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Howard L. Harrod. *Becoming and Remaining a People: Native American Religions on the Northern Plains.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995. xx + 149 pp. $18.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8165-1569-1; $31.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8165-1583-7.

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Religion and Native Americans

In his latest work, *Becoming and Remaining a People: Native American Religions on the Northern Plains*, Howard L. Harrod sets out to demonstrate that the emergence of the buffalo culture on the Northern Plains was aided by the religious institutions of the indigenous peoples in this region. In this study he skillfully asserts that the religious rituals and traditions among the Mandan, Hidatsa, Crow, and Cheyenne, in particular, promoted both continuity and change among these peoples. Thus, in my opinion, the purpose of this book is twofold. On the one hand, Harrod offers his readers an explanation for the emergence of the buffalo culture on the Northern Plains; on the other hand, he convincingly argues that the transformation of the indigenous cultures in this region did not constitute a total disruption of their lifestyles and cultural patterns.

After citing numerous previous explanations for the emergence of the buffalo culture–such as those of Wisler, Kehoe, and Hyde, to name a few–and correctly noting that a detailed consideration of the religious dimension is missing in all of these studies, Harrod proceeds to illustrate that the transformation of religious institutions and rituals played a significant role in shaping and directing the formation of the buffalo culture on trhe Northern Plains among previously horticultural groups. He then refutes the erroneous conviction that the Native American cultures were primal and unchanging, as he explains that they experienced change both from without and from within–in the latter case, due to religious innovations that can be seen as a response to novelty.

One simply cannot ignore the extent to which religion influenced social change among the Indians of the Northern Plains, as their religious practices were–and still are–central to everyday life. The origin traditions and migrations narratives, together with various rituals, established a sense of continuity that confirmed the specific peoples' social order; the bundles and respective ceremonies released power through ritual actions and transferred important cultural values that were resistant to change; whereas dreams and visions played a vital role in shaping cultural change.

By showing similarities between the origin myths of the Mandan and Hidatsa, which transmit a sense of place, identity, and continuity, Harrod proves that the distinct identities of these two peoples emerged due to intentional acts of interpretation and reinterpretation within the oral tradition, and he illustrates that religious traditions and rituals shape a people's broader world view. He then offers a detailed description of the four-day Okipa ceremony of the Mandan and the four-day Naxpike ceremony of the Hidatsa, which remained relatively intact and distinct from each other, although some rituals became widely shared between the Mandan and Hidatsa as a result of their increased proximity. The Okipa ceremony, which reenacted the renewal of the buffalo, embodied and sustained the primary identity-forming traditions of the Mandan–it was essential to their remaining a people, as it mediated their traditions of creation, migration, and settlement.

Harrod takes care to note that social change is a constructive, not destructive, response to a particular event, and he offers one primary example of his claim. The smallpox epidemic of 1837 threw the social units of the Mandan and Hidatsa into disarray, as it disturbed the transmission of knowledge and power among the hereditary lines. In response to this shattering epidemic, many important rituals among the Mandan remained and even increased, such as the Okipa ceremony and the practice of self-torture as a source of protective power. Moreover, the epidemic forced the Mandan and Hidatsa into closer proximity, thereby fostering an increase in intermarriage which, in turn, stimulated social change. As a result, a new religious synthesis between the two peoples was achieved, and many of the changes were per-

ceived as a development of existing religious and cultural practices, not as a break with tradition, for the peoples' visions and dreams legitimized this social change. According to Harrod, these changes demonstrate the Native Americans' creative capacities under increasingly difficult conditions. Alterations of animal calling rituals and fertility and renewal rituals, for example, were seen as continous with previous experience, rather than threatinig to the social identity of the group.

Moving from the Mandan and Hidatsa, Harrod uses the examples of essential religious traditions of the Crow and Cheyenne to illustrate that religious activities often motivated the processes of cultural reinterpretation. As the Crow moved west from the Hidatsa, the transformation of their religious traditions, such as the shaping of the Tobacco Society, helped create their new identity as nomadic buffalo hunters. Even though the Crow shared some aspects of the Hidatsa origin tradition, they added new accents in their rituals and social organizations to establish their new identity and to maintain and renew the social boundaires that defined them as a people. Comparatively, the new religious traditions of the Cheyenne arose through appropriation and reinterpretations of core myths of the Awatixa. Thus, the Cheyenne innovatively created new cultural forms by expanding previously existing cultural traditions.

As Harrod observes, religious traditions create a sense of special identity and give concrete shape to social worlds, be it through conservation of social forms or through innovation, meaning the appropriation of new traditions, and he concludes his study by drawing a most helpful parallel between Native American religious traditions and the civil religions of contemporary state-based societies as central agents for the construction of society. Like the religions of Native American peoples, civil religions also celebrate predecessors in rituals and designate special groups to transmit their cultural knowledge. However, state-based societies transmit their meanings in documents, such as concrete laws and constitutions, whereas Native American societies rely primarily on oral and ritual transmission.

Harrod closes his study on a positive note by asserting that contemporary Native American religions are not completely disconnected to the distant past, but are rather reinterpretations of previous traditions that meet today's economic and political problems. Furthermore, Native American identities, firmly grounded in religion, will continue in the future and religious traditions and practices will remain important for the native peoples' identity and persistence. The contemporary cultures of the Native American peoples reveal a triumph over their past tragedies and their capacity for self-renewal and reinterpretation. I would recommend *Becoming and Remaining a People* to all who wish to deepen their understanding of the role of religious institutions among the Plains Indians. Readers of Harrod's study will undoubtedly be richly rewarded.

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