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Book Review

Alfred A. Cave, *Prophets of the Great Spirit: Native American Revitalization Movements in Eastern North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 328 pp., $27.95 (hbk), ISBN: 978-0-8032-1555-9.

Alfred Cave is a historian who describes in this book six American Indian prophets of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Neolin of the Lenape (Delaware), Tenskwatawa the Shawnee and his military leader brother Tecumseh, the Muskogee (Creek) Red Sticks, Handsome Lake of the Seneca, and Kenekuk of the Kickapoo. His thesis is that each of these revitalization movements retained indigenous beliefs and some practices, while introducing ideas of a personalized Creator deity still active in human affairs, likely from Christian missionizing. Heaven and hell as eternal dwelling places earned by one's behavior in life were also introduced, again apparently Christian elements. Cave does not consider these prophets' religions to be Christian, but to be responses to the drastic upsets experienced by these Indian nations in the first decades of the United States. Their customary religious practices apparently failed to empower them as they once had, therefore new visions were to be expected; in this the prophets and their followers were traditional.

Cave's strength is skill in the historian's craft of searching out and comparing accounts of happenings, evaluating veracity, and contextualizing reports. His endnotes add to the readers' appreciation of this skill. Whether or not one agrees with Cave's thesis that these prophets are similar in altering traditional religions by pulling in the Christian concept of a personal anthropomorphic God, the book is a useful and interesting summary of the careers of these six significant leaders of Eastern American First Nations. It conveys well, too, the intense frustrations of their leaders trying to deal with the duplicities of British and American politicians, not least Thomas Jefferson. Without melodrama, Cave lets his readers feel the tragedies generated by epidemics, vigilante attacks, wars, trickery, and the unrelenting influx of foreign settlers. He concludes that the prophets he describes were resisters, some by claiming their medicine power could bring military victories, others by advocating accommodation to the new order without losing the core of their own culture.

To me, one disappointment in this book is Cave's usage of the term 'shaman'. In an endnote (p. 255), Cave cites Eliade's 1964 *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* as 'magisterial…an invaluable survey'. In the same endnote, he cites, without comment, my 'critique of Eliade' in my 2000 book *Shamans and Religion*. In the book, I tried to show the arrant racism in conventional application of the term 'shaman' to more or less all non-Western religious leaders and ritualists: we have priests, they have shamans. I cited literary studies that traced the usage to Catherine the Great of Russia and her friend Johann Goethe, Catherine clearly writing in an imperialist mode. Eliade continued this imperial Western discourse, clothing his mystical appreciation of 'the Sacred' with citations galore, unfortunately not always referring to actual books or real authors. The term 'shaman' should be restricted to practitioners with historical ties to Siberian shamans, a real and definable set of beliefs and practices

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properly documented in Siberian ethnographies. Outside of Asia and, arguably, northern North America, there are numerous other religions and practices that if they resemble any in Siberia, are likely to do so because of common human physiology. Eliade's claim that 'shamans' preserved humankind's primordial religion for 40,000 years is contrary to all that we know historically of religions' functions in societies and their responsiveness to social conditions. Furthermore, by tying 'shamanism' to non-Western 'primitives', Eliade and his followers perpetuate the distinction between supposedly fully evolved 'civilized' societies and stagnated 'primitives'.

Calling prophets 'shamans' when they perform healing rituals is particularly obtuse. Are all Christian Scientists shamans? The Pope when he beatifies saints on the basis of miraculous cures? His priests when they lead prayers for healing? Laying on of hands? And so on. Conversely, there is ample ethnographic material on the formal training and public ordination of non-Western religious practitioners, including in the same American First Nations of Cave's prophets; they should be termed 'priests'. James Mooney, in his magnificent 1896 monograph on the Ghost Dance religion, respected that. Cave notes the blind ethnocentrism of missionaries describing Indian rituals as 'wild howlings', without applying the same critical sense to labeling religious leaders 'shamans' when they perform priestly roles for their communities. Invoking spiritual help in relieving distress is a fundamental duty of intercessors between suffering humanity and its gods.

There is one small error that may be a typo, on page 288, note 61: the Seneca constitution was adopted by the Seneca in 1848, not 1868. This is worth mentioning because it is interesting that the literate Seneca wrote a 'democratic' constitution giving the vote to male citizens, in the Year of Revolutions in Europe that had so many repercussions in the United States, including the nearby Seneca Falls women's rights convention that year. Ironically, the 1848 Seneca constitution deprived Seneca women of the vote; traditionally, they advised their representatives in council. The Seneca constitution was a later example of the melding of some European concepts with First Nations' societies as they adapted to living in a Euroamerican nation.

Overall, I can recommend this book for its detailed chronicles of events connected to several well-known Eastern American religious leaders termed prophets by historians. Except for his conventional, invidious use of 'shaman' for First Nations priests, Cave has been careful to acknowledge the intelligence and reasoned leadership of the prophets, however impossible the satisfactory resolution of their communities' efforts to remain free nations.

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Alice B. Kehoe
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
akehoe@uwm.edu

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