goals or concerns which received varying degrees of emphasis over time. Religious leaders at the 1970 gathering made it clear that their top priorities were the healing of religious divisions in their communities and the revival of their religious and culture heritage, and they "felt that the work of future Conferences would be to evolve a way of implementing this process." They also recognized, however, that religious healing and revival were intimately related to many of the social problems facing native communities. The ten resolutions approved in 1970 called for religious freedom, tolerance, and respect, but five of them also spelled out the connection between these religious issues and "secular" community concerns: subsistence (hunting rights), treaty rights, public education, health care, and desecration and repatriation.

Another Conference concern emerged in 1970 when an unexpectedly large number of young people took part and "asked their religious leaders for action." The 1971 Conference announcement stated that their participation "made everybody, both young and old, feel good," and by 1976 the Steering Committee declared: "Our hopes and aspirations have finally been achieved, the bringing together of the young so that they may receive instruction from our elders."

Conference participants believed in the authority of oral tradition and in the central role played by the elders in the transmission of religious and cultural knowledge. Thornton theorized that the Ghost dance prophecy of resurrection was an effort at demographic revitalization among depopulated tribes. It may not be too far-fetched to suggest that when Conference leaders focussed their attention on native youth, many of whom were being lost to their home communities through the processes of urbanization and education, they were attempting their own form of demographic revitalization.

The Steering Committee discussed four primary concerns at their 1972 planning meeting: religious harmony, religious and cultural revival, social problems, and the youth. Sam Stanley listed these same concerns as being the "four major foci" in 1974, though by then Conference leaders had also become more outspoken about another issue, the environmental crisis. John Hascall said, "now we are seeing the Holy Spirit bringing more relevance to the kind of nature religion that is the Indian way," and the 1973 Conference announcement charged native people with responsibility for the environment: "The Great Spirit placed the Native people here to be the keepers of this Island and we are failing in carrying out our mission."

A sixth major concern emerged by the mid-seventies, as the Conference developed a more explicit critique of the American Indian Movement and other politically-oriented organizations. Ernest Tootosis declared that "Any Indian liberation movement

must be totally rooted in religion and culture," and Ernie Willie suggested that while the activist groups are "exciting alternatives," it is more important to "concentrate on developing self-awareness."

The intertribal and interreligious aspects of the Indian Ecumenical Conference were its hallmarks, but they also became the basis for controversy and conflict at times. As Freeman suggested, the cultivation of group solidarity and commitment is a major concern for any movement. Conference leaders relied on the strength of their shared interests and concerns as religious native people to overcome the potentially divisive power of divergent tribal and religious backgrounds. Tensions did arise among Conference leaders and participants, however, and during the seventies the movement went through several different shifts in orientation. Wallace called this the process of adaptation, whereby the original motivations and goals of a movement change over time in response to their reception and reconceptualization by participants and by the broader society.

One important shift took place very early in the movement and resulted when leadership was transferred from the organizers to the initial Steering Committee. The 1970 Conference was organized by Ian MacKenzie, Robert Thomas and Wilfred Pelletier, none of them religious leaders, and they seem to have envisioned the meeting as an opportunity for interreligious discussion and dialogue. No Christian services and only a few traditional ceremonies (blessing of the grounds, sunrise ceremonies) were held at the Crow Fair meeting. When the Conference was moved to Stoney Park under the

control of grassroots religious leaders, it soon developed more of an experiential focus, with a wide range of ceremonies and services conducted throughout the gathering. The discursive focus was never lost, though it was made more egalitarian through the open forums under the brush arbor, where anyone was free to speak because "we know that all Native people in [the] Americas have contributions [to make] in relation to their personal experiences."

Another shift in orientation took place over the involvement of non-natives in the gatherings. The Anglican Church originally intended to support native self-determination and community development, but there were still some white Christians who saw the Conference as an opportunity for interracial dialogue. A number of white missionaries and church representatives participated in the first few Conferences and their presence was accepted and affirmed by some. But growing criticism of the churches over denominational missionization and complicity in the process of land dispossession led many white Christians to stop attending within several years. During the same period of time, however, Conference leaders became convinced that they did have something to say to white society about another religious issue, the environmental crisis. John Snow extended an open invitation to non-natives in 1973 because "they are starting to come around to a way of thinking about ecology and nature that we have been practising for a long time."

Denunciation of the white churches developed into a more general critique directed at anyone connected with Christianity, and a third major shift involved the increasing tensions between native

people who were actively Christian and those who were not. Native Christian ministers such as Andrew Ahenakew soon discovered that they were not exempt from the criticism levelled at their white colleagues. Ernest Tootosis served as the outspoken leader for many Conference participants, especially young people, who often condemned Christianity in any form. Ahenakew stated that "Christianity is now just as much a part of Indian religious identity as tribal religion" and that "the two must live in harmony," but Tootosis argued that "it just isn't right for Indians to be Christian--God never intended it that way." These tensions and the need for healing the religious divisions in native communities were the main reasons the Conference had been organized in the first place; nevertheless, conflict over this issue took on increasing importance and undoubtedly led many of the more conservative Christians to stop participating as aggressively traditional people became more active in the movement.

The Conference declined in participation and influence after the 1976 gathering, for a variety of reasons. The 1976 dispute with the American Indian Movement over the Small Legs suicide, the 1978 split between organizers over the filming of Obomsawin's documentary, and continuing tensions between Christian and traditional participants undoubtedly made it more difficult to maintain movement unity. As the movement grew in attendance and it became more popular among people whose motivations were more secular than religious, it also became more difficult for Conference leaders to maintain camp security and to prohibit the use of alcohol.

The increasing presence of non-native participants and would-be traditional healers became another point of contention.

Shrinking resources, especially the loss of outside financial support, also had an important impact. The decline of the movement coincided with the resurgence of political and social conservatism in Canada and the United States. The institutionalization of other social programs initiated during the sixties and seventies may have led to increased factionalism in native communities, particularly as funding resources became less reliable. Community and religious leaders otherwise willing to participate in cooperative ventures often had to devote increasing amounts of time and energy to maintaining their own programs. Much of what the Conference accomplished took place at a personal religious level, so it may have been difficult for organizers to demonstrate tangible results to public, private and religious funding agencies, who often want statistical measures of success.

Freeman identified four typical patterns of decline and pointed out that decline does not necessarily mean failure. The Conference broke down as a movement due to a variety of internal and external factors, but it also succeeded in spawning similar gatherings throughout Canada and the United States. Regional "Indian Ecumenical Councils" were being held in other parts of Canada by the mid-1970s; Buck Drywater attended one and then organized a similar group among Oklahoma Cherokees. Stewart Etsitty reported in 1979 that the Conference had prompted religious revival among the Navajos. Intertribal gatherings promoting

traditional religions, spiritual unity, and contact between elders and youth are still held in many reservation and urban native communities.⁵³ Wallace theorized that after a revitalization movement accomplishes cultural transformation, it becomes routinized and society returns to the steady state. The Conference was routinized in the sense that these gatherings are now an important part of native religious life on both tribal and intertribal levels.

Linton contended that nativistic movements concern themselves only with particular elements of cultures and not with culture in its entirety, but it is hard to imagine a movement that would not perceive of itself as addressing the need for holistic renewal. Linton's typology of revivalistic vs. perpetuative and rational vs. magical movements, and Aberle's classification of individual vs. supra-individual and partial vs. total orientation, are also not helpful in understanding the Conference. Voget, however, supplied a useful alternative to these dualistic categories with his formulation of the reformative movement, which seeks to arrive at a synthesis of the old and the new by assuming a critical perspective toward both. John Snow called this approach to cultural development *biculturalism*:

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. . . . Our hope was (and still is) to retain the best in the Stoney culture and to take the best in the dominant culture.

What Snow described here is the sorting process Wallace called "mazeway resynthesis," though accomplished in a more conscious, rational way than Wallace intended.

Brightman argued that religious experimentation and innovation is a distinctive dimension of native cultural history, a view which supports the interpretation of the Conference as a reformative movement. Many Conference participants took a constructive approach to religious innovation and viewed it as a positive, not negative, experience. John Hascall believed that his role as Roman Catholic priest could be compatible with his role as Ojibwa medicine man, and he incorporated innovations in the mass he conducted for his native congregation. He sought a synthesis of "Apostolic Christianity" and his "native traditions."

Even those Conference participants who argued that all native people should return to "the old ways" engaged in a process of religious innovation. Ernest Tootosis condemned Christianity while Andrew Ahenakew believed that it is a valid part of native religious life; while they may have differed on the role of Christianity, both leaders were suggesting that some type of religious change is appropriate and desirable for native people, individually and communally. Bernard Second, Ernie Willie, and other Conference leaders believed that the survival of native communities depended on the success of this religious revival. The Steering Committee encouraged Conference participants in 1988 to "rediscover the wisdom of your elders." The process of religious innovation can take place because some religious leaders have kept traditional ways

alive and because many native people are still receiving guidance from the Creator.

This constructive approach to religious innovation is a product of a typically native understanding of religious authority and orthodoxy. Western religions commonly emphasize the notion of orthodoxy (literally, "correct opinion") as a way of maintaining doctrinal regularity. Christians and Jews profess belief in supernatural revelation, but on a practical level tend to locate religious authority in codified texts (scriptures) and bureaucratic institutions. Native religions, however, survive today as primarily oral traditions and often emphasize the importance of personal experience and religious abilities. Conference leaders were able, therefore, to understand religious authority in terms of heterodoxy and to accept religious diversity.

Deborah LeVeen observed the native people are doubly marginalized in Canada and the United States, both institutionally and culturally. This may always be the case, in light of current socioeconomic, political, and demographic realities, unlike regions such as southern Africa, where the introduction of democratic forms of government will be sufficient to protect the rights of indigenous people. The presence in North America of an immigrant population possessing an overwhelming numerical majority in the context of a democratic political system constitutes an apparently permanent negation of native political, social, economic, cultural, and religious rights. LeVeen was correct to say 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.

The Indian Ecumenical Conference was what Cohen and Touraine would call an identity-oriented movement; as a movement, it was less concerned with achieving political or economic goals than with recovering and preserving native identity, particularly religious identity. This orientation was similar to that of many other native religious movements that have taken place during the past five hundred years. The affirmation of native identity was at the very center of concern for Conference participants. Jim Dumont found in native traditions a way of saying "you're proud of what you are" and "a way of finding yourself." Ernest Tootosis expressed his concern for native youth: "There's an exterior darkness in the way of life between the two societies and that's why the younger people are behaving the way they are. They have lost their sense of identity." Andrew Ahenakew said that his involvement in the Conference brought him a new perspective on traditional ways; "It's part of my heritage. I will never lose that again." Wilfred Pelletier may have best captured the spirit of the movement in his 1973 autobiography:

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.