

God Is Red: A Native View of Religion: 50th Anniversary Edition

Vine Deloria Jr.

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A classic, incisive study of Native American religion and culture, Vine Deloria Jr.'s *God Is Red* speaks with remarkable relevance and poignancy.

First released in 1973, this work considers the place of Native American religious beliefs in US history—that is, within the “story of the West’s conquest of the remainder of the world.” Intriguing contrasts are drawn between Native American religions, tied to the geography and myths of sacred places, and Western thought, defined by a “historical” Christian timeline that begins with creation and moves through Jesus’s crucifixion, resurrection, and expectations for the end times. The book argues that many cultural inequities and environmental crises can be traced to Western assumptions about a sinful world and focus on a spiritual afterlife. Also included is an insightful summary of the struggle of Native Americans during the civil rights movement.

While the book emphasizes the tragic subjugation of native cultures, it is equally critical of New Age spiritualism that reduces tribal religion to a vision quest and a sweat lodge as well as greedy Native American shamans who hustle “on the workshop circuit.” The arguments hold up remarkably well, though a few sections seem dated, including a lengthy defense of Immanuel Velikovsky’s controversial work connecting celestial catastrophes with biblical accounts of the parting of the Red Sea and images of supernovae in Native American rock paintings.

Wry humor is threaded throughout. Oral Robert’s pleas for his followers to donate \$10 million to his ministry are described as the “Deity resorting to extortion [after two thousand years] as a means of keeping people in line” and Christian visions of heaven are notable for their “startling resemblance to suburban middle-class life.”

Brilliant and discerning, *God Is Red* is as thought-provoking and pertinent today as it was when it was first released fifty years ago.

KRISTEN RABE (July / August 2023)

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