

universal character, it revealed some influence from Christian teaching, but it did not require a personal experience of conversion for participation in its activities.

The other new religion which was active in the region in the 1950's was the Native American Church. This was not an invention of any of the tribes in the region but had diffused to them from Indians in Oklahoma who had organized the church in the 1890's. The Native American Church was a religious group which employed as its central rite the eating of the cactus button, peyote. The system of beliefs and rituals combined some Christian-derived elements, such as the belief in Jesus as a source of spiritual inspiration, and other elements derived from the old ceremonial systems of the Delaware and other Indian tribes who had been sent to Oklahoma by the United States government. The moon as a female deity and ground altars were examples of such elements. The religion centered around the practice of group eating of the peyote buttons. Such a group gathered in a house or other structure, sat in a circle, and consumed the buttons. The effect of the peyote consisted in the inducement of visions of various kinds and, when eaten in the group, feelings of well-being and group identification. A usual accompaniment of peyote-eating was the passing of a drum to each participant successively, who then accompanied himself while singing songs known as the peyote songs. A session was ordinarily an all-night affair and was terminated with forced vomiting about dawn by each member of the group. The Native American Church existed as early as 1900 as an organized institution with a national head and staff of officers. It carried on missionary work among many Indian groups, proselytization which steadily increased through the 1950's.

The first New Mexican tribe to show interest in the Native American Church was Taos village among the eastern Pueblos. Peyote buttons had been used there traditionally as a specific cure against illnesses caused by witchcraft, but the use of peyote had never developed into a cult. In the 1890's a young Taos man who had been educated in Pennsylvania at Carlisle took an interest in the peyote ceremony and introduced it to other young men in the village. Soon a group was established which regularly carried out the peyote-eating ceremonies. Their activities were opposed by the village leaders, especially as the "peyote boys," as they were called, began to curtail their participation in the traditional village ceremonial life.

Attempts were made by the village hierarchy to forcibly suppress the new rites and oust the peyote-eaters from the village. These were unsuccessful and a feud developed between the families of the "peyote boys" and other families. The peyote cult became more entrenched in the lives of the group that had adopted it, but it did not spread as the opposition to it by the ceremonial leaders crystallized. It continued to exist, and its practitioners increasingly withdrew from other religious activities, constituting a source of conflict for fifty years at Taos. Its attempted introduction was resisted at San Juan village, and it spread nowhere else among the Eastern Pueblos, except for its adoption by a lone practitioner in Santa Clara village.

Although Native American Church missionaries worked as far west and south as the Papagos, nowhere else in the Southwest was the religion adopted for the forty years following its introduction at Taos. But during World War II in the