

Time of Transition

Mineral wealth is altering tribal patterns. Presbyterians—through education, medicine, and the Word of God—are smoothing the path from the nineteenth century to contemporary culture

by Janette T. Harrington

with photographs by Joseph M. Elkins

Navahos. In the wind also is a giant Federal government dam project, on the order of Coolidge Dam, which would enormously improve agricultural prospects.

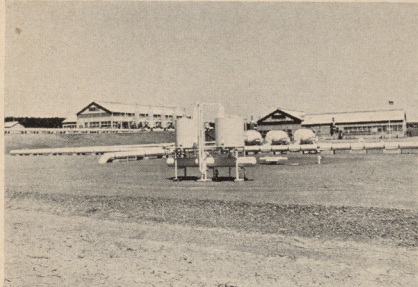
Meanwhile, signs of "prosperity" among individual Navahos are meager, unless one counts the aqua-blue trucks. Yet the creeping infiltration of the great outside world is evident in startling ways. Sheepherders often carry transistor radios to while away time. In spots, some astonishingly modern, \$500, two-room plywood houses made available by the tribal council flank, but do not yet supplant, the old-type hogans.

At the new civic center on the road to Window Rock, Guy Lombardo played a concert not long ago. The stunning, modern-style building is one of four or five being put up across the reservation as centers for community activities. This one has featured, in the last few months, sports events, various meetings, and dances, not Indian-style, but the rock-and-roll variety. There are about forty smaller chapter houses.

At one of the public schools, we heard a seventh-grade class of girls and boys in colorful cottons and slacks give a choral reading of modern poetry. The rhythmic reading, their teacher said, helps build a familiarity with English sorely needed by youngsters whose families still speak Navaho. Until a few years ago, not many Navahos were able to attend school. In recent years, however, the government has built, on or off the reservation, enough elementary and boarding



Modern prefabricated house, costing \$500 and financed through tribal council, stands beside traditional hogan.



Natural gas, transported to customers in California by modern pumping stations, has helped raise tribal income.



At Window Rock, Arizona, cars of tourists mingle with those of tribe attending meeting in council headquarters.

THE NAVAHOS: TIME OF TRANSITION

schools to put 30,000 Navaho children in classrooms—a 343 per cent increase in schooling since 1946. The only children left out—about 8 per cent—live too far away from the schools.

The low-built brick public school down the road from Canado, built with Federal funds but operated by a local school board with Federal per diem payments made through the state for each student, is typical of stepped-up education on the reservation.

INEVITABLY, the many changes affect Presbyterian work. Churchmen are aware of what some not-yet-assimilated transitions are doing to the Navahos. The Navaho is caught between the old ways of the reservation and the new American customs. Recently, for example, a man who died was being given a Christian burial when the sound of shots punctuated the prayers. Over the brow of the hill, relatives had shot his horse so his personal belongings would not be around to invite ghosts. Religious leaders on the reservation are vastly concerned about the growing consumption of alcohol, and about a sizable native religious group which spiritualizes the use of peyote, a drug made from cactus.

Dr. William D. Spining, medical director of the Presbyterian mission hospital at Canado and the Tselani clinic, now counts automobile accidents the foremost cause of death on the reservation. He reports that the staff was never busier; the newly acquired automobiles have vastly increased the number of outpatients.

Fifty miles west of Gallup, New Mexico, is the most extensive United Presbyterian mission on the reservation. A church, school, and hospital are all located at Canado, Arizona. Seven other mission churches are located in the Arizona towns of Fort Defiance, Chinle, Indian Wells, Kayenta, Tuba City, Leupp, and Dennehotso, in addition to a congregation across the state line in Oljato, Utah. In every church, members are con-

ducting religious education classes and carrying on evangelism through visits and meetings in homes.

Canado superintendent Joseph A. Poncel and school principal Arthur Dodd say that the decline in the need to fill educational gaps places a different emphasis on the mission-school program. The mission's lower grades have been dropped, and there is less preliminary training to be done when students enroll. Now largely high school and college preparatory, the school makes a concentrated effort to discover young people of ability and encourage them to work toward challenging goals.

Out of the 1960 graduating class of thirty, about half of whom were Navaho, twenty-nine elected to continue their education—in college or nurses' training school, in commercial work or some other specialty. Ten applied for tribal scholarships available to youngsters of potential who agree to give two years' service to their people after graduation.

Still needed is a balance wheel to steady the transition of these young people into contemporary American life. Some children from Navaho-speaking homes find it difficult to achieve an adequate skill in English usage, without which they are handicapped as adults. Fluency in English, therefore, is given priority by mission school teachers.

Another is common-sense briefing in American romantic customs, totally alien and morally confusing to the old-time Navaho. A list of dating procedures posted on the bulletin board of each dormitory spells out the do's and don'ts for Canado boys and girls.

Fundamental to all United Presbyterian programs is a sense of spiritual urgency. Many ancient and some new religious rites are practiced on the reservation; the medicine man is still trusted. For the Navahos the swift change from Indian ways to contemporary culture is a difficult one at best. The doctors in the hospital, the ministers, lay workers, teachers, and evangelists have a common goal: to introduce a stabilizing influence into the Indians' lives through a meaningful Christian faith.

The Navahos:



Centuries-old scene: A Navaho shepherd follows his flock. Many Indians now carry transistor radios to pass the long hours.

A first-time visitor's impression of the Navaho reservation, I suppose, is that here time stands still. Driving along, sooner or later you see a slow-moving flock of sheep drifting across the road. Walking beside the flock is a Navaho woman in nineteenth-century wrist-and-ankle-length dress. Off against the hills, barely distinguishable against the brown-red earth and knee-high brush, are the same six-sided hogans, floorless, windowless, and plumbingless, that have seemingly forever been Navaho homes.

But astonishing changes lie in wait, as this photographer-writer team found out after a lapse of five years between visits to the reservation. We had our first surprise when we stopped by the tribal headquarters at Window Rock, in the lee of its towering red sandstone name plate. A neatly dressed Navaho offered us a map of the reservation. To get it, he dug into the back of his car, a Mercedes-Benz.

Only a few years ago, a horse and wagon, or a horse and saddle, carried the Navahos over mud-rutted roads. On our last trip, pick-up trucks were beginning to be common. Now all the pick-ups seemed a startling shade of robin's egg blue, and new modern roads cut through the piñon- and pine-covered hills from Gallup to Ganado. In fact, modern highways now span the reservation, which covers 25,000 square miles in the northeast corner of Arizona, overlapping into Utah and New Mexico.

We passed dazzling new pumping stations built, we were told, to carry natural gas to California. The gas, an unexpected by-product of oil explorations, yields a tidy income both from sale of the fuel and rental of the land crossed by the pipeline. It seemed incredible to see bright signs of prosperity in a land which had so long been dreadfully impoverished. Oil, gas, uranium, timber, and other never-before-realized resources were over night yielding returns from the same arid ground that so long denied the Navahos a living. These newly discovered resources are bringing an air of expectancy to the whole reservation.

"Now that we have money, everybody loves the poor Navaho," remarked a Presbyterian member of the tribal council, in a wry reference to years of governmental neglect. Some of the tribe would like the proceeds, which amount to several million dollars, to be divided up individually. But this would come out to only about \$800 or \$1,000 a head. The present council restricts the use of funds to purposes that will benefit the whole community. Included are four handsomely modern motels at scattered points on the reservation; the new tribal park and observatory at Monument Valley; a new wood-processing plant and sawmill. Funds are allocated for the Navaho needy, for infant layettes and clothes for school children. Perhaps most impressive of all is the \$10,000,000 scholarship fund to provide college and professional education for promising young

PRESBYTERIAN LIFE

A JOURNAL OF PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY

CONTINUING *The Presbyterian*
AND
The United Presbyterian

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THE COVER: Edward Hicks painted some one hundred versions of "The Peaceable Kingdom" between 1820 and 1849 in an attempt to interpret Isaiah's prophecy (see page 24). Some students of folk art see a remarkable resemblance between the portrait of Hicks (right) painted by his cousin Thomas and all the Peaceable Kingdom lions, which age from painting to painting as Hicks himself grows older. The other animals are ageless. The cover painting, dated 1830-40, depicts a middle-aged lion. The lion above is from a "Kingdom" dated 1847, two years before Hicks's death.

Diagnosis: Polio (P.L., Nov. 29, 1952) was Joanne Thompson's story of postponing her wedding while she battled infantile paralysis. Now Pfarrfrau Walter Dennig, Joanne has written a happy sequel, **A Hyphen for Minnesota-Germany**.

Will the Church Lose the College Generation? is the first of two articles on the Church's program for college-age students. The author, Presbyterian minister Robert K. Kelley, recently completed his doctoral studies at the University of Southern California.

The names of Janette T. Harrington (see **The Navahos: Time of Transition**) and Elwyn A. Smith (see **The True Meaning of Piety**) are not new to P.L. readers. Miss Harrington is the Board of National Missions Secretary for Press and Publications. Dr. Smith is Professor of Church History at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

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Navaho women in nineteenth-century dress glimpse one of tribe's newest members through nursery window of hospital.

NOVEMBER 15, 1960

Outmoded and artificial religious practices
are keeping many people away from the Church.
We need to recover

the true meaning

An Oxford student recently remarked that he could tell the social standing of an Englishman the minute he opened his mouth. That seemed to be the view of Rex Harrison in the charming song from *My Fair Lady* in which he complained: "Why cahn't the English learn . . . to . . . speak?"

People constantly betray themselves by the ways they choose to say ordinary things. For example, what do you make of a fellow who bids you good-by by saying: "God bless you, brother"? It must be admitted that the idea of the phrase is sound. It is actually a prayer that God will prosper us, and it acknowledges that we are not strangers or aliens to one another but beloved brothers. It means all this, that is to say, if it is meant seriously. But "God bless you, brother" sounds phony to a lot of people just the same. Even if we meet a man once in a while who *will* act as a brother to us, it remains true that the phrase has been so badly abused that it sounds like glib "piosity."

That, in fact, is what has gone wrong with Christian piety. Not just the religious phrases, but even the religious conduct of an earlier time, have been abandoned by many church people. One of the first things to go was Sabbath-keeping. Perhaps some changes in Sunday habits were bound to come, although one wonders if we are better off since Ed Sullivan's trained-dog acts follow Sunday evening services. Is it really good and right that piety should have all but disappeared; and that what remains of it is so objectionable to so many serious people?

The heart of true piety is prayer. If the practice of prayer is strong among Christians, the Church's sense of the presence of God is vigorous. But when prayer is neither clearly understood nor faithfully practiced, all the moral rules and theological beliefs in the world cannot make a man truly religious. If prayer is an index of our religion, how do things stand with us?

That, of course, is a question for every church mem-

ber to answer for himself. There are many kinds of prayer: formal prayers in the worship service or at the table; spontaneous prayers, as when we pray about some special concern such as sickness or danger or an important examination at school. Among many people only formal types of prayer survive—a formula at meals, recitation of the confessions in the church, and perhaps an adult revised version of "Now I lay me." It would be interesting to know how many Protestants utter a fully personal prayer in a year's time. Perhaps a considerable number do; but often it consists of asking for things or seeking relief from worry. These are legitimate enough as a part of prayer, but they do not exhaust its purpose. Prayer is one of man's responses to God, and it flows very naturally from a heart that is deeply moved by the splendor of God and therefore accustomed to praise him. Those who have not yet known God often find prayer difficult, even embarrassing. Nevertheless, men and women who have not learned to pray should begin in any way they can, remembering that God, like the father of the prodigal, has already proved his patience and is willing to receive anyone who has clearly decided to return.

A vast scaffolding of outmoded and sometimes even cheap piety has driven many serious people away from American religion, along with others who are looking for an excuse to ignore the churches. But the larger problem is that there has arisen no strong and authentic piety that answers to the needs and circumstances of modern life. Even many able ministers seem to be lacking here. They are courageous on social issues; they are theologically informed; they are realists. We value their judgment on practical problems of Christian living, but we are not sure that they have much acquaintance with prayer. The ministry in this century has found itself at a number of points—but what about its piety? For every book written on prayer, there is a score of much better books on ethics. Examination of