
As is apparent from the title, there are two primary interwoven themes in this complex study: the nature and meaning of prophecy and a comprehensive study of Hopi religion in the twentieth century. Methodologically, the work is an exercise in ethnohermeneutics, an approach pioneered by Geertz. The study illustrates the interplay of continuity and change in a religious tradition, and the role of prophecy in this process. The Invention of Prophecy is the most important, challenging, and illuminating study of both prophecy in general and Hopi religion in particular to date.

Both of the primary themes are the subjects of other recent studies. Prophecy has also been studied with a focus on Native American religious traditions by Thomas W. Overholt. An Old Testament scholar who has written on Anishnabe (Ojibwa) myths, Overholt creates a paradigm for prophecy based on Old Testament studies, and expands this paradigm with cross-cultural studies, particularly those of Native American traditions. Unfortunately, Overholt conflates prophecy, shamanism, and mediumism (spirit possession) into a single construct, thus vitiating meaningful comparison. Moreover, the author ignores the clear influences from the Old Testament on his selected Native American examples. Written from a Christian theological perspective, the study is of little use to comparative religionists but does serve to inform biblical scholars of the existence of prophecy outside of the biblical context, including contemporary Western culture.

The subject culture of Geertz’s study has been the object of a number of volumes for over a century. On reviewing the literature for a comparative analysis of aspects of Hopi religion, I was struck by the large number of studies, given the relatively small population of approximately eleven thousand. While there may not be a book written on Hopi religion for every living Hopi, there are at least several score pages per Hopi available in major libraries. On a per capita basis, no other religious tradition has been studied to this degree.

The Hopi have fascinated both Americans and Europeans as exemplars of the “Noble Savage.” Because the Hopi reside in a rather inhospitable part of the southwestern desert, they attracted comparatively little attention from the Spanish and were able partially to resist American influence into the twentieth century. Maintaining a rich ritual tradition, Hopi culture became the focus of a number of ethnologists. The publication of Frank Waters’ rather dubious Hopi “Bible”, Book of the Hopi, as an inexpensive and popular paperback at the height of the countercultural movement, led to the Hopi becoming for many Americans the epitome of a holy people, the
subject of the same awe to which Tibetans are held in Britain following the influence of Madame Blavatsky. Hopi religion has become the subject of films and music; for example, the film *Koyaanisqati*, the first of a trilogy, with the music of Philip Glass.

The most recent comprehensive study of Hopi religion is by John D. Loftin. It is a slim volume that baldly states on the first page of the “Introduction” that the author seeks to remedy our lack of knowledge of a “relatively unknown people”! (On the next page, Loftin notes a 1977 bibliography “that included almost three thousand works, and many more have been published since.”) Loftin admires Hopi culture and religion and is sympathetic with their present plight, but his work is replete with ethnocentrism and androcentrism. Concerning the latter, Loftin writes as if Hopi society was typical of patriarchal ones, and only notes in passing that it is matrilineal but not that it is matrilocal, and that women have substantial economic and social power and consider themselves more important than men. His imposition of a Western monotheism on Hopi polytheistic theology obscures major female deities. Indeed, Loftin considers the Hopi illogical because “of the fact that Hopi men do the hunting and yet the master of animals is perceived to be female” (42-43). The lack of awareness in a scholar of religion that the spiritual essence of hunted animals, a source of life, is usually understood to be female is disappointing.

Loftin exemplifies the continuation of the ethnocentric notion that other people are mentally primitive: “The Hopi feel they cannot grasp intellectually that which is their origin, sustenance, and end” (xvi). In Loftin’s study, cultural imperialism survives the plague of political correctness, for he knows better than the Hopi as to what they mean. Similar to his denial of Hopi polytheism and his assumption that all Hopi rituals are essentially the same, Loftin writes, “But the Hopi perceived no problem in stating that creation is the result of the union of a number of different deities, given that all deities are for them so many refractions of the ‘spiritual substance’” (42). Relevant to this review, Loftin castigates Geertz for taking what the Hopi say about their deities seriously and not overlaying a Western notion of a universal oneness of all deities on Hopi understanding (131, n. 24). Loftin’s study is full of vague generalizations argued with selected and highly limited specifics and further contributes to the romantic literature emphasizing the holiness of the Hopi in comparison to other Native Americans.

In contrast to Waters and Loftin, Armin Geertz has sought to allow the Hopi to present their religion in their own words and from their own perspective. In an earlier book, Geertz, together with Michael Lomatuway’ma, collected narratives regarding interconnected Hopi rituals and accompanying ritual paraphernalia from the keepers of the particular traditions. These narratives were translated (with all the original texts in an appendix) and re-