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Bimaadiziwin, or the "Good Life," as a Unifying Concept of Anishinaabe Religion

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The experience of the Anishinaabe in the modern world contains a great amount of variety, from those who are fluent in their language and culture to those who, in the aftermath of the boarding school experience and similar assaults on Native cultures, are "in recovery." I belong to the latter group. My mother attended boarding schools during the 1930s and 1940s, and "relocated" to Minneapolis in the early 1950s. After moving to a small town in central Minnesota with my father, she raised nine children. Being the only children of Indian descent in school, there were times when our Indian identity was painfully obvious. Yet, as a whole, the exact contours of Anishinaabe culture remained elusive to us simply because our mother was not in a position to provide much information, and there was not an Indian community in town to support us.

Much of my adult life, then, has involved a process of recovering my Anishinaabe identity, although I will be the first to admit I have a long way to go in that regard. One part of the search led me to Thomas Shingobe, a respected spiritual leader of the Anishinaabe community in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the 1970s. As part of our conversations, Shingobe would often mention the "Proper Conduct of Life," although he never explained the term, and I never asked. It was not until years after he died that I realized he was trying to convey something of importance to me. It was with renewed conviction, then, that I set about to understand what I believe Shingobe was talking about: *bimaadiziwin,* or the "good life," as defined by the Anishinaabe. The following are my preliminary thoughts on the subject as I continue to pursue the good life of the Anishinaabe.

The moral structure of traditional Anishinaabe religion as encapsulated by the term *bimaadiziwin* is at least one unifying concept providing continuity in the worldview of the Anishinaabe from the past into the modern era.[1] *Bimaadiziwin*, or the Good Life, can basically be described as a long and

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healthy life, and was the life goal for the old Anishinaabe.[2] The emphasis, as such, concentrates on this world, and not reward in an afterlife. An examination of traditional Anishinaabe religion reveals that *bimaadiziwin* served as an underlying theme of most traditional religious structures. In the modern age, *bimaadiziwin* is helping the Anishinaabe to reconstruct their worlds in the postapocalyptic period.[3] Of course, the old world of the Anishinaabe can never be recovered in full, but concepts such as *bimaadiziwin* create a bridge from the old world to the new. Even though the surface phenomena may have changed, the core essence of the Anishinaabe world survives, in part, in the teaching of *bimaadiziwin.*

Some researchers have argued that the worldview of the Anishinaabe has either collapsed or decayed. Since one of the aims of this paper is to demonstrate the continuity in Anishinaabe worldview, the discussion here will begin with two works by Calvin Martin and Christopher Vecsey, who respectively assert the claim that the traditional Anishinaabe worldview has lost its vigor. From there, a review of the literature on *bimaadiziwin* is offered in an attempt to demonstrate that even though the term has been dealt with by scholars, none to date has shown how *bimaadiziwin* can serve as a unifying concept for Anishinaabe religion, especially in the move from the pre-reservation period into the modern age. Once the literature review is complete, *bimaadiziwin* as it exists in Anishinaabe religion will be taken up, first for the traditional culture and then the modern age. For the old Anishinaabe, *bimaadiziwin* informed the myths, vision quest, human-animal relations, health and healing, the Midewiwin, and relations with the dead. In the modern age, *bimaadiziwin* is helping the Anishinaabe to reconstruct their worlds in the postapocalyptic period. *Bimaadiziwin* was incorporated into Anishinaabe interpretations of Christianity. Myths are still being told.[4] Teachers such as Thomas Shingobe stressed *bimaadiziwin* in their oral teachings while others such as Edward Benton-Banai emphasized the same in their writings. Interestingly enough, *bimaadiziwin* is finding outlets in other areas as well, such as board games meant to help fight substance abuse. Through this examination of *bimaadiziwin,* it will become evident that the worldview of the Anishinaabe remains vital for those who choose to live the good life.

Martin and Vecsey can be said to occupy opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of the traditional Anishinaabe worldview, here defined as the era when the Anishinaabe were living with sovereignty over their own lives prior to the reservation period in the mid-1800s. Martin concentrates on the time period following initial contact with Europeans in the mid 1600s; Vecsey concludes his examination of traditional Anishinaabe religion in the mid-1900s. Despite the difference in centuries, Martin and Vecsey share a similar outlook as to the fate of the traditional Anishinaabe worldview. Martin argues that the introduction of European diseases caused Indian beliefs in general to atrophy.[5] In the worldview of Indians of the Northeast, including Canada, human diseases were believed to be a sign of displeasure from the respective master spirit of the game animals. The sudden increase in diseases for seemingly no apparent reason caused Indians to lose faith in the human-animal compact and, blaming animals for disease, go to war with the animals.[6] Vecsey does not

argue in such specific terms. Instead, at almost every turn in his examination of traditional Anishinaabe religion, he concludes that in the modern age, the traditions are corrupt or defunct. For example, in speaking of Anishinaabe myths, Vecsey writes that, "The narratives which formerly provided the Indians with bases of reality . . . have atrophied."[7]

The works of both Martin and Vecsey have problems. Martin's hypothesis has been discredited to a large degree, especially in the volume of essays dedicated to examining his work, *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade*.[8] The sharpest critique in that volume comes from Charles Bishop.[9] As part of his discussion, Bishop wonders how the Indians, who, according to Martin, had abandoned their beliefs, could later return to a pristine Indian worldview. In other words, Bishop understands Martin to say the Indians had their worldview, lost it, and then gained it back. This is unreasonable and unlikely, especially in the face of the more likely event that the Indians never lost their worldview in the first place. The continuity in worldview into the twentieth century, Bishop asserts, can be seen in the works of Irving Hallowell and other writers Martin himself cites.[10]

For his part, Vecsey focused primarily on researching the traditional religion. As such, he did not seem to do any fieldwork to investigate Anishinaabe religion as it existed at the time. This is unfortunate, for about the same time Vecsey was working on his manuscript in the mid-1970s, Anishinaabe religion was experiencing a renaissance. Including observations on the current-day situation of the Anishinaabe would have greatly contributed to Vecsey's investigation and perhaps helped curtail his generally negative evaluation of the state of Anishinaabe religion. Additionally, over the last twenty years or so since Vecsey's work first appeared, the situation for Anishinaabe religion has changed significantly.

It is now clear that the Anishinaabe worldview continues to exist. The question being addressed here is how did the tradition maintain itself over the years? One way is through the morality inherent in the concept of *bimaadiziwin.* Unfortunately, scholars to date have not recognized the manner in which *bimaadiziwin* provides a unifying theme for Anishinaabe religion.

The first researcher to explore the concept of *bimaadiziwin* in detail was A. Irving Hallowell.[11] However, Hallowell limits the scope to his investigation of the idea, never using it to describe a unifying concept for Anishinaabe religion, as a cursory examination of his works will illustrate. One locus classicus for *bimaadiziwin* in the scholarly literature is Hallowell's "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View." The idea is introduced as follows: "The central goal of life for the Ojibwa is expressed by the term *pîmädäzîwin,* life in the fullest sense, life in the sense of longevity, health and freedom from misfortune."[12] However, the idea itself is only introduced toward the end of the piece, with the bulk of the article dedicated to the role of "other-than-human" persons in the worldview of the Anishinaabe. The basic argument that Hallowell makes, then, is that "[t]his goal cannot be achieved without the effective help and cooperation of *both* human and other-than-human 'persons,' as well as by one's own personal efforts."[13] In this regard, Hallowell does recognize the moral aspect of *bimaadiziwin,* and even discusses its relevance to the vision quest.[14] However, no effort is made to go beyond these observations.

In his other works which mention *bimaadiziwin,* Hallowell mainly focuses on the connection between the good life, sickness, and sexuality. The point of these works is more or less summed up in the following quote:

> The central concept of the good life and the highest value is *pîmädäzîwin,* life in the fullest sense; life in the sense of health, longevity, and well-being, not only for one's self, but one's family. *Pîmädäzîwin* is a word heard again and again in ceremonies, and the supernaturals are petitioned for it. It is made possible primarily only through supernatural help, by "blessings" from guardian spirits. Bad conduct interferes with achieving this desired goal. One of the principal categories of bad conduct is some kind of sexual transgression. Illness may be a sign of bad conduct. Since there are no organized penal sanctions and, in fact, no adult has any authority to impose any sort of penalty upon another person, and since openly expressed moral disapproval is avoided because it may be taken as a sign of hostility, fear of disease is the major social sanction.[15]

That is the basic thrust of Hallowell's argument, with the rest of the article exploring deviant sexual behavior, the health consequences resulting therefrom, and the act of public confession of sexual conduct necessary to heal illnesses brought about by said conduct. While Hallowell is to be commended for recognizing the importance of *bimaadiziwin,* his work is narrow in scope and does not use *bimaadiziwin* as a unifying concept for Anishinaabe religion as it can and should be.

Martin dedicates a chapter of his work to *bimaadiziwin.*[16] However, this discussion, too, is limited in scope. Since Martin's main concern is with human-animal relations, he puts most emphasis on that topic, stressing those aspects of Anishinaabe life most relevant to it, including the vision quest to some extent. However, he does not go beyond that, turning his discussion to theories of disease etiology among the old Anishinaabe. It should be noted that in this part of his examination, Martin does not explore the manner in which animal spirits were considered a possible disease agent, but instead looks at the numerous ways non-animals, especially other humans, were thought to be responsible for certain diseases. With his emphasis on disease, Martin does not draw any conclusions about the manner in which *bimaadiziwin* functioned as a cultural whole for the old Anishinaabe. So, like Hallowell, even though he discusses the topic, there is little evidence or appreciation for *bimaadiziwin* as an explanatory device for Anishinaabe religion in the broad sense of the term.

A similar situation prevails in the work of Thomas Overholt and Baird Callicott, who explored the meaning of Anishinaabe myth.[17] Like Martin, they bring up the subject of *bimaadiziwin* and their discussion is limited to that point. Thus, while they delineate some of the values found in Anishinaabe myths, such as generosity and self-control, the discussion does not move beyond that circumscribed perspective, and the manner in which *bimaadiziwin* is related to myths, let alone the rest of Anishinaabe religion, is not spelled out in very clear terms. The work on the myths is fine in and of itself,

but as a commentary on the role of *bimaadiziwin* in Anishinaabe myth, religion, and life, the work is of limited value.

The above three works constitute the major writings related to *bimaadiziwin,* with other works either not mentioning the concept or citing it only in passing. One example of the former is Vecsey's monograph on Anishinaabe religion. Although the study covers most aspects of the tradition, no reference is made to *bimaadiziwin.* Also, as stated above, Vecsey does not bring his analysis into the modern era, so the work is of only marginal value in understanding *bimaadiziwin.* An example of a work which cites *bimaadiziwin* only parenthetically is that of Theresa Smith.[18] She acknowledges the concept in the beginning of her examination of the three-tiered nature of the Anishinaabe universe. However, the term is not used in her analysis to any great degree.

So the claim being made here is not that *bimaadiziwin* has not been discussed before, or that the above works are inaccurate in any manner. Indeed, most of the comments to follow will be based on and draw from these earlier works. Instead, the study of *bimaadiziwin* remains incomplete. The first goal, then, is to bring these previous works together to illustrate how *bimaadiziwin* served as a unifying concept for traditional Anishinaabe religion. However, since much of this material has been covered elsewhere, I will keep my remarks on traditional Anishinaabe religion relatively brief.

The teaching of *bimaadiziwin* operates at many levels. On a simple day-to-day basis, it suggests such actions as rising with the sun and retiring with the same. Further, *bimaadiziwin* governs human relations as well, stressing the type of conduct appropriate between individuals, and the manner in which social life is to be conducted. *Bimaadiziwin* also covers the relationship with the broader environment. So, for example, it teaches the necessity of respecting all life, from the smallest insects on up. *Bimaadiziwin,* however, does not exist as a definitive body of law. Instead, it is left up to the individual to develop an understanding of *bimaadiziwin* through careful attention to the teaching wherever it can be found. This makes the term quite complex, and it can serve as a religious blessing, moral teaching, value system, and life goal. The reader should be forewarned, then, that the term appears in all these guises below. Most importantly, this protean character allows *bimaadiziwin* to flow through just about every facet of traditional Anishinaabe religion.

If we follow the course of an Anishinaabe from birth to death, *bimaadiziwin* is present throughout. In childhood, the most important exposure to the teaching comes through the telling of stories. The myths of the Anishinaabe are one of the great depositories of moral teaching. On the surface, this may not appear so. The stories of the culture hero, Wenabozho, are often humorous and entertaining.[19] Also, Anishinaabe storytellers never conclude with a moral as in Aesop's Fables. The narrator allows the listener to develop an individual understanding of the lesson being conveyed. As such, the stories are designed to engage the listener, implanting seeds for later reflection and contemplation.

One example of how this process works might be found in the earth-diver myth. Vecsey has argued that this myth sanctions hunting by the

Anishinaabe.[20] However, a closer reading might suggest that the story actually contains the environmental teaching of the Anishinaabe. In the tale, Wenabozho and his companion, a wolf, overhunt their territory. To protect themselves, the animals have the wolf killed. After Wenabozho attains revenge for his companion's death, the animals become further enraged, and flood the world. Wenabozho succeeds in rebuilding the earth, so in the end balance is restored. It should be noted that the trouble initially started when Wenabozho damaged the natural environment. One lesson that may be drawn from the story, then, is the need to check human power in relation to the world.[21]

At the next stage of human life, the Anishinaabe traditionally engaged in a vision quest. In the old days, the Anishinaabe sought to gain power in order to live a long and productive life here on earth. Usually, this power came through the aid of a spiritual helper.[22] Note, however, it was incumbent upon the individual to live a moral life to maintain the blessings of this helper.[23] So while the vision quest was ostensibly and traditionally a search for power, more comprehensively speaking the quest also brought an individual into a lifelong moral compact with the spiritual world.

On attaining adulthood, *bimaadiziwin* continued to direct one's actions. At this point, the many levels of the teaching discussed above come into play, be they personal, social, or environmental in nature. One way in which the personal and environmental are combined concerns relations with game animals. As Hallowell has pointed out, animals were seen as other-than-human people.[24] Although Hallowell does not make this point, the Anishinaabe probably had reasons for this feeling of kinship. For example, people belonged to specific *dodems*, or clans, with the clans being named after animals. It is easy to see how the feeling of kinship for one's relatives as a member of the bear or otter clan, for example, could be extended to the species itself. Also, the Anishinaabe recognized the intelligence of animals. The recognition of that intelligence may have helped instill a sense of camaraderie for animals among the old Anishinaabe. Of course, having spiritual helpers in the form of animals probably supported these notions as well. In any case, for whatever reasons, the old Anishinaabe felt they were in a relationship with animals. However, that relationship demanded certain moral attitudes and actions. Thus, the Anishinaabe felt they needed to maintain a proper attitude of respect for animals. In addition to that, there were numerous injunctions as to the proper behavior to be followed in regard to animals. Thus, one was not to speak ill of animals. Also, dead game were to be treated as honored guests. As Martin has argued, if these attitudes and behavioral guidelines were violated, illness might result.[25] Thus, a proper relationship with game animals was necessary for a long and healthy life. As such, the relationship with animals had its moral side driven by *bimaadiziwin*.

This issue requires a few additional comments. It is disappointing that past scholars often played up the fear inherent in Anishinaabe relations with game animals; that is, scholars argued that the prime motivating factor for treating animals well is usually presented as a fear of illness or the fear that game animals will make themselves scarce, thus bringing starvation. I would like to counter this approach. First, I find it regrettable that most scholars in

the past have only focused on the negative reinforcement for moral behavior while completely ignoring positive aspects of the relationship. This would be similar to a discussion of Christian morality in which the only focus was on the fear of going to hell. In that case, the conclusion might be that the only reason Christians acted in a moral manner was due to the terror of eternal damnation. Such an approach would completely ignore the positive aspects of Christianity, such as the saving grace of Jesus Christ and the promise of a life of eternity in heaven. The same argument can be applied to the old Anishinaabe. Yes, the fear of retribution from game animals may have existed. However, as long as one acted well, one could look forward to the promise of a long and healthy life. One could also look forward to a continuing positive relationship with game animals. Of course, the old Anishinaabe had their doubts. But any people, including Christians, have their doubts from time to time about their moral conduct. For the most part, though, I suspect the old Anishinaabe, like most people, thought about the positive aspects of their moral structure as much as, if not more than, the negative aspects.

Another aspect of old Anishinaabe relations with game animals has also been overlooked. If we take seriously Hallowell's observation that animals were seen as other-than-human people, we need to think seriously about the implications of that belief. The old Anishinaabe felt they were in a relationship with other-than-human people or, more to the point, they saw other-than-human people as relatives. Thus, sometimes the old Anishinaabe would address the sun as Grandfather. More than anything else, then, the Anishinaabe relationship with the world can be thought of as a familial one and, as we all know, family relationships are filled with delight and fraught with difficulty. The old Anishinaabe would have looked at trouble with the world, including its animals, in the same way family troubles would have been viewed. Maybe one would have difficulty with one's animal relatives for awhile, but the expectation was that the relationship would eventually return to normal. As an extreme manifestation of ill will, though, illness might result from bad relations with both human and non-human family members. But there were ways of dealing with even these types of extremes. In the end, the old Anishinaabe probably looked at other-than-human relatives in the same way they looked at their human relations. They probably loved them immensely and hated them passionately, often both at the same time! So, when we look at the moral attitudes and actions necessary for maintaining good relations with game animals, those attitudes and actions can be thought of as being little different from the same moral attitudes and actions necessary for human relations. And, as with human relatives, I suspect that at bottom the feeling that prevailed strongest was love. This love is what gave impetus to the old Anishinaabe to follow the dictates of *bimaadiziwin* in their relationship with game animals.

As mentioned above, one of the consequences of trouble with one's relatives, whether human or other-than-human, could be illness. Hallowell has discussed this topic in some detail in a number of publications. To summarize his basic argument, the goal of *bimaadiziwin* was a long and healthy life. Maintaining health, though, was a moral act. Good action promoted health

while immoral action could bring on sickness. Hallowell explores the way immoral actions could bring on sickness mainly by examining deviant sexual practices and the illness that results from engaging in those types of practices.[26]

The cure for violating sexual taboos, as Hallowell relates, usually involved public confession.[27] However, the main point in Hallowell's discussion of sex and sickness, and the manner in which immoral actions can bring on illness more generally, is that these types of illness can be cured by bringing oneself back into harmony with morality. So health and healing are directly related to the morality found in *bimaadiziwin,* as Hallowell observed.

In relation to health and sickness, it can also be argued that the Midewiwin, the most important religious society in Anishinaabe culture, is also based on the teaching of *bimaadiziwin.* The term *Midewiwin* is often translated as "Grand Medicine Society." It has as its chief function the healing of illness. The method by which the society achieves this aim is through initiation into the society itself. Many components go into the teachings surrounding the initiation process, including the use of herbal medicines and the migration stories of the Anishinaabe. However, one aspect of particular interest is the emphasis on teachings related to the proper conduct of life.[28] Since the goals of *bimaadiziwin* and the Midewiwin are essentially the same, it should come as no surprise that the teaching of *bimaadiziwin* should find its way into the Midewiwin.

Relationships with the dead hold a special place in Anishinaabe culture. Traditionally, the dead have been honored and, at the same time, kept at a safe distance. The funeral ceremonies of the Anishinaabe were directed toward safely removing the dead from the realm of the living. Having accomplished this task, the Anishinaabe preferred to maintain a discreet distance between the living and the dead.[29] To be sure, the Anishinaabe showed their respect for the dead, making offerings of food to the departed. However, the Anishinaabe also preferred not to have the dead lurking around the land of the living. They instead preferred the dead to remain in their own land.

The manner in which *bimaadiziwin* functions in Anishinaabe life helps explain Anishinaabe attitudes toward the dead. The goal of *bimaadiziwin* is one in which the dead cannot participate or contribute. In some respects, then, the dead do not have a living place in the religion of the Anishinaabe. Contrast this approach with that of the Hopi, where the ceremonial cycle very much keeps the dead present among the living. No, the teaching of *bimaadiziwin* and the role of the dead in Anishinaabe life simply do not mix. Due to the greater importance of *bimaadiziwin,* we can thus understand the place of the dead in Anishinaabe culture.

Having reviewed the concept of *bimaadiziwin* in the traditional culture, we may begin examining current Anishinaabe religion. At the onset of an investigation of *bimaadiziwin* for the modern Anishinaabe, it is first necessary to place the tradition within its historical context. It especially needs to be understood that the Anishinaabe, along with all Indians, are living in a postapocalyptic period. Larson has argued that Indians "have recently experienced the end of the world."[30] I agree with this assessment and have developed the theory in more detail elsewhere.[31] Postapocalypse theory is related to the notion of world building. Berger has argued that people build worlds;

that is, the physical environment is not simply a given.[32] Human beings have a low instinctual drive and do not structure the world. Instead, people find it necessary to construct their own order for the universe, in particular the world of social reality. The process of world construction is dynamic in nature. Thus, being raised in a social context, people are trained to see the world in a certain way. Being trained in that manner, people will on the one hand look for confirmation of that order and on the other actively construct the world to reflect given expectations.

Of course, the worlds humans create are inherently unstable. No one person is ever completely socialized into a given world. This leaves room for worlds to change from within. Outside forces can also cause a world to shake and even collapse. The latter was the experience of American Indians in general, especially in the early days of the reservation period in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The collapse of their respective worlds is what both Larson and I term an *apocalypse.* I have attempted to develop the theory more, however, specifically as encapsulated in the term *postapocalypse stress syndrome,* or PASS. At its simplest, PASS can be thought of as post traumatic stress disorder raised to the level of a cultural whole. The collapse of a world is an extremely traumatic event. An apocalypse may initiate a string of interconnected societal dysfunctions, including, but not limited to, desertion of previous religious practices; breakdown of family units; abandonment of productive employment; tendency toward fanatical forms of religious practice; increase in substance abuse and violence (especially domestic violence); a sense of despair; a loss of hope; and a sense of survivor's guilt on the part of those who remain standing. Interestingly, Europe went through these types of dysfunctions in the wake of the Bubonic Plague. The European experience teaches us that it takes about one hundred to one-hundred-and-fifty years for a society to recover from PASS.[33] If we date the beginning of PASS for Indians to 1900, the date at which the American Indian population reached its nadir, it can be seen that Indians are still in that process of recovery. The continued existence of such social dysfunctions as alcoholism, high unemployment, and domestic violence seem to confirm this observation. However, the difference between worlds and worldviews must be distinguished. To say that a world has collapsed does not necessarily mean the associated worldview has died as well. Instead, the argument being made is that the Anshinaabe are building a new world order, based in part on the worldview of the past. One important component of this process is *bimaadiziwin.*

An early example of the Anishinaabe preserving traditional cultural values in the wake of PASS can be found in Christian hymns translated into the Anishinaabe language early in the twentieth century. The Anishinaabe were not capitulating to the worldview of the Europeans, but were incorporating their own values into the hymns, and, by extension, their approach to Christianity. McNally has explored this issue in some detail, with one particularly relevant example involving the translations of these Anishinaabe Christian hymns into English.[34] As McNally writes,

> To carry the meaning of the central concept of salvation, translators chose the Ojibwe term bimaaji'iwewin, a word formed from the same

> root as *bimaadiziwin*. . . . For the many Ojibwes who still maintained that *bimaadiziwin* was the good life lived well in proper relationship to human and nonhuman persons, there was nothing in this world, per se, to be radically saved from. Ojibwe tradition values the cultivation of an awareness of one's interdependence in the web of life. The pervading presence of the term bimaadiziwin and related expressions suggests a prevalent concern with life in this broader sense in the religious thought of Ojibwe hymns.[35]

McNally goes on to provide an example from the Reginald Heber hymn, "From Greenland's Icy Mountain."[36] The original expresses the duty of individuals enlightened with the Christian message to help those who are "benighted." However, in translating the term "salvation," the term *bimaaji'iwewin* was used. As McNally explains, in this context, the fluent speaker of Anishinaabe would bring a set of associations informed by Anishinaabe values to the singing of the lyrics. Rather than seeing this world as something from which to escape, in Anishinaabe "[n]o modifier specifies that the life to be given in salvation is radically other than the current life."[37] As a term, *bimaaji'iwewin* also carries the sense of restoration. So one reading of the hymn might be, "Oh, that which restores the Circle of Life." Thus, salvation is not being interpreted as life in the body of Christ, salvation from sin, or the promise of life in heaven. Instead, the emphasis is again on life in this world, the natural world. The song celebrates those moral forces that sustain life in this world and, by doing so, it points to the goodness of life. The Anishinaabe hymn says this life is good. Valuing life in this manner is reflective of the attitudes inherent in the term *bimaadiziwin,* and, in using the exact term *bimaaji'iwewin,* the reflection of Anishinaabe morality becomes quite clear.

Another example, which McNally does not discuss, but which deserves attention, appears in the translation of the Issac Watts hymn "Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove."[38] Of particular interest is the phrase, "*oma aking ayayang,*" which can be translated "we here on earth." It should be noted that the original English does not contain this phrase, but instead reads, "In vain we strive to rise." Larry Cloud Morgan, a now-deceased Anishinaabe elder from the White Earth Reservation, had a telling commentary on the phrase "*oma aking ayayang.*" According to Cloud Morgan, the phrase is used often in Anishinaabe, and it has the sense that wherever one is on the earth, that is good enough, even if one is in jail. Simply to be alive is a great gift and as such it is a gift from the Creator to be alive no matter where one finds oneself. The phrase and the hymn speak to the importance of life, the importance of living, the importance of *bimaadiziwin.* In the end, what we see is a reformulation of European Christianity to fit the morality of the Anishinaabe, with that reformulation being especially informed by the concept of *bimaadiziwin.*

This reformulation of traditional morality works as well in the realm of myths, or, more specifically, myth telling. Suffice it to say that myths are still being told and the main character of Anishinaabe stories, Wenabozho, remains a vital character. It is true that in the modern age the serious side of Wenabozho has been developed to a greater extent than may have been the

case in the past. Today he is seen as a son of God, teacher of morality, and warrior against the forces of colonialism.[39] However, it is also true that many of the old stories are still told in which Wenabozho plays the role of the fool. In either case, serious or comical, one intent of the stories remains the same: moral teaching. As Overholt and Callicott have pointed out, in the traditional setting, Anishinaabe myths taught such values as self-control, generosity, and respect.[40] All those values are still conveyed in the telling of myths today. Layered on top of that, however, would be lessons pertinent to the changing realities of Anishinaabe life, most especially in relation to the effects of PASS. In that regard, Wenabozho is now seen as a son of God. A culture going through PASS faces the challenge of rebuilding its world. Complicating the task for the Anishinaabe, as for other Indians, is the fallout from PASS, including, as mentioned above, an increase in substance abuse and domestic violence. It takes a strong cultural figure to deal with these challenges. This is one reason Wenabozho is now conceived as a son of God by some Anishinaabe. Being the son of God gives Wenabozho stature in assisting traditional Anishinaabe religious leaders as they go about the hard work of rebuilding the Anishinaabe world and dealing with the effects of PASS. However, in taking on this role as rebuilder of the Anishinaabe world—a role Wenabozho has played before in Anishinaabe myths—the moral system being employed has not changed over time. If anything, the ethos conveyed in the myths has intensified. Thus, if self-control is taught, it is not simply control of one's anger, but control of one's violent actions. The type of morality taught when the stories were told in the old days was, of course, in harmony with *bimaadiziwin*. If the system of morality taught when the stories are told today has intensified, it is not because the teaching of *bimaadiziwin* has dwindled, but because it has actually grown stronger.

The teaching of *bimaadiziwin* in both oral and written form has continued into the modern age among various religious leaders. Thomas Shingobe worked in the oral tradition before his death in 1978 and was a fourth-degree Mide priest in the Midewiwin, or Grand Medicine Society. Although the number of degrees of initiation vary, usually between four and eight, it is generally recognized that the fourth degree is the highest attainable.[41] Thus, Shingobe had reached the pinnacle in the Midewiwin, and so was more than qualified to speak on Anishinaabe religious matters. Before his death, he was an especially influential religious leader in the Anishinaabe community in Minneapolis, being called upon to serve at naming ceremonies and other rituals, and often being consulted by individuals in the community on religious matters. In his teachings to me, he emphasized two matters in particular. The first was the spiritual nature of the world. As he expressed it, "The whole world is spiritualized." In true oral tradition, he did not expound on the meaning of this observation, leaving it to me, his listener, to contemplate its meaning privately. We should not be fooled by the seeming simplicity of this comment. Teachers in the oral tradition often will take the most complicated notions and boil them down to their pure essence. This seems to have been the case with Shingobe's teaching on the spiritual nature of the world. A second teaching Shingobe often emphasized was

what he called, "the proper conduct of life."[42] Since the Anishinaabe do not have a set of commandments as in the Judeo-Christian tradition or a list of recommendations as in the Eight-Fold Path of Buddhism, the teaching of the proper conduct of life among the Anishinaabe tends to be impressionistic, acquired through the telling of stories, most especially those related to the teacher own life's. In the case of Shingobe, several things stand out, most of which were related to dealing with the effects of PASS, although he did not actually use the term or concept. Shingobe conveyed the importance of dealing with substance abuse. He also taught that the Creator had two sons, Jesus Christ and Wenabozho. As a well-established religious teacher, Shingobe's views on Wenabozho need to be taken seriously. His comments, then, helped reconfigure Wenabozho and the myths associated with him. Conducting various ceremonies, such as naming ceremonies, and relating myths also helped to keep those traditions alive. In combining his teaching about Wenabozho as the son of God, and his storytelling, he communicated his interpretation of the moral system and worldview of the Anishinaabe to a younger generation.

Another teacher concerned with the younger generation is Edward Benton-Banai. In 1988 he wrote a work entitled *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* to be used at the Little Red School House in St. Paul.[43] The curriculum of the school is intended to immerse Indian children in Indian language and culture. Benton-Banai's work covers various facets of Anishinaabe culture, including myths, ceremonies, and history. His presentation of the earth-diver myth is of special interest. He states the Creator flooded the land to punish the people for being violent. This seems to differ from traditional accounts of the story in which the flood occurs because Wenabozho killed the water monster, Michibizhii, whose followers inundate the land in revenge. Benton-Banai may have changed the story to help the Anishinaabe deal the societal violence which often accompanies PASS.[44] The book also covers rituals of the Midewiwin and the sweat lodge, and the concomitant paraphernalia, such as the pipe and drum. In addition to his lessons on the evils of violence, Benton-Banai also stresses the importance of remaining in harmony with creation. This is a theme he returns to again and again. But for our purposes here, perhaps the section of greatest interest concerns the teachings of the Midewiwin. Benton-Banai relates how a young boy was given a gift by each of seven grandfathers.[45] The gifts, as it turned out, were instructions, as follows:

1. To cherish knowledge is to know **WISDOM.**
2. To know LOVE is to know peace.
3. To honor all of the Creation is to have **RESPECT.**
4. **BRAVERY** is to face the foe with integrity.
5. **HONESTY** in facing a situation is to be brave.
6. **HUMILITY** is to know yourself as a sacred part of the Creation.
7. **TRUTH** is know all of these things.[46]

Benton-Banai later adds that the instructions of the Grandfathers included the admonition to maintain a strong physical body. Further, the vision quest, fasting, dreaming, and meditation were all ways to seek out knowledge of the spirit world.

An examination of Benton-Banai's writing could continue. However, the above is enough to establish the degree to which Benton-Banai strives to preserve the Anishinaabe moral system and worldview for the younger generation. As to be expected, his teaching includes many of the elements already discussed, such as respect for creation and the importance of nonviolence. Interestingly, he also provides encouragement for the younger generation in rebuilding the world of the Anishinaabe, in dealing with the effects of PASS, although he does not use that concept explicitly. Certainly, however, there is an implicit understanding of PASS in his work. He writes of the seven fires, with each fire representing a generation.[47] The traditions of the Anishinaabe decline with each passing fire until there is a revival by the time of the seventh fire. He wonders if the young generation may represent the seventh fire. He recognizes that the traditions have changed. However, he seems to express confidence that the basic teachings of the Anishinaabe have survived and, although he does not use the term explicitly, there is the sense that the moral system of the Anishinaabe as represented by *bimaadiziwin* still has an important role to play in Anishinaabe life.

Other members of the Anishinaabe community are teaching *bimaadiziwin* through their writings as well. One example is the environmental activist, Winona LaDuke. In her book, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life,* she examines the state of reservation life among various Indian nations today, including a chapter on her home reservation in Minnesota, White Earth.[48] The discussion on the White Earth Anishinaabe ends with a section on *minobimaadiziwin.*[49] LaDuke refers to the concept as a lifeway which has "sustained a community for generations," and comments on how the word is used in blessings, thanksgivings, and ceremonies.[50] Following Anishinaabe tradition, however, she refrains from providing an exact definition of the good life. Instead, she offers examples of living individuals who survive primarily by following the traditional practices of hunting, fishing, gathering wild rice, and making maple syrup. For LaDuke, then, *bimaadiziwin* means living in harmony with the natural cycles of life in the north woods of Minnesota, thus stressing that aspect of the good life marked by environmental morality.

The modern Anishinaabe are also taking it upon themselves to learn *bimaadiziwin* individually by fasting. I use the term *fast* because, although it is related to the vision quest of old, for some Anishinaabe the purpose has changed over the years, having been altered instead into a spiritual exercise. One of my second cousins, Devery Fairbanks, fasts in the woods on a fairly regular basis. As he explained it to me, one of the main purposes of the fasts is to learn humility and respect for the earth. When one is fasting in the woods without any food or water for days, one gains a very real appreciation for food and water and, by extension, for the earth in general. As mentioned previously, respect for nature in general is a traditional value of the Anishinaabe and an important component of *bimaadiziwin.* As such, the type of ritual fast carried out by my second cousin continues to be informed by traditional Anishinaabe values.[51]

Bimaadiziwin continues to inform Anishinaabe life in other areas as well. One particularly fascinating manifestation of this phenomenon is the board game, Minobimaadiziwin: A Good Way of Life. The game was originally devel-

oped by the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe in conjunction with the Institute for Social and Behavioral Research at Iowa State University and with a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. The copyright on the game is 1999, making it especially relevant for discussion here. The game is part of a larger effort on the part of the Mille Lacs Band to develop methods for fighting substance abuse based on traditional Anishinaabe morality. The fact that the game was developed by a given group of Anishinaabe makes this board game especially significant. In creating an original game, the developers had an opportunity to express what they thought was important to their culture, especially in regard to the Anishinaabe value system since the game is intended to teach morality. The game was also developed to help fight substance abuse. Given the acuteness of that concern, the developers must have been highly motivated to include the values of the greatest importance to the Anishinaabe. So, even though on the surface this appears to be a simple board game, the interest informing its development makes it an especially valuable resource for examining the present-day state of the Anishinaabe system of morality. As such, it should not be dismissed lightly, but instead deserves especially close scrutiny.

Given the history of the game, it is not surprising that the values inherent in *bimaadiziwin* permeate its every aspect. The game's "Outline and Rules" make specific the intentions of the game, with the "Goals" portion reading,

> The goals of the game are many. You are supposed to have fun while using the game as a learning tool. Some specific game design goals through encouraged discussion are: 1. To reinforce the importance of Anishinaabe values; 2. To recognize we all make mistakes; 3. To learn from our mistakes and continue with our lives on the good path; 4. To recognize students and parents have much in common; 5. To learn and recognize there are consequences to our actions and behaviors; 6. To recognize there are rewards to living the good way of life; and 7. To stress the importance of being members of strong Ojibwe families and communities.[52]

Of especial interest are numbers two and three. One of the functions of myth telling among the traditional Anishinaabe was teaching self-forgiveness.[53] Whenever Wenabozho makes a mistake, he says, "There's another foolish thing my aunts and uncles can do." We, of course, are Wenabozho's aunts and uncles. In essence, the myths teach that we all make mistakes. The important thing is not to dwell on them, but to learn from them and move on. This is a factor of *bimaadiziwin,* and the inclusion of self-forgiveness as an explicit aspect of this game points to the continued relevance of Anishinaabe values today.

The board is laid out in seven stages from infancy to old age. The object of the game is to move through all seven stages. Along the way, there are two types of spaces, one for cards and the other with various types of statements. For the purposes of this study, only the cards will be considered. There are two types of cards: Tomahawk (negative symbol) and Medicine Wheel (value sym-

bol). Some of the negative symbols, or mistakes that one can make, include the following:

> I lose a turn and get "the look" for being lazy
> I move back 2 spaces for being on "Indian Time"
> I have been wasteful. I lose a turn and must pick up all of the garbage at the table.
> I move back 1 space for not handling my anger well.
> I have to stand up and spin 3 times in a circle for being foolish.

The negative cards offers a variety of ways one can stray from the good life. As the examples above show, there is a mixture of cards drawing from traditional ways and modern concerns. Not being wasteful is a long-held value of the Anishinaabe, and spinning in a circle is reminiscent of the foolish activities of Wenabozho. The old Anishinaabe were hard workers, but one effect of PASS is being thrown out of gainful employment, thus the concern with laziness, being late, or being on "Indian time." The issue of anger has been discussed numerous times already, and the example given above simply adds to the weight of evidence showing just how concerned the Anishinaabe are about that issue.

By the same token, some of the Medicine Wheel, or value cards, include:

> I get 2 free spaces for living *A Good Way of Life.*
> I get a free space for playing with children.
> I get a free space for being on time for something.
> I get a free space for having **respect for all life**.
> I get a free space and a round of applause for having a s**ense of humor**.
> I get 2 free spaces and a handshake for spending time with an elder.
> I get a free space for having **patience**.

Some of these value cards stand in relation to the negative cards discussed above, and include the examples of being on time to combat laziness and having patience to deal with violence. Others flow out of traditional values, such as having respect for all life and living a good way of life. The others are more interesting in their own right. Playing with children and receiving a handshake for spending time with an elder point to the importance of being in a community. The relation stretches in all directions, from the very youngest to the very oldest. The handshake is especially interesting in that it provides physical reinforcement during play for the value being encouraged. It is also significant that the importance of having a sense of humor returns in the value cards. It seems as if the developers very much wanted to make sure the game teaches humor. There also seems to be an emphasis on teaching the correct type of humor. So it is not enough to simply be foolish. One gets rewarded for having a sense of humor appealing to other people, as evidenced in the round of applause accompanying the card. The healing effects of humor are recognized, and are thus seen as an important component of *bimaadiziwin.*

Of course, the individual who completes all seven stages is the winner. As the "Outline and Rules" point out, "Your prize is learning you are never alone." Be that as it may, there may be another result of the game as well. If one thinks about it seriously, the game ends with the end of life. In other words, completing all seven stages implies that one has come to the end of life, and dies. On the surface, this might not seem like a gratifying way to end a game. On the other hand, having finished the game, one can look back at the sweep of human life, and realize there is a circle to life, and that the time for death will come for all of us. The question is, How can one best prepare for that eventuality? This game, teaching as it does the importance of *bimaadiziwin,* communicates that the best way to prepare for death is through living a good life. This affective part of the game may be its most important component.

The evidence presented for *bimaadiziwin* as it exists for the Anishinaabe today may have seemed a bit unusual, incorporating as it did a children's book and children's board game. However, this is just the kind of evidence that should be considered. The evidence presented above illustrates how Anishinaabe values operate on the ground, in a manner of speaking, in the real lives of current day Anishinaabe. Added to the other evidence, it becomes clear that today, as in the past, *bimaadiziwin* informs the value system and worldview of the Anishinaabe. It is true that the teaching may have declined during the last century, especially during the middle decades of the last century. When considering the reality of PASS, however, such a decline is not only understandable, but also to be expected. As it stands, though, Anishinaabe culture is learning to deal with the effects of PASS. One of the mechanisms by which it is doing so is by drawing on the value system of the traditional culture, especially as represented by *bimaadiziwin.* As we have seen, there have been some surface changes, such as reformulation of the vision quest into a ritual fast. However, even writers such as Benton-Banai acknowledged that such changes are to be expected. In the end, outside observers should not be fooled. The river running underneath Anishinaabe culture, connecting the worldview and value system of today's Anishinaabe with their ancestors, has not dried up. In order to understand Anishinaabe culture as a continuous phenomenon, we must look underneath the surface. There we will find that one unifying concept for the Anishinaabe, yesterday, today, and tomorrow, is *bimaadiziwin.*

NOTES

1. The term *religion* remains controversial in its application to the Anishinaabe. As one Anishinaabe, Erma Vizenor, has stated, "We do not have a religion. We have a way of life." In this article, the term *religion* should be understood as referring to the lifeway of the Anishinaabe.
2. *Old Anishinaabe* refers to the Anishinaabe of the pre-reservation period.
3. Postapocalypse should be understood as the end of a world, not the end of time.
4. The term *myths* is being used here in the sense of sacred stories, as opposed to the everyday stories which comprise an additional segment of Anshinaabe storytelling.

5. Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 144–149.

6. Ibid., 148.

7. Christopher Vecsey, *Traditional Ojibwa Religion and Its Historical Changes* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983), 100.

8. Shepard Krech III, ed., *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade: A Critique of* Keepers of the Game (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1981).

9. Charles A. Bishop, "Northeastern Indian Concepts of Conservation and the Fur Trade: A Critique of Calvin Martin's Thesis," in Shepard Krech III, ed., *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade: A Critique of* Keepers of the Game (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 1981), 39–58.

10. Ibid., 43.

11. A. Irving Hallowell, "Sin, Sex, and Sickness in Saulteaux Belief," *The British Journal of Medical Psychology* 18 (1939): 191–197; id., "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in Stanley Diamond, ed., *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 19–52; id., "Ojibwa World View and Disease," in Iago Galdston, ed., *Man's Image in Medicine and Anthropology* (New York: International Universities Press, 1963), 258–315; id., "Psychosexual Adjustment, Personality, and the Good Life in a Nonliterate Culture," in *Culture and Experience* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1988), 291–305.

12. Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," 45. *Pîmädäzîwin,* as rendered by Hallowell, is one dialectal pronunciation of the term. I prefer the pronunciation more common to my area of investigation in central and northern Minnesota.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 46.

15. A. Irving Hallowell, "Psychosexual Adjustment, Personality, and the Good Life in a Nonliterate Culture," 294.

16. Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game,* 69–93.

17. Thomas W. and J. Baird Callicott Overholt, *Clothed-in-Fur and Other Tales: An Introduction to an Ojibwa World View* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), 151–152.

18. Theresa S. Smith, *The Island of the Anishnaabeg: Thunderers and Water Monsters in the Traditional Ojibwe Life-World* (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1995), 24.

19. Wenabozho, of course, goes by a number of names, including Nanabush, Nanabozho, Manabush, Manabozho, etc.

20. Vecsey, *Traditional Ojibwa Religion,* 94–98; Christopher Vecsey and John F. Fisher, "The Ojibwa Creation Myth: An Analysis of Its Structure and Content," *Temenos* 20 (1984): 66–100.

21. Lawrence W. Gross, "The Liberating and Healing Power of the Trickster: A Case Study of Nanabush in the Anishinaabe Tradition" (2000), 14–15.

22. Vecsey, *Traditional Ojibwa Religion,* 121–143.

23. Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," 46.

24. Ibid., 30–34.

25. Martin, *Keepers of the Game,* 129–130.

26. Hallowell, "Psychosexual Adjustment, Personality, and the Good Life in a Nonliterate Culture," 295.

27. Ibid., 294.
28. Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Customs* (n.p. Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1979), 87.
29. Ruth Landes, *Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 87–88; W. J. Hoffman, "The Midê'wiwin or 'Grand Medicine Society,'" in J. W. Powell, ed., *Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1885–'86* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891), 278–281.
30. Sidner Larson, *Captured in the Middle: Tradition and Experience in Contemporary Native American Writing* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 18.
31. Gross, "The Liberating and Healing Power of the Trickster," 14–15.
32. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967), 3–51.
33. William H. McNeill, *Plagues and People* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), 161–165.
34. Michael D. McNally, *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61–63.
35. Ibid., 61.
36. Ibid., 62–63.
37. Ibid., 62.
38. Ibid., 59.
39. Gross, "The Liberating and Healing Power of the Trickster," 17–18.
40. Callicott and Overholt, *Clothed-in-Fur and Other Tales*, 151–152.
41. W. J. Hoffman, "The Midê'wiwin or 'Grand Medicine Society,'" 164; Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Customs*, 90; Ruth Landes, *Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin*, 52; Selwyn Dewdney, *The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 111.
42. Although Shingobe never gave me the Anishinaabe word he intended by the term, "proper conduct of life," it is clear to me he meant *bimaadiziwin*. It should be noted, then, that no single translation of *bimaadiziwin* seems to suffice. For example, *mino-bimaasiziwin* can be understood as "continuous rebirth." This issue of translation further points to the complexity of the term.
43. Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (St. Paul, MN: Red School House, 1988).
44. Gross, "The Liberating and Healing Power of the Trickster," 16–17.
45. Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book*, 64.
46. Ibid., 66.
47. Ibid., 89–93.
48. Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 115–134.
49. Ibid., 132–134.
50. Ibid., 134.
51. It will be noted that the vision quest in its more traditional form continues for other Anishinaabe.
52. Minobimaadiziwin: A Good Way of Life is copyrighted by the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, which may be contacted at: 43408 Ocdena Drive, Onamia, Minnesota 56359. Their web address is http://www.millelacsojibwe.org.
53. Gross, "The Liberating and Healing Power of the Trickster," 11.