

**Unholy Communion:
Ministries of the Puritan and Franciscan Clergy
With The (New England) Algonquian
And The Pueblo Native Americans
In the 17th Century**

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I. Introduction: Starting Points

I have researched and written this article specifically for religious leaders of all faiths in North America. I have set about to describe two disastrous ministries that were going forward in America at the same formative time. I have sensed that few in the present-day line of these clergy really know how hurtfully their predecessors ministered, nor how this early record set the posture for the later extermination of American Indians.

A Partial Odyssey

My contact and exposure to Native Americans began in college, when as a straw boss working in the United States Forest Service (1953-1956) on the Lolo National Forest in Montana and Idaho, I encountered Indians of the region. One of these, a Shoshone woman, made a deep impression on me, and I describe that in the last section of this essay.

My next exposure came while fulfilling my Internship as a student in McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago in 1959, when I volunteered to assist in the ministry of a community church on the Chippewa Reservation in Lac du Flambeau, WS for the summer. This work introduced me to the reality of Indian life in mid-century America as being in a trough between a culture that was poor, but managing to hold onto tribal traditions on the one hand, and a future that was vague about where Indians on the Rez ought to go next – a trough in which the role of Christian missions was beginning to take a decidedly social work and medical services tack. After the Internship I sensed no calling to continue ministry among Native Americans, and at that time there were no positions open.

In the 1960s I volunteered myself for the Civil Rights movement. I took part in the campaigns both North and South for voter registration, integration of public facilities, fair housing, and educational equality. To be effective and successful, I had to listen to African-Americans talk about their experiences from slavery to the present. Listen I did, and grow and change.

In 1980 my growth took an environmental route. I signed on through the Unitarian Universalist Association to take an environmental tour of the Navajo Reservation with Prof. David M. Brugge of the University of New Mexico.

He introduced us to Navajos, many in dire poverty. He showed us what the agribusiness and strip-mining were doing to their land. The Navajo spokespersons, men and women, were fine-tuned with wisdom and with deep concern for their land and resources.

Exactly what environmental lesson we should pay attention to was clear to me. I already knew that the Navajo and the Pueblo people did not simply worship our Mother Earth. This was about respect for earth and sky, and a living heritage of respect.

In 1986 a friend I met through the parish ministry, Paul Peralta-Ramos (deceased, August 2003) invited me to come to Taos, New Mexico, where he lived part of each year. He was a collector of Spanish and American Indian fine arts and crafts - as was his mother, Millicent Rogers before him. He, his brother Arturo, and several associates founded the wonderful Millicent Rogers Museum in Taos.

Paul taught me that the way to access a people and their story was through arts and crafts. We went through a rich level of details in this area, both Native and Spanish. Paul also kept me focused on archeology of the 10th-17th centuries that bears the authorship or is done in collaboration with Indians. He really led me deep and wide in this field, and my exploring travels in the Southwest continued for the next twelve years.

I joined the new Mashantucket Pequot Nation Museum, in Ledyard, CT, in 2000 and have attended conferences and exhibits there on a regular basis. This has provided insights and a hands-on learning experience of Northeast Natives. I began reading about the tragic extermination in 1637 of the Pequots of Southeastern, CT. I realized, after

visiting the region of West Mystic, CT and the hill on which “Fort Mystic” had stood when it was occupied by upwards of 700 men, women and children, and was burned by the Puritan army in 1637, killing almost all the inhabitants, that I had stumbled across another holocaust.

Some key texts for this article include: The Book of the Hopi, Frank Waters; When Jesus Came, The Corn Mothers Went Away, by Ramon A. Gutierrez, Stanford Press, 1991. A Little Matter of Genocide, by Ward Churchill, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1997. The Name of War, by Jill Lepore, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1998. The Pequot War, by Alfred A. Cave, University of Massachusetts Press 1996. The Native Peoples of New England, 1500-1650, Kathleen J. Bragdon, Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1996

“There are no shadows
to tell us where we are,
but memory of yesterday’s
perfect songs, when tomorrow was sure,
a time of met images and kept fires:
winter dreams that almost disappeared
in scattered light.” - Paul Gunn Allen “The Return”

II. Theology and practices of Puritan clergy among the Algonquians

A. The Puritan Ministers’ Faith-Formation.

It is important to re-construct the paradigm of the ministers’ faith-formation before we go further. The material comes from Jill Lepore’s TheName Of War, chs, 2-3. Also from my study of Puritan history with Prof. Perry Miller of Harvard College. It comes from my study of Calvinism in a Presbyterian seminary in the 1950s. Other comes from the historical records of the Town of Medfield, MA, and its First Parish, where I served in the 1970s as minister. Also, from the Town of Little Compton, RI, and the history of the First Parish Church. The Plimouth Plantation and engages the visitor with its colonial impersonators in 17th c. dialogue. I recommend the new feature there called, “Irreconcilable Differences.”

Puritan religion and its Pilgrim offshoot in England and in New England required a distinct kind of religious formation. It was different from the later 18th century, very personal and emotional, religious experience, e.g. Methodism. It was different from the Spanish Franciscan, emotional and mystical, “marriage with Christ” vision as well.

Ministers like Increase Mather and John Hooker did not have an emotional conversion. It all hinged on a man’s assent to certain religious doctrines. The man believed in a literal truth about the world as revealed in scripture, or the Word of God.

The young Puritan man sat in a gathering of believers, and there heard Bible-laced preaching. This preaching was composed of Bible quotations linked together to achieve a certain purpose. The purpose was to confront the hearers with the evidence for the sovereignty of God in the universe. The preacher made the man know that he was a fallen and unworthy creature, because of original sin and his own sins in breaking the Ten Commandments.

Then the sinner was told he had only one choice to avoid the wrath of God, and that was to confess his sins (including numerous violations of the rules of the church involving impiety), and to declare Christ to be his savior. He must thereafter keep to pure doctrine, and not allow it to become embellished by heathen religion, which is of the Devil. Such embellishments of pure doctrine were the downfall of the Anglicans and “the Papists.”

The man would be admitted to the Lord’s Supper once he had satisfied the preacher and the elders that he was in a state of grace, had fasted, prayed and had kept the Ten Commandments, had thrown off the influence of Satan. Some of the signs of grace: keeping a temperament free of lust, keeping free of strong drink and wild behavior, no loudness, joking and crude language.

He ought to marry, but not for sex. He must refrain from enjoyment of the privileges of the marital bed. He must not enjoy any of life’s physical beauties, not those of nature or of man’s handiwork, though he may enjoy some culinary sweets. He shall have no affection for music or the arts in themselves. If he enjoys anything except the Word of God he must repent of it, and put on a right mind about the enjoyment of God.

He must not grieve long. If he loses a wife or a child through illness or through accident, he must thank God that he has been blessed, and pray for the faith to endure any loss. When things go wrong, he must look to his own sins as the cause, i.e. he probably has listened to and obeyed Satan’s wiles.

This Puritan may become a minister when still a young adult if he enrolls in the school (and then later college) for learning the scriptures. If he passes the examination in the Bible and doctrine, he may be voted or called to a parish and then ordained. Ordination is not by the authority of any bishop, but by the people of his church and its elders. The act of the “laying on of hands” is the only one recognized as formal ordination.

Thereafter he knows the right from the wrong, as set forth in the Law of God. He is invested with understanding of God’s Law. He must be obeyed. He is supremely confident in God’s Word alone.

The Puritan minister lives in a black-white, dualistic universe. His mind, his Bible and his doctrine are his good possessions. His body is darkness, not light. His body dies because it is of the earth, because it is of sin. His body only serves his mind and assists him in gaining property.

His continual fear of the Lord is his bulwark against damnation, and his very fear gives him the sign that he stands in God's grace. Life is difficult. Life is short. Fear leads to trusting God alone. The only joy is the joy of reprieve from damnation and Hell. If there is any true love, or joy, or peace, it is present in hints and flecks. All that has to wait for God - when God chooses to end the world.

As for woman, she lives in a patriarchal universe, one in which the roles of women are those of helpers to males, mothers of their children, and cohabiters of their property. Property was then usually not in her name, nor held for her. Women adorned this property and family. Women did and did not read and write. It all depended. As a rule, there was no need for them to read.

The minister chooses a wife, or is offered a wife who is quiet, hard working, dour and sober, fearful of God and of Satan, and who shows little emotion. If she gossips or cannot quote scripture, she is not wife-material. The minister's wife treats her body as the seat of Satan and his temptations, and keeps her body covered, never allowing it to become exposed. Women are judged in part by the whiteness of their facial skin, and by the total coverage afforded by their clothes.

Puritan sermons can be difficult to get hold of. When I served the First Parish in Medfield, MA, I discovered in a church filing cabinet a brown bag; it held 48 years of hand-written sermons from 1697 to 1745 by Rev. Joseph Baxter. He was the minister who followed Medfield's first and famous, Rev. John Wilson (1651 to 1690).

Each sermon is written on pieces of paper about 3 x 5 inches in size. Each page contains about 500 words - in so miniscule a script that I was able to read it only with a magnifying glass. I just know that paper was scarce. I also know that the mere act of writing his sermons provided him with the fullest possible proof that he was serving God!

I can report that Rev. Joseph Baxter's sermons constitute marvels of intellectual vacuity. They contain wooden repetitions of Biblical formulae. It is as though one were spinning miles of thread from nappy dogma. There is no countryside, no home, friends and loved ones, no weather, no festivities, no issues of prior war and peace, no past and no future except Heaven or Hell. It is closed-mindedness the likes of which you might see in a stubborn two-year old. Judging by these sermons, there is no mystery why 17th century Puritans understood nothing about the Algonquian culture, or about individual sachems.

B.. Ministers score the Native Americans as heathen, witches and cannibals

As one reads the scholars, it becomes clear that the Puritan and Pilgrim ministers came ashore with a paradigm fashioned back in Europe in the 1500s of the unworthiness of all Native People. Here then follows the 17th century ministers' scoring of Native American unworthiness.

- a) The tribal groups of the Algonquian were not baptized Christians. If not Christian,

then they worshipped Satan. If the Native People worshipped Satan, then they were corrupt in body, mind and spirit. Ministers did teach that Algonquians were human in theory, but in reality, they were less than human.

- b) Ministers denounced Natives in their “carriage,” hygiene and sexual conduct. Their social life was loud, rude, joking and dance-filled. Ministers declared them to be “cannibals.” The Rev. John Wilson of Medfield, in 1676, wrote Boston asking for reinforcements and described Indians as “cannibals.”
- c) Social intercourse with Natives was to be avoided. There could be no marriage between a Christian and a “heathen.”
- d) Native People were often witches. They went into trances in their ceremonies, communed with Satan and emerged with evil powers.
- e) The ministers stated that Indians did not own property, so they were nomads, and could not bring anything of value to the colony.
- f) They could not learn English; but if they did learn, they were informed about the English ways, and were apt to betray the English.

The terror of witch hunts is not something we can even begin to appreciate. As is well known, the Puritan ministers were absolutely paranoid about English women who lurked in the towns and practiced sorcery. Puritans used the “trial by ordeal” to determine if a woman charged was a witch. The clergy threw the woman into a river or a lake, with ropes tied around her, and weights bound to her legs, to see if she could fight her way free and swim to the surface. If she did she was judged not guilty. This happened as late as 1780 in Williamstown, MA. In Arthur L. Perry’s history of Williamstown, the author lays the blame on a group of “Baptists that came up and settled from Providence, RI.” She was thrown into the icy river, with ties and weights, and she fought free, and afterward was accepted as a righteous woman.

C. Puritanism: The Towns and the Algonquian Natives

“Come Lord Jesus, save this poor Englishman if thou canst, whom I am about to Kill.” (Allegedly uttered by the Nipmuck warrior as a taunt to his enemy, during the raid on the Town of Sudbury, Mass. in 1676.) The warriors of the Wampanoag, Narragansett, Nipmuck and their allies reduced half of the English property in the towns in New England to ashes in 1675 -76.

The New England town is a well-known fact of history. The town is known, but overlooked as a seat of settlers’ power, expansionism, and war base. A town may be studied by going to any local town library - a sacred place rivaling the church - and one gains at least a half-real picture of 17th century life.

The English colonists came ashore in 1620 with a plan of town organization. (The Spanish and Franciscans conquered the Southwest with the plan of *encomienda* or plantation and mission church in 1598.) The Protestants who sailed across the Atlantic had lived in England in towns, but lived there usually without property. They were mostly second and third sons who were not provided property.

Once in Plymouth or Massachusetts Bay, or Connecticut, they would acquire property and be townsmen. They held office; they served as judges. They owned firearms. They fought in the militia for pay. They paid taxes. Some owned slaves. They founded the local churches, studied for the ministry and became ordained. They built homes and seafaring boats. They cut timber tall as God’s heaven, sold it back in

England, and built mills. They owned land, cleared it and ran farms with numerous cattle. With help from the hand of God, they became well off.

The seat of power was the church. The minister was listed as a nobleman, and as a divine. Not only was his ordination his key to God, it was his key to social superiority. No town was without its minister. That would be deprivation of not hearing the Word of God preached. Soldiers under Lieut. Lyon Gardener in 1635, who were building the fort in Old Saybrook, CT for the Puritans in Boston, complained bitterly that they had not heard preaching of the Word of God for two months, and were being deprived of a benefit in their contract!

Puritans proclaimed that all Algonquian Natives were subject to the crown and to English town magistrates and town laws. Ministers stated that God and the King had reserved the land of New England for them to rule. This was to be to the Native Americans' advantage. The English declared themselves to be kindly, not the cruel conquerors, unlike the Spanish. In this regard the English composed a book that had the stamp of English royalty on it that explained in great detail the Spanish atrocities of the 16th century in the New World, and by comparison, declared the English to be true Christians and interested in the Natives' welfare. A copy exists in the Millicent Rogers Museum in Taos, NM, where it is displayed with an explanation as to how untrue and prejudicial its material is toward the Spanish people.

As for the actual towns in New England, the colonists deemed their settlements to comprise something akin to peaceable co-existence. However, the Algonquian people were selling their lands for wampum in total ignorance of what they were losing. They were trying to make accommodation with colonists for trade, barter, for justice in courts, for peace.

The Wampanoag sachems and shamans tried to understand the town system, but could not. Sachems such as Metacom, (King Philip as he was called) woke up to the reality that the English owners of the towns had the right to encroach on any lands anywhere, and when provoked, to drive off the Native Americans.

James Printer, one of the Nipmuck war party, left a note on a tree by the Charles River in Medfield, telling why they had burned half of New England's standing homes and barns. He wrote, "We have nothing but our lives to lose but thou hast many fair houses cattle & much good things."

D. Puritanism: the Economy, Demographics and Anti-Native Issues

It is an historical fact that land itself played a part in the Puritan's hatred. Some historians of colonial New England try to show that the hatred was all about land. Half of the colonists came over as indentured servants or serfs, and worked off seven to ten years, and then headed out to clear a farm or fish or cut timber. A fortune was to be made in raw materials like timber, in fishing and fur trading, in coast-wise shipping, and in farming. The Puritans came prepared to give up dreams of leisure and to work hard.

The English colonist's rising per capita income clearly was a major factor in land-expansionism. Fernand Braudel, in Vol. III of Civilization and Capitalism, (p.421, "The Americas") points out that the per capita income of Mexico was only 33% of that in the ex-colonies of New England in 1800. What the comparison was in 1675, before the start of King Philip's War, is not recorded. However, fish yielded, according to Braudel, an income equal to that of silver.

We return to the ministers' record and we ask: How far did the ministers have to go from preaching the Christian gospel to preaching hatred of the Native Americans? Ministers were ready with the language of hatred. They lifted it from the writers of Old Testament: Jehovah told the Israelites to destroy the Philistines whom God hated.

The answer also comes from the Pequot War. The Native's exculpatory evidence concerning the two fugitives from justice is on the table as compiled by Alfred Cave. We see the Pequots were not about to convert to Christianity, but they wanted peace. They wanted exchange and trade with the English – so they signed the Treaty of 1636. The ministers ordered total war because if the Pequot did not turn in the two fugitives and deliver up the murderer of the English trader Stone, they would go unpunished. Such would void God's Law. To go unpunished was to send a message that the English did not punish law-breakers.

It was left up to the Puritan captains and their soldiers as to how the punishment was to be meted out. "You shall all perish by fire and sword, and we shall spare only those to be sold or given as slaves" as rewards to the English who fought the war. Thus the battle of Fort Mystic was a scene in 1637 of terrifying carnage. The ministers exalted in this battle, and declared this a great victory for God's people.

It is important not to leave out of their profile that Puritan ministers held no mandate to sacrifice their lives in ministry, certainly not in ministry to Native Americans. The 17th c. Puritan ministers stood ready to kill for their faith, but not to die for it. This is in contrast to the Franciscans in the Southwest, who chose to sacrifice their lives there.

Now comes some diversity in ministers' profiles and some perspective. More than a few Algonquians were ready and willing to convert to Puritan Christianity. The ministry of conversion and advocacy by Rev. John Eliot of Boston was on behalf of the Native People. He co-founded the Society For The Propagation Of The Gospel. He translated the Bible into Algonquian, befriended tribal members, made Native converts, among them his student John Sassamon (here is one of the more unusual stories in American history), and sent these to "praying towns."

So they were settled into "praying towns" in order to control their movements and to make them work and serve the English. Natick in the East and Stockbridge in the Berkshires were two such "praying towns." If the Indians wore English clothes, they were told to change back, so Puritans could tell the difference. Besides, nobody wanted even Christian Indians looking like they were English.

As a poignant example of this control strategy, the Town of Rochester in about 1680 passed a law stating that Indians had to walk openly on the roads, never in the fields or woods, and in groups of ten. Hence the lyrics of the children's song that went: "One little, two little, three little Indians; four little, five little six little Indians; seven little, eight little, nine little Indians; ten little Indians boys."

Yet sadly, even John Eliot sat silent during King Philip's War. This showed his marginal role and power in the colony. He was opposed to the English system that took away Algonquian lands, and created mutual hatred. He just was not out-spoken about it. Of his list of "praying Indians" to save - he barely saved half. His charges starved to death on Deer Island in Boston Harbor that one winter of 1675. After the war was over, he could do little to prevent enslavement and deportation of many captives.

More perspective still comes from the Puritans who had settled on Cape Cod, plus Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. The records are plentiful and informative. Truly ambitious and rigid Puritan preachers avoided the Cape owing to the lesser political status. In the History of Cape Cod, Vol. 2, Freeman, (pp.48ff) describes a rising movement for "religious tolerance." Sentiments of religious tolerance evidently began in the first Cape Cod town of Sandwich as early as 1624 - sentiments that favored the admission of Anglicans and Anabaptists to citizenship, even Quakers. It is said that the struggle for "the right of private judgment," and religious tolerance in Sandwich in the 17th century would take "many volumes to describe."

These Cape Cod Puritans were never attacked or harmed during 1675-76. English and Wampanoag reportedly cooperated in joint social endeavors, including sweat lodge practices, and co-existed with equal parcels of land and with cooperative fishing throughout the war.

However, not all Cape Cod Colonists and Natives sat out King Philip's War. A platoon of "friendly Indians" fought along side two companies under Capt. Pierce and Capt. Gorham. About 500 Narragansett warriors ambushed Capt. Pierce's company and defeated them on March 26, 1675 in Rehoboth, MA. Capt. Pierce was killed. Sandwich lost citizens in that battle, and Indians fought to the last man.

In 19th c. evidence, we hear from a Massachusetts State Senator from Cape Cod at the Medfield, MA Bi-Centennial observance of the burning of Medfield by the Nipmuck on February 20, 1876. The legislator spoke of the mutual "love" that the English and the Wampanoag on the Cape shared with each other since 1624. He told of person to person, family to family devotion that was well known. He pointed to this love as proof that the King Philip War need not have occurred at all!

To realize still more contrast and perspective viz. the Puritan ministers' hatred, consider the Quakers. They were a very small body in Massachusetts Bay. They emigrated from England usually to Pennsylvania. In New England the judges exiled them, as we often forget, or banished them. Thus they had no part in King Philip's War.

Quakers emerged in England with a different religious formation. They met in house churches. They heard the word of God through an inner voice, intuitively and emotionally, in silence. They did not hold to the dominance of Satan over all the earth. They read the Bible in a way that made them believe that Jesus was their Savior and Master. They “heard” the equality of all believers, the equality of women with men; and they never instituted the ordained ministry in their Meetings. A Quaker’s rise to sainthood in Christ was not bound up in God’s Law, but in God’s grace, and no Quaker maintained his or her sainthood solely by obeying either scriptural or secular laws.

Quakers were disposed to confront the Native Americans with much civility, appreciation, and with no fear of Natives being agents of Satan and witches. All the above is provided in the Puritan tracts themselves that condemned Quakers as bad influences and devoid of pure faith. One again gets a nice perspective on Massachusetts Quakers and the Native People in “Irreconcilable Differences,” the newest exhibit at Pilmouth Plantation.

III. The Christian Faith and Practices of 17th century Franciscan Friars in New Mexico

A. The Franciscans enter the Pueblo Indian land in 1598 as Chiefs.

The pre-Columban Pueblo Natives, or the “ancients” go by the names Anasazi, Hohokam and Mogollon. From as far back as 900 AD these people constructed adobe and/or stone habitations above ground which they used year-round. Clusters of houses were built inside a perimeter of sentry houses or inside a wall. There was one central plaza surrounded by *kivas* and homes. These were true “towns” (pueblos in Spanish). There were built in *arroyos* (valleys) near water that was often seasonal.

After 1200 AD the “ancients” abandoned the panorama of towns because of drought and lack of fuel and food. The population moved into new locations within the same region, along water (e.g. the Rio Grande River) wherever found, built new clusters of towns, and formed three distinct languages. This population kept the same culture, but introduced a set of “*kachina*” ceremonies they believed would provide rain, fertility, and respect for Mother earth and Father sky.

Traditional creation stories are important. Frank Waters in the Book of the Hopi describes the one story that belongs to Pueblo and the Navajo people. There were three worlds before the present, and each was destroyed with all its inhabitants because of some kind of human failure: greed, violence among people, heedless destruction of the animals by humankind, and failure to keep in close spiritual contact with earth and sky. The fourth world was born and humans emerged into it from waters under the earth, through a birth-hole called the *sippapu*. Several important “Mothers” are named as guides for the people emerging into this world.

It is a good Fourth World, but for people to prosper they must avoid their past hurts toward each other and animals, and keep the rituals of the seasons. They must walk

a disciplined path of observance of ceremonies and perform them. *Kiva* societies induct young boys into ceremonial roles, which they will carry on as adults and pass again to their children. Seven annual ceremonies were performed in each Pueblo in the 17th c.

The “stimulus-diffusion and dissemination” of their reformed culture produced a sustainable life. It was comprised of farming, hunting, trading, ceremonies, and defense and skirmishing, also astronomical record keeping. They were ritualized and non-warlike, gender-equal, semi-monogamous, artistic and creative humans. These people were without the wheel, metal, guns, wheat, sheep, cattle, horses and mules, and guitars.

Pueblo Indians grew cotton that they wove for festival garments. Most sandals, leggings and britches were woven of yucca fibers. There is a one-mile long thread of yucca that archeologists have excavated at the Anasazi, Chaco Canyon site. They formed pottery from mica-laden clay in some places, and from water-mixed pulverized shale in other regions. Fired and sometimes painted in designs, pottery had enormous varieties. It replaced the basket.

When the Spanish first viewed the Pueblos they reckoned them to be Moorish and exactly like North African dwellings. The overall population in the region is estimated to have been between 300 thousand and half a million people.

The *Conquistadors* in 1540 already had conquered and claimed New Mexico as a tribute for the King of Spain. These soldier-adventurers had plundered the 150 Pueblos, bounced up and down the Rio Grande, taking slaves and raping women from 1540 to 1598. They had created such a bad name for themselves with cruel treatment of the Pueblos, that the Spanish government evacuated them from the territory.

The government of 16th century New Spain was willing to post missions and a few soldiers in New Mexico as a buffer for the region of colonists south of the Rio Grande. The buffer would hopefully protect Northern Mexico against encroachments from the French way north, and from the raids by the nearer tribes. The buffer colony would supply the slave labor of the Indians to work in the silver mines of Mexico.

The Franciscans then asked the King of Spain in 1581, for a mandate to enter New Mexico and evangelize the Natives. This they had only dreamed about before. It was given them. They were given permission to found a pure theocracy in the Pueblo settlements, and no authority stood above them other than that of their prelates.

The friars were officially ushered in by the governor and soldier-leader, Onate (pronounced Ohn-yah-teh) in 1598. Onate personally ordered a war (with massacre) against the Acoma, in retribution for a brief skirmish. That conflict escalated as did the Pequot War with the English in 1636. Onate slaughtered 700, (some accounts double that) then sold a large number into slavery into Mexico. He brought to trial 80 men and several hundred women and children in Santo Domingo. All men over 25 years had one foot chopped off - in the name of Christ’s conquest of the “infidels.”

Onate orchestrated a special introduction for himself and the Franciscans. This was called “the re-staging of the conquest by Cortez.” Onate summoned all the Pueblo chiefs to a public ceremony. He did it first in El Paso before he went north, and he did it when he reached the center of the Native territory in the Pueblo earlier named Santo Domingo.

The ceremony consisted of an entry parade on horseback, with crowds of Native Americans making approved gestures of greeting. He came to the central plaza and dismounted. The chiefs all knelt before him and kissed his and the friars’ hands and feet. Next the *caciques* (pronounced ka-chee-kay-s) or officials of the Pueblos, knelt before Onate and the Franciscans and the *caciques* kissed all their hands and feet. Then came the mass baptism of the chiefs and *caciques*, only at Santo Domingo in 1599 this was omitted. The soldiers fired off the Spanish artillery pieces and their muskets. The Spanish raised up a large cross and implanted it in the plaza.

The planting of the cross announced Christ’s victory over the infidels, and over sin and death. The cross ever after became in itself a sort of Christian saint. The cross was in effect worshipped as a scared emanation from Christ and from God and the saints.

Onate everywhere planted a huge cross and gave this ultimatum, “Accept us and convert to our Christian faith or perish by fire and by the sword.” The Pueblo chiefs knew that Onate has just killed or sold into slavery a fourth of the Acoma.

When the chiefs bowed and agreed, they voted, as it were, a resolution to take on a whole new system. What they understood we cannot know. We can judge from the subsequent century’s record that the chiefs intended to accept a) what they had to accept, and whatever they could adapt to their own ways, and b) what they could use to increase their own power, i.e. sheep, horses and wagons, the utensils and guns.

The Franciscans then set about methodically to rule. The soldiers forced the consolidation of the 100+/- Pueblos into 40-odd so the rulers could rule better. This was the first, possibly the most painful, ethnic re-grouping, of normal Pueblo life. A few were left unchanged, however. These consisted of the Rio Grande based Taos, Tesuque and Jemez; also the isolated Hopi on their mesas to the West; and the hidden, but intriguing, wealthy Picuris, situated in the middle of the Sangre de Christo mountain.

All 40-plus Pueblos were issued tribute quotas payable twice a year, of corn and cotton garments, plus animal hides traded from the Apache. All were subject to forced labor demands to build missions and dwellings on or near their lands. Thus the Spanish underwrote the costs of their theocracy off the Pueblo’s backs. Only the Hopi repelled the Franciscan priests and barred them from settling and building a church on their land.

B. Religious Formation of the Friars.

We rely upon an excellent and rare description of these priests in When Jesus Came, The Corn Mothers Went Away, by Ramon A. Gutierrez, especially Chapter Two,

pp47ff, “The Franciscan Century.”

The Franciscans volunteered for the priesthood; and they all came from Spain to New Mexico. They volunteered out of a sense of being soldiers in the forefront of a great battle for Christ against the “heathen,” e.g., the Moors. They volunteered as Spanish patriots, as well, and carried the cross of the Spanish King.

They went to a Spanish seminary or to a *convent* (not to be confused with a place for nuns) and underwent several years of formation. The training was the imitation of Christ - his ministry and death as told in the New Testament.

First, they vowed poverty and practiced renunciation of the world - money, class and status, fame, clothing, houses, horses - all possessions. Second, they practiced renunciation of sexual desires coming from the body and desires toward men, women and children. Third, they practiced the imitation of Christ in ministry, preaching and self-sacrifice to God, readiness to be martyred and go directly to Heaven.

Fourth, they rehearsed a “marriage vision.” They went through a visualization of coming before Christ clothed in a robe. Next - of being embraced by Christ, and then penetrated by Christ, made one with Christ, in their hearts and minds by his spiritual organ, and then immediately suffering crucifixion with Christ and dying in glory. This was the “marriage vision” all Franciscans self-indulged in.

Lastly, we have a certain theological twist: belief in the immediate Second Coming of Christ. The friars were not consumed by a devotion to the Virgin Mary. They drank from the well of Biblical apocalypticism - a borderline fanaticism in itself. Such a fear-based set of beliefs predict the earth-shaking return of Jesus, the millennial wars, the Last Judgment. The friars’ purpose was to prepare for the End, to baptize or to make “wet heads” of every living soul. “The only good Indian was a baptized Indian,” as one hears this crudely summarized.

Spanish priests labored in 17th c. New Mexico mainly among the Pueblo Indians. Unlike the Puritan ministers, whose sole focus was the English town church, with the exception of people like Rev. John Eliot, there was little Spanish colonial presence until they re-conquered in 1692 after the Pueblo Revolt.

To prepare for the Second Coming, to imitate Christ in the ministry, meant they had to take over the Pueblo life *in toto*. The friars each became the powerful “Inside Chief.” They had to build a mission church and institute an elaborate Mass, a spectacle really, and run a school for Christian formation. They had to baptize all the children, and the women if possible, to prepare the Pueblo to be the bride of Christ.

Each friar lived in one of the Pueblos he was in charge of. If there was armed rebellion or if he was brought out for humiliation, he had to welcome scourging and even execution. He wanted to die as an example of Christ’s love, in hopes that his death

would bring remorse in the Native People and spur a re-birth of the mission after he died.

In the 17th c. the average annual count of the priests settled in the Pueblo missions numbered in the 40 range. Pueblo Indians killed, executed, “martyred” depending on the interpretation, a total of 49 friars in the century from 1580 to 1680. The example of “martyrdom” provided an incentive for priests to come to New Mexico. Franciscans did not want to die of natural causes. They believed in the scripture, “Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s shall find it.” (Matthew 8:35)

Of course, the priests themselves were involved directly and indirectly in many deaths of Pueblo Indians, and in abuses of sexual power over children, and in cohabitation with, rapes and whippings of, Native women, and in numerous schemes of the slave-holdings of hapless captives from Apache and Pueblo tribal groups. As the saying goes, they brought it on themselves.

C. The Strategy of conversion: material goods, bans and churches

The Spanish introduced the wheat plant, which augmented traditional corn for farming. Their sheep brought a revolution in herding and in clothing and weaving. Their horses, mules and the oxen totally changed transportation in the vast reaches of the desert and mountains. The pig and beef cattle changed the food source and introduced a lot of regular protein to the diet. The iron metal for cooking utensils and axes and knives changed the utility of the family household. Their technology of gunpowder and muskets and artillery escalated the use of such deadly force. Lastly the wagon and the cart drawn by horses changed product distribution. And the guitar, might have, but did not, soften the hearts and lighten up the grim festivities of the Spanish-enslaved people.

The Franciscans intended they would bribe the Pueblos into adhering to the Catholic religion. The Indians would take orders from the friars, and the friars would in turn protect them from the demands for workers and slaves in the Spanish *encomiendas* and in the mines.

The friars spoke none of the Pueblo languages, nor wrote in them. That being the case, each priest went ahead and became the “Inside Chief” in each Pueblo. He set about building a mission church, instituting daily Mass, and instituting a school run by subordinates. Now the rule of forced labor by men and women went into effect. To build these churches was not out of the question. The Pueblo people had the skills needed for making stone and adobe houses and apartments - going back to the Anasazi centers of Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde.

But the church in Acoma outdoes anything. It is about 40 by 90 feet, by 40 feet high. The walls are up to eight feet thick. The place sits atop Sky City, as it is called, or the 400-foot high, 10-acre mesa with no way up or down then except footholds in the rock. With this obstacle to construction, the people of Acoma over a generation built their church for the Franciscans with adobe bricks they crafted, and wooden beams or

vegas, cut and hauled from the mountains 20-40 miles distant. Now the present church is not from the 17th c. but from the early 18th c., but the size of the church speaks volumes for the accommodation and submission the Acoma people worked out to Spanish rule.

When the friar banned most traditional ceremonies - the *kiva*-centered rituals - he struck at the body and soul of a Pueblo Indian. Further, to ban the traditional wedding gifts was to break apart the customs that bound the generations together. To ban the consensual concubines (an old Pueblo tradition) was to eliminate the accepted rounds of pleasure. To ban homosexual activity (a old Pueblo tolerance) was to exterminate an accepted minority in the American Indian culture.

The priest attempted to do this banning, and he was successful at first. The people got to know each Franciscan and to admire his devotion to his cult of Christian service, his charisma, and they respected his celibacy. Sexual abstinence for four-day periods was the required practice of a warrior, or sacred dancer, or hunter. Every Pueblo member recognized male abstinence and admired it.

The priest had his Indian assistants. The worker who went around enforcing Mass attendance and banning the *kachinas* and dolls, who also kept up the priest's property and the mission, was the *fiscale*. Today he is a ceremonial the head of the Catholic Mission church in each Pueblo and he is called the *Major domo*. The person who made sure the school was full of students and was in charge of the children was the *policia espiritual*. The friars compensated both the *policia espiritual* and the *fiscale* in material goods.

The central focus of the Franciscan's work lay in taking over the children and giving them baptism, then enrolling them in school, in giving them the catechism, communion, and preparing them for Christian marriage. He took over the role of the mothers, and he eliminated the role of the children's fathers in the marriage customs. The children would grow up outside the ways of the Pueblo, marry in the Christian way and adopt the Spanish ways.

The Franciscans used their schools to teach Spanish. In a generation all the Taos kids knew Spanish! In two generations, most of the elders plus the children knew Spanish and could communicate freely among the 40-odd remaining Pueblos. Ironically, the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 was planned and orchestrated in Spanish, because it was the new, common language.

The priest dealt with infractions usually with the whip. In the Pueblo a whipping post got used quite often. In the mission in Carmel, CA, founded by Franciscan Father Junipero Serra a century later, the records in the mission state he personally whipped the "savages," to scold Mission Indians who ran away and were later caught. We note the use of whipping posts in New England, but I have not run across any accounts stating that Puritan ministers whipped Native Americans.

In New Mexico the priest could only whip someone. But he could whip him to death, and did in several recorded cases, especially in Taos. He could also call out the two soldiers who stood guard constantly and have the offender shot dead. Offenses involved infractions of the Spanish code of justice, and violations of the no-tribal-ceremonies rule. For instance, whipping or shooting the rain priest was a sight every Franciscan wanted to see. .

D. The Rain Dance & The Friars - A Classic Conflict

The rain dance was punishable by whipping or death. This is somewhat similar to the US government's outlawing the Sun Dance in the 1870s. The Pueblo traditions were, and still are, part of racial memory going back perhaps thousands of years. M. Scott Momaday's recent article in Stars Above, Earth Below, edited by Marsha C. Bol, talks about "the memory, the imagining and the understanding - of the relationship of the Indian with his landscape." (p.5)

The rain dance was like an annual Native American revival. The priest danced in a trance. During this time he held a rattlesnake in his mouth. The snake is symbol for rain in many Pueblos. He also got a man (details are still not exact here) to perform fellatio on him as a sign of submission to the rain spirit. Fellatio symbolized love of a snake-like human body part. This was a ritual and not for pleasure. (I have read descriptions of this dance at Hopi, where it is performed without the fellatio.)

Then the rain priest flagellated his naked body with a whip sharp enough to cause a display of trickling blood. He was the only one who did this, and did it only in the annual ritual. The Franciscans observed that the rain priest drew blood from his groin and his penis. In Pueblo eyes it was not sacrifice, but the uniting of the snake and the penis-blood --with the clouds, lightening and rain in the sky.

The Franciscans banned the rain dance. They replaced it with Catholic rituals and with the Mass. The Indian rituals simply went underground in the *kiva* and stayed there.

To co-opt the rain festival, the priest flagellated himself (then a common Catholic practice) and made his assistants flagellate themselves, and made all the men and boys of the Pueblo flagellate their naked backs, and performed this regularly - every month. The Franciscan priest even flagellated his penis, too, for good measure, enough to make his penis bleed. Then they went to Mass in the church.

Today in the Millicent Rogers Museum in Taos, one sees the *santos*, or woodcarvings of Jesus, where his clothes are oozing rivulets of blood. This blood appears coming from his groin, presumably from this penis.

E. The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and the rejection of the friars' ministry.

Ramon Gutierrez indicates that most of the Pueblo chiefs and elders were very cool toward Christianity. Pueblo leaders absented themselves from Mass except when it

was necessary, or some governor showed up with a bunch of soldiers. Only a few chiefs made a genuine conversion throughout the 17th century. The friar's success was mostly a success with children and with Spanish language instruction, with the flow of goods and services, and with the kind of protection a great friar could provide against external Spanish, military threats.

The lack of a genuine Native American reception is given proof in the collective Pueblo Revolt. It was a surprise attack in 1680, led by one, Pepe from Jemez. A large army of Pueblo warriors killed about 25 Spanish priests, many soldiers and some 400 colonists. They drove out all the rest back below the Rio Grande River to a sanctuary in Mexico a full month or two away. It was the equivalent of sending the English Puritans back to England 3,000 miles away.

The revolt was obviously anti-Spanish. If one could pinpoint one of several Spanish errors it was slaving. (The Spanish royalty had outlawed slavery.) The Spanish settlers came to New Mexico to trade in slaves. There was no gold. Hunting, raiding for slaves was the only reason to be a governor in New Mexico. Even the Franciscans were having a long and at times bloody fight with the Spanish governors and slave-hunting soldiers over collapse of their authority to curb slave trading.

The Spanish slave hunting throughout the entire territory is what destroyed the Native American economy. Slave hunting destroyed their trading partners, i.e., the Apache and Commanche, and made it impossible for Pueblo Indians to provide the mandated tribute twice a year to the Spanish governors. The Apache and Commanche and Navajo and Ute then raided the Pueblo stores for food and people for replacements.

It is crucial to see how this was an anti-religious revolt underneath its being an anti-Spanish revolt. Because it was the Spanish enforcement of Christianity as schemed by the Franciscans that led to the firestorm of Revolt.

The three factors behind this were as follows. First, the friars' banned traditional religious and social ceremonies, which they regarded as Satanic and morally depraved. This created civil war between the baptized and the non-baptized, between the converted kids and the traditional elders in the Pueblos - a social chaos of maddening, inflaming proportions.

Second, the friars used excessive force, set a poor personal example by assaulting women, taking women as concubines, and sexually abusing children; all the while they built huge buildings and filled them with ornamental, religious objects (e.g. bells) earned from Pueblo's labors.

Third, the friars did not model the racial brotherhood to the people they claimed to save. They refused to enlist a single Pueblo man into the track of the priesthood. Instead, they declared that the infidels were children too weak in their faith to lead the body of Christ. They thus condoned the racism, even as they blasted the governors for

running a slave business. Chorus: “and the rains never came, and instead we grew ill, and our enemies raided us to death.”

The Pueblo people “asked” the spirits of the animals and elements of creation (*kachinas*) to save them from humans who were out to rob them. In my summary, the 17th century Spanish occupation was that of a feudal, exploitative, and somewhat unproductive system, which they layered over a once-wealth-producing, stable fabric of nomad and Pueblo tribes in the upper Rio Grande basins. None of the Spanish material changes resulted in a noticeable rise in standard of living and per capita income.

The Franciscan friars were possibly the worst representatives the Catholic Church had at the time. Certain Catholic historians I have talked with bemoan the Franciscans and wish the Jesuits had done the work, instead. If the *hidalgos*, or Spanish-blood landowners in New Mexico, were a lazy class who put work and commerce beneath them, then the friars were “narcissistic, self-indulgent” manipulators. (Gutierrez)

The declining population figures for the Pueblos are depressing to say the least. When Onate commenced to institute the Spanish theocracy and buffer zone in 1598 the tribal count stood at 80,000. By the end of the 17th c. they were down to 10,000 according to the *Smithsonian Series on the Native Americans*, Vol. 9 the section entitled, “The Southwest”. They were being enslaved and they were being worked to death and shot and left untreated in diseases. By the time of 1905, the population was down to less than 3,500 tribal members among the 19 remaining Pueblos.

IV. How Their Theology and Practices Influenced the Attitudes of Subsequent European Settlers toward the Native Americans

Scholars Russell Bourne, Alfred Cave and Jill Lepore venture to declare that the Pequot War of 1636 created the pattern in the minds of Euro-American people as to how to think, fear and hate, deny the truth, and get rid of the American Indians. The 1676 King Philip’s War comprised the massive lock-in for such a pattern in the minds of the English, who were to take over most of America in 200 years.

Unless a tribe joined up with the English (or with the Spanish, as did some Apache and some Pueblo) - and fought hard beside them decade after decade, they had no chance of avoiding the swindle by the English. Take the typical example of what happened to the few Pequot who survived their own tribe’s extermination.

The small band of surviving Pequot settled in Eastern Connecticut in the woods. This band vowed to support the English, and fought hard with the English against King Philip in 1675-76. They deeded most of their lands to Capt. John Mason’s family to hold in perpetuity on their behalf. Mason’s heirs ran into the changing laws of Connecticut, and could not hold the tribal lands for the then, mixed-race descendants of the Pequot past the mid-18th century. The “tribe” held on with a tract of land in Ledyard, CT of less than ten acres in 1992.

The Puritans and the Franciscans from the beginning, built their case against the sovereignty of the Native Americans on theology; but by the late-18th century, theocratic principles no longer counted. The US government was bent on eradicating the tribes' right of land-ownership and sovereignty. The issue in 1775 was the right to hold land. This right was claimed by the Iroquois Confederation, and by the Five Tribes Confederation of the Southeast. And by 1830, it was the claim to be a "Nation" in the face of the territorial expansion of the United States of America.

I have traced some of the contemporary American church history and I have discovered the rather large silence in the churches from 1770s to the 1840s viz. the Native People. In Protestantism the Native Confederations had no powerful advocates, even though they did have certain white politicians who were listening to their proposals.

Now the Iroquois were chiefly living the "ordeal of the longhouse," as it has been called, that is, enduring all the wars that the Iroquois Nation got caught up in and lost - from roughly 1730 to 1790. They fought on both sides of the American Revolution. They were subsequently removed from or confined to reduced tribal lands, after 1790. It did not matter that a large minority were converted and baptized in the Christian faith, or by whom. One Iroquois Catholic nun, who lived in the 18th century, is to be elevated to Catholic sainthood.

Consider the "Indian Removal Act," which President Andrew Jackson and the US Congress enacted in the 1830 to remove the Five Tribes from the Southeastern states out to Oklahoma by marching them on the "Trail of Tears."

The American colonies had waged an 80-years sporadic, often brutal war of attrition against the Five Tribes, and had not succeeded in removing them, and had suffered many casualties of all kinds. In the debate in Congress the Southerners continually cited the way the New England Protestant states handled their "Indian problem," by killing them all and driving the survivors ever-farther westward. Jackson pointedly asked in 1830 if the New Englanders would like to have several independent nations in Maine and Massachusetts.

Now among the Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Chicksaw and Choctaw there were a large percentage of Christians, baptized and worshipping believers since the 1720s. The Moravian Brethren came in first, (many Native People loved their complex and uplifting, Germanic music), followed by the Presbyterian missions, and by 1800 the Baptist and Methodist missions. Their schools and churches, and latter's camp meetings converted an untold number. The legendary leaders, John Ridge and John Ross, spoke as Christians and as Cherokees - and had fought with General Jackson in the 1814!

There were, in the early 1820s, perhaps a dozen Protestant missionaries ministering to and living among the Five Tribes in the Southeast. These participated in protests and in passive resistance in 1835-38 against the US soldiers when the soldiers were sent to burn and destroy. These Methodist and Baptist missionaries went on trial

and four were sentenced to prison. Release from prison came only on a signed promise to discontinue all legal or public protest against the Indian Removal Act.

Thomas Jefferson held Unitarian and Universalist, independent-yeoman principles of government that led him in many different directions. In the 1780s he avowed his advocacy for the Five Tribes, asking that they not get treated the way the 17th century New Englanders treated the Algonquians. But from before he was elected President until he died, Jefferson walked away from the issue and stood with the American whites.

I have let the Puritan and Franciscan stories speak for themselves. Both the Puritans and the Franciscans came into these Native cultures with the ultimatum that they would employ the “fire and sword” if the latter did not submit to the conquerors’ demands. The English claimed to be civilized and caring but were not, and were nearly driven out. The Spanish Franciscans claimed to be loving and caring, but were driven out for their attitudes and actions. Neither made any apology for what they did.

In the United States, the longer the Christian’s incriminating story was allowed to stay hidden, the more easily it was dismissed as a mistake made long ago. As book reviewer and Pulitzer Prize winner, Gail Caldwell, of the Boston Globe wrote, “We tend to wear the past lightly in America, flaunting it when it suits us and discarding it as the first sign of weight or trouble.” (August 29, 1999)

All of the American Protestants hold bedrock assumptions about their own moral beginnings. Ministers today in preaching use non-contextual, romantic anecdotes, about the English Founding Fathers. My colleagues talk about how the Forebears bravely crossed the sea and bore the cruel costs of living bare to the weather in New England.

No minister today says, “Miles Standish in 1623 murdered ten defenseless Massachusetts Indians because he had intelligence that they were planning a raid on Plymouth.” No minister says the Pilgrims drew first blood - without cause.

No minister says, “The Pilgrims chose a landing site previously lived on by a large band of Wampanoags, who all died within months of first contracting small pox and left no survivors - and the Puritan ministers called this ‘the wondrous providence of God working on our behalf’.”

No minister today says, “At the Thanksgiving festival in Plymouth in 1676, the faithful congregation gathered at tables under the clotted head of King Philip. When Capt. Benjamin Church of Rhode Island brought the head into Plymouth and stuck it on the pole, the leading minister in Boston, Cotton Mather, went up to the trophy and tore off his jaw and took it home as his due.”

The Christians’ incriminating story brings one to the conclusion that in America the Protestants and the Catholics commenced their conquest and occupation as a policy of extermination. For these Christians to admit that their churches are direct descendants

of the Spanish and the English traditions of extermination is not easy. The institutional admission would involve re-enactment of events, and would involve the recitation of the broken treaties.

Reparations are important because this gets Christians to the point where we take some concrete measures to repair an ancient wrong, i.e. giving land back. We already rejoice that under President Richard Nixon, the United States returned to the Taos Pueblo their old, sacred Blue Lake region.

It is not a matter of supporting casinos. Many question the casino expansion on principle and on practical grounds. And the Navajo have rejected the casino world because they have traditions of the great harm that gaming once caused them as a people.

VI. Relating This To Interaction With Indians

I close with three personal stories. First, in 1954, while working for the Forest Service on the Lolo Trail (Montana-Idaho border), I met a Shoshone guide and tribal agent, who stated she was a 7th generation descendant of Sacajawea. She was bringing 15 people from the Lewis and Clark reenactment through the Bitterroot mountains where her ancestor had walked as a guide for the 1804-05 Expedition.

We had had no rain, so she did a rain dance after supper – dancing in costume and singing like a performer. That evening we hung out together for two hours in our camp. She ended our conversation with an offer: “Why don’t you come and live with the Shoshone on the Reservation. We’ll make you one of us, and we will teach you about our people’s ancient ways. We could send you to law school. You could work for us.” My answer was, “I am finishing my degree at Harvard. I have a career planned. I have it worked out.” I loaned her my coat for the cool night. She replied, “We have been here for ten thousand years, Bob, and we know a lot more than you think we know.”

In 1959 I was talked with a certain elder in the Lac du Flameau, WS, Chippewa “old village,” where I made a pastoral call once a week. He had told me he was not a Catholic, so I tried to win him over to the idea of coming to the Protestant congregation that I was serving. I laid it on him all about God’s love in Christ, and how church people would welcome him. I looked out over the dilapidated houses, unkempt grassy lots and often with the villagers passed out on the grass - and I said, “Christ is the better way for everyone.” He replied, “We have our own religion, Reverend.”

I visited Hopi in 1992, and went up to First Mesa with some friends. We walked along with our Hopi guide. We watched a thunderstorm grow from afar and sweep near. I asked to go inside an historic house, and the woman who lived there invited us. She had some pottery, and I bought a small pot. She shared some grievances.

Storm at Walpi, AZ
Walpi is a First Mesa Hopi village where
for spiritual reasons a few women

choose to live without power or
water and sell pottery to tourists.
One old soldier who sits in his doorway
carving kachina dolls gets to stay.
Here the focus of any prayer includes
rain for the corn fields below.

Women inherited these stone houses
from their mothers' mothers' mothers,
who built them around 1500
on top of First Mesa's rise
to protect their children from
stealing by Navajo and Spaniard.

On the May afternoon of our visit
the wind kicked up the dust,
the sky in three directions was laden
with electric water brooms which
basted the corn fields with quick wetness.

I watched the woman potter,
who had opened her house to us,
sweep the steps which led down
to the famous plaza of dances,
then climb back up and stand,
a silhouette in a blown calico dress.
The spring storm, now black as
her hair, came straight for Walpi.

She seemed to me to stand for Hopis:
for 500 years they have stood up to Jesus
for corn, rain and eagle feathers.
These days she could speak freely
of Hopi sufferings from Federals,
and from missionaries, too, who loved
Christ, whom none had ever seen,
instead of Hopis, whom they called
children and savages.

I felt the first drops of the driven rain,
sharply cold – and so close to this
one vision of our Mother Earth.

I reply to the Shoshone tribal agent, the Hopi potter and the Chippewa elder in my thoughts. "I wonder if you can actually see me for who I am. I am glad to see you and to see that your pride is strong. As long as you hold these places, I feel right."

It is still about whether or not someone wants to teach and someone wants to learn. It is still about who is doing the teaching, about how and what he or she teaches. It is still about what is secret or not. I want both our pasts to teach and to give us a blessing. This, I believe, is the Shoshone agent's blessing to me fifty years ago.

“I add my breath to your breath
That our days may be long on the Earth;
That the days of our people may be long;
That we shall be one person;
That we may finish our roads together.
May my father bless you with life;
May our Life Paths be fulfilled.”

-Paula Gunn Allen, “Medicine Song.” (Lincoln, p 80.)