



# **People of the Circle, People of the Four Directions: A Gathering of Native American Prayers, Rituals, and Traditions**

*Fr. Scott McCarthy*

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People of the Circle, People of the Four Directions explores the common spiritual symbols of the Native People of North and South America. Drawing on poems, stories, ceremonies, and ethnological writings, Scott McCarthy gives examples of the use of circles, the four directions, and the number four, both individually and in combination, as common themes that run through all the Native cultures of the Americas. The ceremonies and lifeways presented here will encourage a sharing and understanding between cultures, as cultures meet, sometimes colliding, sometimes entwining. "Without a sense of the Creator's presence, it would be difficult for many human beings to comprehend life." Picture the following scenarios: A Spanish soldier or Franciscan friar sometime shortly after the invasion of Mexico and an Aztec merchant: As they "size up" each other, what are the religious symbols that each wears to express a particular spirituality? A mid-nineteenth-century settler living in Wyoming greets some Cheyenne visitors at his homestead: What might be the content of their individual prayers later that night? Prayers for understanding, protection? Modern-day tourists passing through the Black Hills area, visit Bear Butte State Park (a huge mountain rising above the plains that was, and is, an ancient place of worship for several tribes) and are surprised to see and hear Sioux and Cheyenne vision questers praying and singing as they are sequestered among the bushes, trees, and rocky mountain ledges: Some are praying, others are simply enjoying the outdoors. Do they share any aspects of spirituality?

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