Native leaders are generally agreed that education is the key that will open the door of the future for Canada’s Aboriginal people. For many years, however, the voice of the First Nations has been silenced due to the nature of education which they endured. For a long time children of First Nations were exposed to an educational system under the auspices of the Indian Act whereby the federal government assumed complete control of the children and their schooling. The consequences of this arrangement resulted in mind transformation instead of individual development. Eventually the process of cognitive imperialism had a crushing effect on Native communities. Several generations of Aboriginals lost their world-views, languages, and cultures and were forced to live with psychological and social upheaval. This scene is about to change as First Nations communities determine what the nature of their education should be.

Until quite recently, most books about Canadian or United States history either disregarded any happenings before the European invasion of this continent, or only alluded to them in passing. In Canada most historians dealt primarily with matters pertaining directly to the dealings of the Charter Nations (English and French), and anything connected to First Nations communities was relegated second place status, if even acknowledged. Today the scene is changing, thanks largely to the work of Indigenous writers, particularly Native historians such as Olive Dickason (1984, 1993), a retired University of Alberta professor. Canadian history now reaches back before the time of Jacques Cartier and includes developments in arenas beyond that of the Charter Nations.

Being strongly ethnocentric in perspective, early Canadian historians found it quite easy to ignore many precontact historical developments in North America. Partially this was because these writers were not trained to appreciate the nuances or validity of the oral tradition which was central to the First Nations way of life. Coupled with this was the complicating factor of Native spirituality which framed the foundation of oral transmission. A sad omission that, because discovery and comprehension of the depth and
dimensions of the oral tradition make it possible to appreciate the rudiments of the first extensive educational system on this continent (Friesen, 2000: 113f).

The antiquated view that the Aboriginal way of thinking is inferior to its EuroAmerican counterpart is slowly eroding. Scholars are beginning to discover that previous methods of studying diverse knowledge forms are often unreliable, and a new broadmindedness is emerging in academic circles. No longer are varying epistemologies being subjected to western tests of coherence and correspondence, but instead new approaches to knowledge gathering and understanding, such as hermeneutical phenomenology, are being developed. The misguided theory which suggests that primitive mankind once took up the pursuit of knowledge at the bottom of some kind of scale and worked up to the sophistication of modern times (Morgan, 1963: 3), is now gathering dust on library shelves.

A century ago, many anthropologists still promulgated the ancient notion that societal progress was intricately connected to technology. Until quite recently, it was widely believed that the progressive development of inventions, discoveries, and institutions supported the notion that since the origin of the humans, their aggressive efforts helped them ascend to a higher rung on the ladder of evolutionary civilization. This perspective was premised on the European-inherited notion that the tribal societies encountered by the first visitors to North America were vastly inferior to those they had left behind in Spain, France, or England. Morgan (1963) cited seven proofs of the latter’s success including more finely developed forms of subsistence, government, speech, family, religion and architecture, and the origin of the notion of property ownership.

Traditional Eurocentric thinkers enunciated the view that the Aryan kinship family enjoyed “intrinsic superiority” when compared with the First Peoples of North America (Battiste and Henderson, 2000). This implied mental and moral inferiority on the part of the Indigenous peoples due to cultural underdevelopment and inexperience hindered by animal appetites and passions. Small wonder that the Aboriginal tribal configurations encountered by the first Europeans in North American were immediately denigrated and assigned inferior status. The imported philosophers boasted that the vast “improvements” of modern society, particularly the quest for property ownership, could even produce unmanageable power quests that would surely be the unmaking of civilization. It was further projected that the attainment of the highest plane of civilization that could be envisaged, might imply a return to the ancient ways that respected liberty, equality, and fraternity. This future state was not to be confused with savage or barbaric communalism, because
tribal configurations could at best hold such ideals in embryonic form (Dippie, 1985: 110).

The emergence of some form of ideal state may yet become reality. The tendency to respect the earth and all living things once so clearly exhibited by tribal societies is today being hailed as an urgent need. John Collier, Indian Commissioner for the United States, once commented on the traditional Indigenous reverence for the earth, “They [the First Nations] had what the world has lost. They have it now. What the world has lost the world must have again, lest it die” (Bordewich, 1996: 71). Some philosophers, like Knudtson and Suzuki (1992), are optimistic in observing that increasing numbers of people are beginning to recognize the degree of respect afforded the earth by many ancient societies must be regained – and soon. They maintain that

If biodiversity and ecosystem integrity are critical to salvaging some of the skin of life on earth, then every successful fight to protect the land of Indigenous Peoples is a victory for all humanity and for all living things. (Knudtson and Suzuki, 1992: xxxiv)

Knudtson and Suzuki go on to argue that the ecological impact of industrial civilization, and the sheer weight of human numbers, is now a global concern because these realities are changing the biosphere with frightening speed. It is clear that such problems as global warming, species depletion, ozone depletion and pollution cannot be resolved by any band-aid approach such as higher taxes, government intervention or recycling. A radical approach that consists of new ways of relating to the universe is both urgent and necessary. If this truth ever sinks in there may be a scramble to understand why the ancients prized the forces of nature so highly.

There is a prophecy among the Lakota Sioux that eventually people of other races and cultures will come to the First Nations seeking the wisdom of their elders. The next generation may realize they are out of balance with the universe and out of right relation with the Great Mystery and Grandmother earth despite their many packed houses of worship. Future generations of Indians must therefore be prepared to help them when they come. It will be a time of renewal (Kaltreider, 1998: 91).

**Aboriginal Origins**

Scientists on the edge always seem to have an explanation for the unknown, often in the form of an unsupported theory without which nothing apparently seems to make sense. This is certainly true in regard to the histo-
ry of North American First Nations whose ancestors are often labelled Paleo Indians or Clovis People by anthropologists. About the best explanation of their ancient lifestyle that can be rendered is the conjecture that the people were big-game hunters and gatherers. As Bowden (1981: 3) notes:

> We know nothing about the clothing, shelters, or social organization of the peoples who constituted this tradition and very little about their appearance, values, and religious orientation.

This admission has not hindered the speculative process, which, in fairness, is not entirely without some evidence. Several excavated archaeological sites have verified the theory about the existence of big-game. A recent dig at Big Springs, South Dakota, for example, has substantiated the previous existence of several species of mammals whose perfectly-preserved skeletons were discovered in a sink-hole where these creatures perished when they came to drink. The bones of one species of mammals found in the sink-hole show them to have measured nearly five metres (over fourteen feet) in height.

It is heartening to note that social scientists are gradually eliminating ethnocentric comments while studying First Nations' cultures, and producing works more readily oriented towards the acknowledgment of Aboriginal contributions to the North American way of life. Several decades ago, anthropologists, like Ruth Underhill (1953), still clung tenaciously to the theory that Indigenous peoples migrated to North America via the Bering Strait. Driver (1969: 4) was more hesitant stating; “Although we are certain that there was some contact between South Pacific Islands and South America before 1492, this came much too late to account for any principal peopling of the New World.”

The lack of information about the fabled Bering Strait theory did not keep anthropologists from guessing about Native origins on this continent. The general presupposition on which the Bering Strait theory was promulgated was that since archaeological evidence exists to identify the presence of Indigenous peoples 11,000 years ago in the Valley of Mexico, this means that their ancestors must have come to America via the Bering Strait thousands of years earlier. Today, anyone reading Vine Deloria, Jr.’s sarcastic repudiation of that theory is sure to agree with him that “the Bering Strait theory is simply shorthand scientific language for, ‘I don’t know, but it sounds good and no one will check’” (Deloria, 1995: 81). Sadly, if Deloria is correct, the most compelling reason for advancing the theory is to justify European colonization. If it can convincingly be argued that First Nations were also recent immigrants to North America, they would lose their claim to being original inhabitants and the right of first occupancy.
Gradually descriptions about Indian migrations have begun to take on a degree of sophistication, but musings about the Bering Strait linger. As Owen, Deetz and Fisher have suggested;

The dates of the earliest migration to the New World are still in question... Regarded as even less likely are those fanciful contentions which suggest that the origin of American Indians can be attributed to sunken continents or wandering lost tribes. (Owen, Deetz, and Fisher, 1968: 3)

Josephy was more specific, and estimates that the bridge across the Bering Strait was probably part of the path that led to the New World some 12 000 to 35 000 years ago (Josephy, 1968: 37). Peter Farb (1968: 191) concurred, but estimated that proof exists to show that Aboriginal people had lived on this continent at least 13 000 years ago. Jennings (1978: 1) was even more persistent, insisting that "There is no reasonable doubt as to the ultimate origin of the human population that finally covered the hemisphere. There is consensus among scholars that the first American was of Asian stock." Deloria was right; for "professionals" of this ilk, any form of "educated" speculation would appear to be much superior to what they might term pure fantasy, although the differences might not be evident to anyone else.

Regardless of specificity of origin, it is becoming evident that before European contact, Aboriginal peoples of the various culture areas in North America lived full and probably satisfying lives. They had plenty of food and there were thriving agricultural communities around the Great Lakes Region, in the Eastern Woodlands, in the southwest, and as far north as North Dakota. Fishing was a major source of food supply on both east and west coasts as well as among the Plateau Indians in what is now the British Columbia Interior. When the Woodland Peoples migrated to the plains several centuries ago they developed a nomadic lifestyle following the migration patterns of the buffalo. The base of all of these cultures rested on a philosophy of ready adjustment to changes necessitated by natural forces. Many of the more sedentary civilizations left impressive remains behind which gave a clear indication of the extent of their technological genius. The moundbuilders of the American southeast bequeathed thousands of huge temple mounds as well as burial and effigy mounds, some of which had lunar alignments (Shaffer, 1992). The Anasazi of the southwest left huge walled cities, some of them five stories high. Their neighbors, the Hohokam, dug hundreds of miles of water-carrying canals, many of which are still in use today. Only the plains tribes left little physical evidence of the magnitude and genius of their cultures save for buffalo jumps and remains of winter camps and other sites of interest to archaeologists.
Using these remains as foundation for their theories, social scientists have tried to reconstruct the rudiments of past cultures. Unfortunately, they too often disregarded the oral tradition in constructing their prototypes. We can learn from their mistakes by incorporating elements of existing Indigenous knowledge into planning for the future.

Tribal World-View

It is useful for researchers to note that many Aboriginal societies today much more resemble the lifestyles of their forebears than do those social systems that were imported from Europe. The genius of this reality is that it is still possible to study and comprehend the workings of Indigenous societies in that they reflect the essence of their traditional ways. In addition, the cultural revitalization movement that is active among First Peoples today has placed new emphasis on old ways so that elders are being sought out to explain the old ways and bring them back into practice. Many ancient customs and rituals that were once deemed lost are being reenacted with new meaning as elders begin to share their knowledge. Fortunately, these have not been stamped out, for many of them were simply taken underground and held there until the time was right to release them. Illustrative of the rebirth of Aboriginal ceremonies include the sundance, potlatch, pipe ceremonies, use of sweetgrass, transfer ceremonies, and a host of other rituals (Lincoln: 1985).

Some 19th century anthropologists made the unfortunate ethnocentric error of assuming that cultural change always implies improvement. They also assumed that the Eurocentric model of cultural development could well serve as an international, indeed global model of human achievement, and should be copied by civilizations everywhere. A reexamination of this rather haughty perspective has convinced even anthropologists that they may have been too hasty in denouncing Aboriginal tribal cultures as inferior.

Many social and spiritual aspects of pre-contact tribal cultures are now coming to light, thanks to the willingness of Native elders to open the vaults of Indigenous knowledge (Couture, 1991a). In light of these admissions, there is reason to believe that Aboriginal peoples from many different areas on this continent traditionally ascribed to a similar metaphysical perspective while it remained unaffected by immigration, industry or imported forms of technology. It is necessary, of course, to acknowledge the diversity that existed among traditional Indian cultures with respect to their means of obtaining food, cultural practices, lifestyle, and so on, but the basic theological system to which they all subscribed was fundamentally tribal.
The need for this discussion stems from the fact that while the Weltanschauung of the First Peoples is markedly different than that of EuroCanadians; it is simply a significantly different way of viewing the world. An examination of four traditional core values which are still well-preserved among many Native tribes will substantiate this assertion.

(1) A Holistic, Global Perspective

Nature prevailed and flourished for untold centuries, unchanged by the Indian. – Chief Red Fox, Sioux First Nation (Friesen, 1998: 8)

Canadians are a lucky people. Nature’s lottery has left us with undant natural resources, oil and gas among them. But we are also a careless people. Rich in resources, we have been poor in policy. – David Crane, columnist, Controlling Interest: The Canadian Gas and Oil Stakes. (Colombo, 1987: 250)

It is difficult for nonAboriginals to comprehend the implications of a holistic view of the universe, but the Indigenous peoples traditionally believed that all phenomena, including both material and non-material elements, are connected and interconnected. The interconnectedness of all things on earth means that everything we do has consequences that reverberate through the system of which we are a part (Suzuki, 1997: 102). Native people do not adhere to any “scientific” breakdown of how people function or how the universe operates. The nonNative scientific view further allows and encourages the development of separate “hard-core” academic disciplines which seek to identify and explain the various components of cosmic and material phenomena, such as biophysics, astrochemistry, biotechnology, nuclear mathematics, social physiology, and so on. Although the proponents of each of these specialties will make sophisticated claims about interdisciplinary parallels and concerns, there is always an element of professional ethnocentrism involved in their scientific deliberations.

This delineation of disciplinary specialties is quite foreign to the First Nations way of thinking. Aboriginal People view the world as an interconnected series of only sometimes distinguishable or comprehensible elements. They experience no uneasiness at the thought of multiple realities simultaneously operant in the universe, and they do not differentiate among the varieties or qualities of entities, that is between material or spiritual elements. Their world-view allows for the possibility that a variety of “structurally-different” elements may simultaneously be active in the process of holistic healing. This also explains why dreams, visions, and personal experiences com-
prise as important a source of knowledge as scientifically-derived truths. In short, you never know where you might gain knowledge or where you might learn something.

Indian tribal appreciation for the spiritual dimension has been underestimated and misunderstood by researchers from the time of first contact. Not recognizing the nature of Indian spirituality, since the Europeans had left their own tribal origins far behind, the newcomers underestimated the extent to which spiritual concerns were valued by Native peoples as a significant part of daily life. In fact, the invaders assumed that the Indians were not even spiritually-oriented in the conventional sense. At most Indigenous People were accused of worshipping “evil spirits.” European thinkers tended to place great importance on institutionalized religion which was routinely delineated in terms of elaborately-decorated physical structures and structured procedures. From the European perspective there were few meaningful points by which to compare the two systems. In an interesting twist, the clash of the two traditions produced a regrettable functionality of sorts. European spokespersons, particularly those backed by a religious hierarchy, believed in making authoritative claims about the various workings of the universe. Indians, on the other hand, were a listening people; if anyone did make such a claim, he or she was certainly given an audience because not to do so might be to risk losing valuable insights. After all, no one would knowingly make a false claim about having a particular spiritual insight because the fear of being exposed was strong. An individual’s claim to truth was expected to be validated through subsequent happenings. After contact the arrangement was that the claim-making newcomers gained a dominant position in negotiations based on their particular interpretation of who was in possession of a superior theological system.

The traditional Native tribal orientation towards the universe naturally blossomed into a resignation to work with forces of the universe. The power of these forces was obvious, yet rhythmic, and by respecting these reliable patterns, it was possible to sustain a form of cultural life on earth. A further extension of this mind-set was an inherent warning not to seek to dominate or exploit nature, but always to work in harmony with it.

Tribal cultures have always had a profound respect for the earth, largely because they appreciated its produce for sustenance. As Leobold notes,

The land is not merely soil; it is a foundation of energy flowing through a circuit of souls, plants and animals . . . An ethic to supplement and guide the economic relation to land presupposes the existence of some mental image of land as a biotic mechanism. We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in. (quoted in Suzuki, 1997: 104)
The concept of personal or group ownership of land was foreign to Indian tribal societies at the time of treaty-signing. Their concept of a treaty was one of creating a good and lasting friendship between two nations who at one time were at war with one another or who wanted to avoid war. When the Canadian government began the process of signing written treaties in 1871 with First Nations across the country, they were building on a process that was quite familiar to the Aboriginal peoples. Most tribes had a long history of treaty-making with other nations, usually negotiated as a symbol of peace, and accompanied by the ceremonial smoking of the pipe and the exchange of gifts. To Native people, smoking the pipe was analogous to the nonNative practice of swearing on the Bible (Treaty 7, 1996: 68). Some historians also estimate that before 1871 when the formal treaty-signing process began, as many as 500 treaties had been signed between First Nations and European governments. Unlike the numbered treaties, the previous treaties were primarily friendship agreements intended to hinder the outbreak of war. To this day many Native leaders regret that their forebears were forced to give up their lands when they participated in treaty signing.

Traditionally, tribal societies relied on the oral tradition for passing along revered cultural knowledge. This was done largely through storytelling. The oral tradition afforded an entirely flexible dimension to tribal philosophy with the inbuilt possibility of reacting to unexpected changes much in the way that nature does. Contrasted with the current preoccupation for recording everything, an Oglala elder, Four Guns, once stated:

Many of the white man’s ways are past our understanding . . . They put a great store upon writing; there is always a paper.

The white people must think paper has some mysterious power to help them in the world. The Indian needs no writings; words that are true sink deep into his heart, where they remain. He never forgets them. On the other hand, if the white man loses his paper, he is helpless.

I once heard one of their preachers say that no white man was admitted to heaven unless there were writings about him in a great book! (Friesen, 1995a: 38)

In the traditional First Nations’ world there was only one universal and absolute truth – the universe exists and its rhythms must be respected. Often described in terms such as respect for nature or working in harmony with nature, the underlying truth requires is worthy of greater analysis. Coupled with the concept of interconnectedness the universe remains the object of reverence albeit veiled in mystery. There are no satisfying scientific explanations in this approach, and the deeper mysteries are only partially under-
stood through non-scientific, spiritual truths or through mythology steeped in time.

Belief in the eternal mystique of the universe prohibits the idea of exploitation or domination. An unknowable and hallowed entity should not be approached in any other manner but with respect, awe, and obeisance. One should not tamper with the elements or workings of the universe, but respect its modus operandi. As the mysterious but Divinely-controlled source of life and sustenance the earth's power is enigmatic but reliable. To question or seek to tamper with its rhythmic functions would be tantamount to playing God.

Pelletier (Frideres, 1974: 105-106), describes the difference between an Indian and nonIndian approach to the universe in a scene that places him on the top of a mountain in British Columbia. There he imagines he has been assigned the awesome responsibility of improving his natural environment. His first inclination is to stock the sky with a few more birds or perhaps move a few clouds around to provide balance. Then his eye falls on an old plank lying on the ground at his feet and he decides to relocate it to a more appropriate place. The plank is obviously hindering the grass from growing. As he lifts the plank he notices that the underside of it contains a whole colony of insect life. Ants are scrambling to move their eggs to safety, woodlice are digging to get down into the ground, earthworms are coiled up like snakes, and a spider is staring him straight in the face demanding, "What have you done to my world?" Pelletier immediately puts the board down as close to the original place as possible, and apologizes to the insects for disturbing their society. Then he gives thanks for the lesson that he is being taught not to interfere with the doings of the universe (Pelletier, 1974).

Tribal cultures all around the world once respected the natural workings of the earth, but once the infusion of industrialization and technology was realized, this ethic became frustrated. True, some of the inventions of the new outlook proved satisfying and convenient, but the effect on the environment was beyond comprehension. In the conquering mode of today's urban development campaign, the mandate is still to rearrange the earth in a pattern that is virtually indistinguishable when compared with the previous format; nothing can remain untouched, if not completely destroyed. This, after all, is progress. Imagine a traditionally-minded Aboriginal bystander solemnly pondering the process, wondering if "progress" will eventually run its course and Mother Earth be allowed to resume her natural course.

Soon after government negotiators completed the signing of Treaty 7 with the Blood Tribe of southern Alberta, officials suggested that the tribe consider selling off some of their land to provide revenue. This idea was greeted by one chief's unequivocal announcement, "The grass is for sale, but
not the earth." Implicit in this pronouncement was the belief that the resources of Mother Earth were for everyone’s benefit but the earth itself should not be divided up for private ownership or for personal gain.

The downside of earth reverence, if it may be so labelled, is that the resultant attitude towards the universe can take many forms. The strong penchant toward “earth maintenance,” so strongly valued by many successors of the European tradition, for example, might be viewed by Native people as comprising a form of tampering with the operations of the universe. Nowhere is there a better illustration of this than when formerly-developed modern communities wither and fall into disuse. Abandoned town-sites serve to substantiate the Indian view that nonNative people tend to build and abandon or destroy. They dig basements, erect buildings, lay paved roads and streets, and install elaborate underground wiring and pipe systems. The result is a modern community. When a town dies, however, in many cases the modern trappings of convenience are left to decay, often inflicting permanent damage to the environment as well as comprising an eye-sore (even by nonNative standards). Native people find this situation quite incomprehensible. In their view, in time, happily the earth will return to find its own level – provided that no irreparable damage has been done in the meantime.

The First Nations of North America see themselves as part of a great chain of existence that includes all aspects of creation; all elements in this natural chain are interrelated and interdependent. If any single element is subjected to undue attention or pressure or is tampered with, there will be repercussions in the grand scheme of things. Scientists may wish to argue with this layman’s view of things, because the western perspective conceives of the universe in terms of chains of cause-and-effect. Things are what they are, and do what they do, largely because antecedent things did what they did and were what they were. The underlying assumption is that if we design the right tools and approaches we will be able to understand those chains of cause-and-effect and perhaps tailor them to our own objectives. However, when one ponders the tremendous changes that have occurred in society in recent decades, which have necessarily impacted on the environment, the mind boggles. If the earth has been a working enterprise for “millions of years” as we have been led to believe by those same scientists, even a non-scientist can imagine what the effect of increased chemical use and pollution – of the earth, air and water – might be to the universe. This damage to the universe has been accomplished in only a few years, which amounts to a relatively insignificant hiccup in light of the duration of the earth’s existence. It may not be true that every irregularity caused by a scientific adjustment can also be rectified by still another scientific adjustment. If this is so, surely the matter is at least cause for serious concern if not diligent study.
Warnings about this state of affairs are inherent in traditional Indigenous knowledge. If ever there was a need to integrate this knowledge into the public domain, it is now. The call for Aboriginal elders to speak out has never been more urgent.

### (2) An Appreciation for Life and Family

> When you arise in the morning, give thanks for the light; give thanks for the morning, for life and strength; Give thanks for your food and the joy of living. If you see no reason for giving thanks, rest assured, the fault lies within yourself. – Chief Tecumseh, Shawnee First Nation (Friesen, 1998: 14)

> Think of yourself as a human being; and you cannot help feeling the reality of life around you, and becoming impregnated with it.

> If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (I Timothy 5:8 NIV)

One of the hardest “truths” for addicts of the work-ethic to accept is for anyone to claim that work of itself has no virtue. Although this orientation is rapidly changing, due to increased mechanization, few contemporary EuroCanadians probably need to be coaxed into believing in the value of work. By contrast, an important underlying presupposition of the traditional Native lifestyle was to shun work for its own sake, and even demean any colleague who might have such leanings. Virtue was seen as emanating from living in the “perennial now,” and staying to remain in tune with one’s spiritual destiny. Staying alive was a principal occupation of ancient tribal societies and it was accomplished via hunting and gathering, through agriculture or via a combination of these activities. For hunting societies, it was necessary to pursue game only when the larder was empty. Once the larder was full, due to the results of a successful hunt, it was time to celebrate.

The First Nations’ attitude towards work originated in a present-orientated, survival-centred society. Game was hunted to fulfil present needs, and with the exception of being stored as pemmican, meat could not be preserved for long periods of time. When the circumstances of hunting and gathering called for hard work, it was done, but there was no concept of holding a job in order to be “doing something” or as a means of validating one’s existence. Work was undertaken to fulfil a specific task or to satisfy a pressing need –
nothing more. The Indigenous people had great faith in the Creator’s miraculous provision.

An intriguing procedure by which to obtain necessary food was once practiced among the Mandan Indians of what is now North Dakota. Although primarily an agricultural people, the Mandans and their neighbours, the Arikara, and Hidatsa, also hunted buffalo. Being a sedentary society, however, they did not always find it convenient to engage in long distance hunting. They preferred not to wander too far way from their homes and leave them unguarded. As a result they invented the “buffalo calling ceremony” which was usually held during the winter months in hopes of luring the bison near to their villages. During the ceremony, which was presided over by the elders, the entire village became quiet. Dogs were muzzled and children were appeased with whatever it took to keep them quiet. Then everyone waited for the buffalo to come close to the village. Usually the plan worked, assuring the people that they were indeed being looked after by the Creator (Schneider, 1989: 62).

The Native concept of work correlates with the contemporary misguided notion of “Indian time.” Observers often joke about “Indian time” as though to imply that First Nations are always late. The truth of the matter is that Indians are sometimes late (at least by nonNative standards), and sometimes they do not even show up for an appointment when they are expected to do so. Of course there are also many nonNatives whose actions fit this description. This does not mean that a sense of time is always irrelevant, but rather that time per se is not the only nor necessarily the most important criterion by which to determine how a particular moment ought to be acted out. It is certainly not a top priority of itself. There are times when Indian people are actually early, depending on circumstances or purpose and the relative importance of an event. Above all, clock-watching per se simply does not happen. It is basically an irrelevant (and perhaps irreverent) entity in the Aboriginal scheme of things.

Traditionally, all tribal societies lived in tune with the cycles of nature. Living off the land and depending on its rhythms meant that nature dictated when things would happen. No one went out to collect blueberries or other edibles until they had ripened to the optimal degree. Nor did they trap until the time of year when pelts were at their fullest. Crops were harvested when they were ready, not on a certain date. While they waited the hunters prepared or repaired their equipment and planned their strategies (Ross, 1992: 39). Thus the notion of “the time being right” is a principle embedded in the very nature of things; to dance to the tune of a different drummer would be foolish. Like other tribal societies, First Nations well recognized who was in control of the elements. They reverently respected the Creator and were well
aware of the consequences of neglecting His dictates. This is aptly illustrated in the reminder given to the Old Testament Bible Prophet, Amos:

... I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me, declares the Lord. (Amos 4:7-8 NIV)

One of the most amazing contradictions of modern society is the claim that family, particularly immediate family, is a top priority when it is obvious that almost everything else takes precedence. This is particularly true when it comes to personal fulfilment through vocation or career. Often intelligent people are caught singing the praises of family life when in reality they spend only a few minutes per week in meaningful interaction with their children. Often both parents in today's nuclear family aggressively pursue individual careers in order to provide a high level of consumptive lifestyle for their young. This tack is adopted either because both parents believe such to be necessary, or they are simply echoing the “family comes first” slogan which has become quite popular among North American politicians seeking public office.

The strongest unit among most precontact tribal societies was the clan, a linear and usually exogamous kin-group (or sib), often characterized by matrilineal descent. Members of a clan lived together, including all married partners and their children, and were subject to a series of stringent regulations. In addition to being exogamous, clans usually had a set of names reserved for naming offspring, and their own burial ground. They often had special religious symbols, and their religious rites were carried out by specially designated individuals. Clans could adopt outsiders but they too would have to subscribe to clan regulations (Goldenweiser, 1968: 565f). Lowie (1956: 9) points out that among the Crow Indians, who were a matrilineal society, a person was always in the same clan as his or her mother but a man could never belong to the same clan as his children who were born into their mother’s group. Even if a father adopted children they automatically fell into the clan of his mother or that of the children’s mother. Among the Crows a child could belong to the father’s clan only if its mother married a man of her own clan, a practice forbidden by the rules of exogamy.

Clans were (and still are) powerful units among member Nations of the former Iroquois League and the Huron Confederacy. West Coast Indians are also organized according to a highly complex clan system. Migrant Plains Indian tribes traditionally limited themselves to bands of 50 or 100 individuals in order to more easily move camp and follow the buffalo. More seden-
tary nations like the Arikara, Hidatsa and Mandan, organized larger village settlements of fifty or more lodges, albeit along strict family lines.

The Native orientation towards strong family linkages had many benefits. Child rearing, for example, was a family affair, and a responsibility shared by family and community. Education was ongoing, and consisted of elders telling stories, modelling, and learning by doing (Haig-Brown, 1993: 38). Even today, among some First Nations a significant portion of child-rearing is done by grandparents rather than parents. Often parents are quite young when they have their first child and they usually require advice and assistance. Besides, it is an unspoken rule among Indians that age is correlated with, although not necessarily a direct cause of, wisdom. Grandparents are more settled, more relaxed about life, and therefore they are also more patient in child-raising. This inclination is also characteristic in sibling relationships. Older children in the same classroom are expected to help their younger siblings even though an uninformed nonNative teacher may see such actions as unscrupulous or cheating.

In the context of life and family, First Nations cultures comprised a utopia of sorts. Their priorities were in order, and there was no contradiction between what they claimed and what they lived, clearly an indicator that this value system could again be installed if there was a will to do so. Drawing attention by Aboriginal elders to their precontact functional family life would be in place at this time.

(3) A Caring and Sharing Society

Material culture is interesting to look at . . . our traditional concept of possessions is not to hoard them, but to use them. If anybody can find a better use for what I have, let him take it. — Russell Wright, Siksika First Nation (Friesen, 1998: 5)

It is a common stereotype to conceive of precontact Indian culture as a sharing society, perhaps because there is truth in the statement. However the meaning of sharing is dependent on the context in which the word is used. In a dictionary definition common to dominant society, "sharing" simply means that those who possess things or have access to resources may use those resources to assist others who may be in need. Implicit in the dictionary definition is the assumption that those who have resources may help out the needy if they so choose. The question of wanting to is seldom a relevant factor in Indian culture because of very limited individual choice in the matter.
The Aboriginal twist to the definition of sharing leans quite heavily toward the obligatory component of the process, very much to the point that they who have, had better share. This tradition has deep historical roots. When a warrior returned from a successful hunt he was expected to share some of the meat to his immediate family, friends, neighbors, and relatives. In times of famine the meat was stretched out as far as possible. Rare was the warrior who refused to fulfill this obligation because there were strict, implicit rules about sharing. Conversely, there were also taboos about not fulfilling this requirement reinforced by various means of disapproval ranging from humor to outright shunning.

At the time of first European contact there were many formalized institutional approaches to sharing among North American tribes such as the pot-latch, which was practiced by West Coast Indians and the give-away dances sponsored by several plains tribes. Joe Dion describes a particular give-away dance among his people the Cree in which a woman experienced such joy and euphoria during a dance that she virtually gave everything away. Her husband was away from home at the time and he was somewhat chagrined on returning home to discover that even his horse and gun had been “danced away” (Dion, 1996: 52). Today several tribes still practice the give-away dance at special occasions designed to honor individuals.

Some historians point out that the traditional Indigenous practice of giving and taking was greatly affected by practices that arose at the time of first contact. As the fur trade got underway the First Nations were perceived as necessary allies in the enterprise and the fruits of their labors were a highly-valued commodity in the world market. Furs were traded for European-produced goods and gifts were exchanged as tokens of trust and goodwill. When the markets eventually dried up and the Indian economy was faced with the inevitable need to change, the perception of the First Nations was radically transformed. Suddenly the Indian became the “white man’s burden,” someone who needed to be taken care of and nothing to offer as a means of preserving integrity. There were even those who viewed the First Nations with the patronizing attitude of admiring “the noble savage” with the wish to preserve Aboriginal cultures for posterity (Friesen, 1995a: 24).

By the mid 1880s the buffalo were wiped out and neither government officials nor the First Nations were prepared for the rather sudden disappearance the latter’s food supply. Government bureaucrats had envisaged that there would be an adjustment period during which the Indians gradually adapted to an agrarian model by planting and harvesting crops, and raising cattle. When these plans suddenly had to be modified the government simply concluded that they would temporarily help the First Nations out by giving them rations. The Indians, on the other hand, projecting a more traditional
stance in keeping with their philosophy, concluded that the arrangement would become permanent. Their “grandfather” (another name for the Indian agent) would look after them. Besides, how could a self-respecting warrior conceive of gaining a livelihood by scratching the ground with a stick and then waiting for things to grow (Dempsey, 1991: 42). This background set the stage for a long-term dependency relationship that has lingered to this day. As a priest in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, once remarked to one of the authors, “In the past we spent a lot of time teaching the Indians to receive. Initially, many of them were insulted by the process. Now, we wish to reverse the process and give them back their independence, and we are finding this a very difficult thing to do.”

There is an element of a business-deal atmosphere to consider in this context which appears to have shifted to a dependency mode. Many Aboriginal leaders have interpreted treaty benefits on a broader basis than the written conditions indicated. They see government grants and rations as a form of regular and perpetual compensation for the elimination of the buffalo and for lands taken. For this reason Indian people are sometimes advised by their leaders not to feel any measure of shame or chagrin for receiving welfare monies or other forms of government subsistence. These are strictly to be viewed as honorable and appropriate compensation for ceded territories and the right of unlimited occupancy (Snow, 1977: 28f).

Traditional trading practices between First Nations and Europeans reflected mutual trust of sorts. Direct confrontation and negative exchanges were generally avoided. This perspective was deeply imbedded in Aboriginal culture whose leaders might have been viewed by outsiders as reluctant or hesitant. According to Cree elder Joseph Couture (1985: 9) Native people possess a kind of self-reliance which nonNatives often interpret as uncooperative, stubborn, belligerent, impossible or even “dumb.” Indians also act with an aloofness which is easily perceived as a reluctance to ask for or receive help other than in an emergency or crisis. The fact is their live-and-let-live philosophy reflects an attitude of non-interference, for to interfere is to be discourteous, threatening, or even insulting. Although group goals are paramount and individual identity is primarily awarded through community channels, the Indigenous community reveals a very strong tendency to avoid any form of direct confrontation with the individual.

The inherent difficulty in trying to understand this aspect of Indian philosophy is imbedded in the European-inspired penchant for talking things out. The Native orientation is more inclined to stifle or repress issues or, if necessary, find a means by which to handle the matter by avoiding direct confrontation as much as possible. Feelings are not to be shown, especially grief and sorrow. These were traditionally seen as emotions which, if indulged,
could threaten a group, for engagement in emotional states could incapacitate the person overwhelmed by them. Only when grief and sorrow were forgotten as quickly as possible could the group continue to meet survival challenges with the fullest attention and energy of every member (Ross, 1992: 29).

Even to this day when some measure of confrontation between Aboriginal individuals becomes necessary, it is often accomplished by telling a story or by relating a legend. In this context, the purpose of story-telling is simply a means by which to let the second party know that his or her behavior has been inappropriate. The hearer is then supposed to figure out that he/she is the target of the story and is expected to amend his/her ways. If the point of the story is missed or if the listener perceives its purpose to be other than informing, another means may be sought to amend the situation. Usually this kind of undertaking is not attempted more than once. Parenthetically, when it is attempted on the uninitiated nonNative individual the scene can have quite humorous side-effects. It is possible that nonNative listeners may become so engrossed in the story that they will make comments which clearly indicate their lack of awareness about what is transpiring. In one instance it did not occur to several individuals that they were the target of a particular story until one of them later related the incident to a third party. At that point the insight sparkled and the nonNative individual burst out, “Aha! This is about my behavior!”

In traditional Inuit society an indirect means of communication was in effect so that one spoke only of oneself in a form of the second person. An announcement that one was going hunting was spoken in this way, “Someone wants to go hunting,” or “Someone is going to the sea.” Other everyday plans and behaviors were conveyed in similar style, “Someone is hungry, someone is angry, someone is going to bed,” and so on.

Respect for the individual in the Native community is often practiced to severe limits according to nonNative standards. For example, one woman removed her daughter from a particular school because the child, who was only seven years old, said she did not enjoy the school. After several days of absence the child was enrolled in another school. Similarly, when an Aboriginal truant officer visited a northern reserve home to determine why a ten-year-old was continually absent from school, the mother asked if the child was in school on the date of the visit. When the officer gave a negative response she simply replied, “Then I don’t know. I told him!” The implicit belief is that if children are left to their own desires as much as possible, and not interfered with, they will develop both independence and a special loyalty to their parents.
Native people are not usually in the habit of providing extended answers such as those which exemplify nonNative explanations. Ask a nonNative why he or she was absent from an occasion at which they were expected to be present and an endless verbal harangue may result. Ask a Native person the same question and you may be rewarded with a one-word response or more likely, none at all. After all, if you respected the person, you would not even ask why they did not show up.

An AmerIndian leader observed recently that the Indigenous way relies heavily on effective early childhood education. Interpreted, this probably means that if Native children are given full opportunity to inculcate the old ways until they are six or seven years of age it will hardly ever be necessary to discipline them afterwards. This tradition has the advantage of encouraging children to become self-reliant and independent at a much earlier age than their nonNative counterparts. As such it is also a vital aspect of the philosophy of valuing and respecting individuality.

Most books about Indian ways mention that the traditional approach to child discipline, when it became necessary to implement it, was to avoid corporal punishment and instead to utilize humor, name-calling and ridicule as means of keeping individuals in line. In addition, the more informal means of social control were practiced by relatives or close friends, never by the parents. Doing so might jeopardize the bond between parent and child. In certain contexts today even nonNative people are expected to carry out these forms of discipline when necessary. If children become too boisterous, for example, and a nonNative person holds an accepted position such as a teacher, it will be expected that he or she will step in and bring order.

The ancient ways of sharing and caring will not readily be appreciated in a world increasingly highlighted by direct confrontation and self-assertiveness, but they do reflect a deep regard for one's peers. To some Canadians, the vulgar, abrasive, crude language used in so many media presentations are indicative of a society that has gone too far. A return to the old ways could be beneficial at this point, particularly if it also conveyed a more respectful attitude towards the rights of others.

(4) A Spiritual Sense of Community

All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it. – Chief Joseph, Nez Perce First Nation. (Friesen, 1998: 45)
The great majority of nations have been formed, not by people who desired intensely to live together, but rather by people who would not live separately. – Jean-Charles Bonenfant, Quebec historian, The French Canadians and the Birth of Confederation. (Colombo, 1987: 84)

Many tribal societies traditionally believed themselves to have a special relationship with Deity, based partially on the grounds of tribal identity and longevity. Since the Creator had chosen them to dwell on this earth as a unique entity, obviously that meant something (Harrod, 1992: 38f). Many First Nations historically also gave themselves unique names signifying their special identity in the scheme of things. The Blackfoot (the preferred term in the United States is Blackfeet) peoples also believed they were a covenant people and they braided their hair as symbol of this link with the Creator. They were firm believers in the supernatural and, according to McClintock (1992: 167), they were subject to what were later called the Good and Evil forces that influence human affairs. Similarly, the Sioux believed that their Sacred Buffalo Calf Pipe, which had been handed down through the generations via procedures imbedded in the oral tradition, was the foundation of their religion. It too linked them with the supernatural. Lame Deer (Lame Deer and Erdoes, 1972: 128) once noted sarcastically, “You white men killed your Jesus; we Indians haven’t killed our peace pipe yet.”

Many North American First Nations have special inventories of sacred objects with long and unique histories. For them these objects form an incarnational connection with the Creator. The Potawotami, for example, have their Sacred Chief Drum which was once presented to them as a symbol of a Divine link (Friesen, 1999: 208). The Cheyennes still value their Sacred Arrows, brought down to them from a Sacred Mountain in Wyoming called Devil’s Tower (Looking Horse, 1988: 68), and the Sacred Buffalo Hat which was another symbol of Divine approval for their spirituality (Grinnell, 1976: 88). When the northern and southern Cheyenne divided into two camps around 1830, possibly because it was easier to manage affairs in smaller numbers, each division took one of the two sacred covenants with them. The northern group took the Sacred Buffalo Hat and the southern Cheyenne took the Sacred Medicine Arrows. Today the rite of renewal for the Sacred Medicine Arrows is an annual summer event during which the entire tribe is in a solemn mood. Originally the arrows were bestowed on the tribe by the Creator via the prophet, Sweet Medicine. In traditional times, it was believed that if the Sacred Arrows and the Sacred Hat were taken into battle, the tribe could not lose. Once, however, in 1830 a band of warring Pawnees stole the arrows and a long period of tribal catastrophe befell the Cheyennes. Now, once a year, shamans open the medicine bundle containing the Sacred Arrows in a solemn ritual. The arrows represent the collective existence of
the Cheyenne Nation and in a sense they may be called the embodiment of the tribal soul (Hoebel, 1965: 7). The Sacred Buffalo Hat is perceived to be a living manifestation of supernatural power and represents a holy covenant which the Cheyenne have with the Creator. The Sacred Buffalo Hat was given to the nation by the prophet, Sacred Horns, at a sacred site in the north. In 1874 a tragedy befell the Sacred Hat when the keeper, Half Bear, died and his son, Coal Bear, was not present to receive the hat. When Coal Bear returned, the temporary keeper of the hat refused to give it up and thus the hat was spiritually contaminated. For a long time, as with the case of the loss of the Sacred Medicine Arrows, the tribe underwent many unfortunate happenings.

Belief in the importance of tribal identity downplays any notion of individuality as a separate entity. Any talents or gifts that an individual possesses must provide some benefit to the community or they are being misused. Any possession that individual may have must be available for use by any member of the community at any time. Traditionally, when there was a community need and someone had the means to fulfill that need, he or she would be expected to behave accordingly. If a vision quester was successful in his search, the blessings of his experience would be welcomed, validated and, hopefully, enhanced by and within the community. In the final analysis, it was the community, the people who mattered, not individual attainment.

There are definite benefits in valuing community above individuality. As Lowie points out in another context, in the “olden days” of Indian culture, an individual was always better off in the company of his peers.

A man may be a champion marksman, but when there is no game to shoot he falls back on the pemmican his wife has stored against that very emergency; and even in the chase he is most efficient when he hunts in company. His robes and leggings are the work of his wives or kinsmen; his very arrows are not of his own making but of the handicraft of skilled craftsmen. If he seeks renown, what are his chances as a lonely raider? Even a well-organized party was likely to be cut to pieces or be hard put to it when fleeing from superior numbers. Crisis lowered on every side, and it meant everything to be able to face life not alone but with a comrade shielded by one’s family and clan, in the bosom of one’s club. (Lowie, 1956: 329)

**Conclusion**

Although the cultural inventories of the various First Nations revealed a measure of diversity at the time of European contact, there was some measure of universality among their ritualistic enactments and religious outlooks. Fortunately for scholars who have an appreciation for epistemological diver-
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sity, many First Nations today still practice many aspects of their ancient tribal perspectives. They have clung tenaciously to these concepts despite the many pressures to abandon their ways during the centuries following European contact. Unlike many immigrant cultural groups they have resisted the temptation to add the trappings of modern statehood and have continued to revere their past. The Native cultural renaissance that began in the 1960s has strengthened the will among First Nations to revive traditional customs and bring them into the public domain. This motivation now affords observers an excellent opportunity to study components of Aboriginal theology and related practice that were heretofore kept secret. This possibility also allows interested observers to gain a deeper knowledge of First Nations' spirituality in a way that these insights can be compared with developing forms of state religions such as Christianity. Whatever the outcome, we must be grateful to the First Nations of North America for preserving so many of their ancient cultural ways. There is no doubt that a study of them offers a form of deep spiritual enrichment to the diligent observer.

A growing crescendo of Aboriginal voices has sounded in recent years to emphasize the importance of a renewal of Indigenous knowledge and spirituality (Meili, 1992; Cajete, 1994; McGaa, 1995; Johnston, 1995; Bear Heart, 1998; Weaver, 1998; Battiste, 2000b; Battiste and Henderson, 2000). These writers have been accompanied by the voices of Indian elders in attempting to explain Indigenous metaphysical systems. The good news is that unlike a century or two ago, nonNatives are beginning to show interest in what they have to say (Couture, 1991a).

Yazzie (2000) maintains that if the First Nations are to throw off the yoke of epistemological colonialism, they must commence the process within themselves. Political self-determination begins with internal sovereignty which means taking control of one’s personal, family, clan, and community life. Essentially this means a return to tradition and a rejection of modern EuroCanadian value systems. The latter will not be easy, as Findley (2000: x) notes:

The task of opposing the dominant orthodoxies of modernity from a position at their ever-extending margins, or from a strategically primitivist place outside, is crucial and dangerous work. . . . Significant numbers of Euro-Canadian scholars have become remarkably good at critiquing the pretensions and practices of modernity and defending marginalized groups, but they do so within institutions among whose faculties Aboriginal people are minimally represented.

Battiste (2000b) insists that Aboriginal languages must be viewed as the basic media for the transmission and survival of Indigenous knowledge. It is Battiste’s contention that unless the revival of Aboriginal languages becomes
a principal government undertaking, many of them will be lost along with the distinctive Aboriginal orientation to understanding the world from an holistic perspective. Unfortunately his improbable likelihood does not diminish the fact that the primary responsibility for maintaining Indigenous language and culture must be assumed by First Nations themselves. It cannot be safeguarded by government policies, school programs, or university degrees (Goulet, Dressyman-Lavallee, and McCleod, 2001: 45).

The maintenance of Indigenous languages must first of all be a demonstrated priority among First Nations themselves. They must know their languages in order to teach them. They must value them enough to put aside less important pursuits in the scheme of things and get on with the business of language teaching. This statement may not be welcomed by more politically-inclined Aboriginals, but it is reality.