

# **The Bear Butte Religion – A Christian Perspective**

By: Rev. Gerhold L. Lemke

After considering the matter for the past few years, it seems to me that now I should do something with the materials that I have collected on the traditional religion of the Cheyenne and Sioux as it finds its focus on Bear Butte, and that I should do so in such a way as to provide a general outline for the evaluation of any religion.

## **General Outline**

My objectives in writing.  
Something of my own background.  
A few basic principles regarding religion.  
The Sweet Medicine story, with commentary.  
Concluding observations.

## **Objectives**

Since it is the members of my congregations who provide for my daily welfare as I serve them in the work of the kingdom of God, I am writing this for their information.

Since Jesus sends His disciples into all the world with His gospel of full and free salvation, His command is also for me, that I should “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you,” 1 Peter 3:15.

Since there are many who are being turned away by faulty representations of what Christianity means, I would hope to touch on some essential principles of the Christian faith.

Since some individuals preparing for a teaching career may find themselves in circumstances where their faith is challenged by traditional or native religions, I would hope to give them some sound reasoning by which to help others see where they are at and what religious alternatives for them there might be.

Since Jesus would have us make disciples of all nations, Matthew 28:19-20, I would also hope by this paper to awaken in those who read this a desire to hear more of the gospel of Christ at our regular Sunday worship services.

## **Something of Myself**

I should tell you something of myself so that you might evaluate what I have to say in the light of “where I’m coming from.”

My 16 great-great-grandparents came to the United States in the mid-1800’s from every part of what at one time or another has been called Germany. Some came to avoid military conscription, some came for economic reasons, but most of them came because they wanted to be true Lutheran Christians at a time when some German rulers desired to establish a union of all protestant denominations.

The fact that I am “white” was God’s doing, even as we read that every child is a gift from God, Psalm 127:3, to its parents. A Christian cannot be racially prejudiced, not if he appreciates the fact that Jesus died for all. So I refuse to accept anyone’s conclusion that if I compare the Bible with the religion connected with Bear Butte I am prejudiced against American Indians. To keep things in perspective, Christianity did not begin as “the white man’s religion.” It began with Adam, Genesis 3:15, continued among the people of Israel, then spread to such as the man of Ethiopia, Acts 8:26-39, and Cornelius the Roman centurion, Acts 10:1ff. It is a religion that is professed today by people of every race the world over. About half of the Apache people of Arizona are members of my Lutheran Christian denomination.

I was born a Lutheran Christian in a Lutheran parsonage in Elgin, ND, but that isn’t the reason for my being a Lutheran Christian today. When Martin Luther, in 1521, was told to take back all that he had written to that time, he replied, “Don’t try to convince me with church tradition or by quoting the church fathers, but show me from the Scriptures where I am wrong, and then I will recant.” In my training I was given Bible backing for

every doctrine, and today I remind those who would learn from me that it is their responsibility to require of me a Bible basis for all that I might teach them. People can't help what religion their parents may or may not have professed, but their lifetime responsibility is to examine every doctrine of every religion that would seek to attract them in the clear light of Bible truth, and to join that denomination that teaches all the Bible without additions or subtractions. I accept the entire Bible as a book unlike any other book, a book from God, and therefore true and factual in all that it says on every subject that it touches. .

I received a public grade school education, 1950-1958, and was given time to "do nothing" in the Wisconsin countryside near my home. One result of this was that I became an environmentalist awhile before Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* sparked today's ecology consciousness. Through high school and college I picked up the languages, sciences, history, religion and music that was a necessary preparation for seminary training. But meanwhile I could read on my own whatever interested me, and to the present day I remain curious about almost everything. Finding myself now in Sturgis, it would be a definite loss if I didn't participate in area archaeological digs as time permits and then try to put myself in the place of former peoples by trying to reproduce their pottery and projectile points, and examine the forests and plains in which they lived.

### **My Experiences At Bear Butte**

The first time that I hiked up Bear Butte was on June 7, 1966. I don't recall seeing evidence of Indian activity there at the time.

On August 23, 1971, I found a new tourist building and paved parking lot at the butte. There were cloth squares tied in the trees on the butte, and at the top there was a "rosary" wound around a cardboard advertisement for a grandmother clock - an object that had been prayed for? (A rosary is made by wrapping a bit of cloth around a pinch of roll-your-own tobacco. The cloth bits are knotted on store string.)

After moving to Sturgis late in 1974, I hiked up the butte again on Friday, June 27, 1975. I saw cloth squares, rosaries, and bags of tobacco in trees along the trail - offerings to the spirit of the mountain, the park ranger said. At the top, toward the western end, there was an Indian in his late teens shaping a peace pipe from a stone that he said he had dug from the quarry at Pipestone, MN. He was using a file and various saw blades. He said that by making the pipe on the butte it would be more effective in its intended use since the spirit of the mountain would enter it. (That evening, a party of northern Cheyenne ascended the butte to stay until Monday morning. They wished to pray for family solidarity in America.)

Every year following 1975 there has been increasing evidence of an Indian presence on Bear Butte. On July 6, 1979, I found a half-dozen unoccupied prayer squares marked out at the corners by trees roughly ten feet apart toward the western end of the butte. An armful of white sage weed was matted down inside each square. The trees were connected at the base by rosaries much bulkier than prayer rosaries. The material of tote rosaries varied in color with the direction that each side of a square faced. At head level on some of the corner trees there were cloth squares corner-folded around 1', inch lumps of tobacco (?) bound to the trees with new strands of bootlace leather.

On the morning of September 24, 1979, Dr. Karl Schlesier, professor of anthropology at Wichita State University, Kansas, stopped by to invite me to come that night to visit with a party of southern Cheyenne who were going to break camp on the butte the next day. That evening went, and met Edward Red Hat I, keeper of the four sacred arrows, who had come to seek guidance from the Great Spirit on what should be done about 80 acres of land that was then for sale at the base of the butte. A young man with the party had come to offer his thanks to the Great Spirit for answering prayers for healing of wounds suffered in Vietnam.

### **Basic Principles**

There is a God, or there isn't. If there isn't, then where has the universe come from, and how did we get a Bible with so many prophecies that have been exactly fulfilled, with some remaining yet to be fulfilled? People who would like to believe that there is no God leave to believe that the universe created itself, the creating agent being blind chance operating over immeasurable periods of time.

But this isn't even scientific, conflicting as it does with the two foundation principles of all of science, the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics.

The First Law states that the sum total of matter and energy in the universe remains constant. No scientist has ever observed something appearing where before there was nothing. The Bible, by contrast, is in harmony with the First Law when it says that, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (the Hebrew way of saying the universe), Genesis 1:1. See also Hebrews 11:3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

The Second Law states that the energy in the universe is constantly becoming less useful or available, and randomness increases. Because of this second law, no scientist has ever invented a perpetual motion machine, and no mechanic has ever stopped a machine from eventually wearing out, and no doctor has ever prevented death when death's time comes. The Bible is in harmony with the Second Law when it shows how God's perfect creation was made imperfect by the rebellion of some of his holy angels led by Satan who tempted man to join him in opposition to God, Genesis 3. Anyone who would say that this story of the temptation of Adam and Eve is a myth must likewise challenge Jesus who spoke of them as real people, Matthew 19:3-6, and St. Paul, who wrote, Romans 5:12,19, "Wherefore, us by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned . . . For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (Jesus Christ) shall many be made righteous." See also Romans 8:18-23.

God made man, or man makes gods. If God made man, Genesis 1:26-31, then man is obligated to obey the whole will of God, also as it is expressed in the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ..." Exodus 20:3-5. But finding himself condemned before the holiness of God, mankind shows a tendency to make gods more to his liking, or to set himself up as his own god in determining for himself what might be right and wrong. Paul speaks of the foolishness of crass idolatry when he tells how people have "changed the truth of God into a lie, and won shipped and served the creature (anything created by God: animals, heavenly bodies, etc.) more than the Creator, who is blessed forever," Romans 1:25. The idolatry of making one's own religion need not involve idols, but ideas, as when the leaders of the French Revolution deified Reason (thus misusing something else that came from the Creator). Among the bible's many warnings, we have 2 Timothy 4:3-4, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

God saves man, or man saves himself. God has given everyone a conscience and the feeling that things have to be made right with God. Put how is this to be done? The Christian religion teaches that when all were "dead in trespasses and sins...God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us ...has made us alive together with Christ...for by grace you are saved through faith...it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast," Ephesians 2:1-10. See also Romans 1:16-17, 3:19-28, 4:1 - 5:21, etc. Every religion of man, by contrast, says that people have to make good for what they have done wrong - punishing themselves to gain the good graces of their self-made gods, denying themselves some good, or making some special effort theme selves to attain eternal blessedness. To the extent that a Christian religion forgets that God has paid for every sin Himself (Jesus on the cross said, "It is finished," John 19:30, and to the extent that some teach that good works must come before God responds with forgiveness, to that extent a Christian denomination compromises the truth of God and encourages the work-righteous instinct in man. True Christianity teaches that good works must follow the new life that God creates in an individual whom He brings to faith, Romans 8:8, 6:1-23.

Anna Lee Waldo, in her paperback novel, *Sacajawea*, 1979, Avon, gives us some good examples of man's idea that he must do something himself to enter into the good graces of his god(s). On page 183 she give; a quotation from H. McCracken concerning the O-kee-pa ceremony of the Mandan. "Among the rituals of the peoples of the earth it would be difficult to find any practice of self-imposed penance more excruciating." In her story, Waldo writes of the participants in this ritual being "completely suspended from wounds in their

flesh,” page 204. Later in the book, pp. 1004-1005, she has Sacajawea’s Comanche husband describing a trip into Mexico where in the village of Santa Cruz de la Canada he sees a re-enactment of Jesus’ sufferings on the Way of Sorrows and the crucifixion. “It is strange that both the white men and the Mandans used the headband of thorns and the crossed poles.” On page 1334 there is the note that a protestant minister on the Wind River Reservation conducted a Christian burial ceremony over Sacajawea’s grave on the day she died, April 9, 1884, even though to his knowledge she had never been in a church in her life or had professed Christianity. On page 1338, the opinion of Tom Rivington, western pioneer, is given: “I believe now, that if there is a hereafter, that the good Indian woman’s name will be on the right side of the ledger.” These examples show man’s tendency to want to believe in a way to heaven apart from the way that was marked out for us once and for all by Jesus who says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me,” John 14:6. If any would disagree with this, his argument is not with me, but with Christ.

The Bible is God’s truth, or everything( thus nothing) is true. It is impossible to say that “Every road leads to God,” for the Bible which excludes other roads claims to show man the only way. To speak as if the Bible’s way is only one of many is to make of the Bible something that it is not. If everything is true, if “it makes no difference what you believe so long as you are sincere in your belief,” then nothing is true or trustworthy as you approach eternity. Every road does not lead to Rome. A rocket blasting off to explore the planets follows just one precise heading - otherwise it ends up lost, useless. Why should things be any different in religion? In Matthew 15:9, God says, “In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Religion is either what God made it once and for all (objective truth), or else it is what man makes of it (subjective “truths”). Christians today find themselves operating in an atmosphere of rationalism, the mind of man being the final judge of all things. In theology. Higher Criticism dominates the field with its presupposition that the Bible is just another record of man’s thoughts about God rather than a special revelation of God’s truth to man.

Beginning a century ago in Germany, things have reached the point where many teachers in Christian schools or pulpits aren’t sure whether or not Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible credited to him, or if the four gospels record the actual sayings of Jesus. According to higher criticism, all the miracles of the Bible including Jesus’ resurrection have some natural explanation, most of the prophecies in the Bible were written after the fact, and nothing can really be trusted as true since no one can say how much oral tradition lies behind the final written books of the Bible.

If the bias of higher criticism is valid, then there is no point in debating the relative value of Christianity and traditional Indian religions. If the record of Moses including the giving of the Ten Commandments was not recorded by Moses through the inspiration of God, but was handed down in the form of oral tradition for centuries after Moses until it was finally recorded, then no one who would champion the worth of Christianity has any foundation from which to challenge the oral traditions of the American Indians which have been put in written form in recent times.

In 1979, after I met Edward Red Hat, keeper of the sacred arrows, at Bear Butte, I wrote to him in Oklahoma to explain to him the Christian symbolism of a small obsidian flake fish that I had given to Dr. Schlesier during my 9-24-79 visit at their campsite. (The letters of the Greek word for “fish” form the initial Greek letters of the confession: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.) Since Jesus has called me to be a disciple, a “fisher of men,” I thought that I owed it to Red Hat to explain to him the fundamentals of the Christian religion which so far as I knew he may never have fully heard before. A few weeks later I received a reply from Regis Ryan, a Dominican priest ordained in 1954 and now working with the Cheyenne and Arapaho people “to bring their vision for meeting the very human needs of their people into day-to-day reality.” This was in connection with the *Dominican Las Casas Fund for the Cheyennes and Arapahos*. In his letter of 11-8-79, Father Ryan took exception to my “almost literal acceptance of the writing down of oral tradition which became the Old Testament, and the rejection of the partial writing down of the oral tradition of the Cheyenne people.”

Father Ryan’s bias was apparently in favor of higher criticism, and his argument that I shouldn’t bother Edward Red Hat with my concerns since one tradition is as good as any other. I just wish that it were possible to

set up a debate between Father Ryan and the Dominican missionaries who risked everything in seeking converts among the Indian tribes of America in the days of European exploration:

I place my trust not in the destructive opinions of men, but in the factual trustworthiness of the Bible (always being supported by the new discoveries of archaeology) and in the word of Jesus (who, for instance, called Moses the author of Genesis to Deuteronomy, John 5:46.) Anyone who would ignore Jesus must first discount His claim to being One with the heavenly Father, the Son of God, John ch. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. If higher criticism casts doubt on everything in the Bible and ends in seeing no real need for true mission work, I want no part in it.

The following four pages are the work of Sturgis historian Richard B. Williams, now deceased, used by permission.

### **The Sweet Medicine Story: Cheyenne Indians Again Pry At Sacred Mountain**

[by Richard B. Williams, August, 1972.]

The Cheyenne fasters came down the rocky slopes of their mountain after they had fasted for four days and four nights and had offered their prayers. They were lead by Edward Red Hat, the Chief of all Cheyenne Chiefs and Keeper of the Sacred Arrows. The time: July 28, 1972, at 7:00 a.m.

The faithful leader, a member of the Southern Cheyennes, from Longdale, Oklahoma, who was born in 1895 was happy. He revealed that during the fast, four of the old Arrow Keepers, long since gone, appeared before the fasters and smiled with their approval that they had come to fast and pray at *Noahvose* (meaning the good or beneficent mountain, in Cheyenne). The spiritual visitors included Little Man, grandfather of Chief Red Hat's wife; Baldwin Twins, White Rabbit, and Magpie. Chief Red Hat noted that as they lay on their sage beds wrapped in a buffalo robe with a buffalo skull at their heads, than the old ones had appeared, and that behind them were relatives - some of them older women, including his mother. All seemed to be happy that these men were making the sacrifice at the mountain and were preparing themselves for the Sun Dance and the renewal of the Sacred Arrows back in Oklahoma on August 13.

Four fasters according to the Cheyenne religion made up the party as always on such formal occasions. Chief Edward Red Hat, Longdale, Oklahoma; Eugene Black Bear of Watonga, Oklahoma; Dr. Karl Schlesier, Wichita State University, Anthropologist studying Indian customs; and Bruce White Man of Ashland, Montana, went through formal preparations and went to their beds Tuesday evening, July 25, just as the evening star appeared in the heavens beyond the Mountain.

Ray Coming, a Chief from Seiling, Oklahoma, served as interpreter for the fasters and those in the encampment nearby. He said, "We are here to thank the Lord God for everything that makes all possible. Thanks for the Holy Mountain, and for South Dakota and the kindness extended. We pray for the victims of the flood and for all who lost relatives. May all people—the youngest and the oldest be blessed with good health and good guidance. Thanks for our flag and the boys and women in our armed services everywhere in the world. Great prayers have been offered to end the war."

All hiking trails in the Mountain and to its 4,422-foot summit were closed by permission from the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission.

If asked to explain the reasoning behind this, the Cheyenne contend that to walk into the Mountain during a formal fast would be the same as if people would walk off the street and wander around in a cathedral during a formal religious worship. The whole mountain is sacred to the Cheyenne and they call it *Noahvose* (the good, or beneficent mountain). The Sioux who followed the Cheyenne on to the Northern High Plains, called it *Mato Paha* (Bear Butte), The latter name was most commonly known to the cavalry, fur traders, miners, cattle drovers from Texas, and the homesteaders - and still today.

The recent fast was one of ten formal ones since the spring of 1945 which marked the first return to the Mountain since 1879 when Little Wolf lead his depleted and suffering little band and stopped to pray and present the Sacred Bundle. This gave them strength to forge on to the lands of the Tongue River where the Northern Cheyenne live today. This torturous journey was known as the "Cheyenne Autumn Trail."

For nearly 150 years after the Sioux came to the area, the Cheyenne may not have made formal appearances. Some of the old timers in the ranch country speak of the “Cheyenne Secret Trail” which hugged the edge of the breaks along the Belle Fourche River and Elk Creek heading to the Mountain.

From 1879 at least they waited in silence. Then in 1939, when the government developed a W.P.A. project at Bear Butte Lake, a young engineer named Grant Solberg was informed that the Cheyennes in Montana regarded Bear Butte as a sacred shrine and that their religion began at that place. He made contact with the superintendent of the Tongue Rive Reservation and he in turn made contact with the Indian leaders there. In a few days a party of ten came to Sturgis, South Dakota, which is within eight miles of the Mountain. Here they revealed to local officials and to the newspapers the history of their people and the religion connected with the Mountain. Four of the group were old and had remembered many of the events that took place here when they were young. Included in the group were Robert Yellow Nose, 92; Charles Spotted Elk, 80; Nelson Holy Bird, 80; and John Black Wolf, 73. Among others they were accompanied by John Stands in the Timber, interpreter and historian, who co-authored with Margot Liberty the book *Cheyenne Memories*, published by Yale University Press in 1967.

The Cheyenne did not return again until the spring of 1945. In May of that year they came to pray for the end of World War II. According to the Cheyenne religion, which is based on the number four, four Cheyenne, Albert Tall Bull, David Deafey, Bert Two Moons and William Little Wolf, instructed by the priest, Whistling Elk, fasted at Bear Butte. John Stands in the Timber was their interpreter.

They revealed, following the fast, that on one of the days a great white horse appeared on the summit. The horse was ridden by an Indian warrior and holding on to him was a white child. Suddenly, the horse dashed down the precipitous slopes and onto the plains. The horse kept its footing and no one was hurt. This meant that the United States would soon end the war—and Indian soldiers fighting side by side with the other soldiers, would be coming home. The Indians were so grateful to the Mountain for the good fortune that they brought the Sacred Arrows from Oklahoma in September to give thanks. Both Northern and Southern Cheyenne met in the ancient sacred grounds at the Mountain and erected the Sacred Tepee near their camp.

Chief Baldwin Twins, Keeper of the Arrows, stayed with the Sacred Bundle in the Tepee. I came to visit them one evening near sun down, and they informed me that they were about to have the revealing of the Sacred Arrows. After a time I asked for and was given permission to photograph Chief Baldwin Twins and the Sacred Bundles in his arms. Later they informed me that I could take part in the ceremony, informing me that women and children could not attend and must remain quiet in camp as the Arrows must never be exposed to noise. The sun was going down behind the Mountain and in the Tepee was a complete circle of holy men, medicine men, John Stands in the Timber; and on the west side of the circle, facing the east, was the Keeper. First the Tepee and the occupants were cleansed by smoke from the long pipe, the pipe having been filled with sage and other sacred herbs from the Mountain. Then the unwrapping of the beautiful deerskin beaded bundle began. Layer after layer of colored cloths were unwrapped—then in a kit fox skin casing were the Arrows—two dark points for war, two light colored ones for game and peace.

I requested that I hold one of the arrows in my hand. After some deliberation and instructions not to point it at anyone, I held the priceless object. It seemed to float in my hand. Suddenly there was a disturbance in the Tepee and the interpreter informed me that I had pointed the arrow at the Chief. I was also informed that it was a war arrow, a black point, and the Cheyenne would weaken their enemies miles away by pointing a war arrow at them. It was an embarrassing situation and I was a bit nervous about it. Then I was smoked from head to foot, relieving me of all my sins. After that, the ceremony continued.

Once outside the Tepee I was told that this was the first time that the arrows had been to the Mountain since Cheyenne Autumn in 1879. “You are the second white man in history to take part in the ceremony, and we hope you turn out better than the first one,” they said. “Who was the first one?” I asked curiously. “Custer!” they answered.

Then they explained that the General was called in to the ceremony on the Washita River in 1869. They complained that he and his troops had charged their camps in early morning hours causing the women and children to die. “Would you come by daylight and give us a chance to move the women and children from the

battle area?" The General agreed to their request. However, the Keeper of the Arrows and the long pipe thought that he saw deceit as he watched him from the corner of his eye. He took the pipe, now cold, and dumped the ashes on the General's boot as he sat cross-legged. The cold ashes consigned him to ashes and to dust. The warm pipe is life - the cold pipe is death. They continued to say that the General broke his promise, so they were forced to take care of that situation at the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

The Cheyenne religion, which had its beginning at *Noahvose* centuries ago, is an interesting piece of history. It all began when a teen-aged youth, Sweet Medicine (or Sweet Root Standing), went on his first buffalo hunt. The youngster, who was raised by foster parents, was very fortunate in killing a splendid young buffalo bull with a silky hide. As he approached his kill he was challenged by an older Indian who claimed the kill. In the scuffle that followed, Sweet Medicine either severely injured or killed the older man. When the youth returned that night he was banished from his home, since the Cheyenne religion did not permit killing of another Cheyenne, even in self defense. The lonely boy ended up in the Mountain to live on his own. After being there a time, he was met by a young maiden who had also been sent from home. In their tradition they were married. At the end of four years, far on the north side of the Mountain, a rock came down and stood on end like a giant book revealing far above it a small cave. From the mouth of the cave the Gods of the Mountain called for Sweet Medicine and his wife to come forward. When they arrived at the cave, the Gods asked Sweet Medicine if he repented of his crime. If he had, they would like to instruct him to become a prophet to his people who were forgetting their religion and becoming corrupt. They pointed to two bundles on the floor of the cave and explained that in each bundle were four sacred arrows. Two dark points for war and two light points for game and peace. The difference between the bundles was that one bundle had eagle feathers on the shafts—the other hawk feathers. Sweet Medicine chose the arrows with eagle feathers because the eagle was a stronger bird. Then four commandments were given to Sweet Medicine: 1. Thou shalt not kill. 2. Thou shalt not steal. 3. Thou shalt not commit adultery. 4. Thou shalt not marry your own relatives. Then the "Spirits of the Mountain" told the youth that if he believed he must stay four more years in the Mountain to receive instructions before preaching to the people.

At the end of that time he descended the Mountain into the Cheyenne camp and was faced by those who distrusted him because of his crime. He explained the forgiveness, but still the people were reluctant to accept him. With effort he had four tepees established—one to the north, west, east and south. Then he selected four wise men to sit in each representing the directions.

A terrible drought was upon the land and there was no grass for big game. The little children flocked around Sweet Medicine and asked for food. "Eat the white things in the grass," he told them. The children were afraid to eat "the white things" so Sweet Medicine ate them in front of them—but the children complained they needed meat, and there were no buffalo. "If you have faith, the buffalo will come," Sweet Medicine told them.

The children tried, but no buffalo came. Sweet Medicine explained, "You will need to have more faith." No buffalo came the second time and Sweet Medicine said, "Can't you hear them grating and blowing through the grass?" The fourth time, the buffalo came, and all ate. Then Sweet Medicine was regarded as a holy man. He lived to be a very old man. Then he called them back to the mountain and told them he must leave them. "I have some sad things to tell you, my people. Men with fur on their faces and riding fast animals will come and take your mountain. They will teach you to eat food that will harm you, and worse, they will teach you to drink a liquid that will make you sick and it will make you hurt one another." Then he left them forever.

"How did he leave?" I asked a Southern Cheyenne recently. "The people watched him climb to the summit and they followed him. When they reached the summit he was gone—then far below, to the north, they saw a coyote. The coyote changed to a magpie which changed to a hawk. Suddenly the hawk became a golden eagle such as nest on the mountain. The huge bird flew far to the northern horizon and disappeared."

### **Addendum**

During June 5-10, 1974, the Northern Cheyennes came to renew the Sacred Buffalo Hat which is in their keeping. This was the first renewal in over a century. The Sacred Hat had come through the Suhtai group of the Cheyenne who had as their prophet Erect Horns, centuries ago.

The Suhtai claimed that they had originated the War Shield at Bear Butte; also the Sun Dance that later spread all through the West.

Joe Little Coyote of Ashland, Montana, was the Keeper of the Hat during the recent ceremony.

### **My Comparison Of The Sweet Medicine Story, As Told To B. Williams, With The Story Of Moses at Mount Sinai**

Beginning at the bottom of page 9 of William's manuscript, we can follow the events of the story and make comparisons with the Bible.

1. Sweet Medicine was raised by foster parents. Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter in Egypt, Exodus 2:10.
2. Sweet Medicine killed or injured another man, and was banished. Moses killed an Egyptian overseer and fled to Midian, Exodus 2:12,15.
3. Sweet Medicine ended up at Bear Butte. Moses, shepherding for his father-in-law, came to Mount Sinai, Exodus 3:1.
4. Sweet Medicine married an exiled maiden. Moses married a daughter of Jethro, also called Reuel, priest in Midian, Exodus 2:16-21.
5. A rock came down from Sweet Medicine's mountain and stood on end like a giant book. God gave Moses the Commandments written on two tablets of stone, Exodus 31:18, 32:15-16.
6. The gods spoke to Sweet Medicine from a cave. God set Moses in a crack in the rock of Mount Sinai and covered Moses with His hand as He passed by proclaiming His glory, Exodus 33:12-23, 34:5-8.
7. Sweet Medicine had committed a crime. Moses disobeyed God's exact instructions once, and so was told that he could not enter the Promised Land, Numbers 20:7-13.
8. While on the mountain, Sweet Medicine was told that his people were forgetting their religion and becoming corrupt. While Moses was with God on Mount Sinai, the Israelites began to worship the golden calf, Exodus 32:1-6,7-14,19-35.
9. Sweet Medicine chose one of two bundles. Moses received two tablets of stone, twice, Exodus 34:1, since he had smashed the first set when he saw the worship of the golden calf.
10. Sweet Medicine had to repent of his crime before he could be a prophet. Moses at the burning bush was told to remove his sandals, and he was afraid to look upon his holy God, Exodus 3:5-6.
11. Two arrows were for war, two for game and peace. God told Moses He would punish any who hated him, and bless with His mercy all who loved Him, Exodus 20:5-6.
12. Sweet Medicine received four commandments. Three of these are found in the second part of Moses' Ten Commandments, and the commandment regulating marriage was part of the general laws given to Israel, Leviticus 18:1-30.
13. Sweet Medicine was told to stay four more years on the mountain. Moses was 40 years in Egypt, 40 in Midian, and 40 in leading Israel to the Promised Land. Acts 7:23, Exodus 7:7, Deuteronomy 29:5,
14. The Cheyenne distrusted Sweet Medicine when he returned to them. Moses asked God for signs of authority, Exodus 4:1-9.
15. The people were reluctant to accept Sweet Medicine. Israel complained to Moses when their work was increased, Exodus 5:20-23.
16. Sweet Medicine established four tepees, oriented to the four points of the compass. God commanded Moses to establish permanent camping positions for Israel, three of the twelve tribes on each of the four sides of the tabernacle area, Numbers 2:1-34.
17. Sweet Medicine had one wise man sit in each of the four tepees. Each tribe of Israel had its captain, Numbers 2:3,5,7 etc.
18. There was a terrible drought, and the little children asked Sweet Medicine for food. The children of Israel, after leaving Egypt, complained to Moses about a lack of food and water, Exodus 16:3, 15:24.



19. Sweet Medicine gave the people white things to eat in the grass. God gave Israel manna in the wilderness, Exodus 16:4-5,14-31.
20. The children complained to Sweet Medicine that they needed meat. Israel complained, and God provided quail, Exodus 16:11-13.
21. When Sweet Medicine was a very old man, he called his people back to the mountain to advise them concerning the future. When Moses was 120 years old and Israel was ready to enter Canaan, Moses assembled the children of Israel to review all the laws of God with them, laws meant by God for their own good, Deuteronomy 1:3, 5:1 etc.
22. The last time that Sweet Medicine's people saw him as a man, he was climbing his mountain. When God was ready for Moses to die, He had him climb Mount Nebo, where He buried him on the other side so that no one could know where his grave was, Deuteronomy 34:1-7.

### **An Earlier Version Of The Sweet Medicine Story Given By John Stands In Timber, Cheyenne Memories**

It is interesting to compare the Sweet Medicine story as told to Richard Williams with the story as given by John Stands In Timber in the book written with Margot Liberty, *Cheyenne Memories*, 1967. I was told by Mr. William's wife that for his 1972 interview he used a combination of tape recorder, shorthand, and immediate write up, so one can be certain about the details of his story. Mrs. Williams also says that her husband traveled to Lame Deer to be told the Sweet Medicine story that he records, and that he preserved the interview on tape.

John Stands In Timber (a sincere Mennonite Christian) said that from the time he was a little boy he listened carefully to the stories told by old Cheyenne men and women with the idea of preserving them for future generations.

The story of Sweet Medicine in chapter two of *Cheyenne Memories*, pages 27-41, is too long to print here. In essence, it parallels the story told to Williams at least in points 1,2,3,7,8,11,13,18,21 above. There is no mention at all of points 5,12,22, and probably 14 through 17 above. In *Cheyenne Memories* the gods are in a lodge, not a cave. Sweet Medicine isn't given a choice of two bundles. The "white things in the grass" become white buffalo fat in *Cheyenne Memories*. The story as written by John Stands In Timber with Margot Liberty gives us additional details parallel to the Bible. (Other versions might give us even more - I had to conclude research some place.)

23. Sweet Medicine's mother was an unmarried virgin. Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, Isaiah 7:14, Luke 1:26-37.
24. Sweet Medicine was found by an old woman gathering slough grass. Moses was found by the riverside in a woven basket ark, Exodus 2:3-5.
25. The old woman found wet nurses for the baby. Pharaoh's daughter hired a nurse for Moses (his own mother), Exodus 2:7-9.
26. Sweet Medicine's miracle of the throwing sticks and the hoop turning into a live buffalo calf parallels Moses' miracle in which his staff became a snake, Exodus 4:1-5, 7:8-13.
27. There was food left from eating the calf. In Jesus' feeding of the 4000 and the 5000, remnants were collected, Matthew 15:37, 14:20.
28. Sweet Medicine and Moses both organized men for military service.
29. Sweet Medicine gave an order for the largest tepee in camp to be set up for him in the center of camp. God gave Moses precise directions for the Tabernacle tent in the center of Israel's camp, Exodus 26:1-37, 36:1-38.
30. Firewood was needed for the center lodge. An altar of burnt offerings stood before Moses' tabernacle, Exodus 38:1-7, 40:6.
31. The people had to keep their distance when Sweet Medicine came into camp with the sacred arrows. When Moses descended from Sinai the second time with the tablets of the law, his face shone with

the glory of God so that the people couldn't come near until he covered his face with a veil, Exodus 34:29-35.

32. Sweet Medicine established civil, ceremonial, and moral laws, the same categories that God established for Israel through Moses.
33. Sweet Medicine prophesied an eventual falling away from his laws. Moses before he died prophesied the same, Deut. 32:1-43, 31:27,29.
34. Sweet Medicine warned against the Earth Men (White men) and their ways. Moses warned against the idolatry and the wicked ways of the Canaanites, Deuteronomy 6:14, 7:1-5,16,23-26.

In John Stands In Timber's *Cheyenne Memories*, he tells how when Sweet Medicine was pursued out of his village at the start of the journey toward Bear Butte, he came out from behind various ridges wearing different costumes which became the garb or insignia of the various warrior societies that were established among the Cheyennes. There is nothing of this in the story told to Richard Williams. Instead, he was told how, when Sweet Medicine took leave of his people at the end of his career, he appeared successively as a coyote, a magpie, a hawk and a golden eagle which flew north and disappeared. This conflicts with John Stands In Timber's account of Sweet Medicine's death alone in a lodge west of Devil's Tower, or perhaps Bear Butte (stories vary).

These differences in the Sweet Medicine story as published in 1967 and recorded in 1972 demonstrate, in my opinion, the basic problem of operating with oral tradition. Beyond certain basic facts at the core of the story, the details can vary according to the will of the storyteller to reflect his personal thoughts and background. Thus oral tradition may be compared to a snowball picking up leaves and gravel in addition to snow as it grows in size. In the end, how can one know what is true and what came later from the minds of fallible men? And is it right to place one's trust in a religion that, at the rate things are going now, may possibly disappear in all essentials a century from now? Why should a person want to establish a retirement policy with a company that seems to be going out of business? (Even the pagan Roman emperors failed in their attempts to revive the faltering worship of the Roman gods.) *Cheyenne Memories* says repeatedly that a great many old traditions of great importance are now lost. The end of the book *Sacajawea* describes the frivolous attempt of youthful Indians to copy the lost ceremonies of their ancestors. How many young people of today are there still trying to practice the traditional faith of their elder that at least a small part of it might be preserved?

### **Other Opinions and Possibilities**

The book *Sacajawea*, by A.L. Waldo, presents information on the possibility of a tribe of the Mandan Indians having a party of seamen from Wales as their ancestors. These people supposedly came to America in AD 1170 and worked their way upriver from the Bay of Mobile, pages 70 and 151. This tribe with Caucasian characteristics was decimated by smallpox, and any survivors would not be distinguishable from part Indian individuals today. Question: What effect would the religion of these Welshmen have in influencing the beliefs of the native Americans in their area? How have succeeding contacts with white men influenced the traditions of American Indians?

Margot Liberty, in notes printed in *Cheyenne Memories* says that "Such elements of white culture as horses and guns, which led the Cheyenne to glory and then to destruction, were doubtless incorporated into the Sweet Medicine traditions as they appeared, giving continuity with the past and an explanation of the disastrous present." Also, "The wooden tepee, and suggestion of a possible marker, are new elements in the story of Sweet Medicine's death. Stands In Timber's concern with the identification and preservation of Indian historical markers may have given him this idea." Pages 40-41.

Peter J. Powell, *Sweet Medicine*, University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1969, 2 vol., sees the original mountain of Sweet Medicine as being one of the effigy mounds such as are found in Illinois and elsewhere throughout the Midwest. After moving west, the story was simply transferred to Bear Butte. Powell tells how the arrows were captured by the Pawnees in 1830 and substitutes were made.

The book, *The Cheyenne Way*, by Llewellyn & Hoebel, University of Oklahoma Press, tells about Little Wolf, bearer of the Sweet Medicine bundle, who killed Starving Elk in the winter of 1879-1880 in a quarrel. Page 86 notes that the Sweet Medicine itself was suspected to have taken on the “murderer’s stench.” When Sun Road succeeded Little Wolf he took the chiefship without accepting the medicine from Little Wolf. Grasshopper accepted it, but when he died it was gone, no one knows where, but the guess is that he buried it. E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Cheyennes, Indians Of The Great Plains*, University of Minnesota, Henry Holt & Co., 1960, gives information on the migration of the Cheyenne from the woodland country of the western Great Lakes. He also explains how in praying to the spirits an Indian expected to be rewarded with whatever he asked for in return for whatever services he might render, pages 85-87.

The book, *The Soul Of The Indian - An Interpretation*, was written by C. A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), 1911, Houghton Mifflin Co. Pages 54-55: “During the era of reconstruction they modified their customs and beliefs continually, creating a singular admixture of Christian with pagan superstitions, and an addition to the old folk-lore of disguised Bible stories under an Indian aspect. Even their music shows the influence of the Catholic chants. Most of the material collected by modern observers is necessarily of this promiscuous character.” (Note: Eastman writes “modern observers” in 1911.) Eastman has some important things to say about the Medicine Lodge that originated among the Algonquin tribes. Pages 65-66 note that the order was a secret one, and in some respects not unlike the Free Masons. (Who can say that the original Sweet Medicine wasn’t a member in the Medicine Lodge and thus aware of the coming of white men to this continent before his people generally heard about it?) The commandments promulgated by the Medicine Lodge were essentially the same as the Mosaic Ten. The Algonquins were the first contacted by whites, the French, in the northern half of this continent.

By contrast to all the above, we have this in a personal letter, 1978, from Dr. Karl Schlesier of Wichita State University: “There was a historical Sweet Medicine, and he died long before the first Europeans set foot on this continent. Sweet Medicine was at Bear Butte a number of times in his life. I must say this as an ethnohistorian.” Schlesier believes that the Sweet Medicine story has been transmitted essentially unchanged through the centuries to our present time.

### **Conclusions**

#### **A Letter To The Editor of The Black Hills Press, Sturgis, 7-22-78.**

Heading: Cheyenne religion predates tribe’s move to Bear Butte.

Dear Sir: I think that your readers would like to know what I have learned about the Cheyenne and Sioux religion connected with Bear Butte. I have researched this subject since coming to Sturgis in 1974. Perhaps someone would be interested in commenting on my conclusions.

The truth of the Cheyenne religion centering at Bear Butte must depend on the factuality of their story of the prophet Sweet Medicine, who supposedly received divine revelations including four commandments and four arrows after living four years at Bear Butte. As I see it, this story has to be true, or their religion is not true. In studying a copy of the story of Sweet Medicine as it was recorded by Richard H. Williams in 1972, I was struck by the great number of similarities between the story of Sweet Medicine, who was supposedly at Bear Butte some 400 to 500 years ago, and the history of Moses at Mt. Sinai some 3500 years ago. So I asked myself, “Where were the Cheyenne and Sioux tribes living 400 or 500 years ago when they first came into contact with Christians who might have told them the story of Moses and the giving of the Ten Commandments?”

When I read that Sweet Medicine left his people a prophecy that someday “men with fur on their faces and riding fast animals will come and take your mountain...and teach you to drink a liquid that will make you sick,” I asked myself, “Could Sweet Medicine have been at Bear Butte with his people a half century before the Cheyenne first heard of or met white men in North America?”

In my research, I found that the Cheyenne and Sioux are part of the great Algonquin peoples which, in AD 1600, extended from New England through the Great Lakes region into Wisconsin. The Cheyenne lived in the forests around Lake Superior. When the explorers, Marquette and Joliet, came to Green Bay, Wisc., in 1673, they met representatives of the Sioux nation.

I also found that these two tribes moved west in response to pressure from the east. The Cheyenne were living along the Red River between Minnesota and the Dakotas in 1700. The Cheyenne were living as farmers and hunters in earth lodge villages along the Missouri River in 1800. They were friendly to the Mandan Indians who lived farther west along the Missouri, where Lewis and Clark met them in 1804.

About the year 1780, as far as one can tell, the Cheyenne obtained and learned the use of horses. They gradually moved out onto the Great Plains where they grew powerful. Their greatness as a people in the Great Plains lasted from about 1800 to 1860.

So now I ask, how could Sweet Medicine have been at Bear Butte, with his people living not too far away, when he supposedly lived at least 400 years ago, and his people were living around Lake Superior? And how can the Cheyenne believe that they have the original sacred arrows of Sweet Medicine, when those arrows were captured by the Pawnee Indians, their longtime rivals, in 1830, when the Cheyenne took the sacred arrows into battle against them? Some years later, when the Cheyenne had made four substitute arrows with the "medicine" of the original arrows, the Sioux captured one or two of the original arrows and gave them to their friends, the Cheyenne, who no longer had any use for them. What happened after that is another story.

I have come to the conclusion that Sweet Medicine, who may have been a real person, lived somewhere in the Great Lakes area when the French fur traders and explorers were first starting to move west. Sweet Medicine's holy mountain could have been one of the many effigy mounds that are scattered through the Midwest.

It would have seemed important to the French Christians to tell the story of Moses and the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai to the Indians and it would have been natural for the Indians to make it their own story by crediting it to their hero, Sweet Medicine. When the Cheyenne moved onto the Great Plains and came as far as Bear Butte, they brought their story with them and told it as if it had all happened at Bear Butte.

If the Cheyenne don't have the four sacred arrows of Sweet Medicine, and if they don't have their original holy hill, then what do they have left? If they feel the need for spiritual purification, a need felt by all people thanks to the conscience that God has created in man, then why do they try to accomplish such purification themselves?

There are thousands of religions in the world which offer God "good works" or self-purification by which to try to make up for one's sins. There is only one religion, that of Christ Jesus, whereby God offers us purification, the washing away of sins, in the blood of His holy and eternal Son. While I live in this world, it is my duty to tell everyone about Him.

Sincerely, Rev. Gerhold Lemke, Sturgis

If a college is a place for letting every viewpoint be heard, whether or not that viewpoint is favored by a majority, then I thank you, my reader, for your time spent in evaluating my viewpoint, and I would hope that you become motivated to begin your own research in the Bible, perhaps starting with the various passages that I have given. In so doing, you should not fail to discover that the position I hold is not mine alone, but was simply given to me as something of inestimable value to be shared with everyone.

The "bottom line" question that everyone faces in this life is: "What is going to happen to me when I die?" I believe that the Sweet Medicine story can best be evaluated in the light of the question on pages 4-5 (NB: numbering accurate only on original manuscript - ed.), "Does God save man, or does man save himself?" When it is found that the Sweet Medicine religion runs parallel to all other religions in teaching a self-achieved rightness in the eyes of a deity, then the question, "Is the Sweet Medicine story factual?" becomes much less important. Then the important question for today becomes: "Can I trust my eternal destiny to the Sweet Medicine belief? Can I really say that sitting on white sage weed in a sweat lodge is going to purify me spiritually? Can I really, honestly, achieve a perfect rightness with God by my own efforts, good character, or

inherited traditional beliefs?" The religion of Christ Jesus is the only one that teaches that self-achieved rightness in the eyes of God is impossible, that forgiveness before God is His free gift of grace to believers.

If it is true that today's American Indian traditions are heavily based on events of Bible history, then what could be better than to go back to the Bible alone to let it teach you what to believe for eternal life? I would much rather drink from the springs at the headwaters of a river than from any point downstream as it flows to the sea.