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The Whole Universe Is My Cathedral: A Contemporary Navajo Spiritual Synthesis

This article discusses the three major spiritual healing ways used by Navajo Indians today: Traditional healing practices that have been used for generations and still have a dynamic existence relevant to everyday Navajo life; Christian healing traditions, ranging from Catholic Charismatic to Protestant Pentecostal; and practices of the Native American Church (NAC). The complex relationship among these healing traditions on the Navajo reservation is examined through a case study of a Navajo woman whose personal spirituality includes all three. Faced with serious medical problems, this devout Catholic turned to Navajo Traditional and Native American Church spiritual diagnosis and treatment. This analysis is the occasion for a reflection on the contemporary relevance of the kind of spiritual synthesis characterized in this woman's experience. [Navajo, religion, healing, life history]

A unique aspect of contemporary Diné (Navajo) life is the presence of three major spiritual healing ways. The Traditional Diné healing practices, the various Christian denominations, and the Native American Church (NAC) coexist and are integrated to varying degrees within individuals and families. The coexistence ranges from outright opposition to complex synthesis. Many people have been able to integrate two or, in some cases, all three of the major spiritual healing traditions into their spiritual way of life, in addition to making use of Western allopathic medicine.

In this article, we examine the complexity of spiritual synthesis through a case study of a Navajo/Choctaw Catholic nun. For the purpose of confidentiality and out of respect, we have called her Sister Grace.¹ She told us that she is known as Asdzáán Jobaa'ii, or "Woman of Compassion," among the traditional Navajos. Although Sister Grace is a devout Catholic nun, her unique spirituality draws on the indigenous beliefs and practices of the NAC as well as Traditional Diné beliefs and ceremonies. Sister Grace was born into all three spiritual traditions. There was no major or abrupt conversion process from one to another.

Faced with serious medical problems in her late middle age, this devout Catholic woman turned to Navajo tradition and the NAC for spiritual diagnosis and healing. The diagnosis included an in-depth examination of her ancestral relationships, both Navajo and Choctaw. Evidence of ancestral disharmony of a genetic and hereditary nature was brought to light. Ceremonial procedures were initiated, leading to a process of healing. Through a detailed discussion of the holistic nature of this individual healing process, we attempt to provide an awareness and understanding of the broader cultural synthesis present in contemporary Navajo society.

Methodology and Contextualization

This case study has been organized and contextualized in accordance with traditional Navajo epistemology in order to provide an authentic and holistic perspective. We are using our own indigenous life experience in order to provide a culturally grounded interpretation coming from our tribal consciousness, in contrast to the perspective of a non-tribal researcher employing an externally derived methodology. In the past, many researchers from outside the culture have superimposed their own Eurocentric cultural paradigm over the Navajo in their attempt to synthesize their research data, rationalizing this act of epistemological violence in terms of Cartesian-based social science standards of objectivity and detachment. However, as Canadian author Ted Palys has written in his recent book, "Having one epistemological group impose its standards on another is little more than the academic equivalent of cultural imperialism" (1997:35). Our own approach is based on collaboration and cultural participation guided by deep respect for our sources and their knowledge bases. This may be a deviation from standard anthropological field procedure that warns against "going native" or "overidentification." It is in line with the injunction of some qualitative researchers to "recognize that those who have undergone particular life experiences may bring special insights to their research because of having experienced a phenomenon from the 'inside' " (Palys 1997:50). We feel that our approach adds a dimension of intellectual authenticity and integrity to an ethnographic concern with processes in which actors' perceptions and their meanings emerge and change, where valid data come from closeness and extended contact with research participants, and where emphasis is on inductive, ideographic, case study analysis (Palys 1997:22).

The methodology of this article is based on the cosmology of the Diné. The Navajo world view is naturally dynamic and holistic. Everything evolves from a cultural and spiritual way of life, which is rooted in turn in recursive cosmic processes.² The paradigm is thus directly connected to the natural cosmic order. The cosmic processes are intrinsically interconnected through systemic movement and relationship (Begay and Maryboy 1988). A vital awareness and understanding of the concept of wholeness is fundamental to the consciousness of most indigenous peoples. For the Navajo, this holistic consciousness is manifested through the Diné language and ceremonies. This unique and comprehensive consciousness has provided the cultural nexus and dynamic order for countless generations.

Accordingly, we have organized the case study of Sister Grace through a quadripartite model patterned after the Diné education paradigm, as developed at Diné College (formerly Navajo Community College) under the direction of David Begay. The quadripartite organization provides a holistic focus yet allows simultaneous

discussion of four distinct areas. This approach has the benefit of providing holistic equalization of the various aspects of Sister Grace's life, thus limiting the tendency to organize her life through artificial constructs of hierarchy and subordination. To give an example, were we to focus on the medical aspects of her diagnosis, we would subordinate the Traditional, NAC, and Catholic diagnosis and healing treatments to the medical interpretation. This is similar to the approach of many medical doctors who relegate spiritual and cultural healing to the realm of myth, which they may feel is irrelevant in a clinical setting. On the other hand, were we to focus singularly on the Catholic Charismatic prayer ritual of laying on of hands, the medical model would be subordinated, taking a secondary role. The contemporary interest in holistic healing seems to reflect a desire in Western societies to incorporate one or more modes of nonmedical therapeutic healing into mainstream medical practices (LeVine 1982).

In order to provide a holistic analysis of healing processes utilized in our case study, we first outline significant aspects of Sister Grace's life history, following a chronological order based on the four stages of life as articulated by the Diné: birth, adolescence, middle age, and old age. Following this chronological summary, we present a second model that illustrates the perspectives and relationships of events significant to spiritual synthesis. A more comprehensive explanation of both models follows in the next section. By using a methodology grounded in traditional Diné thought, the Navajo contextualization is implicitly built into the framework.

Chronological Life History

Our principal information on Sister Grace comes from an extended series of field interviews, done under the auspices of the Navajo Healing Project (see Csordas, this issue). We interviewed Sister Grace, primarily in English, on the Navajo Indian Reservation during a period of almost four years, from January 1995 to October 1998. At various times, we interviewed her in her roles of counselor, healer, and patient. Additional information comes from an interview with the NAC healer who conducted two ceremonies for Sister Grace. Finally, we wish to acknowledge the information that we gained from the research diagnostic interviews (Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV, or SCID) conducted and described by Dr. Mick Storck (see Storck et al., this issue).

We first present significant aspects of Sister Grace's life history. We follow the numerically sequential diagram in Figure 1, starting with Sister Grace's birth and continuing in a chronological progression to the present date.

1. Sister Grace was born in the mid-1930s in the small community of Lukachukai near the center of the Navajo reservation, in northeast Arizona. She was born into a family that followed Traditional Navajo ways as well as Christian practices. Both of her parents were devout Catholics at the time of her birth. Sister Grace was a "mixed blood" Indian. Her mother was a Choctaw from Mississippi and her father was a Navajo from Lukachukai. Her parents had met in the 1920s at Haskell, a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school in Lawrence, Kansas. Her mother had been a Baptist but later joined the Catholic Church. Her family in Mississippi spoke the Choctaw language. Sister Grace's immediate family included

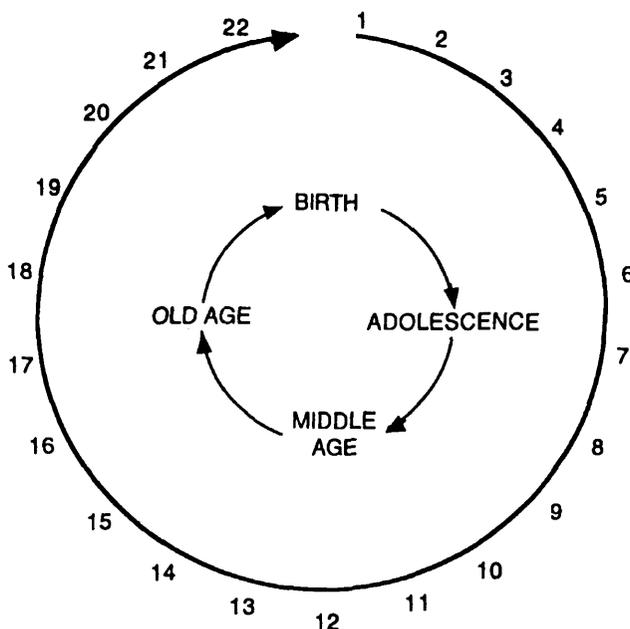


FIGURE 1
Chronological Paradigm Model.

12 siblings, six boys and six girls. English was the primary language of communication in the family. The family was well respected in the community. Sister Grace recalled that her mother was very controlled, seldom showing anger or other emotions. The daughters were expected to be “little ladies,” according to Sister Grace. She recalled her father as being very loving and demonstrative.

2. In the mid-1930s, Sister Grace’s father had an accident. His healing was facilitated by NAC treatment, and, as a result, he became a strong supporter of the NAC, eventually becoming a road man (spiritual leader) of the church. Shortly thereafter, the NAC and the use of sacramental peyote were outlawed by the Navajo Tribal Council. Subsequently, most of the NAC services were conducted in secrecy in order to avoid persecution and incarceration. This situation lasted for almost thirty years, from 1940 to 1967. Although many NAC members were jailed during this time, Sister Grace’s father was not incarcerated. Throughout her childhood, many NAC leaders and road men from various Plains tribes visited her family. The family involvement in Traditional Navajo ceremonies and the Catholic Church continued uninterrupted.
3. Sister Grace attended BIA and Catholic schools during her elementary and high school years, in Lukachukai and in Gallup, New Mexico. She recalled being a minority in the classroom and said she often felt like a second-class citizen. However, by the time she graduated from Gallup High School in 1952, she had begun to enjoy school and was on the Honor Roll.

4. After her high school graduation, her father took the family on a trip to the southeast coast to visit her mother's Choctaw relatives, primarily because an uncle was very sick. It was during this trip that Sister Grace decided to study to become a Catholic nun. She joined the Order of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Philadelphia. This is the order that had been active on the Navajo reservation since 1896. It was founded by Mother Katherine Drexel, the daughter of a Philadelphia multimillionaire, as the "Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People." Mother Drexel purchased 160 acres of land near Fort Defiance, Arizona, in 1898 and was instrumental in inviting priests like Father Anselm Weber to come and minister to the Navajos. In 1910, the church at Lukachukai that Sister Grace attended as a child was built.

When Sister Grace became a nun she began a period of separation from reservation life that lasted almost eighteen years. She continued to study theology in Pennsylvania and then Louisiana. She received a baccalaureate degree in elementary education from Xavier University in the 1950s.

5. During the 1950s and 1960s, she lived in several different locations, including New Orleans, Chicago, and various communities in Arizona, including Houck, St. Michael's, and Pinon. She received a Master's degree in spiritual leadership, specializing in pastoral counseling, from Loyola University in Chicago.
6. During the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s, several events contributed to Sister Grace's growing feeling of stress and depression. One of her main personal tragedies was the death of her mother in 1965. This was a devastating experience for Sister Grace, especially since she was only allowed to come home upon her mother's death. Prior to that time, the family had been able to visit Sister Grace, but she herself was not permitted to return home except under exceptional circumstances.
7. During the mid-1970s, she was associated with the American Indian Movement (AIM). She reported a confrontation she had with AIM leader Russell Means at a Catholic Conference, after Means criticized Indians who were Catholic nuns as having submitted to the unholy U.S. culture. She responded to Means that his own approach was equally an attempt to enslave Indian people. As the result of her comments, she became something of a spokesperson for Catholic Indians.
8. Sister Grace told us that in accordance with the principles of the Vatican II Conference of the early to mid-1960s, Pope John XXIII revolutionized the Church with his emphasis on the power of God's love. At the same time, she added, he also contributed to loosening the restrictive order of the nuns. Sister Grace mentioned many times that she had been very affected by the words and deeds of Pope John XXIII. Today she has several books of his writings displayed in her home.

During the 1960s and well into the next decade, Sister Grace told us, many priests and nuns left the Church. It was a period of great turmoil within the religious life. Sister Grace was affected during this time by feelings of deep depression, alienation, and confusion. She said she was assailed by continued doubts about the integration of Catholicism with her Native ways.

9. During this same period, Sister Grace spent nine months in San Francisco with a group of priests and nuns in what she called “an intensive affirmation program of therapeutic treatment and training.” It was at this time that she began to learn to express her anger, defusing it into a sense of sadness as she came to terms with it. She was exposed to many different types of psychotherapeutic treatments at this time. She mentioned that she felt a sense of difference, being the only Native American in the group.
10. After almost eighteen years away from her people, with only periodic visits home, she finally returned to the Navajo reservation. She had continued to struggle with her feelings of existential doubt and with her inability to integrate the various aspects of her life and spiritual beliefs. She had asked God for guidance and received his message when she heard a voice inside her telling her to “come back to her own space” (interview by the authors, September 8, 1998). She subsequently returned to St. Michael’s, Arizona. Still, her doubts and anguish continued. She developed profound symptoms of depression, which grew to a point where she no longer cared whether she lived or died. Her apathy and depression even brought her to a point where, one night, she walked away from the mission school, not even caring where she was going. A friend picked her up and, after talking with her, drove her back to the mission school.
11. The turning point in her healing came when she began to understand that although two of the main spiritual healing belief systems from her childhood, Catholic and Traditional Navajo, incorporated elements of fear and oppression, more importantly, they simultaneously provided her grounding. She turned increasingly to Jesus, following his teachings that God’s love is the only reality. This profound understanding of love and reality provided the beginning of a true synthesis of belief and personal integration for Sister Grace, along with a growing sense of peace.
12. Her healing process was somewhat complicated by two serious motor vehicle accidents, in which she was seriously injured. As the result of the second accident, her ankle was set with pins and a metal plate.
13. During the same period, another motor vehicle accident took the life of her father. Just before his death in 1983, Sister Grace had experienced a dream in which her father had put her into the driver’s seat of a family van. She later interpreted this dream to mean that he was putting her in charge of her own life, as well as transferring other family responsibilities to her. Just after his death, she had a vision of her father sitting in the family living room, waving an eagle feather and appearing quite peaceful.
14. In 1988, Sister Grace began to experience heart problems. The first time was in California. She was taken to what she called a heart institute in San Francisco and given a thorough physical examination. At that time, she experienced problems breathing, a sensation of needles in her legs, and difficulty walking.
15. During the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, Sister Grace used various alternative healing therapies, primarily in Flagstaff, Arizona, and Santa Fe, New Mexico. These included crystal healing, chakra alignments, the healing sounds of bells, and the chants of monks. She expressed a great

deal of respect for all of the healing arts, “even these ones that I had not been raised with” (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998).

16. The first time that Sister Grace experienced the power of healing through her own efforts was at a Native American Catholic gathering in New Mexico. She was asked to pray by a small group of people, and they reported to her the following year that as a consequence they had been healed of various ailments. She attributed the healing to Jesus Christ, not wanting to take any of the credit herself. Thus began her life as a recognized spiritual healer among Catholics. She took part in the Catholic Cursillo and Charismatic movements and the Tekakwitha Conference healing sessions during these years.³
17. The latter part of the 1980s and the 1990s continued to be a time of reflection, synthesis, and revitalization for Sister Grace, as she increasingly incorporated more of her native spirituality into her life. She continued to integrate her physical and spiritual essence while simultaneously synthesizing her Catholicism with her NAC and Traditional Navajo beliefs. She described an incident that took place in Phoenix, where she was given an eagle feather by spiritual leader Emmett White, a native healer who had previously given an eagle feather to the Pope. She was overwhelmed by the honor and keenly felt the sense of responsibility of caring for others that went with it.
18. In 1995, Sister Grace caught a pneumonia virus that weakened the muscles around her heart. She suffered what doctors told her was congestive heart failure. At the time, she reported, she was diagnosed with an enlarged heart with only 15 percent function. The doctors gave her oxygen and nitrogen to relieve her pain. They subsequently found a blood clot in her heart. They told her that the only surgery that would help her was a heart transplant. They indicated that her problem could be genetic, citing the heart problems of other family members. Shortly thereafter, in January 1995, we had our first interview with Sister Grace. We interviewed her extensively over the next few years, both as a healer and as a patient.
19. Sister Grace turned to an NAC road man for a diagnostic and healing ceremony for her heart. This was planned and facilitated by one of her brothers, who had previously used the same road man for his own blessing ceremony. Sister Grace’s diagnostic ceremony revealed a hereditary cause for her enlarged heart and blood clot. Her problem was traced back several generations through her Choctaw ancestors. The crux of the heart problem was tied to the death of an alligator somewhere in the swamps of Mississippi, when a Choctaw ancestor speared it in the heart. The problem originated there and became genetic, manifesting itself biologically through subsequent generations.
20. During 1996, Sister Grace reached out toward more Traditional Navajo ceremonies. She was the main patient in a Blessingway ceremony, which provided her with a “sense of harmony and reintegration with the Navajo spirituality” of her paternal ancestry (interview by the authors, September 8, 1998). She told us that earlier she had been Traditionally diagnosed as needing a “Lightningway and Whirlwindway ceremony.”⁴ She was told that her breathing difficulties were related to Lightningway. In September,

she took certain herbal remedies that had been prescribed. The herbs, she reported, “diffused negative energies” (interview by the authors, March 26, 1997). She mentioned that her family recommended that she have a “five-night Lightningway ceremony” soon.

21. Today, Sister Grace continues with her ministry and counseling, working out of her current parish on the Navajo reservation. She is heavily involved with a jail ministry, primarily in Window Rock, Arizona. Her individual counseling takes the form of “journeying” with people. She also gives workshops around the country, including at the popular Tekakwitha Conferences, which attract up to 2,000 Native Catholics from many tribes.
22. She continues to have other physical ailments. In addition to her heart problems, she has arthritis in her shoulder and knee.

Spiritual Synthesis—Diné Perspective

Figure 2 illustrates our conception of a holistic synthesis following a traditional Diné quadripartite structure, which was designed to summarize the multiple levels of relationship that contribute to the complexity of Sister Grace’s lifelong journey.

In the center of the model we have placed Sister Grace’s heart. The problems involving her heart are the central focus for our discussion of diagnosis and healing. The surrounding four areas illustrate the perspectives and relationships between significant aspects of her life and healing. At the top of the model, signifying the east direction in accordance with Diné topographical thinking, we have placed the perspective of the Native American spiritual tradition, in this case Choctaw and Navajo, representing Sister Grace’s native heritage. Following the model in a sunwise (clockwise) direction, we have placed the perspective of Christianity, in this case, Roman Catholic, in the south direction, at the right side of the model. At the bottom of the model, in the west direction, we have placed the perspective of the NAC. Finally, at the left side of the model in the north direction, we have placed the medical and psychotherapeutic perspectives.

The outermost circle of the model reflects the holistic synthesis of beliefs as achieved and lived by Sister Grace. To her, there are no conflicting or illogical compromises. We have deliberately chosen to use the term *synthesis* in this article. According to Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, unabridged (1993), *synthesis* comes from the Greek, meaning “action of putting together.” The definition that seems to be most appropriate, given the reality of Indian reservation life, is “composition or combination of parts or elements so as to form a whole.”

Earlier we had discussed possibly using the term *syncretism* to describe Sister Grace’s integration of beliefs. However, on closer examination of the Webster dictionary definition, we found it did not correlate with the realities of her integration. *Syncretism* comes from a root word in Greek pertaining to “uniting against a common enemy.” The first two definitions are “the reconciliation or union of conflicting (as religious) beliefs or an effect intending such” and “flagrant compromise in religion or philosophy, eclecticism that is illogical or leads to inconsistency; uncritical acceptance of conflicting or divergent beliefs or principles.”

Sister Grace may have worked through a process of syncretism earlier in her life, but she was definitely aware and not uncritical of her integration of divergent

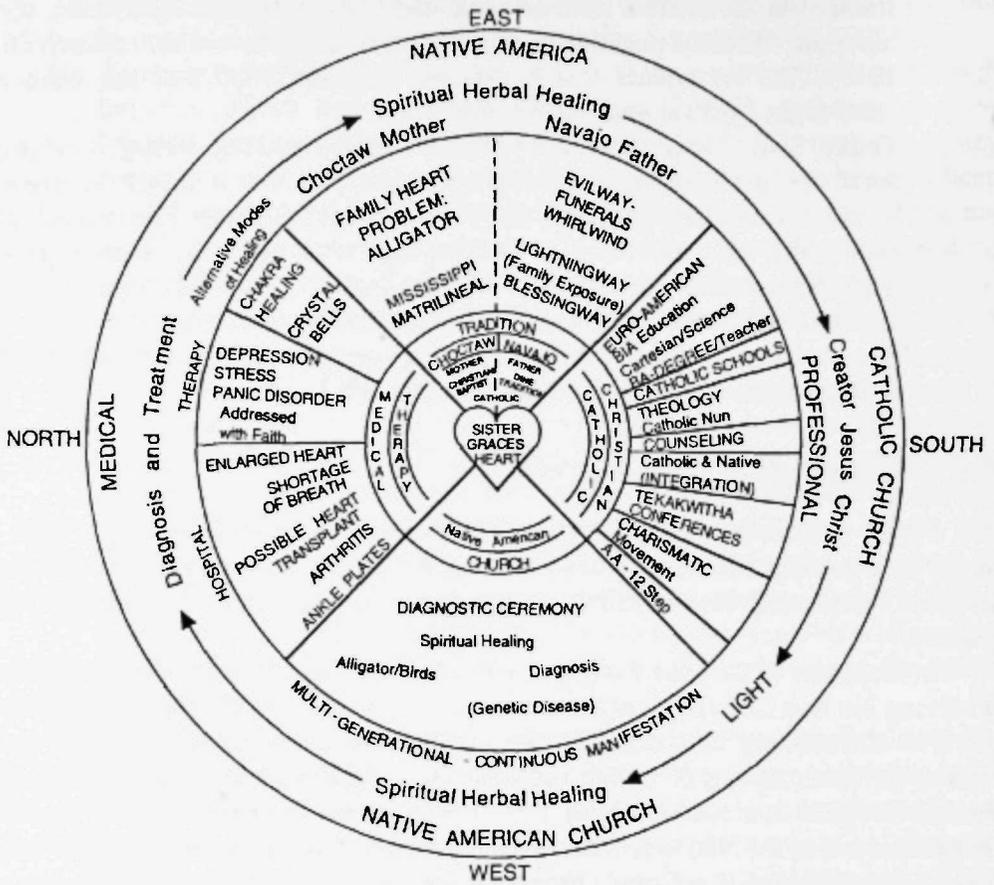


FIGURE 2
Quadripartite Model.

beliefs. She went so far as to question seriously her internal spiritual commitment to her Roman Catholic religious order. She was unusually well grounded and knowledgeable in each of the three spiritual belief systems with which she had been raised. Although she achieved an admirable education in each of these three traditions, her early attempts at spiritual integration still took her to the brink of suicide. She made no compromises in favor of one or the other sets of beliefs to reach her present-day synthesis. For all of these reasons we feel the term *syncretism* would be inappropriate in relation to Sister Grace.

We have placed Sister Grace's heart at the center of the model, since it was partly as a heart patient that we interviewed her for the Navajo Healing Project. We had first interviewed her as a Catholic healer. During the course of the interviews, which took place over a period of nearly three years, she was hospitalized because of

her heart condition. She turned to several different healing traditions for diagnosis and treatment. It was at that point in the project that we began to interview her also as a patient. Faced with a serious health problem, she turned to the rich spiritual healing traditions of her ancestral heritages, Traditional Navajo, Catholic, and NAC, to support and further her medical treatment. She was able to make use of all four healing methods in a seamless and natural integration of faith.

It is important to mention that her ongoing personal synthesis does not delineate these divisions. However, in order to discuss these perspectives in the English language, we followed a four-directional alignment to provide some comprehension and clarity in accordance with Diné epistemology. Clearly, Sister Grace acknowledges other alternative healing methods in which she has participated, and, indeed, one could say she is living by multiple healing modes. But for purposes of this discussion, we have chosen to focus on four major healing methodologies: three spiritual traditions and one medical model, which she acknowledges as the most significant in her life.

Native American Tradition: East Direction of the Model

In order to discuss the traditional Native American understanding of healing as Sister Grace and many other native people perceive it, the NAC diagnostic ceremony must be mentioned, as it provides an enrichment to the integral complexity of contemporary Native American healing processes. The focus in this section is Native American tradition, but the diagnostic lens is partially NAC, as the two traditions are directly and indirectly related in this area. Furthermore, we also briefly touch on the Christian aspects of Sister Grace's parents, as they relate to her Native American upbringing, adding to the complexity. Her life as a Catholic nun is treated separately in the next section.

Fundamental to an understanding of Sister Grace's Native American life is her Choctaw and Navajo heritage. The heritage that gave her life may also be responsible for threatening it, given that a genetic heart problem has been passed down to her through her maternal line. As we have already mentioned, Sister Grace's mother was a Choctaw Indian, originally from Mississippi. According to Sister Grace, heart problems and early death from heart attacks have run in the family for several generations. This has continued into the present generation, and in addition to Sister Grace, several of her close relatives "have been medically diagnosed as suffering from serious heart conditions" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998). She did not specify what kinds of heart conditions.

Her mother was raised Baptist but became a strong Catholic, continuing in the Christian tradition. Although her mother was Choctaw, Sister Grace's exposure to Choctaw culture and spirituality seems to have been limited compared to her exposure to the Navajo side. She grew up with her father's family in Lukachukai, where she experienced Navajo traditional life, largely through relationships with her grandparents. Her father was raised with Traditional Navajo teachings, subsequently integrating Catholicism into his life. Still later, he became a road man in the NAC. Thus, all three spiritual traditions were natural parts of Sister Grace's upbringing.

Navajo society is matrilineal, and one's primary clan is traced through the mother. Although Sister Grace's mother was Choctaw, nevertheless, half of her

heritage was Navajo: on her father's side, she was "born for" the Tachii'nii clan. As is common for many Navajos in a similar situation, she was raised and perceived as a Navajo in many respects. To further complicate matters, according to the BIA definition, all a person needs to be considered a Navajo is one-fourth Navajo blood. In this case, she far exceeded the definition and qualified for the tribal membership roll.

Her complex heritage led to a personal sense of not totally belonging, which became more apparent sometime in the late 1980s. Although by then she had returned to her Navajo homeland, she did not feel completely at home. "I had not felt at home in Navajoland after I had come back, and rightly so because it's a matrilineal system, so maybe having a Blessingway would help as an affirmation for my father's family's belief in Navajo spirituality" (interview by the authors, December 14, 1996). Although she referred to the matrilineal system of Navajo tradition, she had also lived for many years under the patriarchal hierarchy of the Catholic Church, both as a child and in her adult years as a nun.

During her life, she has turned periodically to Traditional Navajo diagnostic and healing ceremonies for help. She told us that she has been diagnosed as needing the Evilway, the Whirlwindway, and the Lightningway. (She described these ceremonies using English terminology, the language with which she was most familiar). These are long ceremonies, usually entailing five days and five nights of continuous healing events. Given Sister Grace's financial situation, it is unlikely she could personally sponsor one of these ceremonies; however, several of her close relatives have offered to assist her with a Lightningway ceremony sometime in the future.

She mentioned having had a short Evilway ceremony done for her. The term *Evilway* has somewhat derogatory connotations in English, but in Navajo it refers to various purification and healing ceremonies. Sister Grace did not recall the exact name in Navajo of the Evilway ceremony she needed, she just remembered it was "Evilway." The Evilway ceremonies diffuse the negative energies associated with extending yourself beyond your capabilities. In the case of Sister Grace, overextension takes the form of her strong professional and spiritual involvement in attending to many deaths and funerals. Because of the degree of her involvement in this area, in the future she may require a five-night Evilway ceremony as opposed to a shorter version of two or three hours. Effects related to Evilway may also have some direct or indirect relationship to her heart problem. According to Navajo tradition, when someone is in a weakened state, like Sister Grace, sometimes an opening is created for Evilway symptoms to be manifested as further illness or an accident.

Sister Grace's need for a Whirlwindway ceremony may go back to a whirlwind that she experienced earlier in her life. The imbalance created through her interaction with a great wind may have contributed to some of her past mental and spiritual turmoil. The Lightningway ceremony is similar to the Whirlwindway ceremony. An imbalance may have been created through a direct exposure to lightning or through various types of indirect exposure, for example, to the shock of a crack of thunder. Each of these diagnoses could be viewed independently in a Traditional way in relation to her various physical and mental symptoms, each of which can be seen as a manifestation of the imbalances that have occurred. Interestingly, Sister Grace mentioned that other members of her family were also affected by lightning

and needed the same ceremony. This may relate back to a single event that affected her along with many of her siblings.

There is a further complication that should be mentioned here. Sister Grace's mother was a member of a native culture in Mississippi that hunts alligators. This is probably natural to them, although there are undoubtedly restrictions implicit to the hunt that have been passed down to preserve a harmonious relationship between the Choctaws and the animals in their environment. On her father's side, there are similar restrictions in place, which exist to retain a harmonious relationship between the Diné and the animals in their environment. Occasionally, these two sets of tribal restrictions may come into cultural conflict. It may be culturally sanctioned to hunt alligators on the mother's side, but on the father's Navajo side, the hunting of reptiles is culturally prohibited. This situation created a complex set of relationships for Sister Grace and her siblings. Although we don't know what actually occurred generations ago in the swamp where one particular alligator was killed, native tradition seems to tell us that a hunting restriction was violated and the spiritual essence of that alligator was disrupted. Whenever these restrictions are violated, disharmony occurs, and, ultimately, the violations will be negatively manifested as human mental and physical symptoms—for example, heart problems—that can continue for generations. The ultimate manifestation is a family genetic heritage of illness. As Sister Grace was growing up, heart problems were considered part of the genetic makeup of her family. But through a native diagnosis, the origin of the genetic heart problem was illuminated and was seen as going back several generations to an encounter with an alligator. The native diagnosis came through an NAC ceremony. In the Native American way of thinking, the diagnosis came through the cactus (peyote) plant.

Each of these possible causal factors, no matter how small or large, or any combination of them could have an impact on Sister Grace's heart. Her symptoms could be examined in relation to Traditional diagnoses on many levels of interaction. Ultimately, at some level they are all complexly interrelated and interface as one, as she has only one body. Somewhere there may be an interaction of causality on a more universal level than humans are able to understand. This is a brief explanation of a complex process. One has to be very careful to not take this process out of the cultural context, as it may lose the integrity of complexity. This has implications for further study of concepts of diagnosis in relation to healing. We only raise the issue here; any further discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this short article.

In 1996, Sister Grace had a Blessingway ceremony done for her. She called it "getting back in harmony with my own people" (interview by the authors, September 8, 1998). As noted earlier, she had not felt truly at home in Navajoland after she had come back, and so she had turned to Blessingway "as an affirmation for my father's family's beliefs in Navajo spirituality" (interview by the authors, December 14, 1996). The Blessingway was very powerful and revitalizing for Sister Grace. She reconnected emotionally and spiritually with the paternal side of her family. She felt a lightness and a sense of peace that remained with her for months. The Blessingway was an affirmation of her connection with God and with the Navajo Diyin Diné'é (glossed as Holy People). She continually spoke of the feeling of oneness with God during the ceremony and the power and peace that came to her, especially during the singing of the Sacred Mountain songs. These songs provide

Diné identity and sacred grounding both in terms of the individual and the physical land of the Navajo. Apparently this was what Sister Grace had been missing during her long years away from her homeland.

Catholic Perspective: South Direction of the Model

The focus in this section is the Roman Catholic perspective of healing as discussed by Sister Grace. As she was growing up, she was heavily influenced by her mother's belief in Christianity. As noted, her mother had been a Baptist but had later joined the Catholic Church. Her father was also a practicing Catholic at the time Sister Grace was born. Her upbringing may have influenced her adolescent decision to become a nun. The community of Lukachukai, in which she was raised, is heavily Catholic. The most substantial building in the community is the hand-hewn stone Catholic Church. Even the NAC ceremonies in the Lukachukai community include elements of Catholic Christianity, such as the Lord's Prayer. This is not the case in many other Navajo communities.

Most of Sister Grace's junior and senior high school education took place in BIA and public schools. Although some of her learning was Catholic influenced, still there was an overlay of Euroamerican Cartesian-based philosophy that contrasted with her grandparents' traditional teachings. The period of her schooling, during the 1940s and 1950s, was one of extreme acculturation during which the traditional native language and culture were not supported. This was a period when native-speaking children had their mouths washed out with soap if they reverted to their native language. Although Sister Grace spoke English as her primary language, she still had to deal with cultural contradictions between the holistic, traditional ways of knowing and the reductionistic, compartmentalized Cartesian paradigm.

It was during this period of acculturation and assimilation that Sister Grace studied theology and took her vows. She entered the order of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in Philadelphia along with several hundred others. The Catholic orders were very conservative and strict at that time. The nuns followed a rigid regime, dressing in long, stiff, black habits. Sister Grace recalls that she was required to keep a notebook of her sinful thoughts. The nuns were not allowed to be alone with one another for more than 15 minutes at a time. As the years went by, she continued her studies and received a degree from a Catholic college in Louisiana.

The era of assimilation and acculturation that was heavily supported at the federal and state level was followed by a reversal of Indian policy in the 1960s. Native people across the nation were given increased autonomy. This federal policy of tribal self-organization included substantial restoration and revitalization of Indian education, including the teaching of traditional and cultural ways of life. Also during this decade, Pope John XXIII began to liberalize the Catholic Church, pursuing reforms culminating in the promulgations of Vatican II. Consequently, the Church experienced great internal turmoil, and many priests and nuns left their orders during this time. The remaining orders became less restrictive, following a liberalized ecclesiastical reorganization.

All of these liberalizing changes created a personal dilemma for Sister Grace. The Church was becoming more receptive to change, lessening the age-old restrictions

of the Catholic orders. Yet at the same time, the increasing opportunities were raising significant new questions. It was at this time that Sister Grace, along with many others, first began to question her wholehearted commitment to the Catholic Church. Simultaneously, this was an era when native people were beginning to experience positive re-identification and revitalization as tribal people, rather than blindly following the path of assimilation and acculturation. During this period, Sister Grace began to examine the contradictions, as she perceived them, between Christianity and native spirituality.

Sister Grace had been schooled in the strict discipline of the old Catholic system. Although her family had been able to synthesize their Catholicism with Traditional native ways and the NAC, her religious order did not allow for deviation from the classical Catholic teachings. Traditional thinking and the NAC did not fit into the accepted norm. Traditional teachings and ceremonies were discouraged as a hindrance to progress, while the NAC at that time was illegal and all its services were underground. The synthesis achieved by Sister Grace's family did not easily carry over into the cultural expectations established by the Church outside of the reservation.

Due to the increased flexibility of thinking allowed the nuns after Vatican II, Sister Grace continued to explore the contradictions as she experienced them. She gradually entered into a state of depression. She had almost no one to whom she could turn to share and discuss her growing unease and sense of disharmony. She increasingly felt her special status as a minority. There was almost no one around who could share similar upbringings and concerns. At times, she said, she felt her "skull would split in half" (interview by the authors, April 12, 1996).

She began the long road to recovery through the teachings of Pope John XXIII. She realized that the old teachings of fear, in both the Catholic Church and Navajo Traditional ways, were not as significant as the teachings of love that were being advocated by Pope John. As she reflected later, "Both my religions of childhood were of fear; the concept of *yii yáá!* and the fear of God were together for me as a child and so contradictory to God's love in some ways.⁵ Vatican II and Pope John XXIII opened the door to God's love as the only reality" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998).

She further explained how she came to integrate her three traditions.

The old way is penance, somewhat like the old way of Navajo, *yii yáá!* Fear is *yii yáá!* Like seeing a snake: you have to take caution. That is what sin is like in the new theology. Sin is what we have done wrong. We are living in illusion, in a void. It always is, always will be. The Catholic Church has a prescribed order of living, and it must be followed in order to get to heaven. But Navajo is similar. There is an order to live by. If you get out of order, there is a *yii yáá!* There can be a return to wholeness. Christ is trying to tell us to come back to our original self. This may seem like a real departure from the old theology. You are born holy, you are always that. You come back to an acknowledgment of that holiness. For example, this is like what Navajos believe. There is a cycle from baby to old age. Old age is baby again. This is the new theology. [interview by the authors, January 9, 1995]

By discarding the guiding concept of fear, in both her Traditional Navajo and Catholic orientations, she was able to begin to integrate her conflicting beliefs through the concept of Christ's divine eternal love, as taught by Pope John XXIII.

Moreover, she came to terms with her feelings of guilt. "I used to scream, 'What is truth?' " she explained. "I am in God's image, I am eternal. I used to have to say that to myself to get past this message, 'Lord, I am not worthy to receive you.' To which I would say back, 'God, you created me in your image. How could I not be worthy?' " (interview by the authors, September 8, 1998).

She told us that she "persevered with Christ's Last Supper as my model. I did ask for guidance at the Tabernacle. I felt I needed to test myself. I asked God for guidance and heard a message inside me saying, 'Come back to your own space' " (interview by the authors, September 8, 1998). She was assigned to the Houck Mission, closer to her homeland. Some time later she was reassigned to St. Michael's Mission back on Navajoland, where she was raised. Finally, after many years, she had come home to the protection of the Four Sacred Mountains.

Several years later, during the time when she continued to integrate her beliefs, she moved temporarily to Chicago and underwent major therapy training sessions. This culminated in a Master's degree in spiritual counseling at Loyola University. At that time, she was exposed to many Western and alternative modes of therapy. She was often the only native person in that setting, which contributed to her increasing sense of alienation.

As she grew older, through the teaching of God's love, she came to a synthesis of the teachings of her childhood Catholic and native spirituality. She began to identify herself as a Native American Catholic. She took part in the Tekakwitha conferences for native Catholics. She began to share her experiences at these gatherings. Her own spiritual healing powers came through her involvement at these indigenous Catholic conferences. When native spiritual leader Emmett White gave her an eagle feather just after her first healing experiences, she interpreted the feather and its associated responsibilities as a native affirmation of her spiritual healing gifts.

Today, if one goes into the Catholic Church on the Navajo reservation, much has changed. Many native teachings have been incorporated into the Church. Sweat lodges are an integral part of native Catholic healing process. Cedar smoke is used for purification. Native ways have been incorporated into Catholic alcoholic counseling, primarily as the Twelve Step Process of Alcoholics Anonymous. The NAC is legal now, and it is not unusual to see four or five tipis set up for ceremonies in the Lukachukai community each weekend. Many of the NAC ceremonies contain elements of Catholicism, for example, ending a prayer with the phrase "in Jesus' name, amen." Christmas is a major celebration, as is Easter.

The Catholic Church has gone through its own significant changes. The Catholic Cursillo Movement was very important for a number of years both on and off the reservation. Sister Grace was involved in the movement. The Charismatic healing process grew out of the Cursillo movement, and she was also involved with the Charismatic way of healing. Today it appears that she continues the laying on of hands as a way of healing.

Native American Church: West Direction of the Model

Much of the uniqueness of Sister Grace's spiritual integration comes from her lifelong commitment to the teachings of the NAC. She does not consider the NAC a church, per se. "NAC is not a church," she said. "It is a spiritual way of life. There

is no set doctrine," she went on, "It is very broad based and can be used for any purpose. It is conducted through prayer and through use of peyote" (interview by the authors, March 26, 1996). "All our Native American ceremonies are for healing," she remarked. "Prayers are directed straight to God" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998)

When Sister Grace returned to the Navajo reservation after many years away, she had what she termed a "welcoming back" NAC ceremony (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998). Throughout the years, she mentioned, she attended many peyote meetings in support of other people. Her homecoming ceremony was the first one she had for herself in many years. She explained her involvement with the use of the herb peyote: "I know the use of the herb peyote has helped me to clear my mind" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995). She was able to meditate and communicate with God through peyote. The use of the herb was medicinal, according to her, and spiritual. Earlier in her life, she had a profound connection with the NAC and the use of peyote. She told us of her pleasure helping her father to set up his altar and prepare for ceremonies, even as a small child.

Because of the general ignorance outside the native community regarding the NAC, one cannot talk openly about the use of peyote. Communication is extremely limited between cultures in this regard. Although Sister Grace could not openly acknowledge her belief and participation in the NAC, it seems always to have been a vital part of her life. Her spirituality is holistic, certainly supporting and integrating NAC with Catholicism. To her, "The medicine is spirit, and the spirit is light. Light is life. Life is spiritual." She describes Christ "as eternal light and wholeness" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998).

With this background, it was thus natural that she would turn intuitively to the NAC when she was medically diagnosed with an enlarged heart and, subsequently, a blood clot in the heart. Her family arranged an emergency peyote ceremony for her, selecting a road man who had helped her brother earlier. There were two ceremonies. The first one was a diagnostic and healing meeting. The second was to give thanks for the healing that occurred.

We interviewed the road man who had conducted her diagnostic peyote ceremony. He told us that "You have to go back and backtrack the problems, and that is how we do the NAC ceremony. You have to find out how and where the problem originated" (interview by the authors, November 10, 1996). During the course of the ceremony, it was discovered that an alligator had been harmed in the heart by Sister Grace's Choctaw ancestors.

So the cause and effect was a result of this injury to this animal, as it is with any other animal. That is what happens when you kill an animal, you are affected by their spirit. . . . The problem stems from that, and all the births since then to here, this is what is affecting your heart. I told her that. She said, it must be true. So, we prayed to the spiritual essence of these animals . . . and asked for a restoration of balance and harmony which would enable her to heal. [interview by the authors, November 10, 1996]

Sister Grace went on to say that the road man asked God to heal "those areas that he encountered which went all the way back to the dinosaur time." In addition to the alligator, the road man had seen a giant bird and a dinosaur, both related to the alligator through an ancient reptile-bird connection. The alligator was filled

with blood around the heart area. "My mother's people," said Sister Grace, "had to hide in the swampland in order to survive, and I am sure one of our ancestors probably ended up killing the alligator through the heart. It is all on my mother's side, that has this heart condition. So this problem, one of our ancestors that did this, and maybe never really made it correct, never corrected it, this killing of the alligator" (interview by the authors, April 22, 1996).

After the road man prayed for restoration and to bring harmony back between Sister Grace and the disrupted spirit of the alligator, "His vision showed him that there was no more blood on the alligator. The alligator went back into the water. The bird that was there, trying to destroy a child, flew away and did not harm the child. And the dinosaur went back into harmony. And so all these three animals went back into the natural world in harmony. For my healing" (interview by the authors, April 12, 1996). As a result of the ceremony, she told us, she felt "very light, and for days I just felt relieved of a lot of heaviness, a lot of sadness, that I knew I was carrying around, and I felt that I had internalized a lot of this sadness from my own mother." She explained her feeling as "a diffusion of negative energies" (interview by the authors, April 12, 1996).

When Sister Grace went back to the hospital, her doctor examined her and said that her heart was significantly better; in fact, the blood clot had disappeared and she was greatly improved. He was not able to account for the healing. In the native way of thinking, the causes of imbalance (disease) and healing (restoration of balance) are intrinsically interrelated. Thus, during the NAC ceremony the imbalance was addressed. Sister Grace experienced a process of healing and later sponsored another peyote meeting for the purpose of thanksgiving.

Medical Interpretation: North Direction of the Model

Although her mother did not trust Public Health Service doctors, Sister Grace herself has relied on their care. She was diagnosed with mild to moderate congestive heart failure and was put on several medications. According to the clinical perspectives delineated in her SCID interview, her Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) is 98 with a slight decrease in functional abilities related to the limitations from congestive heart failure (see Storck et al., this issue). She spent some time in the hospital on an emergency basis. Her heart was found to be so weakened that doctors told her bypass surgery was not an option; the only surgery they would consider would be a heart transplant. She experienced shortness of breath and a sensation of pins and needles in her legs. She has been diagnosed with arthritis. As the result of two serious automobile accidents, she has been left with metal plates in her ankle.

In addition to medical treatment, Sister Grace has gone through significant therapeutic sessions. According to Navajo Healing Project psychiatrist Mick Storck, her clinical diagnosis was major depression (remitted in 1980) and panic disorder (remitted in 1980). Her psychiatric disturbances culminated in a period during which she clearly met criteria for a major depressive illness, with suicidal or at least despondent and nihilistic thoughts. During this period of several years she also had clear panic disorder symptoms. Both of these problems were resolved with considerable effort as she addressed the existential crisis in her life. She

received support and therapy and counseling both from the church and through one of the Indian Health Service hospitals.

Dr. Storck interprets her crisis as being related to “a culture of depression that she was living in or at least a culture of radical existential doubt and uncertainty related to the whole religious order, particularly of Navajo nuns feeling similar feelings at the time. I believe her recovery was most related to a reassessment and reintegration of her sense of who she is in the world” (interview by the authors, December 14, 1996).

Sister Grace’s own therapy helped with her counseling practice, as well as with personal relationships in general. She has experienced a variety of healing processes, including Western therapies and alternative modes of healing. She particularly mentioned the benefits that she received from Reiki treatment and from a crystal chakra alignment. She also mentioned the benefits that one would receive from Tibetan chanting and healing from the sound of bells.

Conclusion

Sister Grace was born into synthesis. Her mother and father created a family synthesis of three spiritual healing traditions along with limited medical intervention. Sister Grace’s use of Western medicine increased as she grew older. It was natural for her and her siblings to live in accordance with this family synthesis. Sister Grace was educated through the BIA Schools, public schools, and then Catholic schools. There was no traditional school or NAC school. During most of her formative years, the three school systems were very rigid and inflexible. She was trained by people who had little accurate knowledge of or interest in Native American ways. The ultimate aim was absolute commitment to the Church and total conversion. Sister Grace made the ultimate commitment by dedicating her life to Jesus Christ, within the Order of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. She spent the next few decades studying theology and education within the church system. At the same time, she never totally lost her Native American identity and holistic spirituality.

As the years passed, she began seriously to question her commitment, finding it increasingly difficult to reconcile classic Catholicism with her Native American ways of knowing. She was not able to find the answers she was seeking from any other human beings. She eventually went directly to God and was given the message, “Go back to your own space, to your homeland and to your native spirituality” (interview by the authors, September 8, 1998). This message served as a catalyst and became the seed of her adult synthesis of belief. Through her return to the Navajo reservation, she was able to begin to synthesize her belief mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually.

She went home to her past, taking with her a trained professional mind. She was looking for the solace of her childhood synthesis and she eventually found it. In essence, the synthesis had never actually been destroyed. Her belief enabled her to transcend her intellectual struggles and to maintain her integrity. Her struggle was to keep a holistic belief but, at the same time, maintain an awareness of distinction. She did not get her answers from what Navajos call *bila’ ashdla’ii* (literally, “five-fingered beings”), human beings. According to Sister Grace, she got them directly from God. Her experiences and actions are all affirmations of her belief, her

spirituality, and her oneness with God. Whether she is praying at dawn to Jesus Christ, feeling a sense of eternalism through a cosmic connection as articulated by Traditional Diné, or in a peyote meeting and feeling the sacredness that comes from eating the plant, she is essentially articulating and expressing her spirituality.

Sister Grace has achieved a remarkable synthesis among three strong spiritual traditions. She describes how when she prays at dawn she experiences a total oneness with the universe. In her own words, she does not just pray in a church building, but "the whole universe is my cathedral. The sky is my roof and the earth is my floor" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1997).

Several times Sister Grace told us that we take our holistic view, our oneness with the cosmos, so much for granted here on the reservation. Yet outside the reservation this way of thinking is rare. It may be difficult for a non-Indian to comprehend. She recalled going out with her grandparents when she was a child to pray at dawn using corn pollen. "You breathe that universe in the morning and you are one with that universe" (interview by the authors, January 9, 1995). Today she continues to pray at dawn, as a vital part of her spiritual way of life. "You go out and pray at dawn with your white corn meal. If God is not number one in all this, then who is?" (interview by the authors, March 20, 1996). She does not make any division between traditional Diné concepts of a sacred universe and a Christian God of the cosmos. She relates the light of Christ to the light of physical dawn. She also relates the predawn light to the Traditional Navajo dawn spirit. Although distinct from one another, they are holistically perceived by her, as a sense of the spirit world. "Traditional Native American spirituality, we go out at dawn. It has given me the sense that if I extend my hand, I send out energy, it goes into eternity. There is no stopping. It goes into the four directions. I use my hands to emphasize even more and my mind goes there, but not my hand. I extend my hands in prayer. And now, to me, prayer is acknowledging God's power in me" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995).

She explained her emerging sense of wholeness. "It's like my being is in oneness with Christ. The mind has a oneness with the creator. We are God's image. That's our only reality" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998). "Here is where Navajo and Catholic traditions come together," she said. "It is a natural fit with all indigenous peoples. I was always a whole person and I walk with that. That's what I meant as always being sacred. Walking on the sacred ground. The earth is sacred. The air that we breathe in and breathe out is sacred. The whole universe is sacred because of our oneness with God. Anything less than that, anything that is not of that is a lie. Pure lie. Illusion" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995). "I feel whole now," she reflected, "because I lived in two cultures, of the European and my own culture, and it was like going back and forth between the two. But once I realized that in the spirit world, there are no lines drawn, that just brought me into harmony with everybody" (interview by the authors, September 8, 1998).

Much of her feeling of harmony came from the Traditional Blessingway ceremony that she had in 1996. The most important aspects of the ceremony were her spiritual purification and intimate oneness with God. She was purified of negativity, and she said that she felt a great sense of peace with the Creator. At the same time she was feeling a oneness with God, she was being energized by the Traditional Diné mountain songs that were being sung. Sister Grace experienced her Blessingway

ceremony as a dual affirmation, of her relationship with Christ and of her Navajo spirituality. Yet she ultimately distinguishes between Catholicism and her native spirituality by describing Catholicism as a Christian faith. "My religion is Catholic because it is the only traditional religion" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995). She identifies Catholicism as the Euroamerican religion that she chose, and because she chose it, she cannot belong to another Christian faith. Christian faiths are based on a creed, she explained, and are highly institutionalized. Once you profess a certain creed you cannot simultaneously profess another one.

On the other hand, native ways of prayer have not been institutionalized. They do not profess a codified, written creed. One can move freely between Traditional and NAC ceremonies if one wishes. "Any one of us Native Americans feel free that we are enriched by all these different ways" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1997). She explained how some religions have become so legalistic and overly institutionalized "that they have lost the spirit, and that's where I appreciate my NAC way and my Traditional, too. They take you into the spirit world" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995). Her integrated spirit world enriches her spirituality. She told us of driving to Albuquerque one day and feeling the spiritual presence of archangels. "It was really powerful. The Almighty was with me. It was Monster Slayer and Born for Water [the Navajo mythic culture heroes]. They were probably archangels" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998).

A further example of her integral thinking is the analogy she draws between the parables of Christ and Native American stories. Jesus used stories as his teaching vehicle. "Christ didn't preach at us, he told stories," she explained. "His stories embedded moral and ethical teachings, and our native stories do the same thing" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1997). She described how native stories are usually told for multiple reasons, including adult stories used to address or correct real life concerns. In this way of thinking, Christ's story of the fish and bread loaves, for example, achieves much the same result as the teachings of the Navajo coyote stories at the adult level. Most of the better-known Navajo stories are generally told to entertain children. However, they still contain teachings of ethical values appropriate for various age levels. On the adult level, the story becomes more complex and can play a major role in healing ceremonies as well as to discipline people and provide moral guidance.

She prays with all three spiritual traditions yet she can delineate between them if she is asked. "Tradition and NAC is part of my prayer life. I pray out of both traditions," she stated (interview by the authors, January 9, 1995). Both NAC and Charismatic Catholic prayer are also natural to her. They both are focused on centering oneself. "You center on yourself. It is like NAC. You go in, you pray. You center on yourself. It is the same with Charismatics" (interview by the authors, January 9, 1995). She equated the Christian mass with the NAC altar, often referred to as an NAC fireplace. According to her, both ceremonies have been passed down unchanging through countless generations. The Catholic mass comes directly from the Last Supper as directed by Jesus Christ. She made the distinction that this was not true for the various Protestant faiths. "The NAC fireplaces are passed down in an unbroken and always acknowledged line, very similar to the Catholic mass" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995).

It was very important for Sister Grace to affirm that what she was saying during our interviews came about as a result of her own spiritual experiences. She

made it clear that she was not speaking on behalf of the Catholic Church or on behalf of the NAC or for Traditional Diné ways. Because of her background, she lives all of these three spiritual ways. She walks these three spiritual ways and has synthesized everything in her own mind. She really speaks for herself. She calls it "journeying," an idea related to her concept of healing. She is not the healer. She constantly reiterates that God is the healer. "God uses us to bring about healing," she states. "When a person comes to me for healing, they are the guide. I follow the person, listen to them, check things out with them to see if I am understanding them correctly. So I journey with them. I learn from the person who comes to be healed. They guide me into areas they want to guide me into, spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally. I feel that the spirit comes into the body. The mind is the connection between the spirit world and the body. The soul embodies our spirit. The mind is a doorway to our communication with God" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998).

People from all three spiritual healing traditions come to Sister Grace for counseling and spiritual healing. She can journey with all of them as a result of her background. She feels that having been raised with three traditions, "I am very enriched. So when people come to me with a Traditional background, I can be there with them. And if they come to me with a NAC background, I can be there with them. And if they come from a Christian background, I can understand them too and be there with them. And if they move into Charismatic Catholic, I have experienced that, too, and can be there with them" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995).

For Sister Grace, healing occurs in many different ways. There is seldom a one-time peak experience. "Healing is being in oneness with God" (interview by the authors, September 15, 1998). Sister Grace's own healing employs the laying on of hands. "The energy of God comes through the healer's hands into the patient's body. It feels like heat when it comes through into the body. . . . It's using God's energy to go into the healer's hands to the individual person for healing" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995).

Much of her ministry includes visiting patients in the hospital. "I guess I do a lot of laying on hands when I visit the sick in the hospital. Resting in the spirit. I haven't tackled casting out of evil spirits . . . because I think to cast out evil spirits one has to really know one's shadow, you really have to know your negative side to do that. That's where the clowns are so powerful in our native spirituality" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995). In this respect, Sister Grace describes similarities between the Catholic exorcism ritual and Navajo Protectionway rites. In the Catholic Church, she explains, the priest who wishes to cast out an evil spirit must first go to the Bishop for powerful protection prayers. This provides increased awareness of the priest's "shadow or negative side." Similarly, she adds, the clown goes to the medicine man for much the same reason, protection from the evil spirit. Also, rather like the priest, the clown is very aware of his role as restorer of balance and this requires a keen awareness of the shadow side. "That's why the clowns are there at all the dances, like at the nine-night Yei bi Chei [Nightway ceremony]. They are there to make sure that the dancers are protected. They're watching for the shadow part" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995). The shadow side and the presence of negative energies are manifestations of the forces of evil. Evil, according to Sister Grace, is the opposite of the life force; evil is the destroyer of

life. Healing is the affirmation of the positive forces of continuous healthy life. "I see evil as our separation from our creator," she said. "And we live in such illusion that the evil is really what we call destruction" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995).

We have provided the above quotes in order to illuminate the complex spiritual synthesis achieved by Sister Grace in a manner faithful to a comment she made the first day we met her: "My Indian spirituality is not for sale" (interview by the authors, January 16, 1995). Her words carry the intrinsic thought process and integrity of her own story. Her words express her own journeying as she has experienced it during her life, living through three spiritual healing traditions. "I can say I am divine love," she explained. "I know that my breathing is God's breathing, my heartbeat is God's heartbeat, and vice versa. And I said that readily. But now I can also say that I am God's love. God is my love. . . . I am divine love" (interview by the authors, April 3, 1995). The awareness and insight were the beginning of a deeper spiritual synthesis for her. Her spiritual growth brought her a larger responsibility as a counselor and a healer, using all the three spiritual traditions with which she was raised.

Today, she is 65 years old and extremely busy fulfilling her professional role as a nun and practitioner of native spirituality. She shares her spiritual life with many native people who are now experiencing conflicting beliefs and looking for balance and healing in their lives. In some ways she looks to her parents, while at the same time she herself is a role model for the many people who look to her for guidance and healing. She is a powerful presence in real life. She lives up to her Navajo name, Asdzáán Jobaa'ii, the Woman of Compassion.

NOTES

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1. Sister Grace was consulted at every step in the production of this article. She reviewed the final draft for accuracy. She felt comfortable with the semi-anonymity of "Sister Grace."

2. This is a cosmology that is generally shared among Diné traditionalists today. The cosmic processes and the related Diné paradigm described here are common knowledge among traditionalists. The authors have translated and articulated in English that which is common knowledge within the traditional community. The authors are native people living traditional lives on the reservation. They both work at Diné College and have been deeply involved in research on Navajo philosophy and epistemology with the Center for Diné Studies, Diné College, over the past 15 years.

3. The Catholic Cursillo and Charismatic movements were related to direct therapeutic ritual, somewhat similar to Pentecostal healing, involving the laying-on of hands, emotional healing, and liberation from evil spirits. The Tekakwitha Conference is a periodic gathering of native Catholics. The Conference is named after Kateri Tekakwitha, a 17th-century Mohawk woman and a devout Catholic, beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1980.

4. Sister Grace referred to these ceremonies using the English names. Navajos might refer to *Lightningway* as *Na'at'oo'hjí* and *Whirlwindway* as *Naats'í oolthdísii*, related to *Nilthch'íjí*, *Windway*.

5. The Young and Morgan Dictionary of the Navajo Language gives *yee'* as the translation of the English "fear." One typically hears "yii yáá" as an exclamation if someone encounters a scary situation.

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