

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



The Aboriginal Peoples of Canada

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THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES OF CANADA
Aboriginal Spirituality in Comparison with Islāmic Theology

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To:

My mother, Nausheen Iqbal, and

my father, Muhammad Iqbal

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ۝

“O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female; and We have made you into tribes and sub-tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable among you, in the sight of Allāh, is he who is the most righteous among you. Surely, Allāh is All-knowing, All-Aware”.

—*The Holy Qur’ān 49:14*

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PREFACE

The idea for this project was first placed in my mind by my teacher, Rashid Yahyah sāhib, Vice Principal Jāmi‘a Ahmadiyya North America, and it greatly attracted my attention because it gave me the opportunity to perform a very unique type of research. I was also inspired by the work of Hadhrat Mirzā Tāhir Ahmad th who analyzed the beliefs of the Aborigines of Australia in his book, *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth*. As far as the Aboriginal faiths of Canada are concerned, very little serious work has been done in understanding them from an Islāmic perspective. This project is a humble effort to initiate and encourage research that can lead to positive interactions between Muslims and Aborigines.

I would like to acknowledge the help of Naseem Mahdi sāhib, former Nā‘ib Amir I and Missionary In charge of Canada and currently the Missionary In charge of U.S.A., for his insight, wisdom and guidance, that helped me choose the right direction for my research. I also acknowledge the help of Dr. Ijaz Rauf sāhib, National Secretary Ta‘lim, who guided me in writing this thesis with the right approach and focus. It was his suggestion that led to the analysis of Aboriginal spirituality from the perspective of the fundamental articles of faith in Islām.

My gratitude also goes to my teachers, Hadi Ali Chaudhary sāhib, Vice Principal Jāmi‘a Ahmadiyya North America, for giving me very useful suggestions at various points of research, and Mukhtar Cheema sāhib, Professor Jāmi‘a Ahmadiyya North America, for providing useful information. I also thank the Aboriginal interviewees, Mr. Frank Sutherland, a Métis Elder, and Mr. Tom Deer, an adherent of the Longhouse religion, for sharing personal information about their faiths.

May Allāh Ta‘ālā make this project a significant addition to the literature of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the field of comparative studies of religion. *Āmīn!*
Thumma Āmīn!

رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

O my Lord, increase me in knowledge. *Āmīn!*

INTRODUCTION

The subjects related to the study of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada are so diverse and complex that a focus needs to be determined. Very truthful are the words of Carl Waldman who writes, “Native North American studies encompass the various fields of history, anthropology, archaeology, geography, sociology, politics, religion, linguistics, and more”¹. No single dissertation or book can ever claim to have comprehensively discussed all these areas of study. This dissertation, in particular, gives an overview of Aboriginal studies, their current situation, the main features of Aboriginal religions today and ultimately chooses to dig deeper into the belief systems of three Aboriginal groups of Canada. The aim is to compare the beliefs of the Ojibway, the Iroquois and the Cree with the fundamentals of Islāmic theology to ultimately provide better grounds for dialogue between Muslims and Aboriginals and for them to view each other’s faiths from their own, respective perspectives. This may also help them in making an informed decision about their faith of choice and lifestyle. In addition, this will help the adherents of both faiths develop mutual respect and understanding for each other’s beliefs and practices. The inspiration for this project has been drawn from the following verse of the Holy Qur’ān which defines the principle for appropriate dialogue:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا
مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ۝

Say, ‘O People of the Book! come to a word equal between us and you — that we worship none but Allāh, and that we associate no partner with Him, and that some of us take not others for Lords beside Allāh.’ But if they turn away, then say, ‘Bear witness that we have submitted *to God*.’ (Sūrah Āle ‘Imrān 3:65)*

In this verse, Allāh Ta‘ālā instructs the Muslims to come to a word which is equal between them and the people of the book, that is, the Jews and the Christians, and this demonstrates that the Qur’ān principally encourages dialogue based on common grounds. It also declares:

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِن مِّنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ ۝

* All references to the Holy Qur’ān in this dissertation use the translation of Hadhrat Maulwī Sher ‘Āli ^{ra}.

Verily, We have sent thee with the truth, *as a bearer of glad tidings and as a Warner*; and there is no people to whom a Warner has not been sent. (Sūrah Al-Fātir 35:25)

This means that Messengers were indeed sent to Aboriginal groups and their beliefs ultimately stem from the truth. Using the Qur'ānic principle, research was done in order to find similarities between Islāmic and Aboriginal beliefs to ultimately aid the goal of developing understanding between the two faiths. It must be noted that studies of a similar nature involving the comparison of Aboriginal beliefs with Christian beliefs have already been undertaken but there is clearly an absence of a dissertation that comprehensively compares their beliefs with Islām. Some basic articles have been written but they are largely insufficient and sometimes make inappropriate generalizations. The fact of the matter is that the world of Aboriginal spirituality is so vast, diverse and rich that even this dissertation can only provide a glimpse. Nevertheless, three of the largest groups of Aboriginals that span across most of central Canada have been selected for comparative study in this dissertation.

To embark on such a project, the first chapter of this dissertation provides an overview of Aboriginal studies by explaining the culture areas and language groups in which these people are divided by scholars for the sake of organized study, and by providing a brief discussion of their origins as well as the overall current situation of the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. The second chapter discusses the salient features that are common to the religions of most Aboriginal groups in Canada. It briefly discusses some of the effects of Christian influence, and introduces the three Aboriginal groups that are the focus of this dissertation, namely the Ojibway, the Iroquois, and the Cree. Five subsequent chapters each take up one of the six fundamental articles of faith in Islām, with the exception of one, and compare them with the beliefs of these groups. These six articles are discussed in a tradition of the Holy Prophet ^{sa} in which the Angel Gabriel ^{as} is reported to have come to him and asked him, "Inform me about *Īmān* (faith). He (the Holy Prophet ^{sa}) replied: That you affirm your faith in Allāh, in His Angels, in His Books, in His Apostles, in the Day of Judgment, and you affirm your faith in the Divine Decree about good and evil".² It would be seen if five of these six articles of faith, which make up *Īmān* (belief), can be found in Aboriginal spirituality. This would not only provide a firm base for comparative study but also authenticate the Divine origins of their teachings. The article of 'faith in the Divine Decree' is not being discussed as it does not provide a reasonable platform for comparison. The author's research does not yield enough evidence of emphasis being placed on this article in Aboriginal belief systems. In contrast, Islām deals with this article in depth and far more comprehensively than other religions of the world. Moreover, the objective of this comparison is to discuss similarities and not contrasts and differences. A comparative study

based on this article of faith is more likely to reveal differences and would be counter-productive. The five articles of faith that are being discussed in this dissertation are also mentioned in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

لَيْسَ الْبِرُّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ
وَالنَّبِيِّينَ...

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the East or the West, but *truly* righteous is he who believes in Allāh and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Prophets... (Sūrah Al-Baqarah 2:178)

After that, chapter 8 includes two interviews that the author had the opportunity to conduct and these provide insight into Aboriginal religious practices today and help to understand the religions from an entirely Aboriginal point of view. Chapter 9 concludes the dissertation with a discussion of some of the prophecies of the Aboriginals about the future and how they compare to prophecies of the Holy Qur'an and Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad ^{as}, the Promised Messiah and Imām Mahdi of the Muslims.

Terminology

Any work on the Aboriginal Peoples can cause confusion if proper clarifications in regards to the terminology employed are not made. It has been observed that many books on this subject consider it a responsibility to make the reader aware of the preferred choice made with Aboriginal names and labels. This is done in order to avoid the stereotypical and racist ways with which some writers referred to these people in earlier times. The different labels used to refer to these people are summarized by Waldman when he writes, "It should be noted that there are many different terms used for the first peoples of North America and their groupings: *Native North Americans, Native Americans, American Indians, Indians, Native Peoples, Aboriginal Peoples, indigenous peoples, tribes, bands, and First Nations.*"³

As it can already be noticed, this dissertation uses the term 'Aboriginals' or 'Aboriginal Peoples' to refer to them in general and this includes three main categories – the First Nations, the Inuit, and the Métis. The term 'Indian' would not be used generally in this dissertation because it is historically inaccurate. However, the few instances where it is used is in reference to the government as it uses this term for the sake of legal definitions. First Nations refers to those

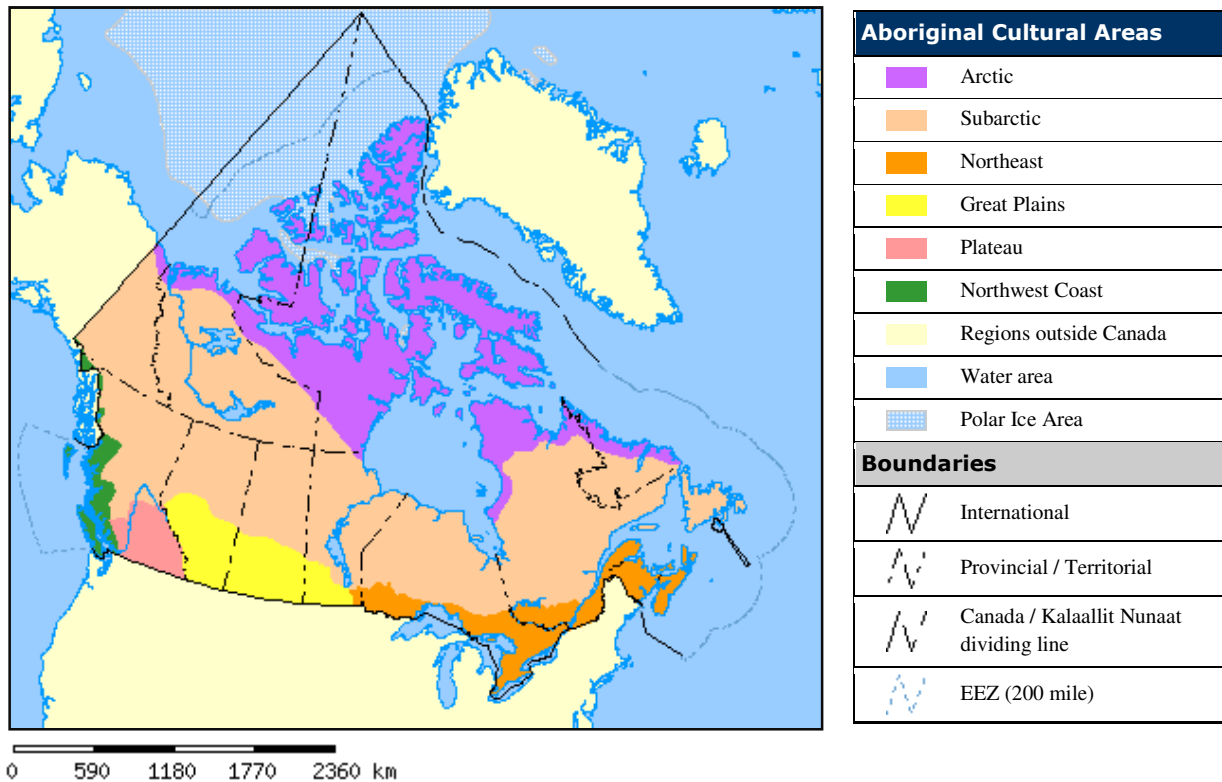
people who are strictly Aboriginal in their ancestry and do not live in the northern regions of Canada. The Inuit are the Aboriginal Peoples of the northern areas of Canada and have chosen this term for themselves instead of the stereotypical 'Eskimo'. Olive Patricia Dickason and David T. McNab explain, "While many of the Europeanized labels have come to be accepted by the Aboriginal Peoples, some have not; for instance, the tundra-dwellers of the Arctic objected to 'Eskimo' on the grounds that it was pejorative their term for themselves, 'Inuit' ('the people', 'Inuk' in the singular), has been officially accepted."⁴ The Métis, on the other hand, refers to those people who have a mixed ancestry as they are the descendants of both the Aboriginals and the Europeans.

CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Culture Areas

Scholars and researchers of Aboriginal studies have divided different areas of North America and South America into geographical regions called culture areas. Carl Waldman explains that the first person to suggest this was Alfred Kroeber and he maintained that environment determined Aboriginal ways of life. Peoples of certain areas depended on the same natural resources and this caused the people in those regions to have similar cultural traits: “the foods they ate; the materials they used for shelter, clothing, and arts and crafts; the organization of their communities; and their view of reality”¹. By making these regions, the study of Aboriginal Peoples becomes easier to understand. However, the boundaries drawn should not be considered absolute or final. They only serve as an educational tool to organize this study. People speaking similar languages or languages of the same family could be found on different culture areas. Many groups also had the aptitude to migrate constantly and move about whenever needed, and this caused some cultural traits to be shared across cultural boundaries. In other words, the Aboriginal Peoples themselves never determined their areas in terms of these culture areas. Each Aboriginal nation had its own distinctive features that made it unique and outstanding. The map [Fig. 1.1²] shows the culture areas that are within the boundaries of modern Canada.



Language Groups

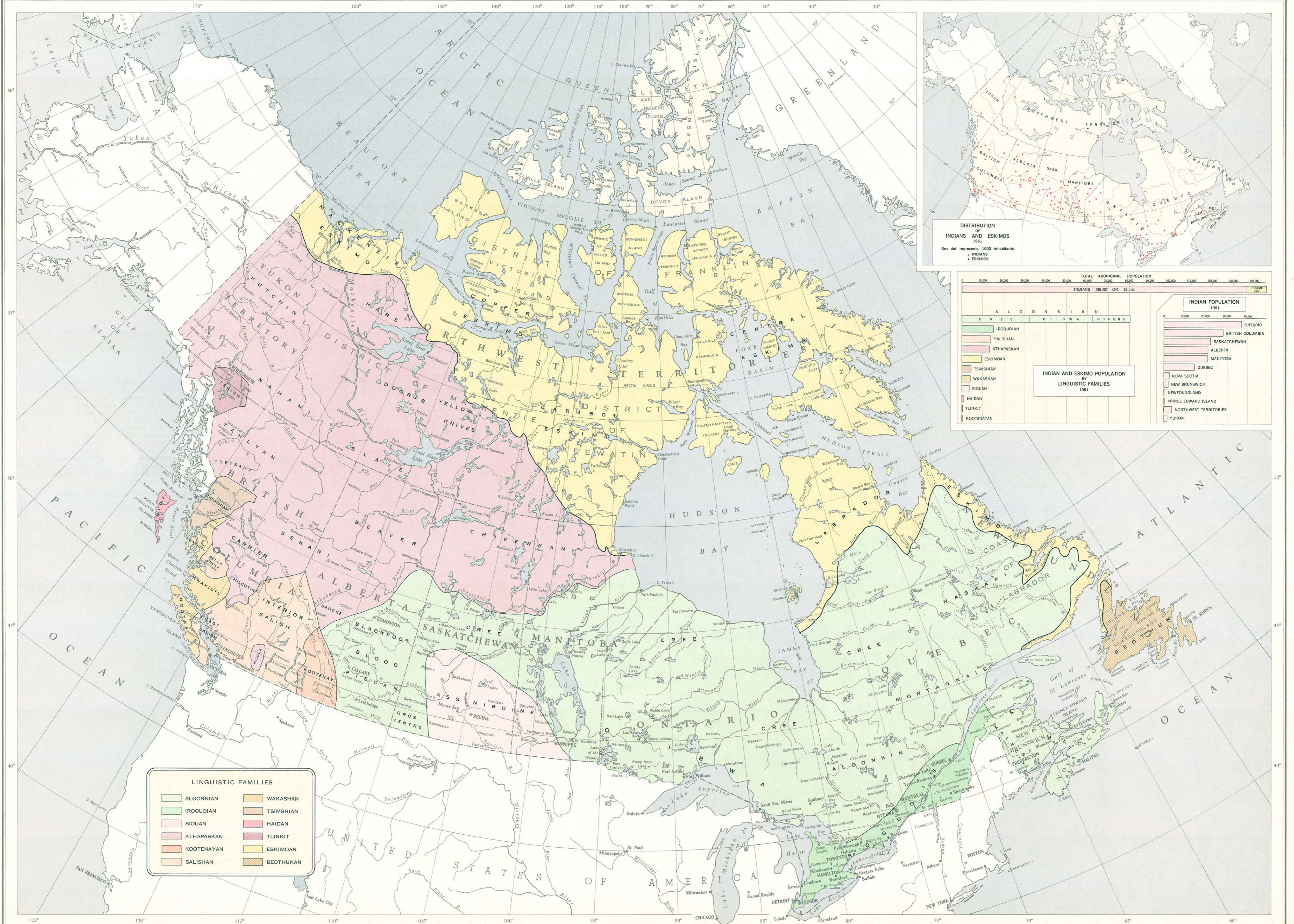
Another way of organizing the study of Aboriginal Peoples is through the analysis of linguistic differences. There are different language families in which these people can be divided and this becomes an added tool to undergo this study with greater sophistication. Alan D. McMillan and Eldon Yellowhorn write:

Approximately fifty-three distinct Aboriginal languages survive in Canada. These can be classified into eleven language families, with differences between them as great as those between English and Arabic. They range from large families containing many separate languages to language isolates with no close relatives. Linguistic diversity is greatest in the west, with six families occurring in British Columbia³

McMillan and Yellowhorn go on to discuss those languages in detail and here is a list of those language families.

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Algonquian | 7. Wakashan |
| 2. Athapaskan | 8. Siouan |
| 3. Iroquoian | 9. Haida |
| 4. Salishan | 10. Tlingit |
| 5. Eskimo-Aleut | 11. Kutenai (Ktunaxa) |
| 6. Tsimshian | |

The map on the next page [Fig. 1.2⁴] shows the regions in which these languages exist and the approximate locations of Aboriginal nations at the time of contact with Europeans. Nowadays, those nations do not cover such large areas as they were moved to reserves through the signing of eight treaties. This issue will be discussed in greater detail under the sub-heading, “The Current Situation”.



DISTRIBUTION OF INDIANS AND ESKIMOS 1951
 One dot represents 1000 inhabitants
 • INDIANS
 • ESKIMOS

TOTAL ABORIGINAL POPULATION	
INDIANS	ESKIMOS
136,407	93,516

INDIAN POPULATION 1951	
Province/Territory	Population
ONTARIO	1,000
BRITISH COLUMBIA	1,000
SASKATCHEWAN	1,000
ALBERTA	1,000
MANITOBA	1,000
QUEBEC	1,000
NOVA SCOTIA	1,000
NEW BRUNSWICK	1,000
NEWFOUNDLAND	1,000
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND	1,000
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES	1,000
YUKON	1,000

LINGUISTIC FAMILIES

ALGONKIAN	WAKASHAN
IROQUOIAN	TSIMSHIAN
SIUAN	HAIKAN
ATHAPASKAN	TLINKIT
KOOTENAYAN	ESKIMOAN
SALISHAN	BEOTHUKAN

The Origins

Many theories discussing the origins of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada have abounded ever since the Europeans first arrived on this continent. Some have survived while others were disproved by advances in scientific knowledge and the discovery of archaeological sites. The most famous and acceptable theory is that of the migration of people from Asia to North America via a land bridge called Beringia. As explained by Waldman, the formation of this bridge would have occurred in the last Ice Age, that is, the Wisconsin glaciations which lasted from about 90,000 or 75,000 to 8,000 B.C. During this period, much of the world's water was frozen and that lowered the oceans and exposed land which is now under water. He further explains, "Where there now is 56 miles of water 180 feet deep in the Bering Strait, there would have been a stretch of tundra possibly 1,000 miles wide, bridging the two continents – the Bering Strait land bridge, or Beringia".⁵ In the book, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, Dickason and McNab explain the motivation behind this migration when they write:

This expanse [Beringia] of open grassland and tundra at one point was more than 2,000 kilometres wide, more like a continent than a bridge. It provided forage for such animals as mammoth, mastodon, giant bison, saiga antelope, and the predators that preyed on them. That human hunters followed the herds is a reasonable assumption supported by archaeological evidence from both sides of the Bering Strait...⁶

This theory remains a very popular and well-accepted theory but there are several other theories that make different propositions. A modern addition to this field of study is genetics. While discussing theories arising out of this field, Waldman writes that the most recent studies, using more refined techniques, have indicated that a single migration event might have taken place over a period of several thousand years. He writes, "various estimates for the beginning of this movement include 55,000-22,000 years ago (meaning that it could have begun anytime between 53,000 to 20,000 B.C.), 37,000-23,000 years ago, or 23,000-18,600 years ago"⁷. Then, he writes that a 2008 study shows that the DNA signature of six women is found in 95 percent of Aboriginal peoples in the Americas. The theory is that these 'founding mothers' must have lived in Beringia, possibly at different times, and the other lineages probably died out. Comparatively, Y chromosomal data paints a somewhat different picture and this is perhaps an indication that males and females had different migration patterns. It is highly likely that the first Asians to

reach America were members of male hunting bands and Y chromosomal data places the start date of migration at 30,000 years ago.⁸ Waldman then goes on to conclude that the differences in this data will probably lessen as understanding of genetics increases and observational techniques improve. Nevertheless, these genetic studies date the beginning of migration from Asia much earlier than archaeological research⁹.

The Current Situation

The Aboriginal people today live largely on reserves and this was a result of a policy of the British colonialists. Waldman explains that starting in the 1830s, a common practice adopted by Great Britain was the setting aside of reserve lands and the titles of these were vested in the Crown. The main idea was to establish areas or locations where Aboriginal Peoples could be Christianized or ‘civilized. This policy was meant for both the protection of Aboriginal Peoples and their assimilation into Christian society. Eventually, in 1850, government officials signed the first in a series of treaties with Aboriginal nations and these allowed them to gain control of the majority of Aboriginal territory in exchange for reserve lands, perpetual trusteeship under the British Crown, one-time payments and annuities in cash and goods, as well as schools and services.¹⁰ Then, after Confederation in 1867, the new Dominion of Canada began the signing of “numbered treaties”. McMillan and Yellowhorn briefly describe these treaties as follows:

The “numbered treaties” began with Treaty 1, affecting the Ojibwa and Cree of southern Manitoba, in 1871. By the time Treaty 7 was signed with the Blackfoot, Sarcee and Stoney of southern Alberta only six years later, the lands from western Lake Superior to the Rockies had been covered. Except for a northward addition to Treaty 6, treaty making came to a halt for twenty-two years, until gold and oil discoveries in the north brought about a new spate of negotiations. Treaty 8 in 1899 to Treaty 11 in 1921 removed Aboriginal title in northern Ontario, the rest of the Prairie Provinces, northeastern British Columbia and the western half of the Northwest Territories. Finally, the Williams treaties of 1923, which extinguished Aboriginal title to the last unsurrendered lands in southern Ontario, brought the historic treaties to a close.

Although there were minor differences, all federal treaties were similar. Aboriginal People agreed to “cede, release, surrender, and yield up” their rights to the land in exchange for reserves, small cash payments, ammunition and fishing twine, uniforms and medals for the chiefs, annual payments to each band member and

promises of continued hunting and fishing rights. For decades annual “treaty days” featured a government official flanked by uniformed Mounties dispensing payments. Members of treaty bands still receive an annual payment, amounting to only \$5 per person under most treaties.¹¹

These quotations clearly show how nearly half of Canada was born out of such treaties and land surrenders. Fig 1.4¹² illustrates the regions covered by each treaty.

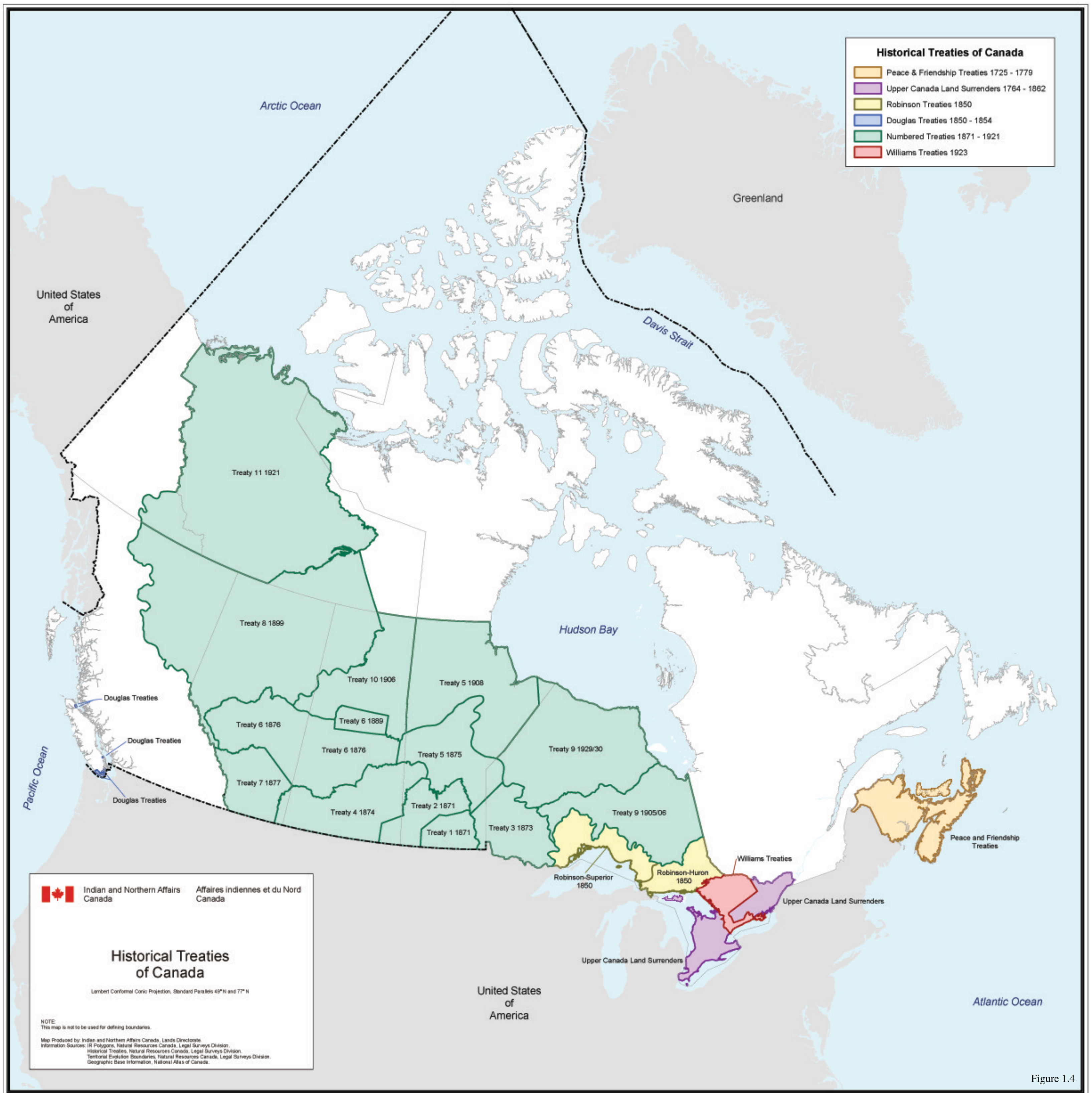


Figure 1.4

The Aboriginal Peoples have been governed by the Indian Act which was first introduced in 1868 and has gone through several changes over the decades. It deals with status Indians living on or off reserve and the privileges associated with being an Aboriginal person of Indian status. These status Indians could choose to become Canadian citizens by giving up the rights and privileges associated with having this status. In 1982, the Constitution Act affirmed all the rights of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples and at that time, the Métis were recognized as one of Canada's three distinct Aboriginal Peoples, along with Indians (First Nations) and Inuit. In 2004, the government recognized the Métis as having First Nation (Aboriginal) status.

According to the 2006 census conducted by Statistics Canada, the total population of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada is 1,172,790. The table below¹³, which was obtained from their website, gives some details.

Aboriginal Identity Population (2006 Census)						
Name	Total Population	Aboriginal Population	North American Indian*	Métis	Inuit	Non-Aboriginal Population
Canada	31,241,030	1,172,785	698,025	389,780	50,480	30,068,240
Newfoundland and Labrador	500,610	23,455	7,765	6,470	4,715	477,160
Prince Edward Island	134,205	1,730	1,225	385	30	132,475
Nova Scotia	903,090	24,175	15,240	7,680	325	878,920
New Brunswick	719,650	17,650	12,385	4,270	185	701,995
Québec	7,435,905	108,425	65,085	27,980	10,950	7,327,475
Ontario	12,028,895	242,495	158,395	73,605	2,035	11,786,405
Manitoba	1,133,515	175,395	100,640	71,805	565	958,115
Saskatchewan	953,850	141,890	91,400	48,120	215	811,960
Alberta	3,256,355	188,365	97,275	85,495	1,610	3,067,990
British Columbia	4,074,385	196,075	129,580	59,445	795	3,878,310
Yukon Territory	30,190	7,580	6,280	800	255	22,615
Northwest Territories	41,060	20,635	12,640	3,580	4,160	20,420
Nunavut	29,325	24,915	100	130	24,635	4,405

The map, Fig. 1.5¹⁴, on the following page, shows the locations of Aboriginal Identity population in Canada according to the 2001 Census Subdivisions and Fig. 1.6¹⁵ shows the locations of Indian reserves according to the 2006 Census Subdivisions. According to Carl Waldman, "The various First Nations [of Canada] hold 2,283 separate reserves, with a total area of more than 10,000 square miles. About half of Aboriginal Peoples live in urban areas, just less than a third on reserves, and about a fifth in rural non-reserve regions. A certain number travel on and off reserves periodically"¹⁶.

* North American Indian is the equivalent of 'First Nations'. It includes those Aboriginals who are neither Métis nor Inuit.

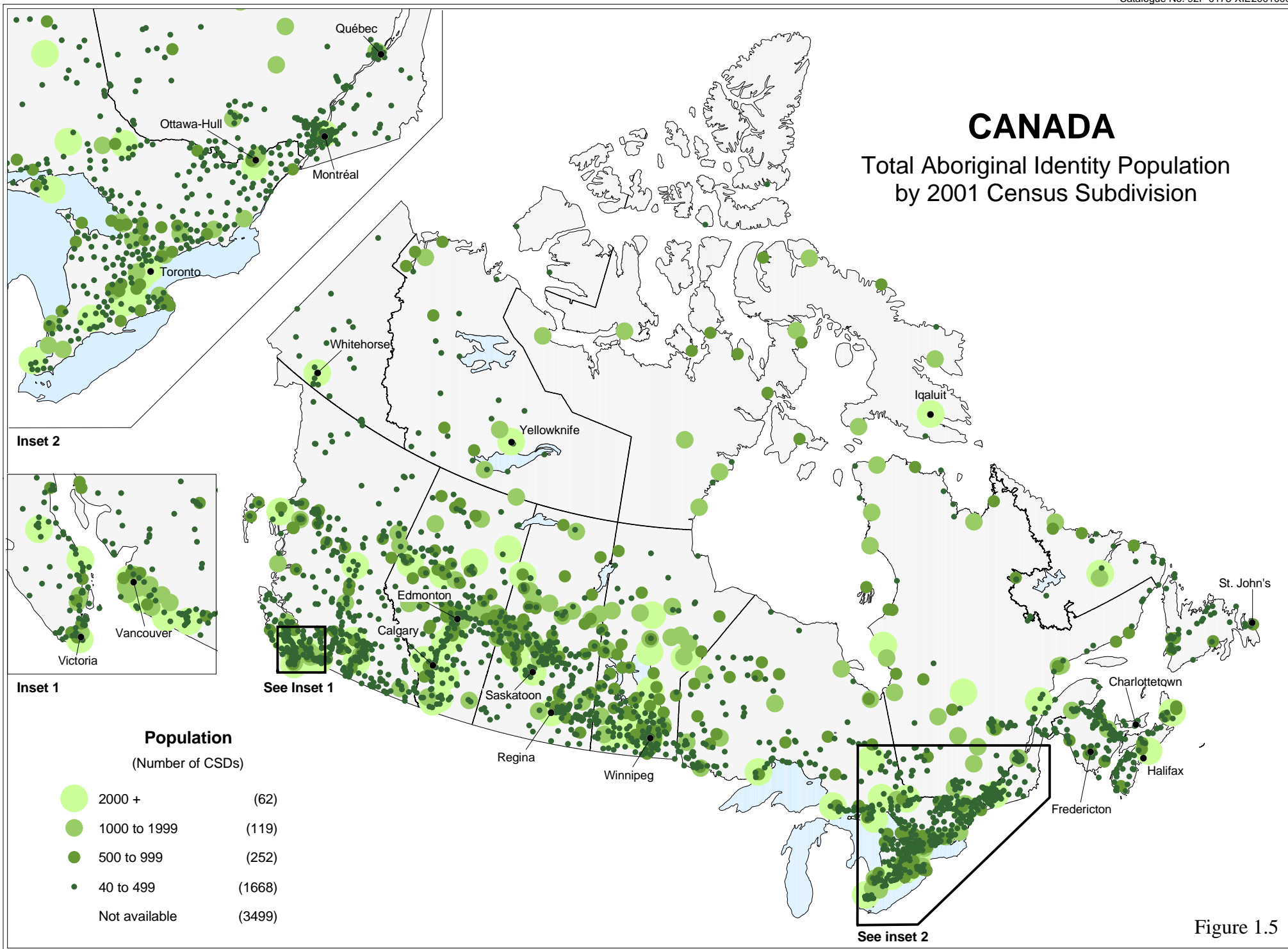
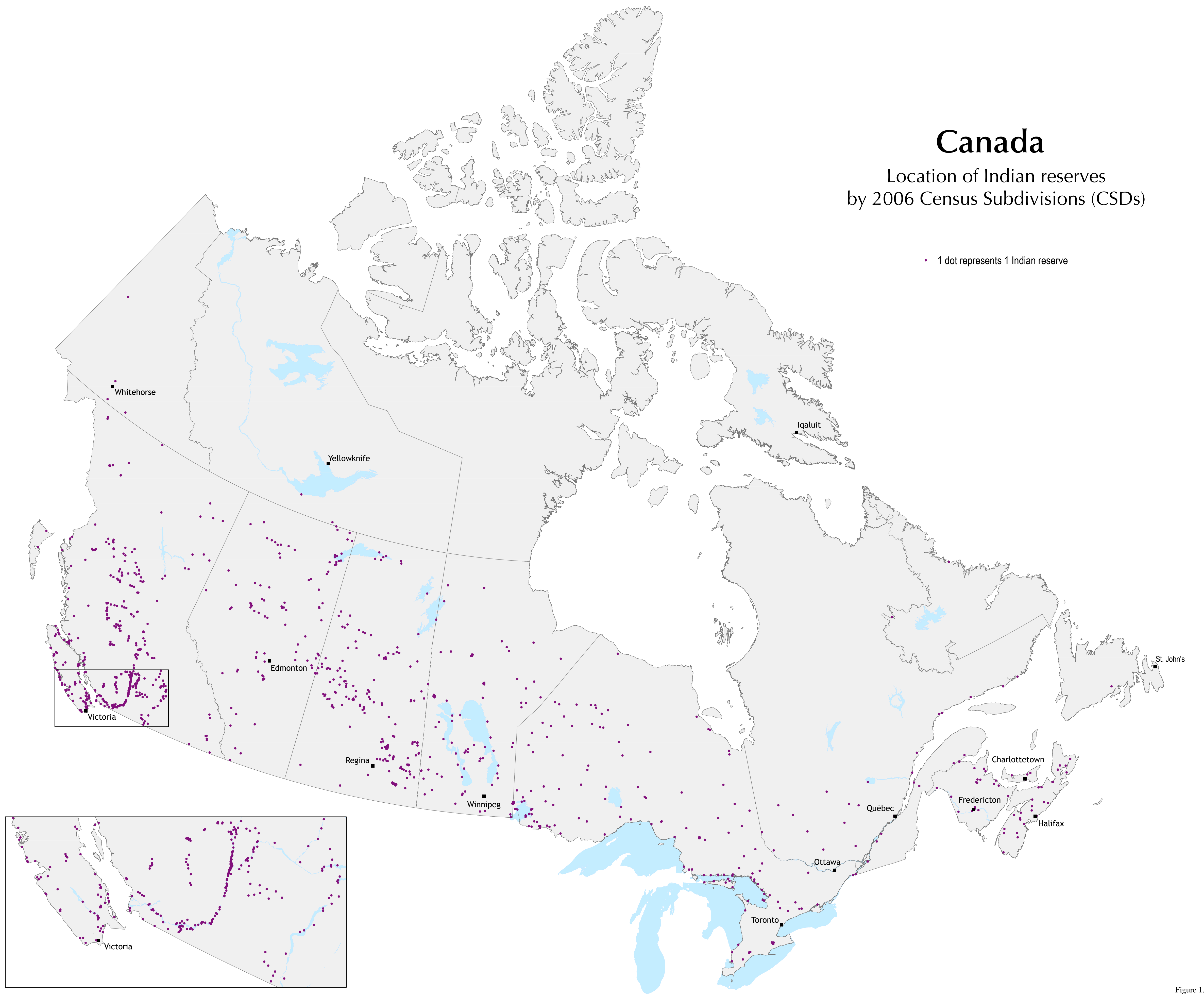


Figure 1.5

Canada

Location of Indian reserves
by 2006 Census Subdivisions (CSDs)

• 1 dot represents 1 Indian reserve



The Ethnologue, an encyclopaedia of the world's 6,909 known living languages, lists the languages spoken in Canada, the current number of speakers of each language, and provides detailed maps of the locations where the Aboriginal Languages of Canada are spoken. Figures 1.7 and 1.8¹⁷ are reproductions of those maps obtained from the web edition of the Ethnologue, which contains all the contents of the print edition. The Ethnologue also makes distinctions between different dialects of the same language and provides the current number of speakers of each dialect. For the sake of brevity, that list is not being reproduced here. Instead, a smaller, more concise list is being presented (after the maps) for the reader to have an idea of the current situation of the Aboriginal Languages of Canada. This list¹⁸ has been obtained from Statistics Canada and it shows the overall situation of the major Aboriginal Languages of Canada and it does not distinguish between the different dialects of the same language. Its information is based on results from the 2001 and 2006 Censuses.

CANADA

NATIONAL LANGUAGES

English
French

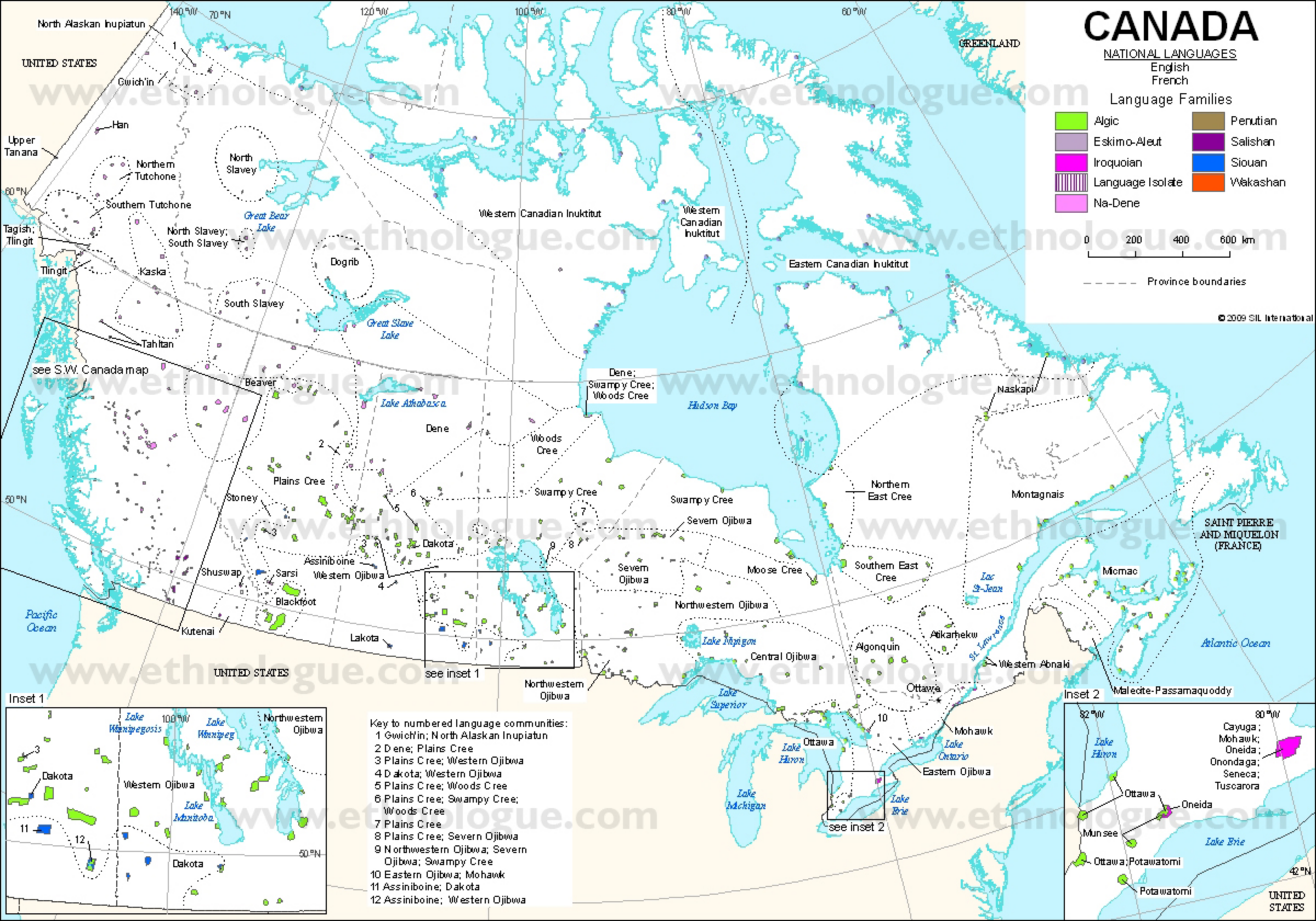
Language Families

	Algic		Penutian
	Eskimo-Aleut		Salishan
	Iroquoian		Siouan
	Language Isolate		Wakashan
	Na-Dene		

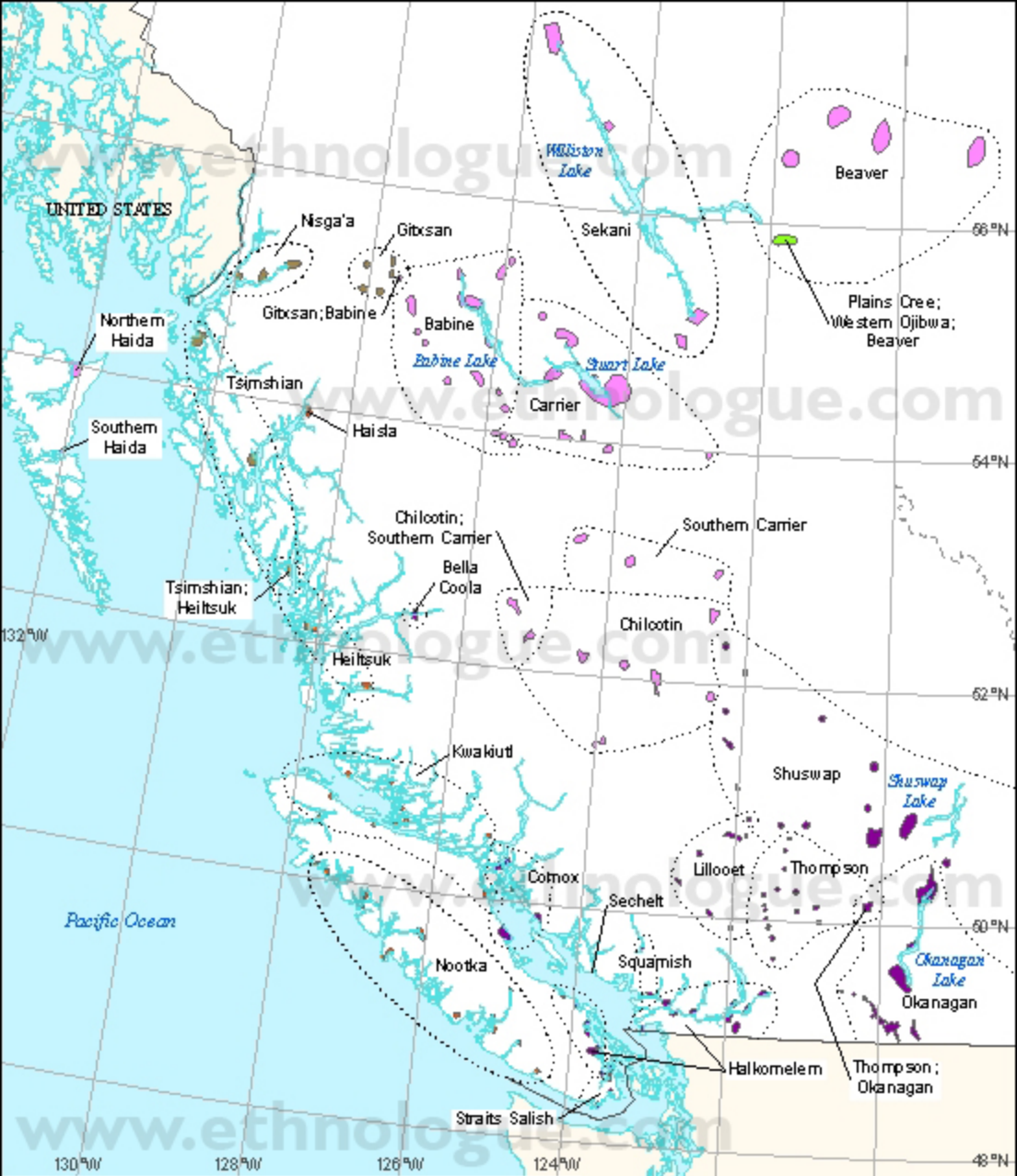
0 200 400 600 km

----- Province boundaries

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- Key to numbered language communities:
- 1 Gwich'in; North Alaskan Inupiatun
 - 2 Dene; Plains Cree
 - 3 Plains Cree; Western Ojibwa
 - 4 Dakota; Western Ojibwa
 - 5 Plains Cree; Woods Cree
 - 6 Plains Cree; Swampy Cree; Woods Cree
 - 7 Plains Cree
 - 8 Plains Cree; Severn Ojibwa
 - 9 Northwestern Ojibwa; Severn Ojibwa; Swampy Cree
 - 10 Eastern Ojibwa; Mohawk
 - 11 Assiniboine; Dakota
 - 12 Assiniboine; Western Ojibwa



SOUTHWESTERN CANADA

UNITED STATES

Language Families

- Algic
- Na-Dene
- Penutian
- Salishan
- Wakashan

NATIONAL LANGUAGE

English
French

0 50 100 150 km



Aboriginal languages indicators for First Nations people				
Aboriginal languages	Aboriginal mother tongue[†]		Knowledge[‡] of an Aboriginal language	
	2006	Percentage change from 2001 to 2006 [§]	2006	Percentage change from 2001 to 2006
Cree	76,460	10	87,285	7
Ojibway	24,410	-2	30,255	-2
Oji-Cree	11,605	18	12,435	20
Montagnais-Naskapi	10,470	8	11,080	10
Dene	8,495	9	9,250	8
Mi'kmaq	7,685	4	8,540	0
Siouan languages (Dakota/Sioux)**	5,675	34	6,285	32
Atikamekw	5,140	11	5,320	12
Blackfoot	3,270	11	4,760	10
Salish languages, n.i.e.^{††}	1,990	6	2,800	-1
Algonquin	2,020	10	2,560	12
Dogrib	2,055	10	2,540	17
Carrier	1,800	29	2,320	18
South Slave	1,575	15	2,160	7

The Revival

Ever since the arrival of the Europeans, the Aboriginal Peoples have had to face many struggles. As more and more immigrants from Europe arrived, they became increasingly dominant economically and socially and eventually succeeded in suppressing Aboriginal culture and ignored Aboriginal interests. In addition, Aboriginal populations dwindled as they were not immune to many of the European diseases. However, since the 1960's, historians agree that there is a growing activism among these people and as a result, they have made various land claims

[†] 'Mother tongue' refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood.

[‡] 'Knowledge' refers to languages in which the respondent can conduct a conversation.

[§] Data have been adjusted to account for incompletely enumerated reserves in 2001 and 2006.

** Caution should be exercised when analysing data for Siouan languages (Dakota/Sioux) due to some overestimation in British Columbia in 2006.

^{††} n.i.e means "not included elsewhere".

and called for a greater say in their governance. Some of those issues with land claims have been resolved while others have not. Waldman explains that the process of claiming lands is very slow and there are hundreds of claims still outstanding. However, there are stories of some Aboriginal groups or nations who made successful settlements. These included the return of ancestral lands, cash payments and self-government agreements that allowed them to have control over the use of settlement lands and to have greater authority in areas like health care, social services, language and education.¹⁹ In addition, a revival has also been seen in the areas of population and economics. Dickason and McNab elaborate on this when they write that the total Aboriginal population at the time of Confederation has been estimated at only between 100,000 and 125,000 but since then, it has multiplied 10 times, with the rate of growth taking a strong upward turn during the 1960s. In 1961, they represented 1.1% of the population but by 1996, it had grown to 3.0%. Today, it is at 3.8% and growing. In 1996, the Aboriginal birth rate (3.15 births per woman) was almost twice the non-Aboriginal birth rate (1.7 births per woman). Although 33% of Aboriginals were on welfare in 1996 and their unemployment rate was more than double that of the population as a whole, Aboriginal entrepreneurship has been exploding. There were only 6,000 Aboriginal-owned businesses in 1989 but this number grew to 20,000 in 1998.²⁰ All this evidence leads one to believe that Aboriginal Peoples are here to stay and thrive and progress. They have lived through centuries of suppression and survived. It is not an impossibility to suggest that Aboriginal Peoples of the future may have a greater say in Canadian politics as well as a more prominent place in society. These statements are not meant to overshadow the social and economic problems that plague Aboriginal societies all across Canada but only to express a hope that all of these things will change for the better, *Inshā' Allāh!* (God willing)

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING ABORIGINAL RELIGIONS

The study of Aboriginal religions is a very complex and daunting task and the more one investigates, the more he or she is filled with awe and wonder at the sheer depth of the spirituality and knowledge that makes up the enormous structure of Aboriginal religious traditions and beliefs. The very first thing that one realizes is that there is no 'one religion' that the Aboriginals of Canada adhere to as a whole. They not only have distinct cultures and languages but also distinct beliefs and traditions. Nevertheless, there are some similarities among the Aboriginals faiths of Canada as well as the United States. Based on those, for the sake of understanding, scholars of comparative religions have attempted to make general statements about the collective beliefs, traditions, and common features of the various Aboriginal nations of North America.

The Oral Tradition

None of the Aboriginals faiths of Canada or the United States possess any kind of holy book or text or scripture. The main foundation of their beliefs and practices is the Oral tradition. It comprises of legends and stories of supernatural as well as human figures which serve a number of purposes, including the discussion of the origins of humans and the establishment of the heritage and lifestyle of the people. John W. Friesen, a Minister in the All Tribes Presbytery of the All Native Circle Conference, the United Church of Canada, sheds some light on four kinds of legends that he noticed among the Aboriginal Peoples of the Plains:

Although these [Aboriginal] stories may be differentiated for the purpose of analysis (a non-Indian habit), there was also considerable overlap in their use. The types

include: (i) *legends for amusement*, which were often about the Trickster (sometimes called Napi, Nanabush, Coyote, Iktomni, or other names), and related primarily for entertainment; (ii) *teaching legends*, which were employed for the purpose of dispensing historical or cultural information about the tribe; (iii) *moral legends*, which were intended to teach ideal or “right” forms of behaviour and perhaps to suggest to the hearer that only certain forms of behaviour would be approved; and, (iv) *spiritual legends*, which could be related only by an elder or other approved individual at a certain time and place, perhaps for a price, and were considered forms of worship.¹

The writer of the above quotation is very well-experienced in the study of Aboriginal spirituality and has provided an interesting insight into their Legends. In the research done for this dissertation, simple questions about these traditions were asked, such as: Do these teaching legends of the nation hold a concept of One God and Angels or spirits similar to that of Islām? Do the moral legends speak of a code of conduct similar to the one contained in the Holy Qur’ān? Are these Tricksters or other legendary heroes, who hold a central position among the legends, possibly prophets or spiritual guides who once brought these teachings to their people? Is it possible to suggest that many inaccurate stories have been attributed to these ‘prophets’ just as it happened with founders of other religions? The answers to these and other similar questions are discussed in the following chapters.

Another thing that is to be noted about the stories of the oral tradition is that they usually cluster around three time periods. As discussed by Paula R. Hartz in the book *Native American Religions*, those three time periods are as follows:

1. **The creation era:** Stories that describe a time when the world came into being and all beings spoke the same language and could understand each other
2. **The era of the Culture hero:** Stories about a supernatural being or beings who prepared the world for humankind and taught people their sacred customs
3. **The present time:** This is the era in which people now live and try to follow the will of the spirits.²

The stories are told by an elder, who is an experienced, knowledgeable and respected figure of the community, and possesses a very good ability to narrate the stories. The stories are never told in any organized, step by step fashion and instead of a linear fashion, they are told in circles or cycles. In fact, Aboriginals don’t have the concept of ‘linear’ time at all. They perceive time like a circle with the repetition of events. There is also a great amount of variety in the traditions

as there are stories for nearly everything in the natural world. The total number of these stories is not known and no single elder claims to know all the traditions of his or her nation. The Elders say that it takes 20-30 years of learning before they consider themselves eligible to teach others. Many of the traditions have never been written down or told to any outsiders as they are considered ‘too special and sacred for any but tribal ears’³. However, attempts have been made to write down some of these traditions. In recent times, there have even been some Aboriginals themselves who have taken the responsibility to write down or dictate narrations of these traditions for the sake of outsiders or their own young ones who are not so attuned to the ways of the past. In this dissertation, only those books will be quoted that have made a meticulous effort in including only authentic traditions of the respective groups or nations.

The Basic Concepts

In the book *Native American Religions*, Hartz lists the following basic concepts that are prevalent among the Aboriginal nations of North America:

- **Great Spirit:** A Great Power, sometimes called Great Spirit or Great Mystery (Wakan Tanka, Manitou, Orenda, among other names) underlies all creation. This power is not a personal god, such as the Judeo-Christian God, and it cannot be imagined in human form. Rather it is a universal force to which all of nature is attuned. All of nature, including human nature, is the creation of this Great Power.
- **Spirits in the Universe:** All things in the universe are alive and contain spirit within them. Spirit forces actively affect human lives in ways that can be both good and bad. The Earth, which nourishes and sustains life, and to which people return after death, is particularly endowed with spirit and is to be respected and revered. All forms of life interact and depend on all others.
- **Walk in the sacred way:** The individual is called on to “walk in the sacred way” – that is, to live in balance and harmony with the universe and the spirit world. People find their own sacred way by seeking clues to the sacred in dreams and visions.
- **Oral tradition and ceremonies:** Values, beliefs, morals, ethics, and sacred traditions are passed on through an oral tradition and through ceremonies. Cultural bonding takes place through rituals developed by each group over

centuries. These often include dancing, singing, drumming, and feasting, as well as purification rites, fasting, and physical ordeals.

- **Medicine men and women:** Certain people (sometimes called shamans, medicine men or women, or singers) have special ties to the higher powers. Their special calling enables them to meditate between the spirit world and the Earthly world for healing, spiritual renewal, and the good of the community.
- **Humour:** Humour is a part of the sacred way because people need to be reminded of their foolishness.⁴

One other important thing to note is that the stories of the oral tradition are always taught beginning at a young age and attempts are made to incorporate the moral teachings and traditions of the stories into the lives of the young ones so much so that there remains very little or no distinction between the secular and the religious. Hartz illustrates this with an example:

Native Americans do not segment their lives into the secular and the religious. Their culture and their religion are one, so closely united that many Native American languages have no word for *religion*. All work is considered prayer. A woman making a basket may pray to the spirit of the grass as she cuts it. Later the designs she weaves into the basket may have symbolic meaning. The art of basketry itself is a kind of spiritual gift for which to be grateful. The successfully completed basket, too, a work of both beauty and usefulness, is an occasion for thanks. Thus even a common utensil has a sacred dimension. Hunters and farmers invoke the spirits of game and fertility so that their efforts and the outcome of their labors will be blessed. Ideally people live with a constant awareness of the spirit world around them and act in ways that honor this awareness.⁵

In other words, religious practices are less like a responsibility and more like an integral part of daily life.

World Creation

An essential part of the oral traditions are stories describing the beginning of creation. To get a general understanding of these stories, their diversity, and their sacredness and importance to Aboriginals, the following entry from the *Encyclopedia of Native American Religions* under the title 'Creation Accounts' is presented:

...Indian creation stories refer to a distant past when animals were still humanlike and spoke with human language. The Supreme Being plays an obscure part in many of the stories, withdrawing in favour of other beings – culture heroes, twins, and tribal ancestors – who were connected to the beginning of existence. Culture heroes live in the era after the world is created but before it is inhabited by people. The hero transforms the world after creation or assists the Creator with it...

Creation stories are usually recited in ritual form but not all rites involve recitals of traditional stories nor do all stories have ritual expressions. Often, a sacred aura and serious demeanor accompany the telling of the creation story. Sacred genesis accounts, often extensive, are known and told by specialists like priests or heads of clans or societies who learned the narratives from predecessors. Sacred stories sometimes are ceremonial property passed down to males of a family. There can be many versions of creation stories told by members of different families in different communities, some even contradicting one another, and storytellers have their own way of telling the creation stories. Stories are told during designated periods, usually winter, when stinging and biting animals are not out to bother the storyteller.

Most Native American accounts of creation vary according to a people's way of life, geography, climate, food eaten, other subsistence factors, and sacred history. In North America, there are endless stories regarding the creation of the world, people, animals, plants, birds, and other beings. Many tribes throughout North America (except in the Southwest, North Pacific Coast, and Arctic) began in a watery environment from which different beings bring up mud to make the earth. In the Southwest, tribes describe four or five worlds, one on top of the other, through which people climb up to eventually emerge from Mother Earth, returning there after death. In the Northwest, people descend through a hole in the sky to emerge in the present world. In some places like Southern California, the world is thought to have resulted from cohabitation between Sky/Man and Earth/Woman.⁶

The above quotation provides a summary of the whole concept of creation among the Aboriginal nations of North America. One can notice that there is almost no resemblance to the theory of migration as proposed by anthropologists. This also sheds light on the contrast between the Aboriginal belief of their being 'true natives' of this land and the anthropologist's view of their being 'immigrants' to this land.

The Spirit World

The world of Aboriginals is filled with spirits and beings with supernatural powers. The animals are believed to have souls and the forces of nature are believed to be governed by spirits. In the book *Canada's Religions*, Robert Choquette describes the nature of this belief, which is widespread among the Aboriginal nations of Canada, in the following words:

The world of the Amerindian* was animated with very real and powerful spirits. While minor spirits were found everywhere such as in special rocks, waterfalls, thunder or animals, Amerindians also believed in some major spirits, those of the heavens for example, because these latter controlled the wind, the seasons, and the tides...

Whatever the particular constellation of spirits present in one tribe or another, some were good and others were evil. Therefore, one had to avoid offending them, and they sometimes needed to be placated. For example, one did not feed the bones of certain animals to the dogs, for fear of offending the spirits of these animals. For similar reasons, offerings of tobacco were left at waterfalls or rapids in order to placate the spirit of the place so that disaster would not be visited upon the traveler. This legion of spirits represented the supernatural power that underlay and permeated the world of the Amerindian.⁷

What is more is that dreams are seen as a way of communicating or interacting with the spirit world and 'shamans' play a significant role in this process because they are believed to have special abilities in communicating with the spirit world. They are also seen as the interpreters of dreams and those who could cure illness with the help of dreams. In addition, due to their belief of a 'spirit' in almost everything, Aboriginals formed a very unique view of the world. There is a sacredness that they see in special places of extra-ordinary natural beauty. These are usually chosen as sites where certain sacred rituals can be performed. There is also a sense of sacredness associated with tobacco which is commonly used as an offering to spirits in worship. The smoke of burnt tobacco is believed to carry their prayers to the spirits or higher powers. The feather of an eagle is also viewed as sacred by many nations who consider the eagle to have a special connection with the more powerful spirits. Due to that, the feather is used in ceremonies, dresses, rituals, and worship in order to invoke those spirits. There is also the concept of a medicine bundle which is "a collection of objects with sacred significance and spirit power

* Another term used to refer to the Aboriginals.

wrapped in an animal skin or in cloth”⁸. This belief in spirits has led some observers to assert that the Aboriginal faiths fall in the category of *animism*. It refers to the belief that the ‘trees, rocks, rivers, plants, and animals are spiritually alive’ and have the power to help or harm and some sort of worship is made to these spirits⁹. Some have even taken this belief to the extreme and have denied that the concept of a Supreme Being existed in the ancient form of Aboriginal faiths. They consider the existence of this belief among them today only a result of Christian influences. However, the Aboriginals themselves vehemently deny this and their stance is beautifully summarized by Joseph Epes Brown in the book, *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions*:

...[Many Native Americans] did not dichotomize human and animal, natural and supernatural. Typical Western distinctions between animism and animatism are not necessarily present in Native American experience, since all forms and aspects of creation are experienced as living and animate. Even “inanimate” rocks are thought to be mysteriously possessed with life. This experience of the sacred does not exclude a unitary, all-inclusive concept that refers to both a Supreme Being and to all gods, spirits, or powers of creation. Black Elk expressed the Lakota understanding of this when he said, “Wakan-Tanka, you are everything, and yet above everything.” Abundant recorded materials make it clear beyond any doubt that this type of ultimate affirmation of a Supreme Being was common among most, if not all, Native American peoples well before the coming of white people and Christian missionaries.¹⁰

This subject can only be discussed further in light of specific tribal beliefs and this is done in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

The Vision Quest

In order to establish a contact with the spirit world, Aboriginals have a special method known as the ‘vision quest’. The young ones are taught that they have to seek a vision for their guardian spirit. Lewis M. Hopfe and Mark R. Woodward describe this behaviour as well as its relationship to the building of totems in the following quotation:

...Visions are especially sought for young people at the time of puberty. Early in life, children are taught that one day they must go alone into the wilderness and seek a vision of the spirit world. When the time for a vision quest arrives, the young person may be sent away from the family and required to live alone until a vision is received.

The vision quest is often accompanied by several days of fasting. Usually, the young person on a vision quest lives without food, perhaps without water, and with only the barest of possessions and clothing. This is done to make the individual appear poor and humble before the spirits... When the vision comes, the spirits often appear in the guise of animals in a dreamlike or trancelike state. When this happens, the animal becomes the special guardian of the young person, whose name may be changed to include this animal. This practice is known as totemism. The animal that appears in the vision is believed to have a close spiritual bond with the young person throughout life. In some Native American societies, there are also totems for clans or other family groups. The vision may also be of a man or a woman. If the vision does not appear after two or three days of fasting and prayer, the young person may feel compelled to take more extreme measures. One might cut his or her flesh or even chop off a finger as a sign of sincerity. When the vision finally comes, the young person returns to the community as a full member of the group, having moved through this rite of passage.¹¹

Hopfe and Woodward go on to explain that these visions may not only be sought at puberty. In the past, they were also sought before great battles or hunting and, nowadays, they could be sought at times of political, economic, or spiritual crises, or at the time of life changing decisions like marriage, running for a political office, or moving from a rural reservation to an urban area for employment or education¹². In addition, it needs to be understood that despite the similarities, the rites involving visions quests vary from nation to nation.

Religious Ceremonies and Rituals

To the Aboriginal, dance and ritual are forms of worship that help one connect with the spirit world. In the words of Hartz, “a dance is a religious rite. Sacred dance-dramas re-enact the tribe’s creation beliefs or represent the actions of powerful spirits. They dramatize the relationship between people, the natural world, and the spirit world”.¹³ These dances, rituals and ceremonies serve a variety of purposes including the recovery and healing of the sick, communion with spirits, good results of hunting expeditions and so on and so forth. Each Aboriginal nation has many different ceremonies depending upon their culture and surroundings and there are so many ceremonies that the discussion of each one lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. *Religions in Canada*, a publication of the Canadian Forces, highlights some of the main ones practised today:

- **Thanksgiving ceremonies:** People participate in these ceremonies individually and in groups. Individually, a person gives thanks every day to the Great Spirit or Creator for all life. The person rises at sunrise, is thankful for a new day, and thanks Mother Earth for all that she has provided. At ceremonies for the community, the spirits of plants and animals that have been used for food, clothing or other products are thanked for allowing their use. Such ceremonies may take place more than once a year.
- **Pipe ceremony:** The pipe is used both individually and in groups for prayer and ceremonial purposes. Participants gather in a circle. A braid of sweetgrass is burned to purify the area and those present, to make a sacred place for the spirits to visit. Tobacco or *kinnickinnick*, a traditional mixture of bearberry and wild herbs or red willow shavings, is smoked so that prayers can be made to the Great Spirit or requests made of the spirits. The pipe may also be smoked to open other meetings or ceremonies. When not in use, the bowl and stem are separated and carried by one individual, the pipe holder.
- **Giveaway:** This ceremony, a stand-alone event east of the Rocky Mountains but often the purpose of a potlatch among coastal nations of British Columbia, is held to celebrate a special event, such as a birth or wedding, or to commemorate a death. It is the occasion to give gifts of blankets, beadwork or crafts to family, friends or visitors. Giveaways usually include ceremonial dancing and singing.
- **Potlatch:** Practised by First Nations of the west coast, the potlatch is an organized meeting for special ceremonies, such as name-giving, birth, rites of passage, treaties and weddings. Giveaways are usually the main feature of the modern potlatch. As a historical note, the Government of British Columbia banned the potlatch in 1887, mistakenly believing that the giveaway aspect of the ceremony, with participants often giving away all their belongings in an excess of zeal, was a cause of poverty among coastal nations. In reality, the potlatch was a principal cultural, social, religious and political institution of the coastal peoples and important to their ability to maintain solidarity and a sense of nationality. The ban was finally repealed in 1951.¹⁴
- **Sweat lodge:** Although First Nations construct the lodges in various styles, some features are common. Usually, they are igloo-shaped, about 1.5 metres high and large enough for eight people to be seated in a circle on the ground. They are erected on previously unused ground. The lodge is constructed of bent willow or other softwood poles tied together with vines. The exterior is covered in hides or blankets to keep all light out. Rocks are heated in a fire pit outside the lodge, then brought in and placed on consecrated ground in the centre. Water is poured on the hot rocks to produce steam. An elder conducts the ceremony, and no one may

enter the lodge without his or her permission. A pipe may be shared around the circle as part of the ceremony.¹⁵

- **Sundance:** The sundance ceremony is celebrated by First Nations in and surrounding the Prairies. It is usually held in June or July at the time of the full moon. Tradition says that it began when a warrior experienced a vision quest that resulted in his understanding a new way to pray to the Great Spirit, as many no longer attached great importance to the pipe ceremony. Its purpose is the self-dedication of participant warriors to the Great Spirit. The dancers must take part in four annual sundances to prepare themselves for the final stage of the rite. Four days before the ceremony, the dancers prepare by purifying themselves, at times in a sweat lodge, by meditating and by collecting ceremonial items of dress to use in the sundance. The sundance itself takes another four days, and the dancer fasts during this time. In the ultimate stage of the rite, dancers pierce the muscles of chest or back with sharp sticks and attach these to a central pole with rawhide thongs. At the conclusion of the dance about the pole, they free themselves by forcibly pulling free of the thongs, causing the tearing of flesh in the process. This frees the dancers from ignorance. After the sundance, another sweat-lodge ceremony is held.¹⁶

The above list only highlights some of the main ceremonies that are very common among the Aboriginals of Canada and it is only meant to give the reader an idea of the kind of ceremonies they practise.

Christian Influence and Residential Schools

In order to better understand Aboriginal religions, one needs to know the kind and level of Christian influence they had to endure. When the Europeans first arrived on this continent, they viewed the Aboriginals as ‘savages’ who were following ‘heathen practices’ and needed to be Christianized. The Missionaries of various sects of Christianity made great efforts in this cause and were quite successful in converting many Aboriginals to their faith. A large part of this success was due to the formation of residential schools, which refers to institutions where Aboriginal children were brought at a young age and taught western culture and Christianity. In an article of *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, J. R. Miller writes about the history, purpose, and life at residential schools all the way up to their closing and aftermath:

With the enactment of the British North America Act in 1867, and the implementation of the Indian Act, the government was required to provide Aboriginal Peoples with an education and to integrate Aboriginal Peoples into Canadian society. The government pursued schooling as a means of making First Nations economically self-sufficient, with its underlying objective being a lessening of native dependency on the public purse. The government collaborated with Christian Missionaries to encourage native self-sufficiency and religious conversion through the native educational policy developed after 1880, which relied heavily on custodial schools.

Beginning with the establishment of 3 industrial schools in the prairies in 1883, and through the next half-century, the federal government and churches developed a system of residential schools stretching from Nova Scotia to the Arctic... At its height around 1930, the residential school system totalled 80 institutions. The Roman Catholics operated three-fifths, the Anglicans one-quarter and the Methodists and Presbyterians the remainder.

...The experiences of residential school students were more negative than positive. The food was low in quantity and poor in quality; preparation did nothing to enhance its limited appeal. Clothing was universally detested: ill-fitting, shabby and, in the case of winter clothing, not adequate protection for the season. The pedagogical program, both academic and vocational, was deficient. Students had to cope with teachers who were usually ill-prepared and curricula and materials derived from and reflected an alien culture. In the workplace, the overseers were often harsh and the supposed training purpose of the work was limited or absent. In contrast, missionary staff lavished time and attention on religious observances, often simultaneously denigrating Aboriginal spiritual traditions.

...Native languages were forbidden in most operations of the school, Aboriginal ways were disparaged and the Euro-Canadian manner was held out as superior... In 1969 the decision was taken to close the residential schools, and the last school, located in Saskatchewan, closed in 1996.

Since the late 1990s former students pressed, often through litigation, for acknowledgment of, and compensation for, their suffering. In 2005 the federal government established a \$1.9-billion compensation package for the survivors of abuse at native residential schools, and in 2007 the federal government and the churches that had operated the schools agreed to provide financial compensation to former students under the Indian residential schools settlement agreement.

On 11 June 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, on behalf of the Government of Canada, offered an apology to all former students of Indian residential schools in Canada. The apology openly recognized that the assimilation policy on which the schools were established was “wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our

country”. The apology recognized the profoundly damaging and lasting impact the schools had on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language and was one of the steps that the government has taken to forge a new relationship with Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples.¹⁷

As it is clear from the extract of the article quoted above, there was a long and sophisticated attempt to eradicate Aboriginal religions and culture. In fact, after studying their situation thoroughly, Diamond Jenness, a great archaeologist, predicted their doom in the year 1932 when he wrote, “Doubtless all the tribes will disappear. Some will endure only a few years longer, others, like the [Inuit], may last several centuries. Some will merge steadily with the white race, others will bequeath to future generations only an infinitesimal fraction of their blood”¹⁸. However, the fact of the matter is that these people were not only able to survive but renew their culture in recent times. As shown in the previous chapter, this is clearly evident when one sees the result of the 2006 census which puts their total current population at 1,172,785. In reaction to this Christian influence, many revivalist movements began among the Aboriginals in an attempt to preserve traditional teachings. A discussion on some of the main movements follows next.

Revivalist Movements

To combat western influences, many different religious movements, both successful and unsuccessful, began among the Aboriginals at different times in their history. Fig. 2.2¹⁹ shows the locations where these movements began. Based on the entries on these religious movements in *The Encyclopedia of Native American Religions*, by Arlene Hirshfelder and Paulette Molin, a brief summary of each of these religious movements is presented below:

- **Washani Religion:** Varying accounts exist on the origin of this religion. According to Waldman, other names for this religion include the Waashat Religion, “Longhouse Religion, Seven Drum Religion, Sunday Dance Religion, or Prophet Dance”²⁰. Some believe that it began with prophets, such as Watilko, or Wasco, while others think that it originated after a devastating epidemic. It was revived by a person named Smohalla and it continues to this day.²¹
- **Indian Shaker Religion:** This religion was founded by John Slocum. In 1881, Slocum became ill, apparently died, and subsequently returned to life with a divine mission to fulfill among Indian people. About a year later, he fell ill again. His wife, Mary Slocum,

was believed to have caused his recovery this time by an act of uncontrollable shaking or trembling. This 'shaking' was seen as a manifestation of divine power and became a center point of this religious movement. It spread to tribes from California to British Columbia and blended Christian beliefs with traditional concepts. This religion also continues to the present day.²²

- **Drum Religion:** Also known as Dream Dance, this religion spread to the Ojibway, Menominee, Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Mesquakie, and Winnebago (Ho-Chunk). Tailfeather Woman, a Dakota woman, is believed to be the originator of the sacred Dance Drum and its rituals. According to her vision, the Dance Drums and the sacred teachings were to be presented to other Native communities to promote brotherhood and peace.²³
- **Ghost Dance of 1870:** This movement was founded by the prophet Wodziwob. In the late 1860s he made a number of prophecies and the movement spread among the Paiute people. However, due to the fact that these prophecies were not fulfilled, this religion ended only after two or three years. Nevertheless, it has offshoots including the Earth Lodge religion, Dream Dance, and the Bole-Maru religion.²⁴
- **Ghost Dance of 1890:** This was a messianic religious movement that was started among the Northern Paiute people in Nevada in the late 1880s by Wovoka, a Numu prophet. On January 1889, an eclipse of the sun occurred and during this period, Wovoka had a visionary religious experience. He was taken to the spirit world where he was given sacred teachings. This religion spread to other Great Basin groups, and its practice extended from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains and beyond. As the movement spread, it was looked upon with suspicion by the whites and this ultimately resulted in military intervention in the case of the Dakotas, the death of Sitting Bull (a Lakota leader) and the massacre of Lakota men, women, and children at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890. This is believed to have been the end of this religion but evidence suggests that some groups continued to practice it for a longer period.²⁵
- **Earth Lodge Religion:** An offshoot of the Ghost Dance of 1870, this religion was advocated by a Ghost Dance leader known as Norelputus and it is believed that it began among the Wintun and Hill Patwin in California in 1871 or 1872. From there, it spread to other tribes.²⁶
- **Bole-Maru Religion:** Another offshoot of the Ghost Dance of 1870, one of the founders of this religion is believed to be Lame Bill, a Hill Patwin. Leaders of this religion were 'dreamers' and their 'revelations' guided the ceremonial activities. Dancing was considered sacred. A unique thing about this movement is that unlike other movements which came

out of the Ghost Dance, practice of the Bole-Maru form of worship continues to this day. An offshoot of this religion is the Big Head religion.²⁷

- **Dream Dance:** This religion evolved out of the Earth Lodge religion. It is also described as the third phase of the Ghost Dance of 1870 movement on the Klamath reservation in Oregon. Its unique features include the fact that it did not have a belief about a worldwide catastrophe unlike the other two and it was closer to traditional ritualism. It is believed to have been practised for only 3 years.²⁸
- **Feather Religion:** This religious movement was founded by Jake Hunt, a Klickitat prophet, in 1904. Hunt was influenced by Washani beliefs and the Indian Shaker religion and incorporated elements from both in his rituals. The eagle was considered the supreme being. In English, other names include the Feather Dance, Pom Pom Shakers, and Feather Cult. After Hunt's death in 1914, the religion is said to have declined.²⁹
- **Longhouse Religion or Handsome Lake Religion:** This religion is based on a combination of traditional beliefs of the Iroquois and elements of Christianity. It was founded by Handsome Lake, a Seneca prophet[†], who was born in 1735, had his first vision in 1799, and died in 1815. He gave his people the *Gaiwí:yo* (the good word) which is also known as the code of Handsome Lake. He believed that he was picked to revive the traditions of his people, and he did not intend to create a new religion. Nevertheless, his teachings did assume the shape of a new religion. The current headquarters of this religion is on the New York Seneca Reservation at Tonawanda. The central place of worship is called a Longhouse[‡] and each Longhouse has three or four preachers of the code. Delegates from each of the 10 Longhouses meet every fall, in September or October, at Tonawanda to arrange that fall's itinerary of Six Nations Meetings where the code is recited.³⁰
- **Peyote Religion:** This religion has pre-Columbian roots and it is centered around the sacramental use of Peyote, a small spineless cactus which grows in the Rio Grande valley in Mexico and the state of Texas, United States. There are two primary ceremonies with minor differences in the Peyote Religion, that is, the Half-Moon ceremony and the Big Moon ceremony which later became the Cross Fire ritual. Both ceremonies have aspects of Aboriginal culture and Christianity and emphasize the divine role of peyote and its power to teach and heal. Due to

Figure 2.3: Cayuga Longhouse, Six Nations Reserve

[†] It must be noted that the word 'prophet' is being used here as it is understood in Western literature and its meaning is not the equivalent to the word "نبي" (Prophet) in Arabic.

[‡] A long, rectangular traditional dwelling of the Iroquois. In modern times, it is used for public activities, including religious gatherings of the adherents of the Longhouse religion.

opposition to the use of peyote at state and federal levels in the United States, the adherents of this religion organized the Native American Church in 1918 in order to protect their religious practices.³¹ Similarly, the Native American Church of Canada began in 1954 at Red Pheasant, Saskatchewan. A couple of years later, a team of medical specialists were invited to participate in one of the ceremonies involving the use of peyote in an attempt to dispel misconceptions about its use. The specialists concluded that its use was harmless. As early as the 1930s, Canadian peyotists had been identified among the Blood, Cree, Ojibway, and Assiniboine groups and after 1950s, they were reported in Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. In 1955, the Native American Church of the United States changed its name to the Native American Church of North America in order to include Canadian peyotists. According to Hirschfelder and Molin, membership estimates range from 100,000 to 250,000. It is a minority religion among the Aboriginals themselves with many nations having no adherents.³²

The Changing Times

Just like its negative impact on other areas of Aboriginal life in Canada, the arrival of European settlers and missionaries caused great harm to Aboriginal religions. Bans were placed on their religious ceremonies for long periods of time and their children were sent to residential schools in order to Christianize them. However, just like their revival in other areas, Aboriginal faiths are also experiencing a period of revival and this is illustrated more clearly in the table³³ below where the “Percentage change (1991-2001)” section shows how more and more people are now claiming to be followers of Aboriginal spirituality.

Religions in Canada (2001 Census)					
Name	Roman Catholic	Muslim	Aboriginal Spirituality	Percentage Distribution (2001) [Aboriginal Spirituality]	Percentage Change (1991-2001) [Aboriginal Spirituality]
Canada	12,793,125	579,640	29,820	0.1%	175.1%
Newfoundland and Labrador	187,405	630	50	0.0%	N/A
Prince Edward Island	63,240	195	50	0.0%	150.0%
Nova Scotia	327,940	3,550	270	0.0%	500.0%
New Brunswick	385,985	1,275	360	0.1%	380.0%
Québec	5,930,380	108,620	735	0.0%	332.4%
Ontario	3,866,350	352,525	7,265	0.1%	161.3%
Manitoba	292,970	5,095	3,415	0.3%	190.6%
Saskatchewan	286,815	2,230	5,885	0.6%	195.0%

Alberta	756,005	49,045	5,860	0.2%	189.4%
British Columbia	666,905	56,215	5,475	0.1%	136.5%
Yukon Territory	5,985	60	185	0.6%	2.8%
Northwest Territories	16,940	180	235	0.6%	422.2%
Nunavut	6,205	25	25	0.1%	150.0%

This table clearly shows the positive change in the attitudes of Aboriginals towards traditional practices. From 1991 to 2001, other than Yukon Territory, every province and territory has shown a significant increase in the numbers of people indicating ‘Aboriginal Spirituality’ as their faith. This clearly indicates that Canada is currently experiencing a revival of traditional Aboriginal practices and beliefs. In addition, all those Aboriginals who have officially stated Roman Catholicism or any other form of Christianity as their religion may actually be mixing those beliefs along with traditional practices. Lewis M. Hopfe and Mark R. Woodward describe the situation as follows:

Some forms of Christianity insist on an all-or-nothing conversion... Other forms of Christianity are more open to native customs and at least to some extent religious ideas. The influence of Christianity has been so strong that today most Native Americans are Christians. But Native American Christianity is as complex and variable as the cultures in which it is found. Some Native Americans have almost completely adopted the European style of Christianity. Others have added Christian symbols and myths to native religions. Probably most Native Americans would place themselves between these two extremes.³⁴

This quotation summarizes the state of Aboriginal spirituality today and also sheds light on the reasons behind the survival of Aboriginal traditions in spite of all the methods used to eradicate them. It also makes one realize that it is indeed very difficult to estimate the actual numbers of Aboriginals who at least give importance to their religious traditions as most would consider Christianity their ‘official’ faith.

The Ojibway

According to the *Religions in Canada* publication of the Canadian Forces, “in Canada today, there are at least 56 distinct native traditions, including that of the Inuit of the North”³⁵. As mentioned in the “Introduction”, this dissertation has the capacity to discuss only three of

them and that includes the traditions of the Ojibway, the Iroquois, and the Cree. McMillan and Yellowhorn give an introduction to the Ojibway in the following quotation:

The Ojibwa (variants include Ojibway, Ochipwe and Chippewa) were originally named for one group north of modern Sault Ste. Marie. The term was later extended to other groups in the upper Great Lakes area that shared the same culture and language. At the beginning of the global era their homeland appears to have been along the northern shores of Lakes Huron and Superior, and its centre was the major fishery at the rapids of Sault Ste. Marie. From this broad base the Ojibwa expanded their territory dramatically, as new opportunities arose. Some moved to the southeast, into lands in southern Ontario made available by Iroquoian dispersal in the seventeenth century. Others pushed into Wisconsin and Minnesota, displacing, often forcefully, the Dakota. The lucrative fur trade lured many far to the north and west, into the Shield country of northern Ontario and Manitoba, in search of new trapping grounds. Some spread out onto the Plains, becoming the Plains Ojibwa of southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan.³⁶

As it is clear from the above quotation, the term ‘Ojibway’ actually refers to a large number of groups, covering a large part of Canada. These groups include the Odawa, Algonquin, Nipissing, and the Mississauga. Despite the fact that these groups have had their individual characteristics, they are emerging today with a singular identity. McMillan and Yellowhorn go on to explain that many Ojibway people prefer to be known as *Anishinabeg* (or *Anishinaubaek*) a term meaning “First People”, and the concept of an *Anishinabeg* Nation now links speakers of the Ojibway language³⁷. Furthermore, it can be noticed that the religious thought among the Ojibway groups is quite universal. Basil H. Johnston, an Ojibway himself and a resident of Cape Croker Indian Reserve in Northern Ontario, has made the effort to write down the legends, concepts, traditions, rituals, and the heritage of the Ojibway people. His books include *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway*, *Tales the Elders Told: Ojibway Legends*, *The Bear-Walker and Other Stories*, *Mermaids and Medicine Women*, and *Ojibway Heritage*.

The Iroquois

Another large group of the Aboriginals of Canada is the Iroquois. It comprises of six nations that once formed a league famously known as the League of Six Nations in order to

establish peace. It includes the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora (as seen in Fig. 2.4). McMillan and Yellowhorn explain their current situation in the following quotation:

Eight Iroquoian reserve communities exist today in southern Ontario and Quebec. One is Huron (the Nation Huronne Wendat), five are Mohawk, one is Oneida and the largest, Six Nations, contains all six league members, plus several other groups such as the Delaware. All except the Huron moved northward in response to historic political events. By far the most populous Indian band in Canada is Six Nations of the Grand River, and Akwesasne, Kahnawake and Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte are the second-, fourth- and eighth-largest respectively. Their total population is almost 60,000 people, more than now live in their American homeland. The Mohawk account for about two-thirds of the total number, and Mohawk is the only Iroquoian language which is not highly endangered in Canada.³⁸

The current status of the religious inclinations of the Iroquois is explained by the same authors below:

In religion, the descendants of the first wave of Mohawk settlement remain primarily Catholic. The Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, the Oneida of the Thames and the Six Nations communities are largely Protestant. At Six Nations, however, much of the population follows the Longhouse religion, and this traditional faction has spread in twentieth century to Akwesasne, Kahnawake, Kanesatake and Oneida... Iroquois society, particularly at Six Nations, is split into two factions. Those in the conservative or traditional faction participate in the Longhouse religion, uphold the code of Handsome Lake, often speak an Iroquois language, tend to emphasize matrilineal descent and recognize clan affiliations, and support the council of hereditary chiefs as the only legitimate government. Non-traditionalists belong to a Christian church (usually Anglican or Baptist at Six Nations), tend not to recognize clan distinctions, deal with the federal government through the elected band council and generally speak English as their main or only language. Both groups highly value their Iroquois heritage, but the larger non-traditionalist faction participates more fully in the broader world around them.³⁹

It is evident from the above quotation that a significant portion of Iroquois society today follows the Longhouse religion. As mentioned earlier, this religion is based on the spiritual experiences of Handsome Lake which started with his first vision in 1799 and continued till his death in 1815. His teachings will be compared with Islām in the following chapters. The principal sources of information would include *Teachings from the Longhouse*, which is based on the narrations of

Chief Jacob Thomas, a faith keeper of the Longhouse religion, and *Tales of the Iroquois*, written by Tehanetorens.

The Cree

The largest group of Aboriginals in Canada is known as the Cree. McMillan and Yellowhorn discuss the geographical area covered by this group in the following quotation:

The distribution of Cree speakers at European contact is difficult to determine. However, they seem to have occupied the lands surrounding James Bay, including far into what is today the interior of Quebec. Their territory appears to have extended north almost to the Churchill River along the western shores of Hudson Bay, west at least as far as Lake Winnipeg and south to Lake Nipigon. Seventeenth-century accounts indicate that they frequently visited the northern shores of Lake Superior, and on a number of occasions they were reported to be fishing at Sault Ste. Marie as guests of the Ojibwa.

The Cree obtained firearms early on through the fur trade on Hudson Bay, and they used these arms to increase their territory dramatically. Lured by profits from furs, the Cree expanded far to the west, eventually living in southern portions of the Western Subarctic as far as the Peace River of Alberta. Many groups pushed out onto the Plains, allying with the Assiniboine against their enemies and adapting their culture to become Plains warriors and bison hunters. By the early nineteenth century Cree speakers occupied the largest geographic area of any Aboriginal group in Canada, reaching from the interior of Quebec to the Rockies.⁴⁰

The same authors go on to discuss that the Cree speak many different dialects of the same language. These include:

1. Plains Cree
2. Woods Cree
3. West Swampy Cree
4. East Swampy
5. Moose Cree
6. East Cree
7. Attikamek or Tête de Boule
8. Naskapi
9. Montagnai

Speakers of the Naskapi and Montagnais are known as the Innu today and hold a more unique identity, separate from the Cree. Another interesting thing to note is that the fur trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries caused some Ojibway and Cree people to mix and nowadays, "... several northern Ojibwa bands consider themselves to be (and are officially designated as) Cree, whereas others in northern Ontario and Manitoba are listed as 'mixed' Ojibwa-Cree. 'Oji-Cree' emerged as a distinct language, and is still widely spoken in northern Ontario and Manitoba".⁴¹ These two groups have the largest populations in Canada and their languages are not in any danger of disappearing. At a number of educational institutions, courses in Ojibway, Cree and Oji-Cree are available. These people are also emerging today as a strong minority which wishes to take control of and influence things that affect them in the social, political, and economic spheres. In this dissertation, the principal source of information on Cree beliefs is the book, *The Orders of the Dreamed*, which includes a revised reprint of a manuscript of George Nelson written in 1823 and notes from several other scholars. The source for Cree traditional stories is the book, *Sacred Stories of the Sweet Grass Cree* (1930), which includes stories dictated to Leonard Bloomfield by four Cree informants. He transcribed those stories in the original Cree language and provided the translation as well.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONCEPT OF GOD

The key, fundamental belief of almost all religions of the world is the belief in a Single, Supreme Being. In this chapter, the aim is to explore the concept of God among three Aboriginal nations of Canada. If it can be proven that these independent groups of Aboriginal Peoples believed in only One God while they were isolated from the rest of the world for many millennia, it would become a very strong evidence for the existence of God. It would also be a strong argument against those atheists who famously propose that belief in God has evolved over time from polytheism to monotheism. However, as stated in the ‘Introduction’, the ultimate objective would be the comparison of such beliefs with those of Islām in order to look for similarities that may benefit dialogue.

In general, the various Aboriginal groups of North America believe in a single, supreme Creator according to the *Encyclopedia of Native American Religions*. It states that they believe this Creator to be above all other spirit beings, powers of nature, and distant from people and daily existence. They also believe Him to be generally invisible, male or female, but very little seems to be known about the true nature of the Creator. The names used for the Creator are many and vary from tribe to tribe. The Algonquians call Him Gitche Manitou, or Great Spirit or Creator; the Apache call Him Unsen, In Charge of Life or Life Giver; the Cheyenne call Him Maheo; the Dakota use the name Wakan Tanka, or Great Mystery; the Hopi say Taiowa to refer to him; and so on.¹ In this belief, the Aboriginals are fundamentally united with Islām. An important thing to note is that the Aboriginal concept links the belief in One God with His attribute of being the Creator or the Only Creator of everything. Interestingly, the following verses of the Holy Qur’ān also link His attributes of being the One and the Creator.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَآتِنِي

تُؤْفِكُونَ ○

O ye men, remember the favour of Allāh towards you. Is there any Creator other than Allāh *Who* provides for you from the heaven and earth? There is none worthy of worship but He. Whither then are you turned away? (Sūrah Al-Fātir 35:4)

قُلْ مَنْ رَبُّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قُلِ اللَّهُ قُلْ أَفَاتَّخَذْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ لِأَنْفُسِهِمْ نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَى وَالْبَصِيرُ أَمْ هَلْ تَسْتَوِي الظُّلُمَاتُ وَالنُّورُ أَمْ جَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ شُرَكَاءَ خَلَقُوا كَخَلْقِهِ فَتَشَابَهَ الْخَلْقُ عَلَيْهِمْ قُلِ اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ ۝

Say, ‘Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?’ Say, ‘Allāh.’ Say, ‘Have you then taken beside Him helpers who have no power for good or harm *even* for themselves?’ Say, ‘Can the blind and the seeing be equal? Or, can darkness be equal to light? Or, do they assign to Allāh partners who have created the like of His creation so that the *two* creations appear similar to them?’ Say, ‘Allāh *alone* is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Most Supreme.’ (Sūrah Al-R‘ad 13:17)

The beliefs of the Ojibway, the Iroquois, and the Cree in regards to the Supreme Creator would now be brought under scrutiny and compared with some of the attributes of God as understood in Islām.

Kitchi-Manitou

Abundant in Ojibway thought is the concept of *manitous*. One meaning of the word *manitou* is ‘spirit’ but it has many other meanings. Johnston explains that this word can mean ‘mystery’ as well as “spiritual, mystical, supernatural, godlike or spiritlike, quiddity, and essence. It is in these other senses that the term is often used and is to be understood, not just in the context of manitou beings”². In other words, this word has many different connotations and this is what caused the Christian priests of the early historic period to misunderstand the Ojibway concept of God. They assumed that these people only believed in spirits without any sovereign Master of the Heavens and the Earth. This is illustrated by the following observation made by Father Allouez and recorded in the *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, which is a very voluminous compilation of the activities and experiences of Jesuit priests during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

There is here ... a false and abominable religion, resembling in many respects the beliefs of some of the ancient Pagans. The Savages of these regions recognize no

sovereign master of Heaven and Earth, but believe there are many spirits — some of whom are beneficent, as the Sun, the Moon, the Lake, Rivers, and Woods; others malevolent, as the adder, the dragon, cold, and storms. And, in general, whatever seems to them either helpful or hurtful they call a Manitou, and pay it the worship and veneration which we render only to the true God.

These divinities they invoke whenever they go out hunting, fishing, to war, or on a journey — offering them sacrifices, with ceremonies appropriate only for Sacrificial priests...

As, moreover, these people are of gross nature, they recognize no purely spiritual divinity, believing that the Sun is a man, and the Moon his wife; that snow and ice are also a man, who goes away in the spring and comes back in the winter; that the evil spirit is in adders, dragons, and other monsters; that the crow, the kite, and some other birds are genii, and speak just as we do; and that there are even people among them who understand the language of birds, as some understand a little that of the French...³

This account by Father Allouez is a very deficient account and shows the lack of respect he held for the ancestors of the Ojibway, their beliefs and their practices. The labelling of these people as ‘savages’ and the tone with which he spoke of their behaviours clearly indicates arrogance and prejudice that he held against a people of whom he knew very little. It is this derogatory way of looking at these people that caused him to miss out on a very basic belief of the Ojibway, that is, the belief in the One God. This is something that is detrimental to successful dialogue between two faiths and is highly discouraged. Instead, by having an attitude of understanding, thoughtfulness, and tolerance, much can be achieved in improving understanding of each other’s faiths.

The Ojibway call their God or Creator, *Kitchi-Manitou*. Johnston illustrates this when he writes:

For the Anishinaubae people, only Kitchi-Manitou could create the world and all that is in it; separate the seasons; set the cycle of birth, growth, decline, and death into motion; instil sense and an inner being in all living creatures; and give form and time to everything. Kitchi-Manitou was the creator, the Great Mystery. By combining *kitchi*, a prefix meaning immense and preeminent, and *manitou*, the Anishinaubae people coined a word for the creator.⁴

In their understanding, *Kitchi-Manitou* is the creator of all things, including all kinds of *manitous*, and this is the same as the Islāmic concept of God. In Sūrah Al-Zumar, Allāh Ta‘ālā says:

اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ ۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ ۝

Allāh is the Creator of all things, and He is Guardian over all things (Sūrah Al-Zumar 39:63)

Similarly, Islām also describes Allāh Ta‘ālā as one who sets the cycle of birth, growth, and death into motion as mentioned in the following verse:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ الْمَلَكُوتُ ۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ۝

Blessed is He in Whose hand is the kingdom, and He has power over all things; Who has created death and life that He might try you — which of you is best in deeds; and He is the Mighty, the Most Forgiving. (Sūrah Al-Mulk 67:2-3)

In addition, many other things that are said about *Kitchi-Manitou* are very similar to the Islāmic concept of God. For instance, He is “The Great Mystery of the supernatural order, one beyond human grasp, beyond words, neither male nor female, not of the flesh”⁵. This is equivalent to the meanings of اللّٰطِيفُ (The Incomprehensible) which is an attribute of God mentioned in the Holy Qur’ān. Similarly, *Kitchi-Manitou* is described as the Qur’ānic equivalent of الصّٰمِدُ (the Independent and Besought of all) in the sense that after the creation of the world, He is independent from human affairs. Furthermore, what is interesting is that their concept of goodness in relation to the concept of God is also very similar to Islām. Johnston writes:

What would be the most fitting gift to tender to *Kitchi-Manitou* in recompense for all the things they received? Nothing. There was not a thing that human beings could offer *Kitchi-Manitou* in return, other than to imitate *Kitchi-Manitou* in the exercise of selflessness and generosity. By giving and sharing one’s goods, knowledge, experience, and abilities with the less fortunate of their kin and neighbours – the elderly, sick, widows, and orphans – human beings could emulate *Kitchi-Manitou*.⁶

This is clearly a concept very similar to Islāmic thought. Hadhrat Mirzā Bashīruddīn Mehmūd Ahmad^{ra}, the second successor of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community writes:

صرف ایک تعریف ہے جس کے متعلق میں سمجھتا ہوں کہ وہ نیکی کی صحیح تعریف ہے اور وہی اکیلی تعریف ہے جس کے بغیر کوئی تعریف نہیں اور وہ تعریف جس کا قرآن کریم سے بھی پتہ چلتا ہے یہ ہے کہ نیکی کہتے ہیں خدا تعالیٰ کی تصویر کا انعکاس اپنے اندر لے لینے کو۔ تعبد کے معنی ہوتے ہیں نشان لے لینا۔ پس عبادت الہیہ کے معنی ہوئے خدا تعالیٰ کے عکس اور اس کی تصویر کو اپنے اندر پیدا کر لینا۔ یہی ایک صحیح ترین تعریف ہے اور اس کے سوا اور کوئی تعریف نہیں۔

There is only one definition which I consider the best definition of virtue and that is the only definition other than which there is no [appropriate] definition. And this definition, which is also discussed in the Holy Qur’ān, is that virtue is the adoption

of the reflection of Allāh Ta‘ālā in oneself. *Ta‘abbud* (being a worshipper) means, ‘the adoption of a sign’. Hence, worship of God refers to the absorption of the picture and reflection of Allāh Ta‘ālā in oneself. This is the only truest definition and there is no other [appropriate] definition*.⁷

These observances show that there are many similarities between Allāh Ta‘ālā and *Kitchi-Manitou*, and even between some related concepts, and all of this can help greatly in successful dialogue between Muslims and Aboriginals based on a very elementary belief.

Muzzu-Kummik-Quae

An essential concept of the Ojibway, which is generally shared by most First Nations, is that of reverence for *Muzzu-Kummik-Quae* (Mother Earth). They have a sense of veneration and respect for the Earth and its ability to provide for their sustenance. Johnston explains:

In the Pipe of Peace Smoking Ceremony, the second whiff of tobacco is offered to the Earth with the prefatory words “To you, Mother, we give thanks.” What the celebrant then says may be summarized as follows: “When I am hungry, you feed me; when I am cold and wet, you shelter me; when I am downcast, you comfort me. For this I am grateful. I am indebted to you.” By using the term *Muzzu-Kummik-Quae*, meaning Earth Woman and, by extension, Mother Earth, the celebrant equates the Earth with motherhood, womanhood. At the same time, the celebrant compares humankind to children. The words spoken in thanksgiving to the Earth are adult, but they express the same sentiments that children feel but cannot articulate.⁸

This extra-ordinary love for ‘Mother Earth’ and the acknowledgement of its ability to provide for human survival and existence can be equated to the concepts of رَحْمَنِيَّة (Graciousness) and رَحِيمِيَّة (Mercy) of Allāh Ta‘ālā in Islām. This idea is enforced by the fact that it was through the changes and beauty of the Earth that the Ojibway “discovered the existence of *Kitchi-Manitou* and reasoned that the Great Mystery was the creator of all things and beings. Mother Earth revealed, by means of her transformations, that there is a *Kitchi-Manitou*”⁹. It is possible that ‘Mother Earth’ was a term used metaphorically in the early traditions to refer, as an example, to the رَحْمَنِيَّة (Graciousness) and رَحِيمِيَّة (Mercy) of God but over the course of time, it began to have an independent status and it was forgotten that this was a reference to two attributes of God.

* Translated by author

The logic behind this is that the Earth is in fact a manifestation of these two attributes of God. According to the Arabic language, Allāh Ta‘ālā is الرَّحْمَنُ (Gracious) in the sense that He is the “One Who shows mercy gratuitously and extensively to all creation without regard to effort or work”¹⁰, and He is الرَّحِيمُ (Merciful) in the sense that He is the “One who shows mercy in response to, and as a result of, the actions of man but shows it liberally and repeatedly”¹¹. If analyzed carefully, it can be noticed that ‘Mother Earth’ manifests the رَحْمَنِيَّة (Graciousness) of Allāh Ta‘ālā in the sense that it was present with all its provisions which are necessary for life even before the birth of man. It provided a suitable and habitable environment for man to survive without regard to any effort or work done by him. At the same time, it manifests the رَحِيمِيَّة (Mercy) of Allāh Ta‘ālā in the sense that it rewards the actions of the people by providing food when they farm, wood for shelter when they cut its trees, and other provisions based on their efforts. This suggestion of a metaphorical implication of ‘Mother Earth’ is based on a writing of Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad ^{as}, the Promised Messiah and Imām Mahdī, who has discussed similar concepts in Hindu mythology. After analyzing the four gods mentioned in the Vedas and proving that they are actually metaphors for the four attributes of God mentioned in Sūrah Fātiha, he writes:

This analysis shows that these four metaphoric gods mentioned in the Vedas possess four metaphoric attributes; the sky possesses metaphorically the attribute of universal Providence and the sun has the quality of *rahmaniyyat* (graciousness) and the moon partakes of the attribute *rahimiyyat* (compassion) and the earth has been invested with the attribute lord of the day of requital. These four attributes are tangible and observable. It is because of this phenomenon that people of dull perception regard them as gods and worthy of worship. In their rebuttal, God, the Exalted, says in His sacred scripture, the Holy Qur’ān, in Sūrah Fātiha: All praise and glorification belong solely to the Great God, whose name is Allāh, the Lord of universal providence, the universally Gracious, the universally Compassionate, and the Master of Judgement for the entire universe. This worthiness of adoration belongs exclusively to God, for, His Providence and Graciousness and Compassion and Lordship in the matter of requital are not confined to one sphere or one manifestation, but appear in numberless manifestations, the end of which is beyond ken. On the other hand the providence of the sky and the sun etc., is limited to a special manifestation and category and cannot travel beyond their limited spheres and therefore cannot be accounted worthy of worship. Besides, their operations are not deliberate; the Divine power operates through them.¹²

This quotation demonstrates how distorted concepts in mythology are actually the result of the devolution of the belief in One God and His various attributes. Unlike the Hindus, the Ojibway

do not worship the Earth as a god but they do show extra-ordinary love for the Earth and as mentioned earlier, they do give thanks to it in prayer. Another difference is that the *dharti* (Earth) goddess of the Hindu concept has qualities similar to the attribute of مالكييت (Lordship) while the Mother Earth concept of the Ojibway appears to be a reference to the رحمنيت (Graciousness) and رحيميت (Mercy) of God. Nevertheless, the cause of their conceptual change is the same and that is that those people who do not possess high intellect can sometimes confuse certain ideas and attributes of God and deviate from the concept of توحيد (the Oneness of God). Although this understanding of the Ojibway, which is also prevalent among most Aboriginal groups, is a little extreme, it is still much closer to Islām as compared to the Hindus.

Taking this issue further, the concept of ‘Mother Earth’ seems to metaphorically indicate the motherly love of Allāh Ta‘ālā for His creation and it also points out the high status of mothers in the eyes of the Ojibway. This is very similar to the way Islām gives reverence to mothers and parents in general. For instance, Allāh Ta‘ālā states:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ إِنَّمَا يُبَلِّغُنَّ عَنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَيْهِمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا
تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ۝

Thy Lord has commanded, “Worship none but Him, and *show* kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age with thee, never say unto them any word expressive of disgust nor reproach them, but address them with excellent speech. (Sūrah Banī Isrā’īl 17:24)

وَوَضَّيْنَا لِلنَّاسِ يَوْلَادَهُمْ حَمْلَتَهُ أُمَّهُ وَهَنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِضْلُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنْ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَىٰ الْمَصِيرِ ۝

And We have enjoined on man concerning his parents — his mother bears him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning takes two years — ‘Give thanks to Me and to thy parents. Unto Me is the *final* return’. (Sūrah Luqmān 31:15)

In both these verses, it can be noticed that Allāh Ta‘ālā only gives two orders – one concerning Himself and the other concerning parents. This shows that the Qur’ān gives grave importance to the kind treatment of parents. The second verse reminds man of the pains that his mother bore to give birth to him and this is meant to motivate him to treat his mother with love, respect, and gratitude. This is further elaborated by the following saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{sa}:

Narrated Abū Huraira ^{ra}: A man came to Allāh’s Apostle ^{sa} and said, “O Allāh’s Apostle ^{sa}! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me?” The Prophet ^{sa} said, “Your mother.” The man asked, “Who is next?” The Prophet ^{sa} said, “Your mother”. The man asked again, “Who is next?” The Prophet ^{sa} said,

“Your mother”. The man asked for the fourth time, “Who is next?” The Prophet ^{sa} said, “Your father”.¹³

As a result, Aboriginals and Muslims both place a mother at a high status and this can be another subject of dialogue among them. Furthermore, in the following Hadith, the Holy Prophet ^{sa} compares a mother-child relationship to the relationship of Allāh with His servants:

‘Umar ibn Al-Khattāb reported that some prisoners were brought to Allāh’s Messenger ^{sa}, amongst whom there was also a woman who was searching (for someone) and when she found a child amongst the prisoners, she took hold of it, pressed it against her chest and suckled it. Thereupon Allāh’s Messenger ^{sa} said, “Do you think this woman would ever afford to throw her child into the Fire?” We said, “By Allāh, so far as it lies in her power, she would never throw the child into the Fire”. Thereupon Allāh’s Messenger ^{sa} said, “Allāh is more kind to His servants than this woman is to her child”.¹⁴

Notice how the Holy Prophet ^{sa} specifically compares the love of Allāh Ta‘ālā with the love of a mother for her child and states that Allāh’s love for His people is far greater than a mother’s love. In other words, the relationship of Allāh with mankind is an enhanced version of a relationship between a mother and its child. Similarly, the concept of a ‘Mother Earth’ is perhaps a metaphorical reference to the motherly love of the Creator or Allāh Ta‘ālā for mankind. Therefore, all these similarities in the concepts of the Ojibway and Islām can be great tools for interesting dialogue to ensue between the adherents of these faiths.

Shongwàyadihs:on

According to Chief Jacob Thomas, a faith-keeper and firm adherent of the Longhouse Religion, the traditional Iroquois believe in only one Creator. He says, “We need only one belief. Why are we so defiant in the way we think? Why must we believe in many gods? ... We have forgotten that there is only one Creator”¹⁵. However, there is evidence to suggest that their belief in the Unity of God is not absolute. For example, some believe that Jesus Christ ^{as} appeared to Handsome Lake in one of his visions as a messenger and referred to himself as the “Great Spirit’s son”¹⁶. This belief seems to have been influenced by Christianity but, nevertheless, the concept of Trinity is non-existent in traditional Iroquois thought. Another example is the fact that much veneration is given to the evil spirit and even some of the creation is attributed to him. A more detailed description of this particular belief will follow in the next chapter. The term

Shongwàdihs:on is used to refer to the Creator and this word literally means “He who made you”¹⁷. As a result, it can be noticed that the Iroquois are very much like the Ojibway in seeing God as the الخالق (The Creator). Moreover, there is also a concept of prayer to the Creator as explained by Terry Boyle in the following quotation:

When [Chief Jacob Thomas] speaks of fire, he speaks of smoke, air, and water and how they are all interconnected. “First you have fire before you burn tobacco. Tobacco comes from Mother Earth and is connected with your mind. Therefore, when you burn tobacco, you send messages to the Creator with your mind. It must be remembered that it is up to the Creator to answer your messages.”¹⁸

The Iroquois also have a very interesting story of the creation of the world and it sheds light on the fact that they do not believe in an All-Powerful, All-Encompassing God. Terry Boyle records Chief Jacob Thomas’s thoughts on this subject in the following words:

This takes us back to the heavenly world – to the story of Creation when the woman came from the sky-world and rested on the turtle’s back and the Creator assigned her to become Mother Earth. Soon she bore a child, and that is where the Creator was born – on this Earth. There is a Master of Life up there whom we never see, but the Creator was born on Earth.¹⁹

This story will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter but it is important here to discuss the concept of the ‘birth’ of the Creator. Interestingly, some Muslim sects have similar beliefs. For instance, the Hanafiyah sect holds the belief that “Allāh might have had a beginning”²⁰, and the Zarariyah believe “that Allāh did not live nor had any attributes till He created for Himself life and His attributes”²¹. It is clear that these beliefs assign weaknesses to the concept of an Al-Mighty, All-Powerful, Eternal God. To get guidance on this issue, one can turn to the Holy Qur’ān which says that these beliefs are merely based on a misunderstanding of the nature of God. Allāh Ta‘ālā says in the Holy Qur’ān:

يَسْأَلُهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ ۝

Of Him do beg all that are in the heavens and the earth. Every day He *reveals Himself* in a different state. (Sūrah Al-Rahmān 55:30)

The fact of the matter is that Allāh Ta‘ālā does not undergo any changes whatsoever but He may choose to reveal or manifest Himself in different ways. Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad ^{as} explains this beautifully when he writes:

Relevant to a proper observance of my teaching it is essential that one should firmly believe that there is an all-Powerful, all-Sustaining Supreme Being, the Creator of everything, Changeless, Everlasting and Eternal... Although He is One, and absolutely unique, His manifestations are diverse and multifarious. Whenever there

occurs in man a new change, for the changed man He becomes a new God, dealing with him on the basis of a fresh manifestation, the man witnessing a change in God in proportion to the change in himself – not that there occurs any change in God, He being Eternal, Changeless and most Perfect in Himself; but with every change in man for the better, God also reveals Himself to him in a fresh and clearer manifestation.²²

This understanding, which is based on the Holy Qur’ān, demonstrates that the words ‘birth of the Creator’, at the time of the creation of the Earth and people, were very likely to have been used to metaphorically indicate the occurrence of a new manifestation of God at that time. Allāh Ta’ālā was always present but when He decided to exercise His attribute of خالقیت (being the Creator), it was termed the ‘birth of the Creator’. In other words, the ‘birth’ of the Creator only means the metaphorical ‘birth’ of an attribute of Allāh Ta’ālā in relation to the creation of this specific universe. Therefore, the verse of the Holy Qur’ān quoted above can be very useful in successfully understanding and collaborating the beliefs of the Iroquois and Muslims.

Kisemanitōw

Many of the concepts of the Cree are similar to the Ojibway and this may have been result of their close and continuous interaction for a long period of time. As a result, the Cree also have the concept of One Supreme Being called *Kisemanitōw* (pronounced ‘Key-shay-mani-to’), which literally means ‘Great Spirit’. Based on their knowledge of several books written on Cree concepts and beliefs, Jennifer S. H. Brown and Robert Brightman write, “Kisemanitōw is the superior being of subarctic Algonquian cosmology, benevolently inclined towards humans and usually identified as the ultimate creator of the world and of living beings”²³. In his manuscript, George Nelson describes him from the Cree perspective as follows:

This one they have a great respect and veneration for but seldom it is (as far as I can learn) that they sacrifice or pray to him, i.e., make speeches, which tho’ extempore I consider as much prayers as tho’ they are composed after the most deliberate and mature reflection; and many parts of them so simple, plain, natural, and withal so sublime that I frequently felt great pleasure in attending to them.²⁴

Nelson goes on to say that the Cree acknowledge *Kisemanitōw* “as the Supreme and absolute Master of all, but more or rather as a passive *Deity* than as He really is”²⁵. Nelson also translates

the term *Kisemanitōw* as the “Greatly Charitable Spirit”²⁶ and this hints at the emphasis placed by the Cree at the graciousness and benevolence of God. These observations by Nelson and other scholars demonstrate that the Cree are also fundamentally united with Islām in their belief in the One God. It has already been demonstrated in this chapter that Allāh Ta‘ālā, as described in the Holy Qur’ān, is also Benevolent or Caring (الرحمن), the Creator and Originator of the world (الخالق), as well as Passive to some extent (الصمد). Furthermore, it should be noted that God is described as the Master of all by the Cree and other Aboriginal groups and this can be equated to the attribute of مالک (Master) or مولی (Lord) as discussed in the Holy Qur’ān:

... فَأَقِمُْوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ ۝

... Therefore observe Prayer and pay the Zakat, and hold fast to Allāh. He is your Master. An excellent Master and an excellent Helper! (Sūrah Al-Hajj 22:79)

However, it appears that the Cree perhaps go too far in emphasizing the صمدیت or Independence of God and pay very little attention to praying to Him. This shows that, like the case of the Iroquois, they do not believe in an All-Powerful God and this may have caused them to emphasize on the importance of other spirits. They do this by sacrificing for them, performing dances and ceremonies in their honour, and going to great lengths to interact and even bond with them. Some of these spirits are discussed in the next chapter. In dialogue, Muslims can benefit from the extensive knowledge that the Cree heritage presents in regards to the functions of various spirits while the Cree can benefit from the Islāmic concept of the All-Powerful God, Who is the only One Who listens to and responds to prayers.

The Benefits of this Study

There are some scholars who reject the claim that the Aboriginals ever had the belief of a Single, Supreme God and consider this belief among them today a result of Christian influence. This of course is not accepted by the Aboriginals themselves who insist that this belief always existed among them. In any case, having studied the beliefs of three main Aboriginal groups of Canada, it is quite clear that their understanding is very close to Islām and this can ultimately lead to a very interesting and fruitful dialogue between the two faiths, *Inshā’ Allāh!* (God Willing) Also, the Aboriginal perspective of having had this belief in a single Creator for centuries is a

blow to the theory of some atheists who consider the belief in One God to have been the result of evolution and the advancement of the human mind.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONCEPT OF ANGELS

The world of Aboriginal spirituality is filled with various types of spirits and supernatural beings as discussed in chapter 2 and a closer study reveals that some of them are very similar to the concept of Angels in Islām. It is very possible that the concept of spirits or supernatural beings, which are believed to be in control of various forces of nature, has actually devolved over time from the concept of Angels. As expressed in the following verse of the Holy Qur'ān, Angels are spirits who have a very important role in the execution of the will of Allāh Ta'ālā:

...لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ ○

...who disobey not Allāh in what He commands them and do as they are commanded. (Sūrah Al-Tahrīm 66:7)

What is being suggested here is that since there is a great emphasis in Aboriginal faiths on the relationship of the natural world with the spirit world, it is very possible that the original teachings were about Angels and their ability to enforce the will of the Great Spirit or Supreme Creator by influencing forces of nature. Over time, some of these 'spirits' or Angels were given too much importance and emphasis resulting in a slightly lesser focus on the Supreme Being and eventually, some groups even began fearing some of these spirits as independent beings. This chapter shall discuss those spirits of the Ojibway, the Iroquois, and the Cree which seem to be very similar to the Angels of Islām.

The *Manitous*

The Ojibway have many mythical stories revolving around the concept of *manitous*. As discussed in the previous chapter, the word *manitou* has many different connotations. As a result, the same word is used to refer to different types of mythical beings. However, the description of some of these *manitous* falls strikingly close to that of Angels in Islām and the following comprehensive note by Johnston illustrates this further:

Kitchi-Manitou created the manitou beings and forces and infused them, to various degrees, into beings and objects.

In creating Sky Woman and other manitous that dwell among the stars and beyond the Earth, Kitchi-Manitou endowed them with immortality, virtue, and wisdom. It is to them that men and women turn in their vision quests and purification rites for the betterment of their inner beings.

Cohabiting the Earth with human beings and other creatures are a range of other manitous. There are those whose mandate is to preside over plant and animal species. There are also those who dwell at the four cardinal points (North, East, South and West); these muses have jurisdiction over creative talent and over the accuracy of stories, laws, insights, wisdom, and the beauty of language. Calling on the muses to assist in the creation of a story was a sacred act. Cohabiting the cardinal points were other manitous that presided over human destinies, well-being, youth and old age.

As benefactors, the manitous were welcome. Men and women were not afraid of the proximate manitous, addressing them and soliciting their favors as friends.¹

After reading the above explanation of *manitous* carefully, it can be realized that this concept is amazingly close to the concept of Angels in Islām. More light is shed on this subject in a story of the Ojibway in which Wauboozoo asks his grandmother, N'okomiss, questions about the *manitous*, their purpose, where they dwelt, what influence they had and so on and so forth. Her reply is recorded by Johnston in the following quotation:

They are there even though you can't see them. You can sense them. And you can feel them touch your inner being. If you get a feeling that you ought not do something but should put it off, it is the manitous' way of warning you. If you get a feeling that something's going to happen, pay attention; it is the manitous letting your soul know. If you see and hear things in a dream, it is the manitous entering your being and your world through the dream to let you know of certain events that are about to occur. On the other hand, your dream may be scenes in your passage

from this reality through the world of dreams, of the spirit, to a different level of existence and being. These are signs.²

Furthermore, the role of the *manitous* in relation to the spiritual needs of man is discussed in the following quotation of the same author:

In addition to their physical needs, men and women had spiritual needs, for which they had to address manitous who presided over matters of spirit. These manitous resided not in humankind's world, as did other manitous, but in the skies, in the stars, and beyond... only a few who possessed spiritual medicine could gain the attention and audience of these beings. Only these people were so privileged by virtue of their respect and their character to attract the attention of the manitous and receive guidance in living a life that was in harmony with the seasons and the Earth...³

Based on the above quotations, the concept of *manitous* in the Ojibway can be summarized in the following points:

1. They were created by God
2. They can help man in his spiritual progress
3. Different *manitous* have different duties
4. They cannot be seen
5. They can inspire humans
6. Some *manitous* reside in the skies and stars

All these six characteristics of the *manitous* are the same as those of Angels in Islām. First, just like the *manitous*, the Angels are all created by Allāh Ta'ālā Himself as He states in the Holy Qur'ān.

أَمْ خَلَقْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِنَاثًا وَهُمْ شَاهِدُونَ ۝

Did We create the Angels females while they were witnesses?" (Sūrah Al-Sāffāt 37:151)

Second, just as the Ojibway seek to have a connection with the *manitous* through purification rites and vision quests for the betterment of their inner beings, the Muslims are taught to try and develop a relationship with Angels so that they can progress spiritually. Allāh Ta'ālā states in the Holy Qur'ān:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخْفُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَلَا تَبْشُرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ۝

نَحْنُ أَوْلِيُّكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهُونَ أَنْفُسُكُمْ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَدَّعُونَ ۗ
 نُزِّلَ مِنْ عَفْوٍ رَّحِيمٍ ۝

As for those who say, ‘Our Lord is Allāh,’ and then remain steadfast, the Angels descend on them, saying: ‘Fear ye not, nor grieve; and rejoice in the Garden that you were promised. ‘We are your friends in this life and in the Hereafter. Therein you will have all that your souls will desire, and therein you will have all that you will ask for — ‘An entertainment from the Most Forgiving, the Merciful.’ (Sūrah Hā Mīm Al-Sajdah 41:31-33)

These verses clearly demonstrate how close the Islāmic concept of Angels is to the concept of *manitous*. By forming a relationship with them, one can advance spiritually and reach a very high status and become a friend of the Angels. This is exactly what the Ojibway seek in their vision quests. In such a quest, a person would go deep into the forest or some other secluded area like a cave and meditate and try to see a dream in which a *manitou* would appear to him. This *manitou* would become a friend or a guardian for that person and would be deemed a personal *manitou* and would be sought for protection throughout one’s life. Comparatively, Islām also teaches that Angels can aid men and this is sometimes done through dreams. Hadhrat Mirzā Bashīruddīn Mehmūd Ahmad ^{ra} writes in *Malā’ikatullāh* (Angels of Allāh), “Angels give testimony in various ways. For example, in a dream, they reveal the truthfulness of a Prophet. One person may be an enemy of the Prophet and considers him a liar but the Angels place such a thought in his heart through a dream that he accepts [the truth of] the Prophet”⁴.

Third, the Angels of Islām have different duties and tasks assigned to them just like the *manitous* of the Ojibway. Hadhrat Mirzā Bashīruddīn Mehmūd Ahmad ^{ra} illustrates this very beautifully in the same book when he writes:

The tenth task of the Angels is that they are the last cause of the laws of nature and whatever is happening in the world is all a result of the influence of the [work of the] Angels. For example, rain falls, wind blows, rays of the sun reach [us], poison has its effect, an antidote has its effect, etc. All this is happening because of the influence of the Angels and there is nothing that can have an effect without their influence. This does not mean that poison is not poison by itself or that an antidote is not an antidote by itself. Instead, what it means is that poison cannot have any effect until the Angel, who controls poison, allows it to. Similarly, an antidote cannot have any effect until the Angel, who controls antidotes, orders it to. This applies to everything. As a result, in various places of the Holy Qur’ān, it is stated that the falling of rain,

⁴ Translation, from the original Urdu, of this and other quotations from this book is done by the author.

the movement of the winds, and several other tasks are entrusted to the Angels... Angels are fulfilling the duties of various departments of the law of nature.⁵

The above quotation leaves no ambiguity in the fact that Angels have different duties and they are responsible for the different workings of nature and this task is the same as that of the *manitous*.

Fourth, both Angels and *manitous* are believed to be hidden and cannot be seen and the Islāmic concept is again explained very beautifully in the same book:

The second matter about the Angels, that should be remembered, is that they are such a spiritual creation that they cannot be seen in their original form by man with the use of these eyes. If they are seen with these eyes, they would be in a state other than their real form. In other words, in order to see Angels, either we will not have these physical eyes and spiritual eyes would be needed instead or if they are seen with these eyes, then, the Angels would not be in their real form. Hence, Allāh Ta‘ālā states:

وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَاهُمْ مَلَكَ لَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ رِجَالًا وَلَلَبَسْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مَا يَلْبَسُونَ ۝١٠†

These people ask why Angels do not descend. The fact is that if Angels come, they would only come in the form of man. Then, they would be able to see.⁶

This quotation also gives further proof that the concept of *manitous* in the Ojibway thought is actually a partially distorted concept of Angels which has been presented by Islām.

Fifth, in a story of the Ojibway, N’okomiss explains that the *manitous* can inspire one to do good and warn a person about evil. Comparatively, Hadhrat Mirzā Bashīruddīn Mehmūd Ahmad ^{ra} explains that one of the tasks of Angels is also to inspire man to do good and place good thoughts in the mind and this can help one to develop a relationship with the Angels and progress spiritually. He explains, “The seventeenth task of the Angels is to place a good inspiration and a good thought in the heart of every person. This is the task of those Angels who have been appointed separately for every person. In fact, this process of Angels inspiring goodness in the hearts of men takes place under the authority of the Angel Gabriel ^{as}”⁷. The following Hadīth sheds more light on this subject:

عن عبد الله بن مسعود قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إن للشيطان لمة بابن آدم و للملك لمة فامالمة الشيطان فايعاد بالشر و تكذيب بالحق و إما لمة الملك فايعاد بالخير و تصديق بالحق فمن وجد ذلك فليعلم انه من الله فليحمد الله و من وجد الاخرى فليتعوذ بالله من

† Sūrah Al-An‘ām 6:10.

الشيطان الرجيم

‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd^{ra} reported that Allāh’s Messenger^{sa} said, “Indeed, the devil has an approach to the son of Adam as the Angel has an approach (to him). As for the approach of the devil, it is an assurance of the evil and rejection of the truth. And as for the approach of the Angel, it is an assurance of what is good and a confirmation of the truth – so, when one finds that, let him know that it is from Allāh and let him praise Allāh. And if one finds the other, he should seek refuge in Allāh from the accursed devil”.⁸

It is very clear from this quotation that the Islāmic concept of Angels aiding in the spiritual needs of man is parallel to the Ojibway concept of *manitous* aiding man in spiritual needs. What is even more interesting is that the Ojibway also have a concept of the ‘Evil One’, known as *Matchi-auwish*, and those of ‘his kind’ who can have negative influences on people and this appears to be similar to the concept of Satan and ‘his helpers’ in Islām.

Sixth, a special group of *manitous* is believed to be residing somewhere in the skies and the stars and beyond. These *manitous* too have the job of taking care of the spiritual needs of man. This concept also has incredible similarities with the Islāmic concept of Angels. Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad^{as}, the Promised Messiah, states:

Deep reflection over the Holy Qur’ān discloses that for the development of man, and indeed for the external and internal development of the whole universe, some intermediaries are needed. It appears clearly from certain indications in the Qur’ān that some of the pure beings that are called Angels have distinct relationship with heavenly bodies. Some of them drive the wind and some cause the rain to descend and some others cause other influences to descend upon the earth. There is no doubt that those pure creations would be related to the bright and illumined stars that are in heaven, but this relationship should not be deemed to be the relationship that exists between every animate and its soul. Those pure spirits have, on account of the brightness and light that they possess, spiritually an indeterminate relationship with the bright stars which is so strong that, if it were to be supposed that those pure spirits had departed from those stars, the faculties of the latter would be upset. It is through the hidden power of those spirits that the stars carry out their functions. It might be said that as God Almighty is, as it were, the life of the universe, those illumined spirits are, as it were, the life of the planets and stars and by their departure the condition of the planets and the stars is bound to be disrupted. No one has ever differed that all the stars and planets in heaven are occupied all the time in the development and perfection of the earthly universe. It is a proved verity that all vegetables, minerals and animals are influenced day and night by heavenly planets.

Even an ignorant peasant believes that the light of the moon fosters the size of fruits and that sunshine helps to ripen and sweeten them and certain winds increase their quantity. As the visible universe is developed through the influence of heavenly bodies, there can be no doubt that the invisible universe is, by the command of God Almighty, influenced by the bright spirits which have such a strong relationship with the bright heavenly bodies as the soul has with the body.⁹

The above quotation is only a small extract from the various writings of the Promised Messiah^{as} on this issue but it is already very clear that the Ojibway concept of *manitous* ultimately has the same source as the Islāmic concept, that is, Allāh Ta‘ālā, and adherents of both religions can greatly enhance their understanding of *manitous* or Angels with mutual dialogue.

The Good Spirit and the Evil Spirit

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the creation story of the Iroquois speaks of a woman coming down from the sky and giving ‘birth’ to the Creator. Slightly different versions of this story exist but they are all united in the main points. The version recorded by Tehanetorens states that she bore twins, one of whom is the ‘Good Spirit’ (the Creator) and the other is the ‘Evil Spirit’. In order to illustrate this concept, an extract of this story, as told by Tehanetorens, is quoted below (along with its pictographs).



One who became the Good Spirit was born first. The other, the Evil Spirit, while being born, caused his mother so much pain that she died during his birth.



The Good Spirit immediately took his mother’s head and hung it in the sky. It became the sun. The Good Spirit, from his mother’s body, fashioned the moon and stars and placed them in the sky.



The rest of his mother’s body he buried under the earth. That is why living things find nourishment from the soil. They spring from Mother Earth.



The Evil Spirit put darkness in the west sky to drive the sun before it.



The Good Spirit created many things which he placed upon the earth. The Evil Spirit tried to undo the work of his brother by creating evil. The Good Spirit made tall and beautiful trees such as the pine and hemlock.



The Evil Spirit stunted some trees. In others, he put knots and gnarls.

He covered some with thorns, and placed poison fruit on them...



The Good Spirit made animals such as the deer and the bear.



The Evil Spirit made poisonous animals, lizards, and serpents to destroy the animals of the Good Spirit's creation...¹⁰

The story goes on to discuss how the Evil Spirit tried to undo the work of his brother by creating everything harmful. Finally, the Good Spirit created man out of clay and bestowed a protecting spirit upon his creation. He then tells his brother to stop his evil work. The Evil Spirit refuses and is challenged by his brother to a duel over the control of earth. He accepts and they fight for several days and the Evil Spirit is ultimately defeated. The Good Spirit then banishes his brother to a dark cave where he must always remain. After that, a description of the Evil Spirit's servants is given in the following words:



But the Evil Spirit has wicked servants who roam the earth. These wicked spirits can take the shape of any creature that the Evil Spirit desires them to take. They are constantly influencing the minds of men, thus causing men to do evil things...



The Good Spirit continues to create and protect mankind. He controls the spirits of good men after death. The Evil Spirit takes charge of the souls of wicked men after death. ¹¹

The Good Spirit described in this story is also called the 'Creator' or *Shongwàyadihs:on*. From an Islāmic perspective, this story as a whole has to be seen as metaphorical because it attributes certain weaknesses to God. In the previous chapter, it has already been stated that based on the Holy Qur'ān, the 'birth of the Creator' can be seen as a metaphorical indication of the beginning of the exercise of an attribute of God, that is, الخالق (The Creator). Now, when one looks at the details of the story, it appears that the work of the Good Spirit is a metaphor for the work of an Angel of God who created the world at the command of God Himself. In other words, when the

attribute of God, الخالق (The Creator), began to exercise according to His will, He chose an Angel to carry out His will. Overtime, the Angel in the story perhaps began to be seen as the Creator Himself. Even in the language of the Holy Qur'an, some acts are attributed both to Allāh Ta'ālā and the Angels and this is clearly demonstrated in the following verses, one of which attributes the cause of death to Allāh Ta'ālā and the other to the Angel of death:

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ مُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ۝

How can you disbelieve in Allāh? When you were without life, He gave you life, and then He will cause you to die, then restore you to life, and then to Him shall you be made to return. (Sūrah Al-Baqarah 2:29)

قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ ۝

Say, 'The Angel of death that has been put in charge of you will cause you to die; then to your Lord will you be brought back.' (Sūrah Al-Sajdah 32:12)

Despite these verses, in the mind of a Muslim, a clear distinction between the One God and the Angels, who only act upon His orders, is always present. When it is said that 'the Angel has done something', it only means that Allāh Ta'ālā commanded him to do so. In fact, at many instances in the Holy Qur'an, Allāh Ta'ālā refers to Himself as 'We' instead of 'I' and one reason is to refer to the Angels and other forces of nature that work according to the will of Allāh. As a result, it is possible that in the traditions of the Iroquois, the same kind of language was used to attribute the act of creation to both the Good Spirit (an Angel) as well as *Shongwàyadihs:on* but over time, the distinction was lost in the minds of the Iroquois. Similarly, a Muslim would see it as a weakness that the Evil Spirit is given this much veneration in comparison to God. Some Iroquois are even of the opinion that he is equal to God and from the Islāmic perspective, this is again perhaps the result of the loss of that distinction between God and His Angels. It may also have been the result of human thought, which found it difficult to attribute the creation of evil to God Al-Mighty. In this respect, when dialogue between the Iroquois and Muslims takes place, the Iroquois can perhaps benefit from the Qur'anic teachings which clearly state that Allāh Ta'ālā created everything with a purpose and by way of wisdom and even in the creation of evil (or شر) there is definitely wisdom. For instance, Allāh Ta'ālā states:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا

سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ۝

Those who remember Allāh while standing, sitting, and *lying* on their sides, and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth: "Our Lord, Thou hast not

created this in **vain**; nay, Holy art Thou; save us, then, from the punishment of the Fire”. (Sūrah Āle Imrān 3:192)

Nevertheless, in essence, the Iroquois story portrays the Good Spirit as someone who represents everything good and positive while the Evil Spirit represents everything bad and negative. In a similar sense, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Islām speaks of Angels as good spirits who help mankind in various positive ways while Satan and the evil beings or spirits associated with him try to harm mankind spiritually in different ways. One startling similarity between the Iroquois concept of the Evil Spirit and the Islāmic concept of Satan is that both have ‘servants’ who can influence other men to do evil. The following verses of the Holy Qur’ān illustrate this further:

إِنَّمَا ذَلِكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ يُخَوِّفُ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُونِ إِن كُنتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ۝

It is Satan who only frightens his friends; so fear them not but fear Me, if you are believers. (Sūrah Āle ‘Imrān 3:176)

...وَمَنْ يَكُنِ الشَّيْطَانُ لَهُ قَرِينًا فَسَاءَ قَرِينًا ۝

...And whoso has Satan for his companion, *let him remember that* an evil companion is he. (Sūrah Al-Nisā’ 4:39)

These verses show that there is a parallel between the Islāmic and Iroquois concepts of Satan or the Evil Spirit as both see him capable of befriending others and turning them into his servants. Therefore, understanding the Iroquois creation story in a metaphorical sense and seeing the Good Spirit as only an Angel and the Evil Spirit as Satan can benefit greatly in noticing similarities between the two concepts.

Dah-gwa-nonh-en-yend

There are several examples of spirits in the traditions of the Iroquois and an interesting and important one among them is the Spirit of the Wind or *Dah-gwa-nonh-en-yend*. One Seneca legend about him speaks of stone giants and how they once decided to destroy the Seneca nation of the Iroquois. They gathered and started to march towards the land of the Seneca. Jesse J. Cornplanter describes what happens next in the following words:

On their way they had to pass through a long deep ravine. (As they were intent on destruction of human race, they were very bold and even defied all to stop them.) While they were going along within this deep ravine, they started to sing their marching War Song. The Great Spirit looked down and saw what is about to happen

to his own people, the Senecas; then he had a compassion and called on the “Spirit of the Wind” to stop the march of these giants by causing wind to blow on this big group of beings...

So the “Spirit of the West Wind” he, the master and supreme of all Wind-Spirits, heeded the call of the “Great Spirit,” and the wind did blow as no wind ever [blew] before... It blew so hard that it scraped the surface of the earth and rocks, levelling off hills and mountains as it went along. It came on, until it reached this certain ravine where these Stone Giants were then marching. With all its fury, it blew so hard that the sides of this ravine caved-in. First it started by taking off the tops of this big ravine and throwing the rocks into the ravine and burying the Stone Giants alive.¹²

This story provides a glimpse into the concept of spirits which the Iroquois associate with different forces of nature. Other legends speak of the Frost Spirit or the Thunder Spirit and it is very interesting to note that the Iroquois believe them to be in control of these forces of nature. As mentioned earlier, this is a concept very similar to Islāmic teachings. According to Hadhrat Mirzā Bashīruddīn Mehmūd Ahmad^{ra}, one of the tasks of the Angels is that “they are the last cause of the laws of nature and whatever is happening in the world is all a result of the influence of the [work of the] Angels. For example, rain falls, wind blows... All this is happening because of the influence of the Angels and there is nothing that can have an effect without their influence”¹³. The fact of the matter is that the Iroquois concept of certain spirits being in control of nature is very close to Islām. The only difference is that the Iroquois give a lot of respect to some of these spirits and in their honour, they even perform certain dances and make offerings of tobacco. Nevertheless, the similarities are numerous enough for a very productive dialogue between them and the Muslims.

***Ātayōhkanak* and the Shaking Lodge Ceremony**

Just like the other Aboriginal groups, Cree religious thought is also full of different kinds of spirit beings called the *Ātayōhkanak* but the unique thing is that among the Cree and even some Ojibway groups, they are believed to take a physically influential role in the everyday lives of humans. Certain spirits are considered to be good while others are considered evil and some can protect humans while most are capable of harming them. Reading George Nelson’s first-hand and second-hand accounts of the involvement of these spirits in everyday life can leave one fascinated by the stories surrounding them. They discuss how these spirits can be invoked at a

ceremony known as the shaking lodge ceremony or the shaking tent ceremony and once they are invoked, they can converse with a live audience and answer their questions about the future or dead relatives or stolen objects while remaining hidden inside the tent. A very brief description of this ceremony is given in the *Encyclopedia of Native American Religions* under the title “Shaking Tent Ceremony”:

A ceremony practiced among Algonquian groups for the purpose of healing, divining, and prophesying. It was conducted by a Shaking Tent Shaman, who possessed a number of powers, including the ability to summon and communicate with spirits. The presence of the spirits in the lodge would cause it to shake violently, hence the name of the ceremony.

The shaman sought spiritual assistance for a number of purposes, including to diagnose and treat illness, to find lost persons or objects, to determine the well-being of absent friends or relatives, and to prophesy future events... The shaking tent shaman was often bound hand and foot with the strongest thongs and suspended within the lodge, to be released by the spirits. Different voices and animal sounds could sometimes be heard during the ceremony as well as rapid conversation between the shaman and the spirits in an archaic version of the Native language. Other characteristics of the ceremony included the singing, accompanied by a drum and rattle, of personal dream songs at intervals during the ceremony, the attainment of a trance state by the shaman, and sparks of light indicating the presence of spirits in the lodge. The shaman generally performed the ceremony alone in a tent or lodge built for the purpose.

The ceremony has been described among the Cree, Menominee, Montagnais, Ojibway, Ottawa, Saulteaux, and other Algonquian groups in the United States and Canada. Early missionaries attributed the practice to paganism and attempted to discredit the shaman and to obliterate the ceremony.¹⁴

George Nelson provides a first-hand, detailed account of this ceremony on pages 102 to 107 of the book, *The Orders of the Dreamed*, and it makes for a most fascinating read of the interaction that happens from a barrel-shaped lodge (approximately 3 feet in diameter), inside which is stationed a shaman who invokes the spirits and helps in their communication with the audience outside. At one point, the shaman invites him to see one of the spirits. Nelson describes his experience as follows:

I accepted the offer and thrust my head [into the lodge or tent from] underneath, and being upon my back I looked up and near the top observed a light as of a Star in a Cloudy night about 1 ½ in. Long and 1 broad; tho' dim, yet perfectly distinct. Tho' they all appear as lights, some larger and others smaller, this one was denominated the Fisher Star [Cree *ocēkatak*], the name by which they designate the Plough. I

believe *we* call it, or Great Bear, from the supposed resemblance it bears to that animal, the fisher...¹⁵

The above experience has been quoted here only for the sake of getting some insight into Spirit-human interaction that the Cree believe in. It is very likely that such ceremonies are extremely rare nowadays especially due to Christian suppression and elimination of such practices over a long period of time. As mentioned earlier, it is not the purpose of this dissertation to discuss all of the various kinds of spirits and their various kinds of powers and influences according to Cree belief. Instead, only those spirits shall be discussed which bare similarities to the Angels of Islāmic theology and a short note on the evil spirit is also given as it bears a resemblance to Satan.

Pawākan

The *pawākan* refer to those spirits that the Cree seek in vision quests for the sake of protection. Jennifer H.S. Brown and Robert Brightman describe the *pawākan* in the following words:

The Cree noun *pawākan* and its Ojibwa cognate refer to any nonhuman agent who enters into an enduring relationship with a human being, bestowing information, technical and spiritual abilities, and sometimes physical aid. In return, the human being is required to respect the *pawākan*, carry out its wishes and instructions and offer to it gifts such as tobacco, food, and manufactured goods. Tobacco has particular importance both as an offering and as a signal of the desire to communicate. Many of the beings identified as *pawākan* by Crees are members of a taxonomic class called 'spirit' in English [Cree *ahcāk*]; these are often associated with biophysical phenomena such as the winds, the sun, the moon, and thunder, and with particular animal species... The human-*pawākan* relationship, with its components of love, respect, obligation and danger, exemplifies the uncertainties and dynamics of interaction between humans and nonhuman beings more generally. The *pawākan* was distinguished from these other entities by the enduring character of its tie to a specific human dependant.¹⁶

While reading the above quotation, a person of the Muslim Faith can only marvel at the astronomical similarities that the *pawākan* hold with the Angels of Islām. As illustrated earlier in this chapter, Islām also encourages its followers to try and build a relationship with Angels

who can help one advance spiritually and protect him or her against spiritual dangers. Hadhrat Mirzā Bashīruddīn Mehmūd Ahmad ^{ra} illustrates this further when he writes:

... There are two kinds of Angels. First, there are those, one or two of whom, are appointed to stay with every person. Hence, Allāh Ta‘ālā says:

إِنَّ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ لَّمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ ۖ

There is no soul upon whom a guardian is not appointed. This shows that there is an Angel appointed with every person. The second type of Angels is made up of those, each one of whom has a relationship with every person and their influence affects, more or less, each person. As a result, Gabriel ^{as} influences everyone. Such Angels have servants who cause their influences to affect other things.¹⁷

Similarly, it has also been illustrated earlier that Angels, like the spirits of Cree, are associated with different physical phenomena like the wind, the sun, the moon, and so on, as helpers of Allāh Ta‘ālā and executors of His will. Therefore, these similarities can greatly aid in discourses between the Muslims and the Cree.

Macimanitōw

The evil spirit of the Cree is called *Macimanitōw* or *Key-jick-oh-kay*. George Nelson describes Cree beliefs about him in the following words:

... [Key-jick-oh-kay] appears to me as to mean “he who made the Day or Skies or resides in the Sky,” &c. This one they represent wicked, and terrible, inexorable to the highest degree; always plotting evil, and endeavouring to circumvent the rest of the creation; is always jawing and bawling... Their Horror of the Devil is so great, that no one ever utters it but when unavoidable; and if thro’ inadvertency or ignorance one of their children should mention it he is severely reprimanded by all who hear.¹⁸

This being is also described as “conceptually opposed and subordinate in power to... Kisemanitōw...”¹⁹. Based on this information, it can easily be understood that this being is equivalent to the Satan of the Holy Qur’ān. Allāh Ta‘ālā describes him as قَسَاءَ قَرِينًا [Evil Companion][§], عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ [open enemy]^{**}, يَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْقَحْشَاءِ [enjoins upon you what is foul]^{††}, and وَيُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ

[‡] Sūrah Al-Tāriq 86:5.

[§] Sūrah Al-Nisā’ 4:39.

^{**} Sūrah Al-Baqarah 2:209.

يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَمِيلَهُمْ سَلْبًا بِعِيدًا [And Satan desires to lead them far astray]**. Also, Islām considers Satan to be subordinate to the power of Allāh Ta‘ālā. Consequently, it is quite clear that the Cree are actually pointing to Satan when they refer to *Macimanitōw* and this concept can also be very useful for dialogue.

Contrasts and Similarities

It should be noted that this chapter largely discusses only those kinds of spirits that resemble the Angels discussed in the Holy Qur’ān and there is also some discussion of the concept of Satan. However, Aboriginal spirituality is filled with a vast number of different kinds of spirits with different qualities, tasks, duties, and powers and many of them are quite different from the Islāmic concepts. Some of them even resemble the popular concepts of demons which have the ability to possess humans. Nevertheless, there is no doubt in the fact that each of the large Aboriginal groups of Canada that are being studied in this dissertation share a belief in spirits that have the power to influence forces of nature and help humans as guardians in a number of different ways. These beliefs are fundamentally united with Islām. An added benefit of this discussion is that it is proved that those spirits of Aboriginal spirituality which resemble Angels do in fact exist because several distinct faiths have given testimony in their favour. Anyhow, this can obviously help the adherents of Islām and Aboriginal faiths to increase each other’s understanding of Angels or spirits through dialogue and discussions.

†† Sūrah Al-Baqarah 2:269.

** Sūrah Al-Nisā’ 4:61.

CHAPTER 5

MORAL TEACHINGS

An important article of faith in Islām is belief in the truthfulness of the books that were revealed to former prophets. These books dealt with a number of subjects including the nature of God, the arguments in favour of God's existence, the arguments of the truth of the prophets, the laws pertaining to good and evil acts, and so on. Comparatively, as discussed earlier, the Aboriginals possess no religious books whatsoever and religious knowledge was always transferred from generation to generation orally. Hartz describes this reality in the following words:

The tales that make up a tribe's sacred tradition are told and retold throughout a person's lifetime so that each man, woman, and child carries within himself or herself a knowledge of the tribe's culture and belief. Native American stories of creation and the actions of heroes and spirits are sacred to them in much the same way that the Bible is sacred to Christians and Jews; the Quran to Muslims; and the sutras, scriptural narratives that are often regarded as discourses of the Buddha, to Buddhists.¹

Moreover, these traditions, customs and rituals of their faith are considered an integral part of life. There is no other way of living life. They are taught these traditions from an early age so that they can adhere to them throughout their life. What can be noted is that these stories and legends tend to have moral messages of what should be done and what should be avoided. Since the Aboriginals are known to have been on this continent undisturbed for a very long period of time, their moral teachings can be understood to have come from a very ancient time period and these can only be logically compared with the teachings of the time period of Prophet Adam ^{as} or Prophet Noah ^{as}. The fact of the matter is that man has experienced four stages of progress ever since the beginning. This is better explained by Hadhrat Mirzā Bashīruddīn Mehmūd Ahmad ^{ra} in the following quotation:

یہ چار دور۔۔۔ درحقیقت انسانی تکمیل کے چار دور ہیں۔ آدم دور تمدن کا بانی ہے۔ نوح دور شریعت کا HERO موسس ہے۔ موسیٰ دور تفصیل کی بنیاد رکھنے والے ہیں اور محمد رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم دور تکمیل کے بانی ہیں۔ انسانیت کی تکمیل آدم نے کی۔ شریعت کی بنیاد نوح نے رکھی لیکن شریعت کی تفصیل موسیٰ نے بیان کی اس کے بعد محمد رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم شریعت کی تکمیل کے لئے اللہ تعالیٰ کی طرف سے مبعوث کئے گئے۔ آپ آئے اور آپ نے انسانیت اور تمدن کو بھی مکمل کیا۔ آپ نے شریعت کو بھی مکمل کیا اور آپ نے تفصیل شریعت کو بھی تکمیل تک پہنچایا۔ گویا وہ تینوں دور جو نامکمل تھے ان کو محمد رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم نے اپنے کمال تک پہنچا دیا۔۔۔ نوح نے بیتک دنیا کے سامنے سب سے پہلے شریعت پیش کی مگر اس میں وسعت نہیں تھی صرف عمق تھا اور وہ بھی چند موٹے موٹے مسائل کے متعلق۔ اس کے بعد موسیٰ نے جو شریعت پیش کی اس میں وسعت تو تھی مگر تمام امور میں عمق نہیں تھا لیکن محمد رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم نے شریعت کی گہرائیوں کو بھی مکمل کیا اور اس کی وسعت کو بھی مکمل کیا۔

These four periods... are actually the four periods of the perfection of man. Adam ^{as} was the founder of the period of civilization. Noah ^{as} was the hero of the period of [the establishment of a] law. Moses ^{as} was the one who placed the foundation for the period of expansion of the law and the Holy Prophet ^{sa} was the founder of the period of perfection. Humanity [or civilization] was shaped by Adam ^{as}. The foundation for laws was placed by Noah ^{as} while the details of the law were explained by Moses ^{as}. After that, the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{sa} was sent by Allāh Ta‘ālā for the completion [and perfection] of the law. He came and perfected the civilization as well as the culture [of man]. He also perfected the law and he perfected the details of the law as well. In other words, those three periods, which were all incomplete, were brought to perfection by the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{sa}... There is no doubt in the fact that Noah ^{as} was the first to present the law to the world. However, it did not have a wide scope. There was only depth in it and that too in regards to only a few basic matters. After that, the law presented by Moses ^{as} had a wide scope but it did not have depth in all matters. However, the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{sa} perfected the depths as well as the scope of the law.²

The above quotation has great insight that can help one understand the true nature of the teachings of the Aboriginals. The fact is that the legends and stories of the oral tradition have been apparently passed down for thousands of years and judging from the nature of the stories, it can be understood that they must have come from the very first period of man, that is, the period of Adam ^{as} when civilization was only beginning. As a result, in this respect, Aboriginal faiths perhaps have the greatest contrast with Islām as Islām is a religion from the fourth period of man and it has the most comprehensive *Shariah* [Law] in the world as the Holy Qur‘ān says:

الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيْتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا فَمَنِ اضْطُرَّ فِي مَخْمَصَةٍ غَيْرِ
مُتَجَانِفٍ لِإِيْمَانِهِ فَرِيقًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ٥

This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour upon you and have chosen for you Islām as religion. But whoso is forced by hunger, without

being wilfully inclined to sin, then, surely, Allāh is Most Forgiving, Merciful. (Sūrah Al-Mā'idah 5:4)

Even in the case of modern revivalist movements among the Aboriginals, the fact remains that they only organize and impose those same ancient teachings and even if something new is added, it is not universal as it is only meant for a specific nation. Nevertheless, despite these differences, discussions in this chapter will *Inshā' Allāh* (God willing) prove that there are some similarities between the moral teachings of the oral tradition and the Holy Qur'ān and their mutual aim is to produce virtuous human beings.

The Legends of the Ojibway

A study of the stories of the legendary heroes of the Ojibway reveals that there are some important teachings contained in them. In writing an introductory note on these heroes, Johnston writes:

The accounts of the manitous that were human or half human in form begin with the story of Ae-pungishimook, the West, who lusted for Winonah, a human woman. This manitou possessed her once every generation, begetting four sons – Maudjee-kawiss, Pukawiss, Cheeby-aub-oozoo, and Nana'b'oozoo – who became the cornerstones of the Anishinaubae heritage and brought lasting tradition to the Anishinaubae people. The sons' gifts were strength and a sense of history; drama and costume; chanting, music, and dream-vision quests; and the pipe of peace, as well as a living sense of human potentials and shortcomings.³

In other words, the stories about the four sons of Winonah teach traditions and a way of life to the Ojibway and this is a form of moral teaching that the Ojibway possess. These stories highlight both positive traits that one must adopt and negative traits that one must avoid. For example, at one point, some positive traits of Nana'b'oozoo are described as follows:

Nana'b'oozoo's concern for his friends and real compassion for others were traits that endeared him to his kin, his neighbours, and other Anishinaubaek. He often voluntarily did a service or undertook a cause for others, and he was regarded as unselfish and kind. He put an end to the harassment of two blind men by an inconsiderate young lout and exemplified that it was unfair for the whole to take advantage of the disabled. He gave spikes to the porcupines so they could protect themselves. He performed hundreds of small services for everything around him,

caring for his fellow human beings, elderly or infant, blind, disabled, or poor, and for bears, wolves, eagles, snakes, and beetles and trees, flowers, and blades of grass. To Nana'b'oozoo, care was not merely a sentiment or a word, but a deed to be carried out whenever someone needed it. No one had a better heart than he did.⁴

The above quotation discusses the same kind of moral messages that are found in the religion of Islām. At the same time as above, Nana'b'oozoo also became the one who reminded the Ojibway of the weaknesses of human beings and of the follies and mistakes that human beings can make and should try to avoid. Many stories which involve Nana'b'oozoo highlight his mistakes and foolish behaviour. Johnston writes, “Eventually, the Anishinaubaek applied the name ‘Nana'b'oozoo’ to anyone who committed blunders as a result of acting on impulse and instinct, rather than on reason and common sense. Nana'b'oozoo came to exemplify the foolishness that men and women are capable of. ‘Ha! Nana'b'oozoo!’ means ‘fool’ or ‘folly’”⁵. In other words, from the character of Nana'b'oozoo in the oral tradition, the Ojibway learned both positive and negative traits.

Another example of morality being a significant part of these stories is that of the *Weendigo*. Many people may simply disregard the stories about the *Weendigos* as superstition and fantastic. However, it is possible that these stories were simply metaphorical and meant to serve the purpose of giving moral messages. According to tradition, the *Weendigo* was “a giant manitou in the form of a man or a woman, who towered five to eight times above the height of a tall man.... Because it was afflicted with never-ending hunger and could never get enough to eat, it was always on the verge of starvation.”⁶ The *Weendigo* could only satisfy its hunger by eating human flesh but every time it did that, it grew and lusted even more for human flesh. Its features are also described to be ugly and horrifying. In other words, the *Weendigo* represented a very despicable being and represented the worst that one could possibly become. Johnston explains further:

It [the *Weendigo*] was a giant cannibal that fed only on human flesh, bones, blood. But the *Weendigo* represented not only the worst a human could do to another human being and ultimately to himself or herself, but exemplified other despicable traits. Even the term “*Weendigo*” evokes images of offensive traits. It may be derived from *ween dagoh*, which means “solely for self,” or from *weenin n'd'igoh*, which means “fat” or excess.⁷

If all the stories surrounding *Weendigos* were to be seen in the light of the above statement, it would become pretty clear that they are only meant to teach morality, especially the kind of morality needed in Ojibway society. Every time winter came, there was a scarcity of food and

there was a need to share and be unselfish. People were warned through these stories that if they were to act selfishly and greedily, it could result in starvation for the entire village or clan. Even Johnston expresses the same view of the purpose of these stories and goes on to explain the ‘modern *weendigoes*’ which he considers to be the ‘corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals’⁸ who are greedy for the hoarding of wealth. Comparatively, the Holy Qur’ān also strongly condemns greed and excess in the following verses:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنشَأَ جَنَّاتٍ مَّعْرُوسَاتٍ وَعَايِرَ مَعْرُوسَاتٍ وَالتَّنَحْلَ وَالزَّرْعَ مُخْتَلِفًا أُكْلُهُ وَالرَّيْحَانَ مُمْتَشِبًا وَعَايِرَ
مُمْتَشِبًا كُلُوا مِنْ ثَمَرِهِ إِذَا أَثْمَرَ وَآتُوا حَقَّهُ يَوْمَ حَصَادِهِ وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ۝

And He it is Who brings into being gardens, trellised and untrellised, and the date-palm and cornfields whose fruits are of diverse kinds, and the olive and the pomegranate, alike and unlike. Eat of the fruit of each when it bears fruit, but pay His due on the day of harvest and exceed not the bounds. Surely, Allāh loves not those who exceed the bounds. (Sūrah Al-An‘ām 6:142)

يَبْنَوعِ آدَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ۝

O children of Adam! look to your adornment at every *time and* place of worship, and eat and drink but exceed not the bounds; surely, He does not love those who exceed the bounds. (Sūrah Al-A‘rāf 7:32)

These verses and other traditions of the Holy Prophet ^{sa} can help in discussions between Muslims and the Ojibway about the issue of greed and how it is indeed a major sin that leads to other sins. Muslims can show the Ojibway the intensity and greatness with which Islām deals with this subject as a whole and how Islām does not contradict or challenge the moral teachings of Ojibway legends.

The *Gaiwí:yo*

Central to the Longhouse religion is the *Gaiwí:yo* (Code of Handsome Lake) which contains the accounts of the spiritual experiences of Handsome Lake and a strict moral code. It is described by Hirschfelder and Molin in the following words:

The code is a narrative of the visions and travels of the prophet Handsome Lake, a catalogue of sins and their punishment, a description of heaven and hell, a definition

of a good way of life, and a prescription for proper ceremonies to be performed in the Longhouse. The code is recited twice a year in short form by a local preacher during the first morning of the Midwinter Ceremony in January and during the Green Corn ceremony in August. The entire code is recited by professional speakers at a Six Nations meeting in the autumn of alternate years at each longhouse (except Tonawanda, where it occurs annually, and Sour Springs, which has an irregular schedule).⁹

The code was brought to Handsome Lake by four ‘messengers’ whom he saw in his visions. What is interesting is that the code specifically condemns the main causes of the moral degradation of the Iroquois society of the time, that is, the late 18th and early 19th centuries. While there definitely are moral lessons and teachings in the ancient traditions of the Iroquois, this code ambitiously organizes those moral teachings as well as introduces certain new commandments. The Iroquois retain and transfer the teachings of the code orally but Chief Jacob Thomas has helped Terry Boyle in writing it down in the book, *Teachings from the Longhouse*. Since a complete discussion of the entire code lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, only a couple of examples will be discussed.

Perhaps the most startling example of a law in this code which is identical to a law of the Qur’ān is its condemnation of alcohol in the following words as related by Chief Jacob Thomas:

The First Matter: “Deganigonhadé:nyons,” Meaning “Mind Changer”

... What you call “deganigonhadé:nyons” is what the messengers call the “mind changer” and was not given to the Ongwehónwe. This is what made the Creator feel sad when your relations delighted in consuming strong drink. It is not for your relations to use... It was only to be used as medicine, but they [the white people] have abused it, and it will cause many minds to split, and many will die from it.¹⁰

The code not only declares alcohol forbidden but goes into the details of the punishment that a habitual drinker of alcohol would face in the afterlife. A reading of the code would make one realize that the condemnation of alcohol is emphasized at several occasions and a strong sense of hatred for the negative effects of alcohol is invoked. The code of the Holy Qur’ān also forbids the consumption of alcohol in the following words:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِن نَّفْعِهِمَا وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلِ الْعَفْوَ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ٥

They ask thee concerning wine and the game of hazard. Say: ‘In both there is great sin and also *some* advantages for men; but their sin is greater than their advantage.’

And they ask thee what they should spend. Say: 'What you can spare.' Thus does Allāh make His commandments clear to you that you may reflect. (Sūrah Al-Baqarah 2:220)

In this sense, the Holy Qur'ān has a very unique position as it is the first law to forbid the drinking of alcohol 1400 years ago and by doing the same, the code of Handsome Lake has only acknowledged the greatness of the law of the Holy Qur'ān. As opposed to the moral codes of other religions, both the Holy Qur'ān and the *Gaiwí:yo* stand united in their condemnation of the destruction that alcohol is capable of causing. The same kind of unity is seen in the way the code regards boasting or arrogance a great evil in the following words:

Boasting (Gowihwagá:deh)

This is what the messengers said about a man boasting of his strength and power:

We heard a man boasting. He said he was the strongest man.

He depended on his strength and power, and it is true that he was a strong man. This made him proud and brought him great sin here on Earth. He used his strength and power to abuse mankind... The Creator did not want any person to abuse or hurt anyone. A person who kills another shall never see the land of the Creator. It is a sin to be proud of what you do.

The strong man should give thanks to the Creator for giving him this kind of gift. He should say, "I thank You for giving me this strength and power to help others the way You intended me to do."¹¹

Similarly, the Holy Qur'ān condemns arrogance and promotes humility in the following verses:

وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ ۝

'And turn not thy cheek away from men in pride nor walk in the earth haughtily; Surely, Allāh loves not any arrogant boaster'. (Sūrah Luqmān 31:19)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَأَخْبَتُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ۝

Verily, those who believe and do good works, and humble themselves before their Lord — these are the inmates of Heaven; therein shall they abide. (Sūrah Hūd 11:24)

When the above verses are compared with the teachings of Handsome Lake, one can find many similarities and realize that the ultimate purpose of both teachings is to emphasize the same virtues. Moreover, the *Gaiwí:yo* strongly condemns witchcraft, medicine charms, and abortion, and discusses the proper etiquettes of family life among many other things. The two examples

given here are only glimpses into the code which has many similarities with the commandments of the Holy Qur'an. Therefore, the Iroquois and the Muslims can help increase each other's understanding of morals by discussing the different aspects of those laws which are shared by the Holy Qur'an and the *Gaiwi:yo*.

Sacred Stories of the Cree

A study of Cree sacred stories recorded by Leonard Bloomfield in *Sacred Stories of the Sweet Grass Cree* (1930) can reveal a number of difficulties in judging the true nature and purpose of such stories. Many stories discuss a distant past before the birth of the first mortal, human beings when many of the animals lived, behaved and communicated like human beings. These stories commonly contain many fantastic features as many characters seem to have supernatural powers and capabilities and some stories also include indecencies and obscenities. Nevertheless, certain moral teachings can still be found in some stories and an example of this is given by Stan Cuthand, who experienced this reality in his Cree community:

There is a very strong relationship between Cree myths and Cree society. The stories of the mythical beings reinforced socially beneficial behaviour... For instance, the stories and ceremonies surrounding Pākahk, the skeleton being, reinforce sharing of food and all material goods. Pākahk is the helping spirit of the hunters to both Plains and Woods Cree. At Little Pine Reserve, a Mahtāhitōwin Dance or "Gift Exchange Dance" was held in the fall, to honour Pākahk. We went many times to this celebration as children, and were included in the ceremony of gift-giving and receiving. The ceremony began at the central tepee with a dance which included the passing of bladders full of grease, a favorite treat of Pākahk. As the ceremony continued everyone became involved. We wandered from tepee to tepee formally exchanging gifts after a brief formalized dance with gestures... This ceremony reinforced the ethic of sharing...¹²

Another example is the story entitled 'Fisherskin-Hat', narrated to Bloomfield by Coming-Day (a Cree informant). In this story, strange things do happen but the ultimate goal of the story is to emphasize certain moral values. The story is about Fisherskin-Hat, a young, handsome man whose good looks are stolen by Bearskin-Breeches, an ugly, hunchbacked man, through a trick. Then, both of them marry two sisters, the elder of whom marries Bearskin-Breeches, who now has good looks, and the younger sister marries Fisherskin-Hat, who now looks ugly. The story

provides long details of how the elder sister mistreats and makes fun of the ugly husband of her younger sister. Eventually, Fisherskin-Hat is able to get back his good looks and praises the younger sister for her respect for him despite his earlier ugly looks. The story emphasizes the fact that despite Fisherskin-Hat's bad looks, his hunting skills were still better than the other and good looks are not the only thing that a wife should seek in her husband.¹³ It is also interesting to note the family values emphasized by the girl's father near the end of the story when he says to her, "... so there, daughter, surely my son-in-law's father and his wife must be lonesome. You had better go there; do you now, in turn, take care of your husband's mother and father"¹⁴. The girl listens to this advice and the story ends with the words, "... and the young woman worked hard, taking care of her parents-in-law. She was very kind to them and took good care of her mother-in-law and of her father-in-law."¹⁵ Among the stories transcribed by Bloomfield, this story is unique as it is only about human beings and it sheds light on the importance of the family unit. This is comparable to the following beautiful injunction of the Holy Qur'an:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ إِنَّمَا يُبَلِّغُنَّ عَنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَيْهِمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُتٍ ۚ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا ۝

Thy Lord has commanded, "Worship none but Him, and *show* kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age with thee, never say unto them any word expressive of disgust nor reproach them, but address them with excellent speech. (Sūrah Banī Isrā'il 17:24)

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِضْلُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَىٰ الْمَصِيرِ ۝

And We have enjoined on man concerning his parents — his mother bears him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning takes two years — 'Give thanks to Me and to thy parents. Unto Me is the *final* return. (Sūrah Luqmān 31:15)

It can now be seen that the moral messages of the story and the commandments of the Holy Qur'an are indeed similar in nature. Therefore, through discussion and dialogue, the Cree can benefit much from the Qur'anic teachings which not only re-enforce these morals but also give reasoning for the purpose of each commandment and are complete in nature.

Universality

Having studied some of the moral teachings found in different stories of the oral tradition, it is quite clear that these teachings were meant for a specific group of people living in a specific environment. Even the code of Handsome Lake quite clearly condemns only the specific evils that plagued Iroquoian society of his time. Comparatively, Islām claims to be a universal religion with teachings meant for all the peoples of the world. Through discussion and dialogue, Aboriginals can test this claim of the Qur'ān and see if it can sufficiently address all of their specific needs and Muslims can also learn more from the moral teachings of the spiritual elders of the Aboriginals to become better people themselves.

CHAPTER 6

DIVINE GUIDANCE AND PROPHETS

The oral tradition of the Aboriginal Peoples is filled with stories about legendary heroes from long ago and the most central figure is usually the Trickster or Transformer as described below:

...the Trickster myths, which frequently but not always represent the Transformer as a comical character who steals light, fire, water, food, animals or even mankind and loses them or sets them loose to create the world as it is now (Raven among the Nuxalk, Tsimshian, Haida; Hare, Nanabozo or Nanabush among the Ojibwa; Frog in the Columbian Plateau; Coyote among the Blackfoot); and the Culture Hero myths, in which the Transformer appears as a human being of supernatural powers who brings the world into its present form by heroic feats (Glooscap of the Micmac, Maliseet, Abenaki).¹

It seems that many stories about the trickster or other heroes serve the purpose of entertainment. Some of these heroes, however, are credited with the introduction of certain rituals, practices, or ceremonies that define the heritage of the people. Still others stand out as important religious or spiritual personalities who had an extraordinary ability to connect to the spirit world, had powerful and meaningful dreams, and introduced those practices that helped others have similar spiritual experiences. These prominent personalities are the ones who could have been Prophets because the Holy Qur'ān states that Prophets were sent to every nation:

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ حَقَّقْنَا عَلَيْهِ الصَّلَاةَ
فَسَيَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَأَنظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ ۝

And We did raise among every people a Messenger, *preaching*: 'Worship Allāh and shun the Evil One.' Then among them were *some* whom Allāh guided and among

them were *some* who became deserving of ruin. So travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who treated *the Prophets* as liars! (Sūrah Al-Nahl 16:37)

Other than the above, as discussed in chapter 2, there are also some reformist, spiritual leaders who started several modern revivalist movements. From the Islāmic perspective, since there can be no Prophet after the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{sa} outside the law of the Holy Qur'ān, some of these leaders could simply have been spiritual guides as the Holy Qur'ān says:

...وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ

... And there is a Guide for every people. (Sūrah Al-Ra'd 13:8)

This possibility is further illustrated by the following quotation of Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad ^{as}, who gives examples of those who received revelations but were not prophets:

من كان يؤمن بالله و آياته فقد وجب عليه ان يؤمن بان الله تعالى يوحي الى من يشاء من عباده رسولا كان او غير رسول و يكلم من يشاء نبيا كان او من المحدثين الا ترى ان الله تعالى قد اخبر في كتابه انه كلم ام موسى و قال وَلَا تَخَافُ وَلَا تَحْزَنِي إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ و كذلك اوحى الى الحواريين و كلم ذالقرنين و اخبرنا به في كتابه.²

Whoever believes in Allāh and His verses, it is incumbent upon him that he believes that Allāh Ta'ālā reveals to whomsoever of His servants as He wills, whether he is a Messenger or not a Messenger. And He speaks to whomsoever He wills, whether he is a Prophet or among the *Muhaddathīn*. Don't you know that Allāh Ta'ālā has stated in his book [the Holy Qur'ān] that He spoke to the mother of Moses ^{as} and He said [to her]:

وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

[Fear not, nor grieve; for We shall restore him to thee, and shall make him one of the Messengers^{*}]. Then, in the same way, He revealed to the disciples of Hadhrat Isa ^{as} and He spoke to *Dhul Qarnain* and He informed us of this in His book [the Holy Qur'ān].[†]

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the Aboriginal experience of spirituality largely circles around dreams. It seems that the way Hadhrat Mirzā Tāhīr Ahmad th described this reality for the Aborigines of Australia also applies to the Aborigines of Canada. He writes:

Thus, a clear line has to be drawn between their religious beliefs and practices on the one hand and their rituals and superstitions on the other, which are of no real

^{*} Sūrah Al-Qasas 28:8.

[†] Translated by the author.

significance anyway. Superstitions and superstitious practices vary from tribe to tribe and there is no common heritage found among all the Aborigines. The issue of dreams is radically different. Like their belief in one God, their reliance on dreams as a means of Divine instruction is shared by all invariably. The dreams very often follow their contemplation on matters of grave importance. Hence, it is not unlikely that this contemplation is just another name for prayers. It has to be so because their contemplation, unlike that among the Buddhists, results in such dreams as are answers to them.³

This is exactly the case with the Aborigines of Canada. Comparatively, in Islām, true visions or dreams are also given great importance because they are considered a part of Prophethood as the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{sa} said:

رؤيا المؤمن جزء من ستة وأربعين جزءا من النبوة

The (good) dream of a faithful believer is a part of the forty-six parts of *An-Nubuwwa* (Prophethood).⁴

As a result, from the Islāmic perspective, it can be deduced that those special religious personalities, whether they were culture heroes or founders of modern revivalist movements, that had meaningful visions, dreams, and other spiritual experiences could have either been Prophets (if they came before the Holy Prophet^{sa}) or simply spiritual guides (if they came after the Holy Prophet ^{sa}). The only question that remains is in regards to the method of judging whether a legendary hero or spiritual reformer is in fact making true claims. For this purpose, one can get some help by studying what Hadhrat Mirzā Tāhir Ahmad th wrote on the Prophets of other nations. In a discussion on Krishna ^{as} of the Hindus, he writes:

Other episodes woven around the image of Krishna can also be read as parables and allegories rather than matter-of-fact statements. As regards the image of Krishna possessing four arms and wings, it can be symbolically interpreted to mean that highly ranked servants of God are gifted with extra faculties. The Holy Quran too, mentions wings in relation to the Holy Prophet ^{sa} of Islām. He is enjoined by God to lower his wing of mercy over the believers. Similarly, when Angels are mentioned as bearing different numbers of wings, it is their attributes which are referred to, and not physical wings.

But it often happens that religious allegories and parables are taken too literally by the followers of religions and thus their underlying significance is altogether missed. The image of Lord Krishna and what is shown to be around him, is no exception⁵.

Similarly, in a discussion on Buddha ^{as}, he writes, “A close examination of Buddha's biography reveals that in his lifestyle, he was not any different from other Prophets of God, who appeared in different parts of the world. There is a universality about the character and style of Prophets which can also be discerned in the life of Buddha”⁶. In the light of these statements of Hadhrat Mirzā Tāhir Ahmad ^{rh} and the aforementioned statement of Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad ^{as}, the legendary heroes or spiritual reformers of the Ojibway, Cree and Iroquois will be discussed in this chapter. These statements can also be used as guidelines for further study of prominent religious personalities of other Aboriginal groups.

Culture Heroes of the Ojibway

As discussed in chapter 5, the Ojibway tradition was brought to them by four half-human, half-*manitou* brothers and their names were Maudjee-kawiss, Pukawiss, Cheeby-aub-oozoo, and Nana'b'oozoo. In the Ojibway stories, discussions are made regarding the qualities, strengths and weaknesses that these brothers had. Each one contributed in a special way to the Ojibway heritage. Johnston writes that the legacy of Maudjee-kawiss was the practice of recording the people's heritage on sashes, scrolls, and stones: deeds, dreams, visions, chants, prophecies, stories, myths, and legends that related to the people's existence on Earth⁷. Pukawiss, on the other hand, is believed to have invented dances, initiated the custom of wearing garments during celebrations, endowed birds and animals and all creatures with vivid colors, and established festivals. It is from him that the Ojibway inherited their love for drama, dance, festivals, and elegant attire and their disposition for practical joking and dramatizing life⁸. What is more interesting though is the case of the other two brothers, that is, Cheeby-aub-oozoo and Nana'b'oozoo. These are the two brothers who contributed to the spiritual element of Ojibway thought and behaviour.

Nana'b'oozoo speaks to Kitchi-Manitou

Although many of the stories involving Nana'b'oozoo speak of his follies and apparently do not make him different from any other ordinary human being, there are certain striking exceptions. One particular story that makes him stand out the most is his direct communication

with *Kitchi-Manitou*. This is something that is very rare in the stories of the Ojibway because most of their communication for spiritual needs takes place with the *manitous* instead of *Kitchi-Manitou* directly. While describing this particular story, Johnston writes that Nana'b'oozoo was very fond of children and it so happens that a time comes when the children of his village are suddenly stricken with a severe case of melancholy which is so deep that they cease to laugh or smile. After trying several different things, Nana'b'oozoo gets frustrated and decides to speak to *Kitchi-Manitou* Himself regarding this issue. For this purpose, he goes in search of the highest mountain in the area, from whose summit he hails and cries out to the Creator. The response he gets is in the form of a riddle and that is 'Even stones have wings'. He is unable to decipher the meaning of these words but when he later takes a handful of pebbles and throws them over his shoulder in frustration, they turn into butterflies which ultimately become the cure for the unhappiness of the children⁹. If the entertaining features of this story are put aside, one thing that this story clearly demonstrates is that the Ojibway believed in a living, caring Creator Who can even communicate with people in times of need. Comparatively, Islām also declares that Allāh Ta'ala speaks to His people at will and whenever required. Although Nana'b'oozoo does not seem to have been a Prophet or even a spiritual guide, this particular story has been mentioned here for the sake of shedding light on the fact that the Ojibway do believe in direct communication with God.

Cheeby-aub-oozoo's Vision

Among the legendary heroes of the Ojibway, Cheeby-aub-oozoo would perhaps spark the greatest interest because of his Prophet-like qualities and behaviours. Johnston gives a considerably detailed account of his life in his book, *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway*, and an attempt has been made here to summarize the main features of his account, especially with the inclusion of those areas that project his Prophet-like qualities. Cheeby-aub-oozoo first had the name, Waub-oozoo, and ever since he was a child, he was unusually quiet and reluctant to play. It seemed that he disliked merrymaking. He had this habit of standing or sitting stock-still for half an hour or so as if he had been struck deaf and dumb and been turned to stone and when asked what he was doing, he would explain that he was listening and that he had committed himself to the beauty and meaning of the call of some bird, animal, or wind; the crackle in the night sky of the Northern Lights; the boom of ice; or the rumble of the earth. According to him, there was nothing as beautiful or full of meaning as these things, and he had

the desire to get his personal fill of beauty. He wanted to know the meaning of echoes and the sounds that gave the birds and animals the gift of speech. He had the habit of going deep into the woods and sitting or standing still for long periods of time. He would ask the elders different questions for which they had no answer and he would even ask his grandmother questions about the *manitous*, the underworld, the afterlife, the future, the spiritual, and the supernatural. He wanted to know how mankind knew of their existence, their purpose, where they lived, and what they were capable of doing. The want for knowledge embedded in the personality of Waub-oozoo was so great and strong that he kept on asking these questions and he even started visiting the places that were known to be the dwelling places of the *manitous*. Then, finally, he had a spiritual experience. This is described by Johnston in the following words:

Finally, after some years of talking to the empty air and listening for some kind of answer, Waub-oozoo had a vision. In the vision, his personal patron manitou showed him a drum, how to construct such an instrument, and what wood and covering were the most fitting and told him that it was to be called *maedawaewae-igun*, the Echo Maker. Waub-oozoo saw men and women cradling small drums and tapping on them while they sang or chanted a psalm in a language that only the very old could understand because it was so unlike the modern language in usage, structure, and cadence. It was the mother of the language now spoken. In the same vision, Waub-oozoo also saw men and women gathered around a large drum, chanting and striking it to make it carry their thoughts, words, and feelings to the manitous dwelling in the skies, in the realm of dreams and visions. He saw as well men and women carve flutes from the bones of hawks and willow wands and blow through them in imitation of hawks. Last, Waub-oozoo saw men and women dance to the beat and throb of the Echo Makers¹⁰.

Based on this vision, Waub-oozoo constructed a drum and introduced certain rituals with which one could communicate with the *manitous*. Following his example, all Ojibway men and women started making and beating drums and this practice spread so much so that every time they had to go out for a hunt, they would perform these rituals, which included the beating of drums, and they would ask the permission of the *manitous* to kill the animals. In addition, Waub-oozoo set the precedent for the practice of retreating and fasting alone in some secluded place near the presence of the *manitous* to seek a dream or a vision. Again, following his example, people went on these vision quests and it was through such dreams that the people could be addressed by the *manitous* who could possibly become their petitioners and grant favours to them in the future. The stories about him go on and other details are given and finally, it is discussed how he goes on a perilous journey with a canoe at a very dangerous time on the persuasion and taunt of his

brother, Maudjee-kawiss, who had dared him to do so. This journey results in his death and the legend says that he turned into a ghost whose purpose was to stay in both the 'Land of the Living Flesh' and the 'Land of the Souls' and whichever home he would enter or whomever he would touch, they would be taken to the Land of the Dead. This is how he earned the title, 'Cheeby-aub-oozoo', meaning 'Chief of the Underworld'.

While it cannot be stated with absolute certainty that Waub-oozoo was indeed a Prophet, it can at least be said that this is very likely. The story about his death and consequent transformation into a ghost can definitely cause some confusion but just like the case of Krishna^{as}, it could be read as a parable or allegory instead of a literal occurrence. Perhaps the word 'Cheeby-aub-oozoo' referred to the Angel of death but when Waub-oozoo died, it was difficult for people to accept this reality and the concept that Waub-oozoo became a spirit-like being emerged. This is not something that is unlikely when one analyzes the history of different religions. Fiction has been mixed with facts in the stories of the deaths of other Prophets like Elijah ^{as} or Jesus Christ ^{as}, both of whom are believed by many to have avoided death and ascended to heaven. Consequently, it can be proposed that Waub-oozoo was possibly a Prophet of God who was taught certain words of prayer in the form of poetry through a vision and this became the basis on which many ceremonies were born and took shape. This poetry, which was 'akin to biblical psalms'¹¹, became a daily part of the life of the Ojibway and examples of the use of this poetry can even be found today in the performance of different ceremonies. This proposition is further enhanced by the fact that, before seeing the vision, he is known to have fasted and this practice of fasting leading up to spiritual experiences is quite universal among Prophets of God. In other words, it can be stated that it is very likely that the vision of Waub-oozoo was a divine experience that Prophets tend to have. One should be careful, however, in comparing him to modern Prophets or law-bearing Prophets like Prophet Moses ^{as} or the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{sa}. His Prophethood can, at best, be compared to that of Adam^{as} or Krishna^{as} or Buddha ^{as}. Even among these, he may best be compared with Adam ^{as} who is known to have brought only a few basic commandments for his people. Therefore, there is significant evidence that shows that Waub-oozoo was possibly a Prophet of God and this only makes it easier for dialogue to ensue between the Ojibway and Muslims because Muslims are obliged to believe in the truthfulness of all the Prophets of Allāh.

Handsome Lake

In the encyclopedia of *American Indian Religious Traditions*, Brian Clearwater writes an introduction to Handsome Lake and the circumstances which gave birth to his religious movement among the Iroquois. He writes that Handsome Lake was born in 1735 to a noble Seneca family of the Allegany band at a time when the Iroquois society was ‘ravaged by European diseases and abuse of alcohol’. Handsome Lake himself suffered from alcoholism and this ultimately caused him to become a debilitated invalid for four years. In 1799, he received his first vision. He was seen to have risen up from his bed and to have gone outside and then collapsed. He laid there as if he was dead until the next day when he woke up. At this point, when he was surrounded by his family, he started to preach his message sent to him by Messengers seen in a vision. They had instructed him of the will of the Creator. He told the people that the origin of the evils that the Europeans brought is *Hanisse’ono*, the evil one. It was him who had inspired a preacher to supply Columbus with “Five Things” that were to benefit them. These included rum, playing cards, money, a violin, and a decayed leg bone. Handsome Lake then preached that these five things were the cause of the downfall of his people and the Creator wanted to change that and save the people with the new religion of the longhouse¹². To summarize his achievements, Brian Clearwater writes the following:

In effect, then, Handsome Lake’s movement was an attempt to revitalize the traditional religious system while adapting social life to the everyday realities of reservation life. It was a religious response to the devastation caused by colonization, but it did not take an extremist position. Rather, Handsome Lake articulated a realistic means of maintaining Iroquois cultural identity in the face of concerted, though implicit, efforts to eradicate it. His moderate path of selective acculturation paired with a revival of the old ways was successful, in that his new religion continues to function today, saving the integrity and self-respect of the Iroquois as a minority with their adherence to a foundational identity-structuring religious system.¹³

Handsome Lake’s spiritual experiences led to the formation of the *Gaiwí:yo*, the code of Handsome Lake. He had three main visions in his life. The first one was on June 15, 1799, when three Messengers introduced the will of the Creator and gave some basic commandments. On August 7th, he had a second vision of a sky journey in which he visited heaven and hell. His third vision was on February 5th, 1800, in which he was told about the Great Spirit’s worries about the condition of His people.¹⁴

Belief about Jesus Christ ^{as}

As mentioned earlier, some adherents of the Longhouse religion, including Chief Jacob Thomas, believe that the fourth messenger of the visions of Handsome Lake was actually Jesus Christ ^{as}. In a vision of Handsome Lake where he visits heaven, he meets the fourth Messenger for the first time. The conversation between them is narrated by Chief Jacob Thomas in the following words:

[Jesus ^{as} said] “...I was sent by my Father to deliver the Good Message to the blue-eyed people over the Great Saltwater. They think that they have killed me, but it is not true. They never killed me. I only came home.”

“...They thought they’d killed me. Here, look at me, here are the marks where the spikes were driven into my hands and feet when they hung me on a cross. Now that was the time I left and came home.”¹⁵

Although it is only a minority among the followers of the Longhouse religion which believes that Handsome Lake had actually met Jesus Christ ^{as}, it is important to note that even these people do not subscribe to any concepts similar to the concept of Trinity and as shown by the quotation above, they only consider him a Messenger of God. What is even more interesting is that despite the fact that some features of the Longhouse religion appear to have been strongly influenced by Christianity, the Iroquois in general are opposed to the concept of atonement, which is perhaps the backbone of the concept of Trinity. Instead, the concept of self-righteousness is extremely evident in the moral code preached by Handsome Lake. What is being suggested here is that the Iroquois may be very interested in the Islāmic belief about the status of Jesus ^{as} as a humble Messenger of God, who survived death on the cross and migrated to Srinagar, Kashmir, where he is buried today.

The Islāmic Perspective

While many writers of comparative religions have a free hand in referring to people like Handsome Lake as ‘Prophets’, Islāmic terminology differs with them by giving sanctity, grace, and a special position to a claimant of Prophethood. In the English language, many people who are spiritual healers, reformists, oracles, and prophesiers can be called Prophets but this is not the case in Islāmic terminology. The Islāmic use of the word ‘Prophet’ is best described by

Hadhrat Mirzā Bashīruddīn Mehmūd Ahmad ^{ra} when he writes the following based on his understanding of the Islāmic dictionaries:

--- لغت کے لحاظ سے نبی وہ ہوتا ہے جس پر خدا تعالیٰ کا کلام نازل ہوتا ہو اور اس کلام میں یہ تین شرطیں پائی جاتی ہوں۔ اول وہ دُوُ فَائِدَةٌ دوم وہ دُوُ فَائِدَةٌ عَظِيمَةٌ ہو۔ سوم وہ ایسا الہام ہو یَحْصُلُ بِهِ عِلْمٌ أَوْ غَلْبَةٌ ظَنٍّ۔ اور پھر زائد بات بوجہ نبی کے صیغہ کے یہ پائی جائیگی کہ اس پر کثرت کے ساتھ اللہ تعالیٰ کا کلام نازل ہوتا ہو۔۔۔ پس جب ہم کسی کو نبی اللہ کہتے ہیں تو اس کے معنی یہ ہوتے ہیں کہ نبی اللہ وہ ہے (۱) جو اللہ تعالیٰ کی طرف سے سکر لوگوں کو کثرت سے خبریں دیتا ہے۔ (۲) ایسی خبریں دیتا ہے جن میں فائدہ ہوتا ہے اور فائدہ بھی عظیم الشان ہوتا ہے اور (۳) پھر اُن سے علم زائد حاصل ہوتا ہے۔¹⁶

According to the dictionary, a ‘Prophet’ is one upon whom descends the revelation of Allāh Ta‘ālā and there are three conditions that exist in that revelation. First, it is دُوُ فَائِدَةٌ [beneficial]; second, it is دُوُ فَائِدَةٌ عَظِيمَةٌ [extra-ordinarily beneficial]; third, it is such a revelation that یَحْصُلُ بِهِ عِلْمٌ أَوْ غَلْبَةٌ ظَنٍّ [one gains knowledge and supremacy from it]. Then, due to the formation of the word ‘نبی’ [Prophet], another thing that should exist in him is that the revelations of Allāh Ta‘ālā should descend on him extensively... Therefore, when we call someone a Prophet of Allāh, it means that the Prophet of Allāh is one (1) who gives news to the people extensively based on what he hears from Allāh Ta‘ālā; (2) He gives such news which is beneficial and the benefit is also extra-ordinary; and (3) additional knowledge is also gained from them[‡]

This quotation briefly summarizes what is essential for someone to be called a Prophet according to Islām and sets a high standard for such people. As a result, a Muslim would be very cautious in calling someone a Prophet of Allāh and the main reason why Handsome Lake cannot be given that title from the Islāmic perspective is that the Holy Qur’ān is the last law after which no one outside the law of the Holy Qur’ān can claim Prophethood. However, it is still possible for there to be truth in the visions, spiritual experiences, and prophecies of Handsome Lake and he can be called a spiritual reformer or guide for his people as indicated in this verse of the Holy Qur’ān:

...وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ ۝

... And there is a Guide for every people. (Sūrah Al-Ra‘d 13:8)

The fact of the matter is that Handsome Lake started receiving visions at a time very close to the time of the Promised Messiah and Imām Mahdi, Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qādiānī ^{as}, who is a Prophet of God. It is very likely that his experiences were the result of a phenomenon called انتشار روحانیتہ (Intishāre Rūhāniyya – the spread of spirituality) that normally occurs at the time

[‡] Translated by the author.

of the coming of a Prophet. This is better explained by Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qādiānī^{as} in the following quotation:

It is worth remembering that when a Prophet or Messenger, having been appointed from heaven, comes, a light generally descends from heaven due to the blessings of that Prophet [affecting men] depending upon the various capacities of men and a spread of spirituality [*Intishāre Rūhāniyya*] is seen. At that time, every person progresses in the seeing of dreams and those who have the capacity [to receive revelations] receive revelations and minds are sharpened in spiritual matters. Just as when it rains, every type of land benefits from it in one form or another, the same happens when the season of spring begins with the arrival of a Prophet. At that time, all the blessings are actually due to that Prophet and all those people who have dreams or revelations experience them because of that Prophet. With his coming, a change occurs in the world and a light generally descends from heaven, from which each person takes his share according to his capacity. That light becomes the cause of dreams and revelations. The foolish one believes that it is due to his personal skills, but [in reality] the fountain of revelations and dreams is opened for the world only because of the blessings of that Prophet. The time of the Prophet is the time of a *Lailatul Qadr* [The night of decree], in which Angels descend. Allāh Ta‘ālā says:

تَنْزِيلُ الْمَلَكِ وَالرُّوحِ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ سَلَامٌ[§]

This has been the law of nature ever since Allāh Ta‘ālā created the world^{**}.¹⁷

The above quotation shows how Handsome Lake was simply benefitting from the *Intishāre Rūhāniyya* that occurred in those days which were very close to the birth of Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qādiānī^{as} in the year 1835. From an Islāmic perspective, Handsome Lake can be called a spiritual guide for his people and anything that he said or predicted would be accepted by the Muslims as long as it does not contradict the statements of the Qur‘ān, Ahādīth, or writings of the Promised Messiah^{as}. Therefore, Muslims and the Iroquoian people can have successful discourses by sharing the beautiful teachings of the founders of their faiths.

[§] Therein descend Angels and the Spirit by the command of their Lord — with every matter. *It is all* peace (Surah Al-Qadr 97:5).

^{**} Translated by the author.

Wīsahkēcāhk

Central to many Cree sacred stories is the strange, trickster-transformer figure known as Wīsahkēcāhk. Writing a note on George Nelson's account of Wīsahkēcāhk, Brown and Brightman describe him in the following words:

Nelson made numerous references to the trickster-transformer character of the Crees west of James Bay and of many or most subarctic Ojibwa, Wīsahkēcāhk. Like Coyote, Raven, and other comparable characters in the oral literatures of North American Indian groups, Wīsahkēcāhk combines attributes of great magical power, pathetic helplessness, wisdom, stupidity, altruism, and moral chaos. Contemporary Manitoba Crees regard him with mingled respect, contempt, and affection.¹⁸

The truth is that when one reads the stories about Wīsahkēcāhk, one is astounded at the strangeness and absurdity associated with many of the stories. It is hard to say what the real purpose of those stories is. Keeping in mind the statements of Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad^{as} and Hadhrat Mirzā Tāhir Ahmadth discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it is very difficult to even suggest the possibility that this person could have been a prophet. At the most, one can only speculate that this person was perhaps a spiritual guide for his people a long time ago, during the course of which so many strange stories started to be attributed to him that they wiped away most, if not all, the good stories associated with him. Consequently, dialogue based on a comparison of Wīsahkēcāhk to other prophets cannot ensue between Muslims and Crees and it is best to avoid this particular subject altogether.

Abishabis

For a short time in the years 1842 and 1843, a revivalist movement became popular among some tribes of the Cree in northern Manitoba and Ontario. This movement was started by Abishabis or Small Eyes. Very little is known about this movement and its spread from historical records. Hirschfelder and Molin write the following about him:

The principal prophet of a religious movement that spread among Cree in the Hudson Bay region from Churchill, Manitoba, to Albany, Ontario, from 1842 to 1843. Abishabis, said to be influenced by words in hymns written in the Cree syllabic system devised by the Methodist missionary James Evans, applied the name of

“Jesus” to himself, while a companion became known as Wasiteck, or “light”. The two men were believed to have visited heaven and returned with blessings and teachings for the people. They claimed the ability to draw “The Track to Heaven” on paper or wood, using the map or chart they created to convey their prophetic message. Abishabis and Wasiteck warned against the ways of the whites while pointing out the promise of game and other heavenly rewards for those who followed their teachings... The religious movement declined as a result of white opposition to it and because of the waning popularity of Abishabis himself. As he sought more goods for his followers, his support diminished and he returned to his earlier poverty. By mid-1843 he was suspected of robbing and killing a York area Indian family. Abishabis subsequently fled to Severn, where he was temporarily detained by a Hudson’s Bay Company officer. During his detention he was seized by area Indians, who killed and burned him.¹⁹

What little written information that is available on Abishabis comes from the notes of a missionary or Hudson’s Bay Company records and both these sources are extremely biased and negative. The movement seems to have survived though as explained by Jennifer S.H. Brown in the following words:

The movement was not forgotten, however, among the Crees. In February 1844, after an absence from Moose, Barnley [a Methodist missionary] returned to find the Indians under its “pernicious influence.” In August he heard that “The Severn system of folly and falsehood” was spreading among the Crees of the Eastmain (Que.). At Norway House, in the winter of 1847–48, the Reverend William Mason encountered a Cree, James Nanoo, who described himself as a minister ordained in the new faith. But Indian awareness of both HBC and missionary disapproval of the movement seems to have led most adherents to conceal their creative synthesis of Cree and Christian religion, and further written references are scarce. In the 1930s, however, anthropologist John Montgomery Cooper found that his Moose Factory informants had vivid oral traditions about the movement. Its expressed meaning, though, had been modified.²⁰

Due to the lack of information about the movement, no conclusive judgement can be made about Abishabis and one can only speculate that he is perhaps another person who briefly benefited from the *Intishāre Rūhāniyya* of the time of the Promised Messiah^{as}. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to use this information for productive dialogue and it is best that Muslims and Crees choose other subjects in order to increase mutual understanding.

The Difficulty of Judgement

It is indeed very difficult to make accurate conclusions about any of the religious personalities that occur in the oral tradition or about the spiritual reformers of modern times. It is only Allāh Who knows best the truth about these personalities. In principle, the Islāmic belief, based on several statements of the Holy Qur'ān, is that Allāh Ta'ālā sent prophets or spiritual guides to every nation in the world. It can be concluded from this that Allāh Ta'ālā indeed appointed several individuals for the guidance of different Aboriginal nations of Canada and all of the strange stories attributed to them were either metaphorical or were born later due to human thought. This reality allows Islām to play a very positive, constructive role in dialogue with the Aboriginals as compared to the early Christians who mostly sought to negate, discredit and eliminate Aboriginal beliefs, and completely rejected the truth of their spiritual guides.

CHAPTER 7

THE AFTER LIFE

A very important part of the beliefs in Islām is the belief in a Day of Judgement. In fact, in several verses of the Holy Qur’ān, the belief in Allāh is mentioned along with the belief in the Last Day to indirectly refer to the six articles of faith in Islām. For example, in Sūrah Āle Imrān, Allāh Ta‘ālā says:

يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسْرِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ۝

They believe in Allāh and the Last Day, and enjoin what is good and forbid evil, and hasten, vying with one another, in good works. And these are among the righteous. (Sūrah Āle Imrān 3:115)

This belief in the last day and the ensuing afterlife is a very important feature of Islām and Islām is unique in the sense that it speaks of the afterlife with an incredible amount of detail. A very essential part of this belief is the belief in the existence of the soul, which most religions, including Islām, consider the entity through which the experience of life continues after death. Regarding a very similar belief among the Aborigines, Hirshfelder and Molin make the following entry in the *Encyclopedia of Native American Religions* under the title ‘Soul’:

According to the traditional beliefs of many Native peoples in North America, individuals have at least two souls... Every healthy individual has one soul linked to breath and life that dies with the body and another, called a free soul, that leaves the body in dreams or vision states, often travelling to distant places and on occasion visiting the land of the dead... Shamans... guide souls of the deceased to the land of the dead. Indians also believe that “inanimate” objects (stones, plants, and so forth) and animals have souls. Tribes picture the afterworld to which souls of the deceased journey in different ways, according to their own surroundings and experience. There are detailed descriptions of the land of the dead among almost all American tribes. Usually, the land of the dead is the reverse of the land of the living, with day

and night and seasons reversed. The dead live very much as they had while alive – eating, dressing, playing, and living in dwellings as during their previous existence. ¹

Comparatively, the Inuit have a unique and distinct concept. It is recorded just underneath the above entry in the same encyclopedia in the following words:

In general, traditional Inuit believe that each person has more than one soul. Some count three: one, an immortal spirit that leaves a person's body at death and goes to live in the spirit world; another, the breath of the spirit of life, a soul that ceases to exist at death; and a third that abides in a person's name (the Name-soul) and persists after death and is reincarnated through the custom of naming babies after relatives who have recently died...²

These two entries in the encyclopedia make it clear that the belief in life after death is common in Aboriginal thought. What follows is a closer look at the concept of the afterlife among the Ojibway, the Iroquois, and the Cree.

The Story of Pauguk

One of the stories of the Ojibway that highlights their belief in an afterlife is the story of Pauguk. In brief, the story, as told by Johnston, begins with a person named Waub-kookoo finding the skull of Pauguk along the shore and the skull narrates his story to him. He tells him how he lusted for his brother's wife, Beewun, when he was alive. He became so obsessed with this desire that it turned into jealousy and hatred for his brother, Waub-oozoo. Eventually, he decided to kill his brother. By an excuse, he took him on a journey and from the top of an overhanging rock on the brow of a cliff, he pushed him and killed him. Unable to handle the grief, Beewun committed suicide. Pauguk then left his village right away in a canoe and kept paddling aimlessly. When it became dark, he heard a scream and lost his paddle due to fright. He then lanced beside his canoe and saw an apparition of Beewun in the water and shrank back suddenly, causing the canoe to roll over. His legs got stuck in the canoe and he died due to drowning. What happens after that sheds light on the Ojibway concept of the afterlife and retribution. Johnston explains this as follows:

“When I [Pauguk] came to, I was across the Bridge of Death, about to set foot in the Land of Souls, when the Guardian took hold of the log that made the bridge and pitched it to and fro until I lost my balance. ‘You don't belong here. Killers of their

own brothers don't belong here!' The Guardian shrilled the words, assailing my ears as I fell into the rapids below.

In the Underworld the manitous shrank from me and hid. 'He killed his brother. . . . He coveted his brother's wife. . . . He killed his brother. He doesn't belong here. He belongs with his own kind,' they shrilled.

"And the turtles and the crayfish destroyed my flesh and sinews until bones fell away and sank. But the manitous and the residents of the Underworld, not wanting my bones to desecrate their world, asked the manitous that presided over the winds and those that governed the currents to cast my bones out of the sea.

"The manitous unleashed the winds that stirred the waters to boil and churn until they had cast out my bones and scattered them on the rocky shore...³

After finishing the story, the skull of Pauguk requests Waub-kookoo to put together his bones in order to set him free and he agrees. Johnston writes what happens next:

...When the final bone was set and the skeleton composed, Pauguk was lifted and was airborne into the skies.

Waub-kookoo stood and watched the night sky and then he heard Pauguk address him from somewhere in the sea of stars, "My friend. I am between the sun and the Realm of Ice. Too close to the sun and I burn; too far and I freeze. I'm an outcast even in the afterlife." As he continued to look upward, Waub-kookoo thought he heard the hiss and rattle of burning bone.⁴

In this story, one can clearly see concepts and beliefs close to those of Islām. The very first thing to be noticed is the 'Bridge of Death'. The same concept of a 'bridge' to be crossed after one's death exists in Islām as illustrated in the following Hadīth:

عن أبي سعيد الخدرى رضى الله عنه عن رسول الله عليه وسلم قال اذا خلى المؤمنون من النار حبسوا بقنطرة بين الجنة و النار فيتقاصون مظالم كانت بينهم فى الدنيا حتى اذا تُقوا و هُذبوا اذن لهم بدخول الجنة. فو الذى نفس محمد صلى الله عليه و سلم بيده، لاحدهم بمسكنه فى الجنة ادل بمنزله كان فى الدنيا

Narrated Abū Sa'īd Al-Khudrī ^{ra} [that] Allāh's Apostle ^{sa} said, "When the believers pass safely over (the bridge across) Hell, they will be stopped at a bridge in between Hell and Paradise where they will retaliate upon each other for the injustices done among them in the world, and when they get purified of all their sins, they will be admitted into Paradise. By Him in Whose Hands the life of Muhammad is everybody will recognize his dwelling in Paradise better than he recognizes his dwelling in this world".⁵

Pauguk then describes his being thrown into the Underworld. This concept is also quite common among the Aboriginals. The Underworld usually refers to the seas and oceans where human-like creatures are believed to exist such as Mermaids and Mermen. Pauguk's actions were so evil that even the inhabitants of the Underworld asked the *manitous* that controlled the wind and currents to cast him out. Eventually, Pauguk ends up in a state of pain and suffering and the sound of it is described as the 'hiss and rattle of burning bone'. The Holy Qur'ān also describes the punishment of Hell as pain and suffering caused by 'burning' as shown in the example below:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا إِنَّمَا يَدْعُو حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ ۝

Surely Satan is an enemy to you; so take him as an enemy. He calls his followers only that they may become inmates of the burning Fire. (Sūrah Al-Fātir 35:7)

Therefore, it is quite clear that the Ojibway share several beliefs about the afterlife with the Muslims and these can help them have fruitful discussions.

Handsome Lake's Sky Journey

In one of his visions, Handsome Lake visits the House of Punishment (*Ganóngeh Shagohewátha' Thonońh:soht*) as well as the Land of the Creator (*Thaonhwenjá:deh Shongwaiatíhs:on*). According to him, after death, all those who did not adhere to the teachings of the code and committed evil acts can expect to go to the House of Punishment while all the faithful can expect to go to the Land of Creator. In the description of his vision, Handsome Lake provides vivid details of the suffering that the people who are evil have to go through at the House of Punishment. This House is described to be in the control of a devil-like being called the 'Punisher' or evil spirit who punishes the people according to their actions. Emphasis is placed on the suffering of those who drink alcohol, practise witchcraft, or disregard family values and the punishments for these are shown to him first. For the sake of illustration, the example of the very first punishment he sees, that is, the one for a heavy drinker of alcohol has been quoted below:

Handsome Lake watched and heard the master of the house [the Punisher] calling a man's name. He seemed to know his name. So he called him by the name he used while he was still on Earth.

He said, "Come here, my nephew."

In a few moments the man came out of the crowd of people in the house and stood before him. He said to him, “Now it is time for you to drink again.”

There was a kettle with something boiling in it. It looked like lead or melted iron and it was red hot. He gave him a cup of drink.

He said to him, “Now you will drink this.”

The man did not want to drink it, but it seemed that he had no control. It was as if something forced him to drink it anyway. Smoke came out of his mouth and from all over his body. He screamed out with great pain. He said, “I repent.”

Then the punisher said, “Just keep it up. This was your delight. You always liked to drink while you were still on Earth and you were always hollering. So come on, holler again. That is what you liked to do when you were drinking.”⁶

It is interesting to note that this description of Hell falls very close to the description of the Holy Qur’ān as it also speaks of the serving of boiling water to the people of Hell:

وَذَرِ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا دِينَهُمْ لَعِبًا وَلَهْوًا وَعَرَاهُمْ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَذَكَّرَ بِهِ أَنْ تُبْسَلَ نَفْسٌ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ ۖ لَيْسَ لَهَا مِنْ دُونِ
اللَّهِ وَلِيٌّ وَلَا شَفِيعٌ وَإِنْ تَعَدَّلَ كُلٌّ لَعَدْلٍ لَّا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أُبْسِلُوا بِمَا كَسَبُوا لَهُمْ شَرَابٌ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ وَعَذَابٌ
أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ ۝

And let alone those who take their religion for a sport and a pastime, and whom worldly life has beguiled. And admonish *people* thereby lest a soul be consigned to perdition for what it has wrought. It shall have no helper nor intercessor beside Allāh; and even if it offer every ransom, it shall not be accepted from it. These are they who have been delivered over to destruction for their own acts. They will have a drink of boiling water and a grievous punishment, because they disbelieved. (Sūrah Al-An‘ām 6:71)

All this time at the House of Punishment, Handsome Lake is actually accompanied by three Messengers who act as his guides. After that, he goes on to visit the Land of the Creator and it is described as follows:

They took up their journey again. As they moved along, it got brighter. A more brilliant light appeared. Our leader could smell a beautiful fragrance of flowers and a fragrance of many different varieties of fruit.

Many different kinds of birds were flying around him that he had never seen before. They were so beautiful.

So now they entered the land of the Creator. Along the pathway he saw some berries growing. Wild strawberries.⁷

Again, interestingly, the Holy Qur'ān also speaks of different kinds of fruits and birds in heaven in the following verses:

لَا يُصَدِّعُونَ عَنْهَا وَلَا يُنْفُونَ ۚ وَفَاكِهَةٍ مِّمَّا يَتَخَيَّرُونَ ۚ وَلَحْمِ طَيْرٍ مِّمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ ۚ

No headache will they get therefrom, nor will they be intoxicated — and *carrying* such fruits as they choose, and flesh of birds as they may desire. (Sūrah Al-Wāqī'ah 56:20-22)

After seeing this, Handsome Lake hears an announcement for a lacrosse game that would take place the next day and a person named Awenhén:seh was to face off the game. That person at the time of the vision was alive on Earth and this was actually a prediction about his death the next day and eventual entry to heaven. After that, Handsome Lake meets his niece in heaven, followed by a meeting with the fourth Messenger (considered by some to be Jesus Christ ^{as}). This vision eventually ends when Handsome Lake is shown his house of eternal abode in heaven. Therefore, the similarities between Handsome Lake's vision and the Holy Qur'ān's description of the afterlife that have been pointed out here can be very beneficial for successful dialogue between Muslims and Iroquoian people.

The Soul

Cree beliefs about the existence of an afterlife surround the concept of the immortal soul which moves on after death. Linda Jaine and Louise Halfe explain these beliefs and the Round Dance associated with this concept in the following words:

Each of the Creator's gifts, particularly animals and humans, possess a Spirit. Because the Spirit is eternal we know that when we die, it is only a physical death and our journey continues on.

Traditional Cree spirituality also strongly reinforces the principle of a circle of life, the essence of which is found in Spirit... Although the body undergoes physical transformations, the Spirit remains unchanged. When the body is no longer viable the spirit ascends into another realm.

Separation from the body does not necessarily mean that all ties to people are disconnected. Spirits have the power to manifest themselves to the human eye and mind as well as to communicate with us. For example Cree people believe that the Northern Lights occur when the Spirits are dancing...

Neither the Spirits nor the people ever fully depart from each other. Our Round Dances are held to honor each other's existence. The origin of the Round Dance actually derives from our Woman Spirit Ancestors. The story has been told as follows:

There was once a girl and her mother who lived together and loved each other deeply. The girl was in her teens when her mother passed on. The girl continuously mourned for her mother. One day while picking berries her mother came to her daughter. She said she was sad and asked her daughter to stop mourning. She asked to [be] released from her ties to earth as she was not in peace.

In return the mother offered to teach her daughter a dance and songs so that at certain times they could be together again. The daughter learned the dance and song and shared them with her people. This is our Round Dance. It is a time for those people who are here to commune with those who have passed on.

When death is viewed as only a part of a continuing process it helps the surviving members and the community as a whole to remember that our ancestors are here with us today just as we will someday be part of our future generations' life. As such the values we hold sacred will never be lost.⁸

This belief parallels the Islāmic concept in the sense that the afterlife is considered a spiritual, distinct realm instead of a physical one. This concept is also something that has been strongly emphasized by the Promised Messiah^{as} and his successors who argued that those Muslims who consider the afterlife a physical reality are strongly mistaken. The Islāmic belief about the soul is summarized in the following words of Hadhrat Mirzā Bashiruddīn Mehmūd Ahmad^{ra}:

Islām... teaches that the soul is created and comes into being during the period of gestation. On the other hand, Islām also teaches that once the soul is created it is never destroyed, but is granted an unending period of time for its development. What is called death is merely the severance of the soul from the body, as the result of which the heart is stilled and the body ceases to be of any further use.

...This flight of the soul from the body is called death. Hence when we say so and so is dead, we simply mean that his soul has quitted his body, but the soul never dies and goes on living for ever. Islām, therefore, teaches that there is a life after death, and it also teaches that that life is a continuation of the life which a man leads on earth.⁹

From the above quotation, it is quite evident that Islām is fundamentally united with the Cree and other Aboriginal nations who hold the belief that life after death is a spiritual reality experienced by an immortal soul. The only main difference between Cree and Islāmic teachings is that Islām does not have any concept of communication with the souls of the dead.

Nevertheless, Muslims and Crees can definitely learn from each other by discussing these commonly held beliefs about the soul and the afterlife.

The Knowledge of the Holy Qur'ān

Having seen the similarities between the beliefs of three major Aboriginal groups of Canada and Islām about the afterlife, one can conclude that this subject can play an important role in dialogue between Muslims and Aboriginals. However, it is also true that compared to their other beliefs, the author found lesser documented information on Aboriginal beliefs related to the afterlife. Perhaps much of it is only discussed orally. It is interesting to note that in recent times, through Divine inspiration, the Promised Messiah ^{as} has extra-ordinarily expounded and elaborated Islāmic teachings about the afterlife given in the Holy Qur'ān. Therefore, it is possible that Aboriginals can benefit from this knowledge of the Qur'ān in regards to the experience of man after death through discussions and discourses with Muslims.

CHAPTER 8

ABORIGINAL RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE TODAY

Since Aboriginal religious teachings are largely transferred orally and books written on this subject are primarily meant to serve academic purposes, it seems best to get first-hand accounts of the Aboriginal religious experience today in order to have a better perspective and understanding of these religions. The author had the opportunity to take interviews of two Aboriginals who actively practise their faiths. First, the author spoke to Mr. Frank Sutherland, a Métis Elder at the Barrie Native Friendship Center, and gained his understanding of the Ojibway religious thought. Second, the author spoke to Mr. Tom Deer, an adherent of the Longhouse religion, who currently resides at the Six Nations reserve in southern Ontario. The author also had the opportunity to visit the central Onondaga Longhouse where some of the main ceremonies of the Six Nations Iroquois take place. The interviewees were asked various questions about their faith and practices, including many surrounding the main theme of this dissertation. What follows are edited versions of the interviews.

Interview with Mr. Frank Sutherland

The Concept of God

Question: What is the concept of God in the Ojibway heritage? Is it (His Name) pronounced *Kitchi-Manitou* or *Kitchay Manitou*?

Answer: “It’s pronounced several ways. Generally among the Ojibway, it’s pronounced as *Zhaminido*. He is the Supreme Creator of everything. He is the voice – an entity that was in

suspension when there was nothing else. The only Spirit that was there was the Great Spirit. [The people] used to call Him *Zhaminido*; they used to call Him *Kitchi-Manido*. There are different names for him [given by] the Hotoshoni people [or] the Iroquois people and so on. But, for the Ojibway people, we call him – generally when we are praying – we talk about *Zhaminido* or *Kitchi-Manido*”.

The Four Levels of Prayer

Question: When you pray to God, do you address Him directly?

Answer: “Generally, it’s a point of recognizing that He is above all and you talk to Him and say, ‘Thank You for all the things You have given me in my life and for this beautiful place for us to live and everything that You have put in place to ensure that I can maintain my own [life]– that I can sustain my life [and] the children that You have given me and the grandchildren’. You kind of go through that little bit of a process there. And then you say ‘*gomiguachoo*’ – that means, ‘Thank You very much’... There [are] four levels for us, anyway. So, you go to the next level which are the sky people... There is eagle. We call him *megazhi* and he is up there and he is the one who can fly right to the Creator and take our prayers [to Him]. And if you see something that we need help that he can go there. He is the one who flies around the earth and looks in and gives us support and gives us direction – that type of thing.

“We talk to *giizis* which is our sun. We thank *giizis* for giving us our light and the warmth that he creates for us, and for the work he does with our Mother, the Earth, to give us sustainable things like food and clothing. And if you look at it from our point of view, there is nothing on this earth that doesn’t come from here... And so we speak to him [*giizis*] about working with Mother Earth for us. She goes through four cycles every year.

“And then we talk to who we call *nookimis*, which is our grandmother, the moon. She is the one who looks after the tides and the waters and the women’s teachings and all those types of things. When water is to be spoken for at a ceremony, the women do that. Men don’t talk about water in the ceremonies. The women will stand up and face the four directions and then, talk about the water, and talk to our grandmother, the moon, about that water. That is just some sort of purification.

“Then, we go from there to what we call *nimkee*. These are thunder beings, who live in the west. He heard the thunder rolling; he sees lightning and everything else. These are the creators of that lightning [or] fire. They are the creators of the thunder and just to let us know that something is on the way, or the rain is on the way to be a part of our Mother, the Earth, who

need[s] that rain or let our people know that we hear that. [When] we hear that, we generally take some tobacco and we thank the thunder beings for speaking to us that way and we go and put that down. The older people. In more recent years... a lot of people would take it and throw a bit of tobacco on the fire, even an open fire. And they would take tobacco and... throw it in there with the wood. Let that burn! That's the sign that you recognize the thunder beings.

“So, then, when we go from there, we go to the next level. And the next level is the grandmothers and grandfathers, who really exist in the west. East to North and the South. We always pray when we start off towards the East. The Ojibways. Some of the more westerly tribes do to the western door aspect. Those are all doorways for us – the four directions. What we do there, we speak about the certain door [which is] from different doorways...”

Moral Teachings and Significance of the Four Directions

“For me, the Eastern door [represents] humility. And I also see courage – what we call bravery in our seven teachings. That bravery is like, for me, the picture I see there is the mouse. [The] animal I see there is the mouse because the mouse is the most humble animal really on earth. And yet it's courageous enough to go out everyday regardless of the fact that it's endangering itself in all those things. That mouse teaches us that bravery and it teaches us humility.

“We are going to the South [the Southern door] and the teachings that come from there are usually about kindness. We have the deer – the white tailed deer we have here. The deer is in the south for us. If you look at the deer, it's a very beautiful animal. It tells us about beauty. It's a very kind animal. It teaches us kindness. It teaches us love and respect; more love than respect.

“Then, we go to the Western door. And that's where everybody exits this earth for us. We exit this life and our spirit travels on and it's going to go through that western door. We have grandmothers and grandfathers out there who teach us and give us knowledge. That's where our knowledge comes from. Usually the older people [or] our middle-aged people... teach us and give us those things that we need to know about the way we should be living and the way we are living and to guide us that we face this modern world. They guide us and help us through. We get that knowledge from that western door. When we go into [and] maybe look at being taught something in a school or workshop or some sort of an educational setting, we [or] I would pray to the western door and I would ask them to help me to understand this knowledge that has been passed onto me.

“So, then, we go from there up to the Northern door. This is where it’s the home of the elders. Our older people who have gone on and we look there for the wisdom because you can have all the knowledge in the world but if you don’t have the wisdom on how to use it, it’s pointless! Know when to use it! So, what we do is pray to them for that and that’s also the area where we pray to the bear, who is our Medicine Person. The bear is for us part of the policing society. They would patrol around the outside of their domain and watch for dangers to come but while they are doing that, quite often they have time to notice different plants and different feelings about them. You can tell when a bear has a headache. They will go down into a red willow patch and they will strip the bark... and chew it. And then they would get up and go away and won’t have the headache anymore. So, it gives us an indication [as] to what types of medicines are available to us. So, we pray to those people for that. Very important to us is respect... We may get angry with something an elder says or we may get upset with it but we respect that and we could go back to him later and say, ‘Could you give me a further explanation on that?’ Not all elders are going to tell you everything the same way. It’s going to be there from their own teachings that they have had. So, one elder would be teaching maybe about tobacco and he would teach us certain things about tobacco but another elder may come along and maybe add something to that. That doesn’t mean [that] one has missed it. He’s just sitting there to have their own teachings on that and they are respectful things...

“For the Ojibway, there is buffalo on the Western door. Now, buffalo has the purpose of making sure that nobody leaves this world before their time. No spirit can pass through. It tries to stop spirits – young people and not older people. [Those] who try to commit suicide. They are there to protect that entrance in there until they are told, ‘It’s okay! Let them go through!’ from above. So, that’s the buffalo’s job. It’s to protect that western door”.

Question: Can you speak more about the eastern door?

Answer: “Eastern Door is where life begins. When you are born, you start through this world. You are going to travel through this world from east to west. And when you are born, you come through the world through your mother and [come through] that eastern door and then you travel your life as you go across that path of life to the western door. And [at] certain points, you are not going to feel good or something. There [are] people around to help you bring you back... You seek that help as you are going across. You seek if from some of our alive elders who are around or some of our alive teachers who are around. And from there, we learn courage and we learn humility... That’s what’s taught from that doorway”.

The Path of Life

Question: What happens after the exit from the western door?

Answer: “Our life spirit – the life spirit within a person – never dies. It’s like [what] the Christian Church says. They have souls... and we believe that life spirit never dies. It just leaves behind its former home in your body. And we look after that body. We also pray for your spirit to have a safe journey to the next world [or] the next realm. And when you go to the next realm, there are certain tests that they go through and I don’t want to get into that because it’s a whole big, long process. There are certain things where you will be tested as you go through this realm until you get to the place that the Creator has set aside for you. And when you are there, you will be rested and your spirit can rest and everything can become healed. All these things maybe you suffered in life like cancer – all those things go away. And your spirit now can become whole again. And some people have had drug problems and addictions and stuff like that. Your spirit becomes whole again while you are there. And I don’t know if everybody believes but some people believe that once you have been there for a while, they will come back to you and say, “You are going to go through. We have got a new mission for you to take”. So, it’s like re-incarnation. I don’t think it’s the same. I guess it’s the same but we don’t term it as reincarnation. You are going to take another trip through life... You are going to take another trip with a body... You are going to be conceived in your mother’s womb and your life spirit is going to go there and you are going to go from there to go on through life on this western road”.

The Seven Grandfathers

Question: Can you speak more about the concept of *manitous* among the Ojibway?

Answer: “There are so many of them. There is very, very many of them... The biggest and most important one of course is the Great Spirit – *Kitchey Manido*. *Kitchey* means ‘big’ or the ‘Great Spirit’. It’s the size! In the Ojibway word, you say ‘*Chi*’ or sometimes ‘*Gchi*’ – that terms [mean] that it’s ‘large’. That’s the Large Spirit – *Kitchey Manido* but He has certain spirits around the earth here to help Him... There [are] a lot of *Manidos*. There is Seven Grandfathers who sit before you enter this world. We go and sit with Seven Grandfathers and those Seven Grandfathers teach us about honesty, truth, bravery, humility, respect, knowledge, and wisdom. Those are our Seven Grandfather Teachings. The Christian Church has the Ten Commandments. Those are our seven teachings. If you live your life through these seven teachings, then you will have lived a good life. [For example] About respect... it’s not to

approach somebody in anger; it's to approach somebody and maybe say, 'Could you explain why you said that?' or something like that. Those are the types of things we are looking at..."

Wanabozho – A Spiritual Guide of the Ojibway

Question: Is there any person whom you consider to have brought these teachings to the Ojibway?

Answer: "Originally, [it was] Wanabozho... The Seven Grandfathers wanted to be able to teach the people but they couldn't come and live on earth. So, they asked the otter to go out. They called him the *esk-bawis*. They asked him to go out and find somebody on earth who was [in] human form who could come to them and be taught these great teachings – the Seven Teachings. *Esk-bawis* went out first and he brought some older people and they [the Grandfathers] said 'No, they are too old to maybe understand everything that's here'. So, they wouldn't accept the older people. Then, there were some middle aged people [and] younger people. He kept bringing one person back from each of these groups. So, *esk-bawis* went out and he said, 'I'm not getting anywhere doing this because everybody I bring, they don't really want to teach that person'. So, he went to a family who had just had a baby and he took that baby [and] told that family, 'I'm going to take your baby. When he comes back to you, he will be older but he would be of a great help to the people'. He tells them what he's going to be doing. So, he takes that baby to the Seven Grandfathers. The Seven Grandfathers are sitting there. They are kind of wondering, 'Why would you bring someone who doesn't understand anything yet?' And *esk-bawis* says, 'It's because there is nothing in his mind. You can form what you want in his mind. He's not going to have any thoughts you give him be polluted by his own misconceptions'. He [the boy] was later sent back. He spent many years with these people. And he came back as an older man, kind of like an elder. And when he came back, he had many things to teach those people... He actually sat with the Seven Grandfathers in the Spirit World. Then, they taught him all those different things. Once he learned them and he had learned everything they wanted him to be taught, they sent him back to the people and so the people could be taught a good way of life. In that, I guess he could almost be like a prophet but he's not... He's more like a Spiritual Guide. Somebody who is there who is going to teach and has a vast [amount of] knowledge".

The Vastness and Nature of Religious Knowledge

“I have been at this particular road in my life since about 1984 and at that time, I was 40 years old. I had just kind of come back. I always believed [that] there was a higher entity than me but I could never find comfort in any of the Christian [beliefs] or anything else I looked at. But when I came to this, it became natural to me and I felt good with it. What happened was that in doing that, I just felt better and it’s just [that] I could move along nicely through this thing. I could understand! But all those things that I have learned, it amounts [to] 20-25 years, it still amounts to about that much because you never learn everything there is to know in a lifetime... If we look at libraries, libraries are merely interpretations. Books are interpretations of what somebody understands. It may not be the actual story itself. And I have no disrespect for the Bible but the whole idea of the Bible being God’s word doesn’t fly with me because it is written primarily by people who had the knowledge of writing and that didn’t come until considerably later [compared to when] the First People came. In the Ojibway, we have pictographs and there are some real old ones that they found. And it takes great understanding of those pictographs to know what’s going on... The Bible is an interpretation of stories that took place originally and they are just stories but somebody had to make them believable. So, they wrote them all down... In our world, we have what we call our original teachings. These are not passed down through books. Sure, you see a book here. That’s more for the benefit of other people – people who have a penchant for books but when you want to hear the real story and stuff, you have to talk to the elders. They talk to you about the original teachings we got from the Great Spirit... We didn’t need schools at one time simply because our grandmothers and our grandfathers and our Elders – they would teach the children. They would teach all the children while the mothers and fathers are busy going about their daily tasks. So, the whole family is responsible for the child. The grandmothers, the grandfathers, the uncles, the aunts – they are all responsible for that child...”

The Role of Tobacco

“In our societies, we never had drugs. We never had alcohol. Nobody ever misused tobacco. We don’t smoke tobacco. It’s sacred to us! And it was a different type of tobacco. It’s sacred to us and then, we use that for praying and that’s the greatest gift we can give to any spirit we bring [it] to – our Great Spirit and so on; and to say ‘thank you’ for things and show that sign of respect and other things. When people come to see me, in our community, and they ask me, ‘Could I ask you a question?’, they bring me a little tobacco and I will accept that. And I will

answer that question and accept that tobacco. If not, I say, 'I can't help you with this but I will tell you where you can go'. That's what I do. And that's the way our people are. I have seen an elder sit there and a person was asking questions and kept asking, 'Why won't you talk to me? Why won't you tell me what I want to know?' And he wouldn't say nothing. And I was sitting there... and I had some tobacco in my bundle. I got some tobacco and I went over there and I said to him, 'Could you teach these young people about this tobacco? And could you give them the answers to the questions they want to know?' And he just held his hand out. I gave him tobacco. He said, 'Yes' and he talked to them [about] what they need[ed] to know. Some people are very stubborn about that. I don't tend to be that way. I like the sign of respect it brings. That doesn't mean I am not going to help somebody..."

The Period of Revival

"We are a resilient people. What has been done to us is equivalent to genocide when you think about it. We have been poisoned by blankets and given smallpox which devastated our people. We have been taken to residential schools and they tried to take the Indian out of the Indian. Doesn't work! So, so many things that we have suffered and as a result of that, our language has been disappearing. Our culture was disappearing. But during the late 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s, these Friendship centers and all these native activist groups and all our societies start[ed] getting together and saying 'No, we are not going to be driven out' and we went right back. Now, if you ask how many are believing? More and more each day! Now, by far we say there are 25% of [us] who follow this way of life. But everyday, there's another few people, from somewhere around us, what we call Turtle Island [North America], who come to our understandings. Some of them leave the Christian teachings and they leave it very angry. We tell them, 'No, you can't do that! They taught you some things in the Christian Church'. And even [a] negative happening in your life is a teacher. That teaches you not to get into that position again. So, we suffered a lot and now, we are coming back. Our language is being more and more revived every year. We have teachers [and] schools. We are starting to develop our own schools... They teach the language at our schools... So, you know, I can go on all day and tell you about different things about us. It's kind of hard to condense it because, let's face it, it takes me a lifetime to learn something. I don't have another lifetime to teach it to you"¹.

Interview with Mr. Tom Deer

The Concept of God and the Creation Story

Question: The first question is about the concept of God, *Shongwàyadihs:on*. Can you speak more about him? How do you perceive him?

Answer: “Well, it goes back to our creation story which talks about a woman coming from heaven – a woman coming from there and coming to this earth. When she came from there, she was herself pregnant. When she came to earth, she had a daughter. That was the baby that was born. And then, that daughter later became pregnant as well by those spirit forces that were here on this earth. And she had twin boys. One was the evil twin. And the other was the good twin. And the good twin was the one who created people. So, that’s like the very basic explanation of what we would call God... Both evil and good [spirits] created different life forms on earth but it was the good twin who created people”.

Question: Do you pray to the good twin?

Answer: “Yes! We pray to *Shongwàyadihs:on*... He actually has a name. His name is *Tharonhiawaklon* and that means ‘He upholds the heavens’. So, after he created people and created all of the different things on earth, he went back to the sky world and his last message was, “I will always be there listening and watching everything that you do”. [He said this] because he left instructions for us to follow and [for] our ceremonial way of life. And so, whenever we would pray, he would hear and see us – these ceremonies that [we perform]”.

Question: Does the evil one still have influence?

Answer: “Yes! He does....It may not be him, himself, but they say he has helpers as well. Well, they both have helpers who come and affect people in different ways. Basically, the teachings that we have are how a person is to be good. Usually, when you have thoughts of going against that or being bad, they say that that’s the evil twin or his workers that are influencing you this way”.

Question: The creator had a mother. What’s her role?

Answer: “Actually, when the twins were born, the creator was born the natural way. They say that when they were in the womb, they were actually arguing. The good twin said that I’m going to be born this way and the evil twin said, ‘Well, I can see light coming from this other spot. So, I’m going to go through there.’ So, the good twin was born the natural way and the evil twin came out of his mother’s armpit and he killed her”.

Question: They appear to have come from heaven. How did that heaven come to be?

Answer: “They just say [that] it was always there”.

Question: One version speaks of the grandmother being thrown down from heaven by her husband. Can you elaborate?

Answer: “Well, there’s different versions that people will say. The one that I have been told is that her husband thought that she wasn’t true to him. So, he got mad at her. He thought that she had extramarital affairs. So, in heaven, there was a tree – a large tree that grew in the middle of the land there – which actually gave them light. Back in those days, they used to have a ceremony. It was like a dream fulfillment ceremony. This man, who was the leader or the chief in the sky world, called for that. He asked people to try to divine his dream [or] his wishes... So, they did that and it was a special ceremony they did for that and what they said was that he wanted them to dig up that tree which they did. So, when he sat beside that hole that was created, with his wife, they sat there together. That’s when he pushed her because he was upset with her. And she fell down and came down to here”.

The Concept of Prayer

Question: Can you speak about more about how you pray?

Answer: “You can talk to the creator anytime. That’s why he says, “I am always watching and always listening to everything”. So, even in your thoughts, the Creator hears everything. So, you can pray that way as well. And we have sort of a thanksgiving speech that we use whenever we have a formal gathering. And we address, first of all, beginning with the people who are gathered. We greet each other and we give thanks that we have come together and help. And then, we address each part of the natural world. We talk about the grasses and we give thanks to the Creator for the grass that is growing. And the medicinal plants that are part of that. And then, we talk about the trees. And we do that for all of the natural world. We give thanks for the water, the animals, the birds, the food crops that we have been given. We call them our mothers that would support our life. In our language, we call it *tionhehkwen*. We also give thanks to the Spirit helpers. We mention our grandfathers, the thunders. We thank them for bringing the rains and helping to nourish the earth and replenish the waters and keep the earth new. And so, we continue onto that. Our elder brother, the Sun, we thank him, and our grandmother, the moon, and our ancestors, the Stars, and finally to the Creator. We thank Him for all of these things He has given us. But what we are told is that that begins with our thoughts. So, when we want to do that personally to thank the Creator, we can have those thoughts in our mind. And

He hears that. [However] when we have a gathering for everyone, there is one speaker selected to say those words and say them on behalf of all the people who are there. That's one form of prayer".

Question: How many times can you pray on your own?

Answer: "Throughout the day, you can do that on your own. We are supposed to do it when we get up in the morning and before we go to bed at night".

Perception of the Sun and the Moon

Question: Can you speak more about the importance of the Sun and Moon?

Answer: "We call him [the Sun] elder brother because the grandmother moon was actually the first woman that came down. She was given the duty by her grandson, the Creator, that she would watch over us during the night... Her brother is the sun. So, he is the elder brother... When the Creator went back to heaven, this is when he assigned [them] to do these duties".

The Concept of Spirits

Question: What is the concept of Spirits among the Iroquois?

Answer: "We call them Spirit Guardians. The four Guardians from the Creator who help to guard us in our life... Those are four beings who... protect us with their hands and guide us throughout the day. The Evil Twin has helpers [as well but] these are the Creator's helpers. They help us keep our thoughts straight [and] pure [and] trying to keep us with the teachings that we have been given".

The Original Teachings and the Four Sacred Ceremonies

Question: Can you speak more about those teachings?

Answer: "The first thing that [the Creator] gave to us was our clan system because all of our families relate to certain animals which is like the totem or the identification of our families which is in clans. That was to help out with the concept of death because when those very first people were created on earth, they were told that they would see a time when people would start to die because they hadn't seen that before. And so, one of the messages that they received was that they would set up this clan system from where they would [have] a reciprocal way to help

each other to deal with mourning and with the loss of a family member. That was... one of the original, ceremonial things that was given. And the next one was through a Messenger* – what we call our four great ceremonies. We have what we call the *ustuwagowah* – the great ‘feather dance’ – which is the Creator’s song which he has given to us to give thanks with. So, he’s given us a song for us to use to give thanks with and a dance that goes with it. So, that’s one.

“The next one we call *adun-wa*, which is a personal chant where individual men can sing these chant songs and say a speech of thanksgiving as well to go with it. That’s the second one. And then, the third one we call *ganeh-hon*. It refers to the drum that we use. It’s covered with a hide and there’s a song that goes with that as well and a dance.

“And then, the last one was actually a *game*. It’s a ceremonial game that we play. Those clans that were created – we have so many that sit together on one side of our ceremonial house and then so many on the other side and they play the game against each other. It’s a bowl game... When we play that game, we cheer. There’s a certain way that we cheer and what that does is it carries all of the strength or all of the power that we have created doing this ceremony and the sound of the cheering and the game carries it to the Creator”.

Question: It’s like a sacred game to you?

Answer: “It is, yes. It’s one of the four sacred ceremonies”.

The Spirit of the Wind

Question: Among these spirits, there is one called the Spirit of the Wind. Can you speak more about that?

Answer: “We have a reference to what we call, in our language, *Haduwhui*. In English, they refer to it as ‘False Face’. All it says is that at the time of creation, as the Creator was travelling around the earth, looking at how he was going to prepare things for the coming of people, he met a being that was there. It was in human form. They started to talk and they had sort of a contest [between] themselves because the Creator said, ‘Who are you and where are you from?’ And this person answered, ‘Well, I have always been here. I am the creator of this world’. The Creator that we know says, ‘Well, that cannot be because I have just created this earth’. And he challenged him. He said, ‘Move this mountain over here! Make it move’... So, they turned their back to the mountain and the being said, ‘Mountain! Move!’. When they turned back around, the mountain did actually move a little bit. So, the Creator was quite surprised at this being that

* This Messenger is called the ‘Fatherless Man’ and he is discussed later on in the interview.

[it] did have power to move mountains... [Then] the Creator called the mountain to them. And it moved towards them and it brushed against their back. So, this being turned to look and as he turned, they say [that] he hit his face on the mountain and broke his nose and twisted his face... [This being] does have spiritual power to help to heal people. He made this agreement with the Creator that when our people would need a healing ceremony to overcome the sickness and disease, we could make a mask in the image of his face. We could use that ceremonially to help to heal people for disease. He actually has the ability to make the winds move as well and sometimes, they say that when he comes, he brings the wind with him”.

Handsome Lake

Question: How do you perceive the four messengers that Handsome Lake saw in his visions?

Answer: “These are the same four beings that are the helpers of the Creator”.

Question: Is the fourth one Jesus Christ ^{as} as Jacob Thomas mentions it in his book?

Answer: “Yes. Some people do say that. In Handsome Lake’s visions, the Messenger didn’t come out and say that ‘I’m Jesus ^{as}’ but I guess he showed him his wounds from being crucified. They say he showed his hands and they had holes in them. So, some people now say that was Jesus^{as}...”

Question: Do all of the traditional Iroquois give credibility to Handsome Lake’s message?

Answer: “Yes. For most. But there are small groups that because of how some people have related some of the teachings of Handsome Lake to Christianity like this concept that some people say that one of the four messengers is Jesus ^{as}. There are some people who reject that because there’s this queasy relationship [with Christianity]. [They] say Handsome Lake was just trying to make things up... It’s not valid... So, not everyone believes in the code of Handsome Lake. There are some Iroquois people who [dislike the code]... They are not saying it’s fake. They are saying that it’s mixed with [Christianity] and so they consider themselves to be so traditional that they don’t want anything that seems to be mixed with [Christianity]...”

Prophecy of the Return of Deganawidah

Question: What about prophecies of the future? Can you discuss them in detail?

Answer: “In one of the teachings that we had... we call it *Gayanshragowah* – the Great Law of Peace – which predated Handsome Lake. When that law came, it was supposed to try and keep peace between the clans and the families of our nations... The Messenger that brought that, we call him the Peacemaker. He has a name as well – Deganawidah. Before he left, he said that he

would be back. We would see a time in the future when we would see all of this turmoil, people wouldn't be practising our ceremonies, our laws would be lost to our people, they wouldn't know or understand and all those kinds of things... He did say that we would see *kahsrongehta*, which is a lion. That's what they refer to as the comet. That we would see these comets going through the sky which would signal that this time was coming. It makes it interesting because we have had so many in the past ten years – comets that have gone through. He said that when we would see these signs, they are described as a lion. Not the lion we could see in Africa but a mountain lion. So, these lions would pass through the sky and it would mark his return – the Peacemaker to bring back his message of peace”.

Question: Do you see him as a Messenger?

Answer: “Yes”.

Question: How do you see him compared to Handsome Lake?

Answer: “Well, he is sort of different. In the origin story of that, it says that he was born of a virgin mother. That was his actual job or his responsibility was to bring that message of peace from the Creator. He is on a different level [compared to] Handsome Lake. Handsome Lake was just a man. There was nothing special about his birth. Just that he had these visions in his later life”.

Question: About his return, did he speak of the time of his return?

Answer: “No”.

Prophecies of Handsome Lake

Question: Can you speak more about Handsome Lake's prophecy of the end of the world?

Answer: “Well, it doesn't really say ‘end of the world’. It says, ‘*oya neshaye*’ and that means that the Creator is going to do something different. We don't know what that is. We are going to see fire coming from the sky, water burning, and even prior to that, a lot of other environmental changes [such as] the earth getting really warm... [And] we will see the maple trees dying from the top down. They will start to rot from the top. The maple tree is an important tree for our people. We have a ceremony dedicated specifically for that throughout the year... We are going to see a woman who's beyond her years giving birth. She'll be having a baby. And you will see girls who are too young to be having babies having babies. You will see a certain bird; they call it a partridge. In our language, we call it a *quaizon* ... that the earth is going to get so warm that this bird that usually nests on the ground, you are going to start to see them nesting up in the trees because the ground is getting too warm [or] too hot. We are going to see a boat flying through

the air. And we are going to hear a man's voice coming very loud, we are going to see our grandfathers, the thunders, who always come from the west, we are going to hear them come from the east this time and they are going to go west. And they are not going to return. It's going to be their last [movement]. Their duties will be done. And there will be a rainbow, instead of going from north and south, [it] will go east and west. We would see all of these kinds of things happening”.

Question: Is this going to happen in the year 2100?

Answer: “Well, it doesn't really say. It says ‘within three lifetimes of Handsome Lake’. Now, some people have said, ‘Okay well, first it used to be 80 or 90 years old and we multiply that by 3, it ends up to be around 2010, [20]11, [or 20]12 from when Handsome Lake first received these messages’. But Handsome Lake himself didn't give a date. He just said, ‘Three lifetimes from now”.

Other Messengers

Question: Other than these two (Deganawidah and Handsome Lake), were there other messengers that came to the Iroquois?

Answer: “There were others. Like I mentioned earlier, there was a messenger who brought the four ceremonies. So, there was Handsome Lake, there was the Peacemaker, and then, there was one who we call the ‘Fatherless Man’ or the ‘Fatherless Boy’. He was born from a virgin mother. He is the one who brought those four sacred ceremonies that I mentioned”.

Question: The Creator who came to the world in the beginning. Did he bring any teachings? What was his role?

Answer: “The creation of the world, creation of people, and the original instructions to be thankful. Those were his last final things and his last message to the people was, ‘When I leave here, follow my tracks. And when you come to where my tracks end, I will leave my final gift to the people. And so, they did that. He left the earth and they followed his tracks. This is where the burial mound was of his mother where they found the corn beans and squash. And that was the food crops that he left for our people”.

Question: Do the Iroquois have different ways of looking at all these things that have been discussed?

Answer: “Yes”.

The Annual Recitals

Question: Is the code recited every year over a four-day period?

Answer: “It’s not over a four-day period. The first day basically talks about the historical information. It talks about Handsome Lake and the circumstances surrounding his visions, the state that the people were in at the time due to the alcoholism that had been rampant in our communities”.

Question: When does it happen?

Answer: “Usually September [or] October in the fall time”.

Question: Does it happen at the Six Nations reserve as well?

Answer: “Well, we have four longhouses here in this community. Every Longhouse, in all of our Iroquoian communities, is obligated to host these recitals every two years. There is only one longhouse here that is obligated to do that. So, it’s held here every two years at the Onondaga Longhouse... So, the first day is mostly all of the history. And the second day talks about all of the things that you can do to be a good person. It gives instructions on how to raise your children; how to discipline [them] if they need to be disciplined; how to be thankful; how to live your life as a good person... The third day talks about the ceremonial aspect – how the ceremonies are supposed to be conducted and all of those kinds of things. And then, the last day goes into the prophecy and the heaven and hell part or the punishment part”.

Question: How many people are expected to attend the next annual ceremony at the Onondaga Longhouse?

Answer: “They will probably be maybe three or four hundred”.

Question: What’s the procedure with which these ceremonies are held in other communities in Canada and the US?

Answer: “There’s actually a circuit. When they start doing the recitals in the fall, they go to each community. So, each longhouse has a representative that they send to travel to the other communities and I have done that on behalf of our Longhouse. I have travelled around and gone the whole circuit... It alternates each year. So, there are only so many communities that will do it one year and the rest of the communities will do it next year. It alternates back and forth. Not everyone does it every year all the time. It’s on alternate years. This community, for example, we just had it this past fall. So, we don’t have to do it again until two years from now. But the community next door to us – the Oneida reserve – near London, they will do theirs next fall, this coming October”.

Question: How many such communities are there in Canada and New York State?

Answer: “There are nine”.

Question: How many people do you estimate to be attending these annual ceremonies in total?

Answer: “For traditional Iroquois people, there aren’t many. There may be three or four hundred here. In the rest of the communities, my own personal estimate would be 5,000 altogether. [It] would be a pretty liberal estimate”.

Question: Do they have different languages at these nine different communities?

Answer: “Yes... but they are all derived from the same language”².

CHAPTER 9

THE FUTURE

As mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, it is a historical fact that since the 1960s, the Aboriginal Peoples have been experiencing a time of change and renewal. Many communities have a greater control over their schools and are attempting to teach their own languages to the next generation and many activist movements have demanded an overview of the problems affecting Aboriginal communities. In the case of religion, just as Mr. Frank Sutherland said, 'more and more people' are turning back to their traditions every day. As far as their political future is concerned, McMillon and Yellowhorn have the following to say:

In general... few Aboriginal candidates appear on the ballot when provincial elections are called. That situation is about to change. Urban Aboriginal People are presently dispersed throughout the general population so they do not typically constitute a bloc of voters. However, as more and more Aboriginal People move into cities, they will mobilize and they will nominate candidates who appeal to the general electorate for civic and provincial politics. Then, Canadians will be surprised to hear that a major Canadian city, perhaps Winnipeg or Regina, has elected an Aboriginal mayor. Before 2029... an Aboriginal premier may well be elected in one of provinces...

...the momentum of change almost assures that the Indian Act will eventually be removed. In the meantime, First Nations will continue to negotiate their way out from under the constraints of the Indian Act, as the Scheldt did in 1986 and as other First Nations have accomplished through land claim settlements. Those First Nations with historic treaties may succeed in negotiating updated and modernized treaties that reflect their new relationship with Canada. Perhaps this is the generation that will witness the election of an Aboriginal premier. They might even see the day when the governor general is Aboriginal or when an Aboriginal judge is appointed to the Supreme Court. They may even witness the Assembly of First Nations evolve into some form of governmental entity.¹

In other words, the political future looks quite optimistic for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. In addition, the Ojibway and the Iroquois have some prophecies of their own and these will be compared with the prophecies of the Holy Qur'an and the Promised Messiah ^{as} to see if any conclusions can be made.

The Seven Fires Prophecies

According to the oral tradition of the Ojibway, seven prophets once came to them and gave them seven predictions about the future. Each of these was called a 'fire' and referred to the events that were to occur in a certain period. The events predicted in the first three Fires relate to a time long ago. The fourth Fire speaks about the coming of the 'Light-Skinned Race' and subsequent events. Edward Benton-Banai discusses the prophecies of the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh Fires in the following words:

The Fourth Fire was originally given to the people by two prophets. They came as one. They told of the coming of the Light-Skinned Race.

One of the prophets said, "You will know the future of our people by what face the Light-skinned Race wears. If they come wearing the face of nee-kon'-nis-iwin' (brotherhood), then there will come a time of wonderful change for generations to come. They will bring new knowledge and articles that can be joined with the knowledge of this country. In this way two nations will join to make a mighty nation. This new nation will be joined by two more so that the four will form the mightiest nation of all. You will know the face of brotherhood if the Light-skinned Race comes carrying no weapons, if they come bearing only their knowledge and a handshake."

The other prophet said, "Beware if the Light-skinned Race comes wearing the face of ni-boo-win' (death). You must be careful because the face of brotherhood and the face of death look very much alike. If they come carrying a weapon... beware. If they come in suffering... they could fool you. Their hearts may be filled with greed for the riches of this land. If they are indeed your brothers, let them prove it. Do not accept them in total trust. You shall know that the face they wear is the one of death if the rivers run with poison and fish become unfit to eat. You shall know them by these many things.

The fifth prophet said, "In the time of the Fifth Fire there will come a time of great struggle that will grip the lives of all Native People. At the waning of this Fire there will come among the people one who holds a promise of great joy and salvation. If the people accept this promise of a new way and abandon the old teachings, then the struggle of the Fifth Fire will be with the people for many generations. The promise

that comes will prove to be a false promise. All those who accept this promise will cause the near destruction of the people.”

The prophet of the Sixth Fire said, “In the time of the Sixth Fire it will be evident that the promise of the Fifth Fire came in a false way. Those deceived by this promise will take their children away from the teachings of the *chi’-ah-ya-og’* (elders). Grandsons and granddaughters will turn against the elders. In this way the elders will lose their reason for living... they will lose their purpose in life. At this time a new sickness will come among the people. The balance of many people will be disturbed. The cup of life will almost be spilled. The cup of life will almost become the cup of grief.”...

The seventh prophet that came to the people long ago was said to be different from the other prophets. He was young and had a strange light in his eyes. He said, “In the time of the Seventh Fire a *Osh-ki-bi-ma-di-zeeg’* (New People) will emerge. They will retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail. Their steps will take them to the elders who they will ask to guide them on their journey. But many of the elders will have fallen asleep. They will awaken to this new time with nothing to offer. Some of the elders will be silent out of fear. Some of the elders will be silent because no one will ask anything of them. The New People will have to be careful in how they approach the elders. The task of the New People will not be easy.

“If the New People will remain strong in their quest, the Waterdrum of the Midewiwin Lodge will again sound its voice. There will be a rebirth of the Anishinabe nation and a rekindling of the old flames. The Sacred Fire will again be lit.

“It is at this time that the Light-Skinned Race will be given a choice between two roads. If they choose the right road, then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and Final Fire – an eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood. If the Light-Skinned Race makes the wrong choice of roads, then the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will come back to them and cause much suffering and death to all the Earth’s people.”²

The way that many parts of this prophecy have been fulfilled indicates that it is very likely that it has a Divine source. The only question that remains is in regards to the events that have yet to occur. The fact of the matter is that the prophecy about the coming of the *Osh-ki-bi-ma-di-zeeg’* (New People) coincides with a prophecy of the Holy Qur’ān made in the following verse:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظَاهِرَهُ عَلَىٰ الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا ۝

He it is Who has sent His Messenger, with guidance and the Religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over *all other* religions. And sufficient is Allāh as a Witness. (Sūrah Al-Fath 48:29)

Commentators of the Holy Qur'an agree that the above verse relates to events that would occur at the time of the Promised Messiah and Imām Mahdi ^{as}, whose advent was prophesied by the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{sa}. That person is Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad ^{as} and he said the following about the future of his community:

O ye people! Remember that this is a prophecy from Him Who created the earth and the heaven. He will cause this Movement of His to spread in all countries and shall grant it dominance over all others by way of sound reasoning and arguments. Those days are approaching, nay they are near at hand, when there shall only be this single religion in the world, which is spoken of with respect. God shall grant this religion and this Movement phenomenal and extra-ordinary blessings and shall cause to fail all those who seek to destroy it. And this dominance will remain till the Day of Judgment... And the third century from this day^{*} shall not have passed when those who await the coming of Jesus ^{as}, whether they be Muslims or Christians, shall relinquish this false notion being severely disappointed and distrustful [of it]. And there shall only be one religion in the world and only one leader. I have only come to sow the seed. So, with my hand, that seed has been planted and now, it shall grow and flourish and there is no one who can stop it[†].³

This prophecy clearly states that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community – a community established by the Promised Messiah ^{as} – will spread and gain dominance in all parts of the world and when this prophecy is put next to the Ojibway prophecy, one can see clear parallels and conclude that the *Osh-ki-bi-ma-di-zeeg*' (New People) are actually the Ahmadi Muslims who will bring the message of “peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood” through the universal teachings of the Holy Qur'an to the Ojibway. *Inshā' Allāh!* (God Willing)

The Return of Deganawidah

As discussed in the interview with Mr. Tom Deer in the previous chapter, the Iroquois have a prophecy of the return of Deganawidah or the Peacemaker, whom they consider to be a Messenger. Two important things about his return are that he would bring a message of peace and there would be comets going through the sky indicating his return. It is possible that the word ‘comet’ has been used to actually refer to meteorites because they are the ones that

^{*} This prophecy was made in the year 1903.

[†] Translated from Urdu by the author.

commonly enter and burn in the earth's atmosphere every now and then. Perhaps that word was used to emphasize the extra-ordinary nature of the meteor shower which will be seen at the time of the coming of his return. It is very interesting that these two signs are exactly the same for the advent of the Promised Messiah ^{as}. According to the Holy Prophet Muhammad ^{sa}, the Promised Messiah ^{as} shall "end war"⁴ ("يضع الحرب") and, in another narration, it says that he shall "end Jizya"⁵ ("يضع الجزية") and both of these narrations indicate that he would establish peace. Also, at the time of the coming of every prophet, a meteor shower of extra-ordinary proportions occurs and the same happened at the time of the Promised Messiah ^{as}. He explains how and when this happened for his advent in the following words:

...On the night of 28 November, 1885, that is, the night which came before the day of 28 November, 1885, there was such a great spectacle of a meteor shower that I have not seen a like thereof in my entire life. And in the atmosphere, there were so many thousands of blazes moving in every direction that there is nothing like it in the world that I may be able to describe it. I remember that at that time, I received this revelation repeatedly: ما رميت اذ رميت ولكن الله رمى [Whatever you did let loose, it was not you but it was Allāh Who let it loose][‡]... [About] that spectacle of a meteor shower that took place at a grand level on the night of 28 November, 1885, the news of which was published with amazement in common newspapers of Europe and America and Asia, people probably think that it was purposeless. However, God Al-Mighty knows that the one who viewed this spectacle with the greatest earnestness, and also took pleasure and delight from it, is me alone. My eyes remained viewing this spectacle for a very long time and the meteor shower had already begun in the evening, which I viewed with much delight only because of [prior] revelations containing [these] glad tidings. This is because it was revealed in my heart that this Sign has been shown for you[§].⁶

This is the same sign that Deganawidah spoke of for his return. It must also be understood that according to Qur'ānic prophecies for the latter days, the world was to become a global village and means of communication and transport were to become much better and modernized. At such a time, it cannot be expected that Allāh Ta'ālā sends different prophets to different nations as it would create discord and disunity among the people. It is only logical that Allāh Ta'ālā sends one Prophet who has the attributes of all the Prophets to bring a message of peace for the entire world. As a result, that Prophet has already arrived in the person of Hadhrat Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad ^{as}, who has stated that his advent not only fulfills the prophecy of the

[‡] Translation of the revelation taken from: Hadhrat Chaudhary Muhammad Zafrullah Khan ^{ra}, *Tadhkirah* (Islamabad: Islām International Publications Ltd., 2009), 58.

[§] Translated by the author.

metaphorical return of Jesus ^{as} but also the return of the Messengers of other nations. He explains this in the following quotation:

...God exercises subtlety in all that He does and in accordance with this age primarily gave me the name of Jesus son of Mary, because, I too, like the Jesus of the past have suffered greatly at the hands of my own people, and have been called a disbeliever, accursed and the antichrist, and been dragged to the courts. Therefore the Son of Mary was my first garb. However, in the register of God, Jesus son of Mary is not my only name. Instead, I have many others which God had recorded in *Brahin-i-Ahmadiyya* through me twenty years ago. There is no Prophet of the past whose name I have not been given. Thus, God has declared in *Brahin-i-Ahmadiyya* that I am Adam, I am Abraham and Isaac, I am Jacob, Ishmael, Moses, David, Jesus son of Mary and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allāh be upon him). (I am all these) by way of reflection in accordance with the revelation found in the same book *جری اللہ فی حلال الانبیاء* i.e. the Messenger of God in the Garb of the Prophets. The greatness of all the Prophets is found in my person and the different attributes of all the individual prophets are manifested through me, but God has preferred that He should first manifest the attribute of the Son of Mary... Indeed I have been given the names of all the Prophets. For example I have also been given the name of the prophet Krishna who was raised in India and was also given the appellation *Rudar Gopal* (the one who sustains and causes to perish). I am the Krishna whom the Aryas are anxiously awaiting in these days. I make this claim not of myself, rather God has repeatedly informed me that I am the Krishna who was to appear in the latter days^{**}.⁷

This reality is also expressed in the following poetic verse of the Promised Messiah ^{as}:

میں کبھی آدم کبھی موسیٰ کبھی یعقوب ہوں
نیز ابراہیم ہوں نسلیں ہیں میری بے شمار

At times I am Adam, at times I am Moses, and at times Jacob;
Also, I am Abraham; My progeny is indeed countless^{††}

^{**} Translation of the original Urdu quotation taken from: Mirzā Fazal Ahmad. *Centenary Khalifat-e-Ahmadiyya*. Rabwah: Tehrik-e-Jadid Anjuman Ahmadiyya Pakistan, 2008, Page 10.

^{††} Ibid.

Based on these arguments, it can be concluded that the advent of the Promised Messiah ^{as} is actually the metaphorical return of Deganawidah and this makes it very important that Muslims discuss this perspective with the Iroquois through dialogue. May Allāh Ta‘ālā enable the Muslims and Aborigines to have continuous dialogues, discourses and discussions in the future that enhance their mutual understanding and respect for each other and bring about a period of peace and tranquility. *Āmīn! Thumma Āmīn!*

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is obvious that there were some limitations of this dissertation and one of them is that many smaller groups of Aboriginals were not discussed. Future research can look into other groups of Aboriginals in Canada and even the United States of America. There could also be an attempt to prove that most, if not all, the groups of North America believe in only One God and a comparison of their views of the One God can be made. In addition, this research viewed the Aboriginal faiths from the perspective of five fundamental articles of faith in Islām. Future research can enhance this research by looking into other areas like worship, the origins of sacred ceremonial activities, healing practices, the connection of sacred objects with spirituality, and so on. On the other hand, a long term research project could involve more field work. A Muslim researcher may choose to live in an Aboriginal community and engage in regular dialogue and discussions with them in order to learn their culture, beliefs, and practices, from first-hand experience. This field work could also help him gain a better understanding of the health of Aboriginal languages and this could pave the way for a translation of the Holy Qur'ān in one or more of the healthier, regularly used Aboriginal languages. It is earnestly hoped that this humble project has opened up the way for much greater research in the future. *Inshā' Allāh!* (God willing)

GLOSSARY

adun-wa: A personal chant sung by individual men in an Iroquoian ceremony.

Ae-pungishimook: A manitou, who is the husband of Winonah and the father of Maudjee-kawiss, Pukawiss, Cheeby-aub-oozoo, and Nana'b'oozoo.

الخالق (Al-Khāliq): Arabic term for a Diving attribute meaning the Creator.

الرحمن (Al-Rahmān): Divine attribute, meaning the Gracious.

الرحيم (Al-Rahīm): Divine attribute, meaning the Merciful.

الصمد (Al-Samad): Divine attribute, meaning the Independent and Besought of all.

Anishinabeg (or Anishinaubaek or Anishinaubae): Ojibway term meaning “First People”. Other names include Ojibway, Ochipwe and Chippewa.

Ātayōhkanak: The term for spirits in Cree religious thought. These spirits can be good or bad and are believed to take a physically influential role in the everyday lives of humans.

Awenhén:seh: The person whose death and eventual placement in Paradise was predicted by Handsome Lake.

Beewun: The wife of Waub-kookoo in the story of Pauguk.

Cheeby-aub-oozoo: The half manitou, half human son of Ae-pungishimook. He is known to have established the tradition of dream vision quests and taught spiritual songs to the Ojibway. The word literally means “Chief of the Underworld” and the former name of this person was Waub-oozoo.

chi'-ah-ya-og': Ojibway term for elders.

Cree: The largest Aboriginal group of Canada. Cree nations reside in most of central Canada – Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba.

Dah-gwa-nonh-en-yend: The Spirit of the Wind in Iroquois religious thought. He is also known as the Spirit of the False Faces.

Deganawidah: A spiritual leader of the Iroquois who brought the Great Law of Peace. He is also known as the 'Peacemaker'.

deganigonhadé:nyons: The Iroquois term for alcohol.

dharti: A Hindu term which literally means earth.

esk-bawis: The otter who was asked by the Seven Grandfathers to go out and find somebody on earth who could come to them and be taught sacred teachings.

Gaiwí:yo: An Iroquois term used to refer to the code of Handsome Lake. Literally means, the good word.

ganeh-hon: A drum used by the Iroquois for their ceremonies.

ganóngeh shagohewátha' thonoñh:soht: Iroquoian term for the House of Punishment in the Afterlife. This is apparently the equivalent of Hell.

gayanshragowah: The Great Law of Peace established by Deganawidah, a spiritual leader of the Iroquois. It resulted in an era of peace between the Iroquois nations.

giizis: Ojibway term for the sun or the sun spirit.

gomiguachoo: Ojibway term meaning thank you very much.

gowihwagá:deh: The Iroquois term for boasting.

haduwhui: The Iroquoian name for the spirit of the wind or the spirit of the false faces.

Hanisse'ono: Iroquoian term for the evil spirit.

Īmān: Arabic term for faith or belief.

Inshā' Allāh: Arabic term meaning, if Allāh wills. In usage, a prayer to Allāh for his help in future events is implied.

انتشارِ روحانیت (Intishāre Rūhāniyya): The Urdu name used by Hadhrat Masīh Mau'ud^{as} to refer to a phenomenon that occurs at the time of the coming of every prophet. It literally means 'the spread of spirituality' and it causes various people to have spiritual experiences at the time of the coming of a prophet.

Iroquois: An Aboriginal group that resides in the southern regions of Ontario and Quebec. It refers to a combination of six different nations, including Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora.

Jesuit priests: French Catholic priests who came to Canada in the 17th and 18th centuries for the sake of evangelizing the masses into the Christian faith.

kahsrongehta: An Iroquoian term used in the prophecy about Deganawidah meaning a 'lion'. It referred to the passing of comets or more likely, meteorites, in the sky. This was a sign for the return of Deganawidah.

Kisemanitōw ("Key-shay-mani-to"): A Cree term which literally means 'Great Spirit' and refers to the Supreme Being.

Kitchi-Manitou (or Kitchi Manido): The Ojibway term for the Supreme Being. It's a combination of the words, *kitchi*, meaning immense and preeminent, and *manitou*, meaning spirit.

macimanitōw or key-jick-oh-kay: Principal Evil spirit in Cree religious thought.

Malā'ikatullāh: Arabic phrase meaning Angels of Allāh. The same phrase is used in Urdu.

مالک (mālik): Divine attribute, meaning Master.

مالکیت (mālikiyyat or mālikiat): An Arabic term referring to the Lordship of God.

manitou(s): An Ojibway term commonly used to refer to spirit(s). Other meanings include mystery, spiritual, mystical, supernatural, godlike or spiritlike, quiddity, and essence.

Matchi-auwish: The Evil Spirit or the 'Evil One' in Ojibway thought.

Maudjee-kawiss: The half manitou, half human son of Ae-pungishimook. He is known to have brought a sense of history and bravery to the Ojibway people.

مولی (maulā): Divine attribute, meaning Lord.

megazhi: Ojibway term for the eagle, who is believed to be able to take prayers to the Creator.

midewiwin lodge: The *Encyclopedia of Native American Religions* describes it as, “The religious society of the Ojibway and related tribal groups whose primary purpose was to prolong life... One version of its origin states that the Midewiwin was a sacred gift sent by Gitche Manitou, the Creator to help the people during a time of hardship and suffering. The society, also called Mide, combined moral teachings and codes of conduct with a knowledge of plants and herbs to heal and to prolong life.”**

Muhaddithin: Arabic term used to refer to non-Prophets who are the recipients of revelation of Allāh Ta‘ālā.

muzzu-kummik-quaē: An Ojibway term which literally means Earth Woman and, by extension, Mother Earth. It represents extra-ordinary love and respect for the earth, a concept prevalent among many Aboriginal nations.

Nana’b’oozoo: The half manitou, half human son of Ae-pungishimook. He is the central trickster figure of Ojibway religious thought and he represents human shortcomings and shortfalls. Another style for writing his name is Nanabush.

nee-kon’-nis-iwin’: Ojibway term for brotherhood.

ni-boo-win’: Ojibway term for death.

nimkee: Ojibway term for the thunder beings, who are believed to be living in the west and to be the creators of lightening or fire.

N’okomiss: The Grandmother of Nana’b’oozoo.

nookimis: Ojibway term for the moon or the moon spirit.

osh-ki-bi-ma-di-zeeg’: Ojibway term for new people.

** Hirschfelder and Molin, *Encyclopedia of Native Religions*, 116.

oya neshaye: Iroquoian phrase from a prophecy of Handsome Lake that spoke of changes to come three generations after him. It means that the Creator is going to do something different.

pākahk: The skeleton being or spirit in Cree religious thought. It represented the concept of sharing and it is also considered the helping spirit of the hunters by both Plains and Woods Cree.

Pauguk: The main character of an Ojibway story that speaks of the punishment of wrong-doers in the afterlife.

pawākan: Guardian spirits that the Cree seek in vision quests.

Pukawiss: The half manitou, half human son of Ae-pungishimook. He is known to have brought drama and costume to the Ojibway heritage. He is also well known for his practical joking in Ojibway stories.

quaizon: A partridge, or the ruffed grouse.

Rudar Gopal: Literally means ‘the one who sustains and causes to perish’. It is an appellation of Prophet Krishna ^{as}.

رحيميت (rahīmiyyat or rahīmiat): An Arabic term which refers to the Compassion of God.

رحمنيت (rahmāniyyat or rahmāniat): An Arabic term referring to the Graciousness of God.

صمديت (samadiat): An Arabic term meaning Independence of God.

shaman: A common term used to refer to the spiritual practitioners of Aboriginal groups. It is more commonly used by the non-Aboriginals and may or may not be used by the Aboriginals themselves as each nation may have a different term to refer to the same person.

شر (Shar): Arabic term for evil.

Shongwàydíhs:on: The Iroquois term for the Creator. It literally means ‘He Who made you’. It also refers to the ‘good spirit’ in their creation story.

توحيد (tawhīd): Arabic term to refer to the Oneness of God.

thaonhwenjá:deh shongwaiatíhs:on: Iroquoian term for the Land of the Creator in the Afterlife. This is the equivalent of Paradise.

Tharonhiawaklon: Another name for the Creator or *Shongwàyadihs:on* in Iroquoian religious thought. It literally means ‘He upholds the heavens’.

tionhehkwen: An Iroquoian term used to refer to the thanking of the trees and other provisions of the natural world during worship.

trickster or transformer: A comical character common in the stories of nearly all Aboriginal nations. In some stories, he may demonstrate very good morals while in others, he could even steal or perform other despicable acts and face consequences. Such stories may serve the purpose of establishing the difference between good and evil. In some stories, he may also appear as a supernatural being who creates the world as it is now.

ustuwagowah: The Iroquoian term meaning the ‘feather hands’, a sacred, thanksgiving song believed to have been given by the Creator to the Iroquoian people.

Wanabozho: The boy in an Ojibway story who learned sacred teachings from the Seven Grandfathers.

Waub-kookoo: The husband of Beewun. He found the skull of Pauguk and restored his bones at his request.

Waub-oozoo: This is the name of two different characters in two different stories. In one, this is the former name of Cheeby-aub-oozoo. In another, this is the name of the person who is the brother of Pauguk.

weendigo: An Ojibway term used to refer to a giant manitou in the form of a man or a woman, who is afflicted with never-ending hunger for human flesh. It also represented any other despicable traits that one could have.

Wisahkēcāhk: The central trickster-transformer character in sacred stories of the Cree.

Zhaminido: Another Ojibway name for Kitchi-Manitou.

NOTES

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