

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

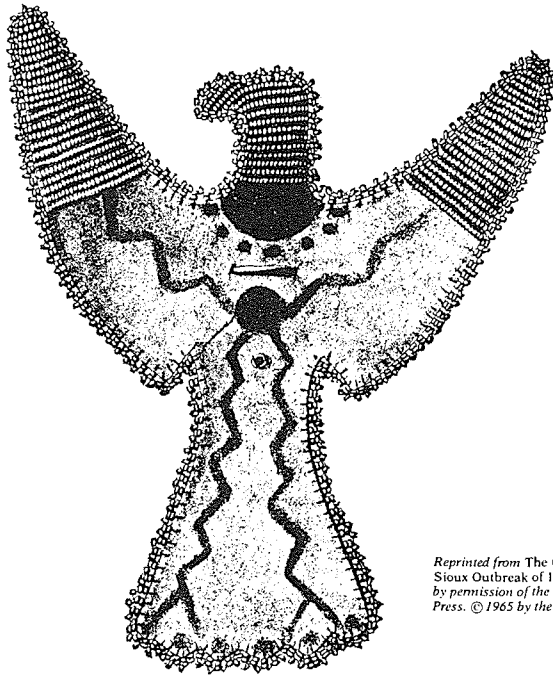
*The Cross
and the Tepee*

"Religious Freedom and Native Americans" by John Dart, in *Theology Today* (July 1981), Princeton Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 29, Princeton, N.J. 08540.

Assailed by missionaries, long stifled by "humanitarian" laws, and eroded by modern ideas, many of the North American Indians' religious traditions have faded. A recent law, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, attempts to protect what survives.

Until the mid-20th century, Washington assumed that its duty was to "civilize and Christianize" the Indians (in the words of one 1887 law). Watchful federal agents banned sacred ceremonies they thought were debasing—such as the Sun Dance of the Plains Indians, in which participants pierce their muscles with skewers. Some Indians responded with a compromise of sorts: establishment of the Native American Church. Incorporated in Oklahoma in 1941, it now claims 100,000 members (mostly southwestern Navajos), or one-eighth of the Indian population. The church blends Bible study and Christian imagery with tepee prayer meetings and ritual peyote consumption.

But the "gradual erosion of Indian customs, most of which are much older than those of the Native American Church," continues to plague many tribes, writes Dart, a religious reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*.



This bead-ornamented, rawhide figure depicts a central spirit of American Indian theology—the Thunderbird. Many Indian religions have been weakened by the white man's laws and by 20th-century ways.

Reprinted from *The Ghost Dance and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* by James Mooney, by permission of the University of Chicago Press. © 1965 by the University of Chicago.

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Navajo medicine men have tried injecting new rigor into their practices by licensing their profession. And many tribes whose own religious rites have vanished with their old priests are now adopting the symbols of the Plains Indians—e.g., the sacred pipe and Sun Dance. Forty percent of all Indians are Christian, at least nominally. Many Protestant and Catholic church workers are trying to fit Indian rites into the framework of Christianity. Episcopalians, for instance, have accepted Navajo medicine men into their congregations and permitted them to offer prayers.

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act requires federal agencies to “protect and preserve” the Indians’ right to practice their traditional religions. The law has ensured the Paiutes and Shoshones of access to sacred hot springs on the China Lake Naval Weapons Center in California and enabled Indian convicts to build a prison “sweat lodge” for pipe ceremonies. But whether the law bars private land development on sacred Indian sites is unclear. And no federal law can protect the Indian religions from the less tangible influences of secularism or from the white man’s proselytizing.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Classical Science

“Godliness and Work” by Lionel Casson
in *Science* '81 (Sept. 1981), P.O. Box
10790, Des Moines, Iowa 50340.

The Parthenon, the great roads to Rome, the stately buildings of ancient Greece stand as testaments to muscle power rather than to technology, writes Casson, a historian at New York University. Greek and Roman scholars knew the energy potential of steam, compressed air, and water; but their efforts to harness these powers produced gadgets such as coin-operated holy water machines or miniature steam engines, not practical machinery. Why?

Most scholars believe that an enormous pool of cheap labor and slaves in ancient Greece and Rome dulled the incentive to develop work-saving devices. Yet, the author notes, contemporary books on farming—the main business of the ancients—complain of a manpower shortage. Casson blames an ancient prejudice against manual labor for the absence of technological progress.

Apollo, the god of music, was imagined by the Greeks to be “gloriously handsome.” By contrast, the god of the forge, Hephaestus (Vulcan, to the Romans) was homely and crippled. According to the poet Homer, his appearance drew “unquenchable laughter” on Mount Olympus. Craftsmen fared no better on Earth. Plato ranked them at the bottom of society; Greek and Roman aristocrats scorned them. And intellectuals avoided their stigma by focusing on theory and impracti-