

CHANGING FAITHS

The Jesuit Missions to the Lakota Sioux at the Turn of the Twentieth
Century

By
Ruth Kinsey

Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of History of Vanderbilt University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Honors in History

May 2011

On the basis of this thesis
defended by the candidate on
May 2, 2011 we, the
undersigned, recommend that the
candidate be awarded
Honors
in History:

David W. Ulrich
Beth A. Cooklin
Richard R. Chitt

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	I
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: Jesuits on the Plains: The Founding of the Lakota Missions.....	9
CHAPTER 2: Being Catholic and Lakota: The Work of the Lakota Catechists	26
CHAPTER 3: The Mixing and Adaptation of Religions.....	43
CONCLUSION	56
APPENDIX	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY	64

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank everyone who made this senior thesis possible, particularly the Vanderbilt History Department, who awarded me the Gertrude Casebier Research Grant, so I could travel to Milwaukee, WI, to carry out research at the Marquette University Archives. Without this trip and the valuable documents I found there, this thesis may never have been achieved.

I am also incredibly grateful to everyone who has read my thesis along the road to its completion, particularly Professors Daniel Usner, Richard Blackett, and Edward Wright-Rios, whose encouragement and guidance from the initial to the final level helped me to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and a more succinct writing style. In this regard, I would also like to thank Professor Beth Conklin, who agreed to be the third reader of the final product.

Thanks must also go to Mark Thiel, the archivist at Marquette University, who spent many hours in the archives with me, finding and deciphering different documents. Also my gratitude goes to historian Father Michael Steltenkamp, who for an entire morning, sat and discussed my subject matter with me and answered many of my questions.

Finally my thanks must go to my friends and family, who have read and reread my paper on countless occasions.

INTRODUCTION

In 1992, at the age of eighty-six, Harry Blue Thunder, a Brulé Sioux from the Rosebud reservation of South Dakota took a flight to Boston with his family to receive the Lumen Christi award. This prize is given annually by the Catholic Extension to those who have done outstanding missionary work in either a poor or remote area of the United States, and was given to Blue Thunder in appreciation and recognition of his sixty years of service as a Catholic catechist on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. For Blue Thunder, however, this honor was particularly special as he was the first lay Catholic to ever win the award. After being presented the prize by Cardinal Joseph Bernadin of Chicago, Blue Thunder gave a short speech. In this speech, he spoke not only of the work he had done and the hardships he had faced, but also about the joys he had felt and shared with the other ninety-five native catechists who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, worked tirelessly to bring the Catholic faith to the Lakota people. He declared that the honor should not only be given to him but to all the catechists, who had worked hard for a cause and a faith they believed in, bringing a higher level of understanding of spiritual life to both the Lakota and the Jesuit missionaries on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations.¹

This story shows that the work the Jesuits and their native catechist counterparts did on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations was important and had a lasting effect. For sixty years Harry Blue Thunder, and other men like him worked not only to convert his fellow Lakota but also to show them it was possible to live fruitfully as a Catholic without forgetting or rejecting their Sioux heritage. As the catechists worked and learned from the Jesuit missionaries about

¹ "Harry Blue Thunder, Sr. – 1992 Lumen Christi Award winner dies." *West River Catholic – Online Edition*, July 2005. http://www.rapidcitydiocese.org/westrivercatholic/2005/July/6_BlueThunder.htm (accessed January 16, 2011)

Catholicism, the Lakotas also taught the Jesuits about their culture, and how to live and survive in South Dakota. This relationship, the Catholic Lakotas, and the work of the Jesuit missionaries and native catechists on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations of South Dakota are the focus of the following study.

From its very beginnings, Christianity has been a religion spread by missionaries. Jesus Christ walked, preached and died among the Jews of the Holy Land; at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and gave them the gift of tongues, instructing them to spread the word of God to those ignorant of his message; St. Paul was sent to and lived in Antioch, Galatia, Ephesus, Corinth and Rome teaching and instructing people in Christian beliefs. Despite having to immerse themselves in a foreign culture and constantly being viewed as different, Christians have always travelled to spread the word of God because spreading the Gospel is one of the key characteristics of Christianity. It is simply what the Bible calls Christians to do.

It is for that reason that in 1886, Fr. John Jutz, a Jesuit missionary, founded the St. Francis mission on the Rosebud reservation, and then later in 1888 established the Holy Rosary Mission on the Pine Ridge reservation. He, and the other missionaries, felt it was their duty to spread the word of God to the Native Americans, even if it was in the face of great opposition.

The nineteenth century saw the peak of anti-Catholic activity in the United States. On account of the large numbers of European Catholic immigrants, particularly from Ireland and Germany, much of the American populace feared the power of Catholics and questioned their loyalty. Would these newcomers be loyal to the President and their new country or would they be loyal to the Pope and Rome? Although the swathes of immigrants mostly settled in large cities, the missionaries and priests on the frontier also experienced this discrimination. Reams of anti-Catholic literature were published, declaring the priests to be rabble-rousers and anti-

American, seeking only to destroy American culture.² Then in 1870, President Grant enacted his “Peace Policy,” which intended to civilize and westernize the Indians across America by educating them about Christian beliefs and values. Grant appointed one Christian denomination to every reservation or group of Indians. Once this had occurred, only the denomination assigned to the reservation had the right to serve the Indians living there. This policy, however, was heavily biased towards Protestants. There were many more reservations where the Catholics had made inroads that were being sent Protestant missionaries than previously Protestant reservations being sent Catholic missionaries. In fact, there were seventy-two Indian agencies across the United States in 1870 – the Catholic Church had been the first to establish missions in thirty-eight. However, the Catholic Church was only assigned eight reservations in the Peace Policy. Anti-Catholicism was rife across America.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century history of the Jesuit missions on the Lakota Sioux reservations of Pine Ridge and Rosebud in South Dakota occupy the center of this study. In the aftermath of President Ulysses S. Grant’s Peace Policy of 1870, the Catholic Church, the different Catholic religious orders and certain Indian chiefs banded together to establish the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions for the protection and promotion of Catholic mission interests in America. Under the wing of this organization, they lobbied the federal government to change the tenets of the Peace Policy and, in so doing, allow the Catholic “Blackrobe” missionaries back to the Lakota reservations of South Dakota.

In this tumultuous religious and political climate, Jesuit missionaries and tribal leaders began to reestablish Catholic missions to the Lakota Sioux, founding in 1886 and 1888 the St. Francis and Holy Rosary Missions respectively. In the following years, they attempted to convert

²Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (Oxford University Press, 2010): 163-164.

the Oglala and Brulé Sioux living on the reservations to Catholicism. Learning Lakota and subsequently translating many of the Catholic prayers and hymns into the language; travelling hundreds of miles on horseback every month preaching, offering Mass and serving the Eucharist; hiring native catechists to teach and explain the ideas of Catholicism; and accepting and integrating the customs of the traditional Lakota religion and culture that were not contrary to Catholicism into established Catholic rituals were just some of the methods of evangelization used by the Jesuits in their attempts to convert the Sioux. Influenced heavily by both the Jesuits and the Lakota Catholics, Catholicism on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservation at the turn of the twentieth century became a more cross-cultural faith.

Due to the Lakota Catholics' dual participation in both their Christian faith and their traditional Lakota culture and rituals, many historians and anthropologists have queried whether this type of religious conversion was actually a true conversion of beliefs. Although uncommon, some Indians on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations completely adopted Catholicism, deserting their old culture and native religion. Others resisted Western influence. The majority of the Catholic Lakota, however, adapted the new Christian faith to suit their own traditions, adopting some rituals and foregoing others. They were encouraged in this practice by the Jesuit missionaries, who sought to preserve the Lakota culture in instances when it did not conflict with Catholic doctrine.

Although different Indian tribes, across the United States, did not respond to the presence of Catholic missionaries in the same way, and over time even Indians of the same tribe did not respond in the same way, there is a consensus among scholars that there were patterns in the Indians' reactions. Historians Christopher Vecsey, William Powers and Lee Irwin agree that on the majority of reservations with a Catholic mission, Indians combined the beliefs and rituals of

Catholicism with those of their native religion, making the Church their own. According to Vecsey, there were two ways of doing this: the process of syncretism referring to the combination of native and Catholic religious elements; and the process of compartmentalization, referring to the way some Indians chose to participate in the two religious systems, whilst keeping them separate from each other. He argues that on the Lakota Sioux reservations of Pine Ridge and Rosebud at the end of the nineteenth century, syncretism was the method most commonly seen.³ Irwin agrees with this sentiment, but adds that Native Americans could no longer be simply classified as a 'traditionalist' or 'Catholic'. Instead, most Indians who converted to Catholicism, particularly the Lakota Sioux were a blend of the two. Powers contributes to this debate by focusing on the Lakota Sioux Nicholas Black Elk, who in his later years was both an Oglala medicine man and a Catholic catechist. According to Powers, after his conversion to Christianity and his confirmation as a Catholic in 1904, Black Elk's "interpretations of old Lakota religions were couched in decidedly Christian terms".⁴ For instance, he began to preach about the importance of the Ghost Dance – an Indian religious movement of the late nineteenth century – using apocalyptic imagery inspired by the Bible. In fact, Powers claims "most Lakotas have been and continue to be quite capable of moving between two or more religions on a situational basis, drawing from each or all those prayers, songs, rituals, histories, myths, and beliefs that satisfied the needs of the particular time and its attendant crises."⁵ Whilst I agree with the aforementioned historians that syncretism was common on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, I will argue in this paper that this was not only because of the attitude of the Lakota. Rather the Jesuit missionaries *also* encouraged the preservation of the Lakota culture and its

³ Christopher Vecsey, "General Introduction." In *The Crossing of Two Roads: Being Catholic and Native in the United States*, edited by Marie Therese Archambault, Mark G. Thiel and Christopher Vecsey (New York: Orbis, 2003).

⁴ William Powers, "When Black Elk Speaks, Everybody Listens," *Social Text* 24 (1990): 48.

⁵ *Ibid.*: 46.

incorporation into Catholic rituals, recognizing its value and importance to the history of the tribe and American society as a whole.

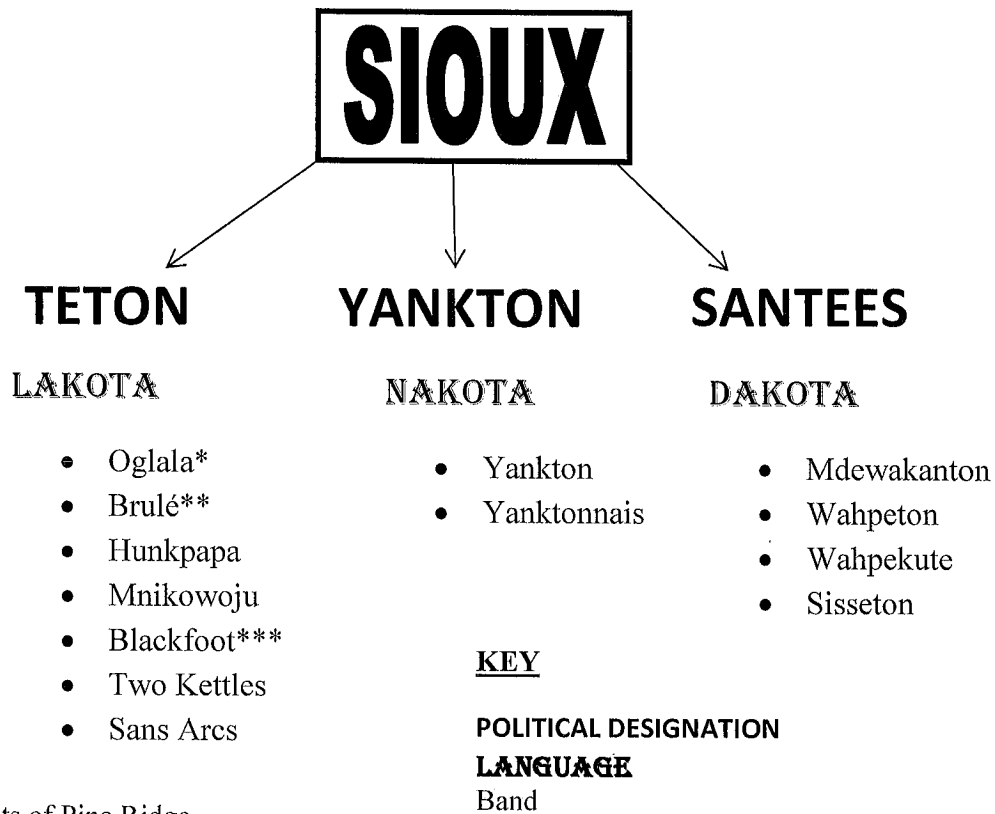
Before I delve deeper into the history of the Jesuits at the Holy Rosary and St. Francis missions, however, I will offer a clarification of the terminology I will use to describe the people, they were intending to convert: namely the Lakota or Teton Sioux. Over the years, historians have debated what to call the Indian tribe known as the Sioux. Although today, the Indians call themselves ‘Sioux’ when talking both English and their native languages, the term is actually a French corruption of the Ojibwa word *nadowe-is-iw-ug*, meaning ‘little adder’, and was originally meant as an insult (the Ojibwas and the Sioux traditionally being enemies). The term was first recorded in the Jesuit *Relations* for 1640 by the Jesuit missionary Jean Nicolet, and has been used to describe this particular group of Indians ever since.⁶

The actual structure of the tribe, however, is more complicated. The Sioux Nation as a whole is in reality comprised of thirteen smaller groups, which can be classified linguistically, politically and geographically. The Eastern band of Sioux are known as the Santee Sioux and speak the Siouan dialect of Dakota; the Middle band of Sioux are known as the Yankton Sioux and speak Nakota, and the Western band of Sioux are politically known as the Teton Sioux and speak Lakota. The Teton or Lakota Sioux can be broken down once more into seven bands of Indians: the Oglala, the Brulé, the Hunkpapa, the Mnikowoju, the Blackfeet, the Two Kettle and the Sans Arcs.⁷ The residents of the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations and the potential congregation of the Holy Rosary and St. Francis missions are the Oglala and the Brulé, respectively. For the purposes of this study, I will use the term “Lakota” or “Lakota Sioux” to

⁶ William Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1975): 5

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-13. For a more visual description of the structure of the Sioux tribe, please see Fig.1 on the next page. The diagram is my own and was assembled using the information given in William Powers’ book *Oglala Religion*.

describe the people living on both the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, and I will use “Oglala” and “Brulé” only when I am discussing the residents of one particular reservation.



* Residents of Pine Ridge
 ** Residents of Rosebud
 *** Not to be confused with the Algonquin tribe of the same name.

Figure 1: Structure of the Sioux Tribe

This study focuses on the work and lives of the Jesuit missionaries and their native catechist counterparts, the reactions of the Indians and the Jesuits and the consequences of encountering two new cultures, and the evolution of the evangelization process on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. Some scholars have suggested that this was simply a religious version of suppression and colonization. However, whilst this process can still be defined as colonization, it was a more accommodating, less intrusive form: a cultural dialogue between the white Jesuit missionaries and the Lakota Sioux. Although the Jesuits used Western methods to

convert the Lakota to Catholicism, they also listened to and learned from the Indians, incorporating traditional Lakota religious and cultural rituals that did not run contrary to Christianity, into Catholic religious ceremonies. In many cases, the Jesuits attempted to add Catholic elements and incorporate Christian beliefs into the traditional Sioux culture. Additionally, the Lakota did not sit idly by and listen quietly to the Jesuit teachings. Instead, those who wished to convert actively helped to merge their traditional culture with their new Catholic beliefs. At the turn of the twentieth century, due to the work of the Jesuit missionaries and the native catechists, Catholicism was assimilated into the lives of many of the Lakota Sioux and the Jesuit's own Catholicism was transformed into a more spiritual, cross-cultural faith: a more developed version of the traditional Lakota religion.

CHAPTER 1

JESUITS ON THE PLAINS: THE FOUNDING OF THE LAKOTA MISSIONS

During the assimilationist era of Native American history, in the year 1870, President Grant enacted his “Peace Policy”. Grant intended for this policy to civilize and westernize the native peoples across America by not only providing them with agricultural and medical supplies, but also by educating them in Christian beliefs and values. Both Grant and the Department of the Interior believed that Christianization was the easiest and most effective way of civilizing the Indians.¹ In order to exact his plan and create some order among the Native Americans, Grant appointed one Christian denomination to every reservation or group of Indians. Once a denomination had received an assignment, they had the exclusive right to evangelize on the reservation. The federal government promised to provide the Christian missionaries with funding to establish schools and administer to the needs of the Native population. However, neither the Indians nor the leaders of the Christian denominations were consulted in this government-mandated reorganization of the missions, and no one, particularly the Sioux Indians of South Dakota and the Catholic Church, whose missionaries had been present in this region for centuries, was pleased with the policy.

Centering around Grant’s Peace Policy, a piece of legislation pivotal in the forming of the Jesuit missions on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Lakota reservations of South Dakota, this chapter presents a brief history of Catholic missionary efforts among the Sioux Indians. The establishment of Holy Rosary Mission amongst the Oglala band of Sioux and St. Francis Mission

¹ E.S. Parker, “Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” October 31, 1870 in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 10.

among the Brule band was the result of centuries of evangelization and development of relations with the Lakota Indians by Catholic missionaries.

In talks prior to the passage of his Peace Policy, President Grant assured the leaders of the various Christian denominations that the assignment of the denominations to Indian tribes and bands would be determined on the basis of the success of each denomination in evangelizing a particular tribe. However, despite the continued presence of Catholic missionaries amongst the Sioux from 1666 onwards, the Jesuits only gained the exclusive rights to evangelize on the Standing Rock and Devil's Lake reservations of North Dakota. The Oglala and Brulé bands of Sioux, amongst whom the Catholics had been particularly active, were declared to be Episcopalian regions under the tenets of the Peace Policy. Catholic officials across America believed they had received far fewer regions than they deserved, particularly in the Dakota Territory. On account of this, Catholics condemned the Grant administration and the Department of the Interior as being anti-Catholic.² The missionaries, including the Belgian Jesuit Pierre De Smet, S.J., who had been working amongst the Sioux, actively began to lobby the Grant administration to rethink their policy, but they were ignored.³

Jesuit missionaries had first arrived in the region, which would one day be the states of North and South Dakota, long before the formation of the Indian reservations and the establishment of official Catholic mission sites. During the latter half of the seventeenth century, from 1666 to 1702, four Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries from New France, travelled around the Dakota Territory, and introduced the idea of Christianity, and more specifically Catholicism,

² Peter Rahill, *The Catholic Indian Missions and Grant's Peace Policy: 1870-1884*, (Washington: Catholic University, 1953), 60.

In 1870, there were 72 Indian agencies across the United States. The Catholic Church had been the first to establish missions in 38 of these agencies. However the Catholic Church was only assigned 8 reservations under the tenets of Grant's Peace Policy: Standing Rock in North and South Dakota, Devil's Lake in North Dakota, Colville in Washington, Papago in Arizona, Tulalip in Washington, Flathead in Montana, Umatilla in Oregon, and Grande Ronde in Oregon.

³ H.M.Chittenden and A.T. Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Pierre-Jean DeSmet: 1801-1873*, 4: 1336

to the Sioux. These four men, Joseph Marest, S.J., Jacques Marquette, S.J., Claude Jean Allouez, S.J., and Louis Hennepin, O.F.M.,⁴ travelled separately amongst the Sioux, studying the Dakota dialect, and learning about their culture. Hennepin and Marquette in particular participated in some of the traditional Sioux rituals, including smoking the calumet, a sacred pipe, which was a universal symbol of good will and friendship amongst Native Americans. Indeed Marquette was known always to carry a pipe, one which had been given to him by the Illinois tribe. When he met with Indians on his journey, he used it as a demonstration of friendship.⁵

Not much is known about these missionaries' expeditions to the Western Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi Valley region. Even though they attempted to bring Christianity to the Sioux Indians, they were mostly unsuccessful. They did manage to befriend the Sioux tribe, however, and make them more open to friendship and peaceful relations with Catholic missionaries that would arrive in the Dakotas and establish missions in later years. By smoking the calumet and living amongst the Sioux, these missionaries demonstrated that they were open to learning about and, to a certain extent, already respected the culture and traditions of the Sioux. This initial contact and recognition of Catholicism greatly aided the later Jesuit missionaries who succeeded in teaching the Sioux the principles of Catholicism. In addition, the strong ties started by these missionaries between the Catholics and the Sioux Indians would help in the eventual overturn of Grant's Peace Policy.

Despite the work of these four missionaries, the Jesuits had not yet established a permanent mission to the Sioux by the end of the eighteenth century, and it was about to become more difficult. In 1763, the French banished the Jesuits from French Louisiana, and then only a decade later in 1773, Pope Clement XIV issued "Dominus Ac Redemptor," an apostolic brief,

⁴ S.J. (Society of Jesus – the Jesuits) O.F.M. (Order of Friars Minor – a Franciscan religious order)

⁵ Paul Steinmetz, S.J., "The Sacred Pipe in American Indian Religions," in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 8 (1984): 61.

suppressing the entire Society of Jesus.⁶ With their organization disbanded, the Jesuits were no longer able to spread the word of God to the Sioux. There were still many years and many trials and tribulations before a permanent mission would be founded amongst the Oglala and Brule Sioux of South Dakota.

The Work of Pierre De Smet, S.J.

It was only after Pope Pius VII restored the Society of Jesus in 1814 that the Jesuits returned to work amongst the Sioux. In 1839, one of the most important and successful Jesuits to administer to the Sioux, the Belgian Pierre De Smet, established contact with the tribe. De Smet had begun his missionary work amongst the Native Americans in 1838, when he helped to create a mission to the Potawatomi tribe near Omaha. After establishing good relations with the Potawatomis, he attempted to end the war between that tribe and the nearby Yankton Sioux by negotiating a peace treaty. During the peace talks, De Smet persuaded the Sioux to give presents to the Potawatomi children and convinced both tribes to smoke the calumet.⁷ De Smet's participation in these traditional Indian customs no doubt endeared him to both tribes and allowed him to gain their trust.

This was not the only time that De Smet would participate in traditional Indian rituals – a peacemaker at heart, he would often smoke the peace pipe with the Indians with whom he was conversing; he would share tribal feasts, and he would even pray alongside the Sioux to their Deity – the Great Spirit *Wakan Tanka*.

⁶ Pope Clement XIV, "Dominus Ac Redemptor" Speech given in Rome on July 21, 1773.

<http://www.reformation.org/jesuit-suppression-bull.html> (accessed on November 10, 2010).

The suppression of the order in Europe was a result of a series of political and economic conflicts between the European monarchs and the Church, rather than a theological controversy. Although the suppression was centered in Europe, it had effects all over the world.

⁷ Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Pierre-Jean DeSmet*, 1:190.

The donation of presents to the children of Indians killed during battle was a custom called 'covering the dead'. It served a similar purpose to the calumet pipe – a way of reconciling two warring parties.

The task of the Jesuits present in the region during the nineteenth century – to convert the Sioux to Catholicism – was made slightly easier due to a combination of their willingness to participate in traditional Indian rituals and learn the tribal languages, and the work of the four missionaries at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Sioux did not easily trust the incoming white Catholic missionaries however. Although the Indians showed an affinity for the missionaries, the Jesuits still had to prove to them that they were different, and more respectful than the U.S. army and government agents, stationed on and near the reservations.

This affinity can be seen during the 1850s, when several Indian bands asked their government agents whether they could have Catholic priests living and working amongst them – a desire that would be reiterated in the aftermath of Grant’s Peace Policy. In 1857, a Protestant government agent, Colonel Alfred Vaughan wrote to Pierre De Smet inquiring whether he would consider establishing a Catholic mission amongst the Blackfoot tribe. In the letter, he specifically mentioned that compared to government agents, the Catholic missionaries tended to succeed in gaining the trust of the Indians and pointed out that, “Such a mission would advance the interests of the government and those of the Indians at the same time.”⁸

For the next thirteen years – until the passage of President Grant’s Peace Policy – the Department of the Interior encouraged Catholic missionary activity amongst the Indian tribes of the Midwest, as it appeared to them to give the Indians a more welcoming attitude in general towards Western white men. In fact, the government was so impressed with the work of the missionaries, particularly De Smet, that in 1858, and later in 1864, it chose him to mediate the peace negotiations between the United States army and different Indian tribes.⁹

⁸ Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Pierre-Jean DeSmet*, 4:1317. Colonel Vaughan to De Smet, May 20, 1857.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4:1569. John Floyd, Secretary of War to DeSmet, War Department, Washington, May 13, 1858. *Ibid.*, William P. Dole to De Smet, March 21, 1864.

In 1864, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, William Dole, wrote to De Smet in order to compliment him on his knowledge of Sioux character and habits, and to ask him to meet with a Sioux band. In response, the missionary travelled to Fort Berthold, ND, in order to meet with a select group of Yankton Sioux Indians. After discussing the government's desire to establish peaceful relations with the Sioux, he sent a small group of Yanktonnais back to the Sioux camp with a present of tobacco and an invitation for the chiefs of each band of the Sioux to meet with him. A few days later, around 200 Sioux came to Fort Berthold, where they smoked the pipe with De Smet, while he advised them to lay down their weapons and conduct peaceful relations with the US government.¹⁰ In addition to being a pacifist, De Smet, in advising peace, was trying to make it easier for Catholic missionaries to evangelize the Sioux. Peaceful Indians were more likely to accept religious sentiments than Indians at war. De Smet concluded additional meetings with the bands of Sioux, including the Oglala and Brulé bands, over the next few years when he advocated peace between the US government and the tribe, and between the different bands of Sioux. At these meetings he also took the opportunity to further the Christian religion by teaching the Indians about Catholic belief and doctrine.

In his meetings with the Oglala and Brulé Sioux, De Smet highlighted the similarities between the Catholic faith and the traditional Lakota religion. In particular he emphasized the use of ritual in both faiths. During the Catholic Mass there are many ceremonial actions, such as kneeling and bowing, chanting, and the distribution of incense, which the Indians recognized as being akin to their ritual dances. De Smet also stressed the similarities between the Christian God and the Lakota *Wakan Tanka* or Great Spirit – the sole divine being – whom the Lakotas believed created the world and looked over their people. When he met with Oglala Chief Red Cloud in 1868, De Smet prayed with the Oglala to *Wakan Tanka* and taught them the custom of

¹⁰ De Smet to William Dole, July 15, 1864, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs: 1864*, 280.

praying to the Great Spirit every morning and night.¹¹ Instead of snubbing the Lakota religion and the Indians' deity, De Smet understood the need to highlight the parallels between the two belief systems, and therefore taught the Sioux new prayers to say to *Wakan Tanka*. The Jesuit missionaries who followed De Smet in administering to the Sioux in the Dakota Territory would adhere to this policy, and try to respect the traditional beliefs of the Lakota Indians.

Even though the Sioux never had faith in the US government and the army, De Smet and his team of Catholic missionaries had earned a reputation for being trustworthy. He was believed to have a great mystical power – one that created peace and harmony in a fragile world. J.A. Hearn, the government agent at the Grand River Agency in South Dakota wrote about De Smet that “the Indians think he is the one white man that does not lie to them.”¹² The Sioux did not paint all white people with the same brush. Instead of assuming they were all the same, the Sioux viewed white people in the same way they viewed other Indians – in tribes. There were the “Blackrobes” – the Catholic tribe, the “Whiterobes” – the Episcopalian tribe, the “Shortcoats” – the Presbyterian tribe, and the “Longknives” – the US army. The Sioux came to believe that most of the “Blackrobes” were trustworthy due to their willingness to share in Indian culture, and their nonviolent defense of the tribe against the might of the US government.

Despite De Smet being on good terms with both the US government and the Sioux Indians, the fate of Catholicism and the missions in the region took a turn for the worse when President Ulysses S. Grant enacted his “Peace Policy” in 1870. As previously stated, American Catholics believed these laws to be severely anti-Catholic and De Smet actively lobbied the Grant administration to rethink their policy. Under the tenets of these laws, the Oglala and Brule Sioux, whose territory would become in 1876 the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, were

¹¹ Chittenden and Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Pierre-Jean DeSmet*, 3:904-905.

¹² J.A. Hearn, report, Grand River Agency, Dakota Territory, Sept. 14, 1870, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1870*, 222.

assigned to the Episcopalians. Many of the Oglala and Brule Indians, however, would have preferred to have Catholic missionaries working in their settlements as they were more accustomed to the “Blackrobe” rituals, education methods, and outlook on their faith. In 1877, Red Cloud, Head Chief of the Oglala, Little Wound, a Chief of the Oglala, and Spotted Tail, Head Chief of the Brule travelled to Washington DC to meet with President Hayes to appeal for Catholic priests. Even though Episcopalians had been present amongst the Oglala and Brule since 1875, the Indians requested Catholic priests. Chief Red Cloud and Chief Spotted Tail focused on the education value of the Catholic missionaries, declaring that the priests and nuns taught the Indians and their children how to read and write in English – a skill they deemed as highly important. Chief Little Wound, on the other hand, merely stated that he wanted a Catholic priest.¹³ Chief Red Cloud would later repeat his request for a Catholic priest during a meeting in South Dakota with E.A. Hayt, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.¹⁴ As can be determined from a newspaper report of the meeting, Red Cloud was quite adamant in his demand for “Blackrobes.” These continued requests for Catholic priests demonstrate the effect the early missionaries had on the Sioux Indians, and their openness to learning more about the Catholic faith.

In response to Grant’s Peace Policy and the outcry of Indians and Catholics alike, the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (BCIM) was established as an agency in Washington DC in 1874. Due to the Indians’ requests for Catholic schools to educate their children, the Bureau, whose sole purpose was to protect and promote Catholic Indian mission interests across America, began to raise money to establish and improve schools on the reservations assigned to

¹³ Transcript of the Meeting between Chiefs Red Cloud, Spotted Tail and other Chiefs and President Hayes, Executive Mansion, Sept. 26, 1877 in *The Crossing of Two Roads: Being Catholic and Native in the United States* edited by Marie Therese Archambault, Mark G. Thiel, and Christopher Vecsey. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003.

¹⁴ *New York Times*, July 15, 1878.

them. Once the schools had been founded, the federal government would help with the funding to continue the running of the school. It was therefore of vital importance that the BCIM raised the initial capital. Over two years, from 1875 to 1877, the Bureau raised over \$16,000 and founded nine additional boarding schools and twelve additional day schools.¹⁵

Eventually Grant's Peace Policy was being attacked from all sides. Indians across America requested missionaries from different Christian denominations to live amongst them and educate their children; and both the Protestant and Catholic missionaries wanted to evangelize on reservations assigned exclusively to another denomination. In 1881, after a surge in lobbying and protests, the policy was repealed and Christian missionaries were once again allowed to evangelize wherever they saw fit. Bolstered by the invalidation of the Peace Policy and the great support of the Indians, the Jesuits quickly began to establish Catholic missions on the Sioux reservations.

The Work of Martin Marty, O.S.B.

The story of Martin Marty, a Swiss Benedictine, begins in 1860 during the time of the Grant Peace Policy, when he was the Abbot of St. Meinrad's Abbey in Indiana. Here, he actively encouraged the Benedictine monks under his stewardship to evangelize the Sioux. In 1876, the year the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations were created by the government,¹⁶ Marty travelled among the Sioux and began to learn the Lakota dialect. As he could not create a mission or school on these new-found reservations due to the precepts of the Peace Policy, he established a

¹⁵ "Work of the Bureau," *Annals of the Catholic Indian Missions of America* 2 (Jan., 1878): 30-31. Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Collection, Series 4/3 Box 2 Folder 6 at the Special Collections and University Archives at Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.

¹⁶ See Fig. 2 for Map of Sioux Reservation Sites on the next page. Institute of American Indian Studies, <http://people.usd.edu/~iaais/siouxnation/tst.html>

Benedictine mission on the government-mandated Catholic Standing Rock reservation – the Lakota Sioux reservation on the border of North and South Dakota.¹⁷

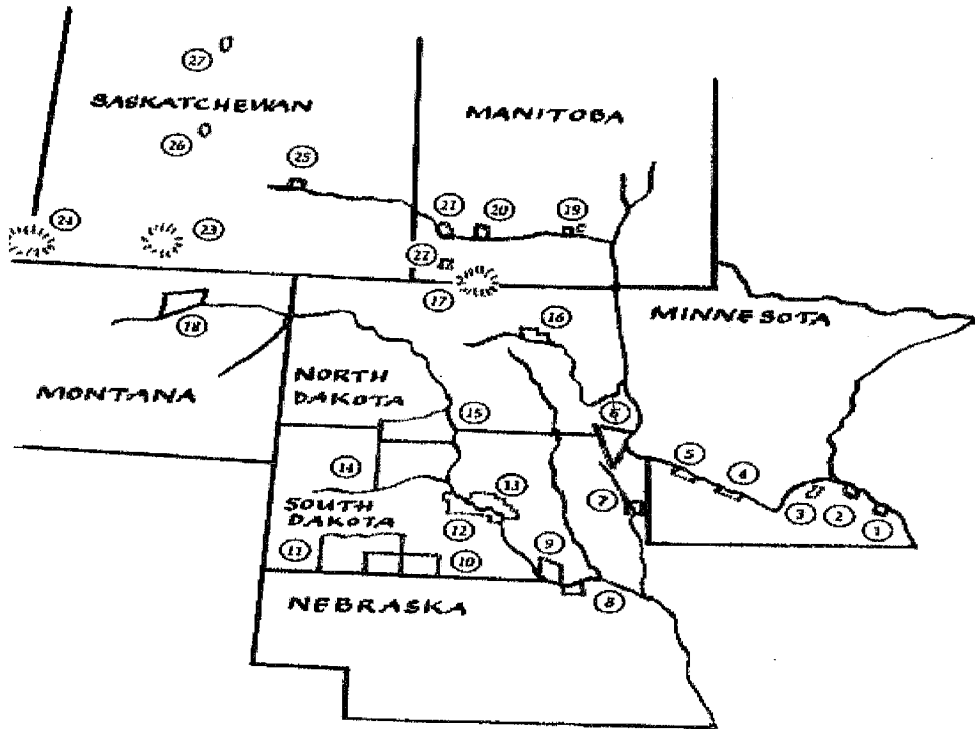


Figure 2: Map of Sioux Reservations in 1900. (10 - Rosebud; 11 - Pine Ridge) Institute of American Indian Studies.

In a way similar to the work of the other Catholic missionaries who came before him, Marty attempted to negotiate peace agreements between the US government and the Sioux. Despite the government ban on cross-denominational evangelization under the tenets of the Peace Policy, Marty often met with Chiefs Red Cloud and Spotted Tail. In these meetings the Chiefs repeated their requests for Catholic priests in order to educate the children of the reservations.¹⁸

¹⁷ Sister M. Claudia Duratschek, *Crusading Along Sioux Trails* (Yankton: Grail, 1947), 77-78.

¹⁸ St. Francis Mission Records. File 1/1 Box 1 Folder 1. Fr. A.H. Frederick to O'Connor, New Spotted Tail Agency, March 15, 1878. In the Special Collections and University Archives of Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.

Whether the Lakota Sioux wanted the Catholic missionaries working amongst them because they had a desire to be Catholic or because they wanted schools and learning materials for their children is unclear. It is clear, however, that the Catholic missionaries' openness to understanding the Sioux culture, and willingness to participate in their ceremonial rituals and speak their language, endeared them to the Lakotas on the reservations, and ensured that the Lakotas requested Catholic priests over Protestant pastors.

During the era of the Peace Policy, however, Marty broke the law by continuing to send Catholic priests and Benedictine brothers to the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations to administer to the needs of the Oglala and Brule Sioux. In 1879 the government finally cracked down on errant missionaries and ordered one of Marty's protégés from the Pine Ridge reservation. Meinrad McCarthy, O.S.B., the priest in question, simply moved two miles south of the border of the reservation – away from government agent Valentine McGillicuddy's jurisdiction – and the Oglalas visited him there to receive the sacraments and to continue in their Catholic education.¹⁹ The enforced removal of Father McCarthy caused more trouble for the government and the agents on the reservations as well because it spurred the Head Chief Red Cloud to further call for the return of Catholic priests to his tribe. In a discussion with McCarthy, Red Cloud declared that even though he had seen many different versions of the Christian church whilst on his travels to and from Washington, he “want[ed] to worship God, who is but one, as the Black Gown worships Him.” He then supplemented his opinion by saying that this was “the sentiment of every chief, man, woman and child of the Oglala tribe.”²⁰ These strong opinions of the Chief of the Oglala band of Sioux contributed to the overturning of President Grant's Peace Policy.

¹⁹ Sister M.Claudia Duratschek, *Builders of God's Kingdom* (Yankton: Sacred Heart Convent, 1985): 40.

²⁰ Henry Caspar, S.J., *History of the Catholic Church in Nebraska* (Milwaukee: Bruce Press, 1960): 256.

In the years after the repeal of the Peace Policy, Marty continued to evangelize and establish missions amongst the Sioux. In 1880, twenty years after he developed an interest in the Sioux Indians, he was recognized for his achievements by Pope Leo XIII and was appointed Titular Bishop and Vicar Apostolic of the Dakota Territory. Only three years after this promotion, in 1883, Bishop Marty sent three priests – Fathers Francis Craft, Caspar Hospenthal and Joseph Bushman – to administer to the needs of the Lakota on Pine Ridge and Rosebud. Two years later, in 1885, Marty called upon these priests and other Jesuit missionaries to establish permanent Catholic missions on these two reservations.²¹ During the time between the arrival of the three priests and the opening of Holy Rosary and St. Francis missions, Chief Red Cloud and his family were baptized and welcomed into the Catholic Church.²² The official conversion of Red Cloud, who had in actuality been practicing Catholicism for years prior, was a giant step for the mission efforts amongst the Oglala because as Chief, he had a lot of influence over the entire tribe.

Francis Craft – the Indian Priest

Despite only spending two full years amongst the Oglala and Brulé Sioux due to a dispute with the government agent on the Rosebud reservation, Father Francis Craft established a lifetime bond with the Lakota Indians soon after his arrival. They recognized in him a fellow soul and Native American. He had Mohawk ancestry, his paternal grandmother having been a member of the tribe, and he could speak the Lakota language fluently. In fact he spoke it with such confidence that he decided to catechize the Brulés and Oglalas solely in their native

²¹ Duratschek, *Builders of God's Kingdom* (Yankton: Sacred Heart Convent, 1985): 90.

²² Henry Theo, S.J., "Holy Rosary Mission," *Indian Sentinel* 1 (April 1919): 15.

tongue.²³ Due to his success in spreading the Catholic faith amongst the Indians, the Jesuit missionaries on the reservations would follow his example.

Owing to his popularity, Craft was one of the first Catholic priests to officially join one of the Sioux bands. He was adopted by the family of Brulé Chief Spotted Tail and given the name “Hovering Eagle.” Chief Spotted Tail had died before Craft came to the Sioux. On his deathbed, however, he had apparently declared that he wanted a “Blackrobe” to succeed him as chief of the Brulés. So, when Craft arrived on the Rosebud reservation in 1883, the Lakotas appointed him as their chief. Craft turned down the position, however, citing that he would not be able to fulfill his vocation as a priest with the added responsibilities of chief.²⁴ In 1890, Father Florentine Digmann, S.J., the superior of St. Francis Mission, wrote in his diary about the unique relationship he observed between Craft and the Brulé Sioux.

Father Francis Craft came on a visit. He had worked on the Reserve for about three years, spoke the Sioux perfectly, and was almost adored by our Indians. Many came to visit him. He preached on the two following Sundays, exhorting them to follow the missionaries and do what they would tell them, though they would not understand the reason at once. I visited with him the Spotted Tail family in which he had been adopted. He called Mrs. Spotted Tail “*ina*” mother, and her children brother and sister.²⁵

Although Craft had a peaceful familial relationship with the Indians, he did not have a tranquil relationship with the US government. He had a rather argumentative nature, inclined to confront anyone who insulted or threatened him and his work, and there was much animosity between him and many of the US government officials stationed in the Dakota Territory. In 1884, James Wright, the government agent at Rosebud wrote a letter of complaint to the

²³ Thomas W. Foley, *Father Francis M. Craft, Missionary to the Sioux*, (Bison Books, 2007).

²⁴ Holy Rosary Mission Records, File 8, Box 4, Folder 3, “Father Craft’s Good Work Among the Sioux” *Irish World*, Jan 10, 1891. In the Special Collections and University Archives of Marquette University.

²⁵ Holy Rosary Mission Records, File 7, Box 14, Folder 8. Digmann, diary, March 15, 1890. In the Special Collections and University Archives of Marquette University.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Hiram Price, about the difficulties he had incurred with Father Craft and his overwhelming influence amongst the Brulés – the people Craft personally viewed as his family. In the letter, Wright discussed a recent meeting at which Craft had criticized the removal of some Brulé children from the Rosebud reservation to a boarding school in Genoa, Nebraska. The Brulé elders had agreed with Craft and declared that no child should be removed from the reservation. Wright worried that “if allowed to pass unnoticed it [Craft’s defiance] must in effect undermine the Agent’s control and authority, leaving the Indians to look to the Priest as their law-giver, and leaving the Agent but an [*sic*] non-entity.”²⁶ Seen as a threat to the US government and Wright’s influence on the Rosebud reservation, Craft was ordered from the reservation by Commissioner Price in 1885. He moved to the Standing Rock reservation and ministered to the Dakota Sioux.

The Founding of Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions

Father John Jutz, S.J. arrived at the Rosebud reservation on New Year’s Eve, 1885, shortly after the departure of Father Francis Craft. With the start of the new year came the establishment of the first permanent Catholic mission to the Brulé Sioux – St. Francis Mission. Exactly one year later, on New Year’s Day, 1887, Jutz travelled to the Oglala reservation of Pine Ridge and founded the Holy Rosary Mission, and remained there as its Superior. Soon afterwards, St. Francis Mission had three Jesuit priests in residence: Florentine Digmann, Joseph

²⁶ Bureau of Catholic Indian Mission Records, File 1, Box 4, Folder 3. James G. Wright to Hiram Price, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Rosebud Agency, Jan 16, 1884. In the Special Collections and University Archives of Marquette University.

Lindebner, and Aloysius Bosch. Meanwhile Holy Rosary had two priests, Jutz himself and Emil Perrig, S.J.²⁷

Unlike Marty, De Smet, and Craft, when these Jesuits reached South Dakota they did not know much about the Sioux religion, language or culture. They were mostly Germans, Swiss and Austrians, who had only recently travelled to America in the aftermath of the *Kulturkampf*, during which Otto von Bismarck expelled them from Germany. Despite this disadvantage, however, they soon became accustomed to the Lakota culture, and by 1887 some even preached in the Lakota language.²⁸ As their mother tongue was German and they had had to learn English when they arrived in America, they were familiar with the difficulties of learning a new language. Their skills in learning a second language were therefore useful when learning their third language – Lakota. In order to help them make the transition from life in Europe to life amongst Native Americans on the plains, Bishop Marty sent several Benedictines to the newly formed missions to help them learn the Lakota language. One of these language teachers was the Benedictine monk, Jerome Hunt, who had been stationed at both the Standing Rock and Devil's Lake reservations in North Dakota. When the European Jesuit priests arrived at the Holy Rosary and St. Francis missions, Hunt travelled to South Dakota to teach them how to read, speak and teach in the Sioux language.²⁹ After Hunt's initial teaching and the training amongst the Jesuits themselves, the following priests at St. Francis and Holy Rosary missions could speak Lakota

²⁷ Holy Rosary Mission Records, File 7, Box 14, Folder 8, Digmann, diary, 1885-1886 entry. In the Special Collections and University Archives of Marquette University.

²⁸ Emil Perrig, S.J., St. Francis Mission, Feb 15. 1887, *Woodstock Letters* 16: 173-175.

²⁹ Duratschek, *Crusading Along Sioux Trails*, 133.

Jerome Hunt could actually only speak the Dakota dialect of the Sioux language, whereas the Oglala and Brule Sioux would have conversed in the Lakota dialect. However, the two dialects are very similar and it would have been relatively easy for the Lakota Indians to understand the Dakota language.

fluently: Florentine Digmann, Joseph Lindebner, Aloysius Bosch, Emil Perrig, Eugene Buechel, Henry Grotegeers, Placidus Sialm, Henry Billings and Louis Goll.³⁰

As well as learning the local language, the Jesuits at the Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions also had other methods to become more accepted among the Indians. Although many of the Lakotas were inclined to like the “Blackrobes” and the Catholic Church, since they had heard about and knew the earlier Catholic missionaries such as De Smet, Marty and Craft, Jutz and his team of Jesuits at the missions were determined to become more popular and influential. In order to best learn how to catechize the Indians successfully, they read collections of De Smet’s letters and publications. One of De Smet’s main evangelization techniques was to concentrate on first converting the Lakota chiefs, due to the fact that they had the most influence on the rest of the tribe. This method was not unique to De Smet, however. In fact, it was an approach described in the *Constitution of the Society of Jesus*:

The more universal the good is the more it is divine. Therefore preference ought to be given to those persons and places, which through their own improvement, become a cause which can spread the good accomplished to many others who are under their influence or take guidance from them. For that reason, the spiritual aid which is given to important and public persons ought to be regarded as more important, since it is a more universal good.³¹

In the same way that Joseph Bushman had focused on converting the Head Chief of the Oglalas, Red Cloud, the Jesuits at Holy Rosary and St. Francis missions concentrated on converting several of the Lakota chiefs, including Chief Big Turkey, Chief He Dog, Chief Big Head, and Chief Two Strike.³²

³⁰ Placidus Sialm, S.J., “In Memory of Those Who Have Labored Among the Sioux.” *Indian Sentinel* 1 (April 1919) 37-38.

³¹ George Ganss, S.J., *The Constitution of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970): 275.

³² Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 7, File 14, Folder 8. Digmann, diary, June 1, 1890. In the Special Collections and University Archives at Marquette University.

By the time the Holy Rosary and St. Francis missions were established on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, Catholic missionaries had been present amongst the Sioux for over 200 years. Even with the difficulties that were encountered earlier by the pioneer missionaries, including the dissolution of the Society of Jesus and President Grant's Peace Policy, the Jesuits at the two permanent missions would see many successes. In 1885, the year St. Francis Mission was founded, 14,000 Lakota Indians lived on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. By 1908, 33% of the Lakotas were Catholic. By 1940, however, a mere fifty-five years after the founding of the permanent missions, almost half of the Indians on the two reservations declared themselves to be Catholic.³³ Even though Grant's Peace Policy presented a major setback to the Catholic missionaries working in the Dakota Territory during the years it was in effect, and although many American Catholics believed that it was anti-Catholic, the Peace Policy's legacy in the Dakota Territory was that it bolstered Catholicism amongst the Lakota Sioux. Due in part to the Catholic Church's long relationship with the Sioux, several Lakota chiefs' requests for Catholic priests to work amongst their tribes, and the fact that several of the Oglala and Brule Indians on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations were already Catholic, the Jesuit missionaries at Holy Rosary and St. Francis missions were able to attract increasing numbers of Lakota Indians to the Catholic Church, and finally overcome the effects of President Grant's Peace Policy.

³³ Louis Goll, S.J., *Jesuit Missions among the Sioux*, 68-69.

Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 2/1, File 3, Folder 1. "Report on Indian Work to Commission," July 30, 1938; "Report on Indian Work to Commission," August 24, 1939. In the Special Collections and University Archives at Marquette University.

CHAPTER 2

BEING CATHOLIC AND LAKOTA: THE WORK OF THE LAKOTA CATECHISTS

Problems Encountered

The winter of 1903 in South Dakota was even colder than usual. Temperatures on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations had dropped below 0 degrees Fahrenheit and gale force winds were blowing across the plains. Late on one December night, a lone priest was making his treacherous journey home to the Holy Rosary Mission after a month-long expedition to the outlying villages of the reservation. His name was Father Aloysius Bosch, the Superior of the mission, and on this particular trip he had visited a number of distant Lakota communities, holding Mass in the homes of the infirm and the small chapels along the route, administering the sacraments, and bringing the Indians food from the mission headquarters. His trip, which had been fairly routine up until this point, was about to take a turn for the worse. His horse was spooked by a falling tree and bolted, throwing Bosch to the ground. Alone and injured, Bosch lay on the frozen mud track until some of his fellow missionaries sent out a search party and found him a few days later. He was still alive but only just, now suffering not only from his wounds, but also from hypothermia and frostbite. As subsequently described by Father Henry Westropp, Bosch was to die a few months later from his injuries:

The first missionary to lose his life to the cause was Fr. Aloys Bosch. While returning from a sick call he was accidentally thrown from his horse and after lingering on in his suffering for many a weary month, he finally went to receive the reward for his many and hard labors in the vineyard of the Lord.¹

Bosch's death might have been prevented, however. If he had not been alone on his journey and had had a companion, his injuries might not have been so severe and his life could have been

¹ Henry Westropp, S.J., "A Bit of Missionary Life Among the Sioux Indians" Pamphlet. In the Holy Rosary Records, Box 7, File 19, Folder 10.

spared. Due to the low numbers of priests at the missions, however, it was not feasible for them to travel in pairs across the reservation.

The Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations covered a vast area of about 5000 square miles and had a combined population of about 14,000 Indians. Meanwhile, the priests at the missions numbered only twenty. This combination of the low number of priests and the sparsely populated land meant that each missionary had to spend most of his time on the road alone, travelling between the small Lakota communities on horseback, instead of serving the Catholic Indians and converting more to the faith. In order to visit as many Indians as possible on the reservations, the Jesuits mapped out routes for individual priests to take. Each circuit took about a month to complete and therefore, even if each priest travelled alone, the Jesuits could only offer Mass and the sacraments, and provide a spiritual ear in each outlying Lakota community once a month. This was not acceptable to the missionaries, who were trying to convert thousands of Native Americans to Catholicism, in part by offering Mass and the sacraments as often as possible. The priests would therefore not be able to pair up on their expeditions to make their journeys safer. Another method and plan to convert more Indians, while ensuring the safety of the Jesuit missionaries would have to be put into action.

Although these physical and geographical obstacles caused the Jesuits great hardship in their mission to convert the Lakota Sioux, they also encountered spiritual and cultural opposition to their religious undertaking. The Jesuits generally adapted Lakota customs to mesh with Catholic practices, and modified Catholic rituals to fit with the Lakota culture. However, there were some Indian traditions that were considered to be particularly offensive to Catholic doctrine, which the Jesuits attempted to discard. These customs included the Lakota practices of polygamy, divorce and *yuwipi* – a ‘magical’ healing ceremony used by the Lakota medicine men.

The Jesuits' intolerance of these traditions caused a setback in relations between the missionaries and the Indians because the Lakotas were angered by the outsiders' criticism of their culture.

Polygamy was considered a major problem by the Jesuit missionaries because many of the Lakota men, particularly the chiefs, had more than one wife. If any of these men wished to convert to Catholicism, they were forced to give up all but one of their wives before the Jesuits would consent to baptize them.² If they decided to continue with their conversion and picked a wife to keep, sometimes converts would change their minds, wishing to leave their one wife and choose another. After Big Turkey converted to Catholicism, for example, he decided that he wanted to divorce his non-Catholic wife, and marry a younger Catholic woman. Father Florentine Digmann, a priest at the Holy Rosary Mission, forbade him from doing this, explaining that in the eyes of God, such an act was morally wrong. At this, Big Turkey threw his prayer book on the floor and stormed out of the church. When asked, Big Turkey declared that he disliked the way his wishes had been so quickly dismissed by the white priest.³ The process sounded too similar to divorce for the Jesuits' liking and was not acceptable.⁴ Consequently, they began trying to instill a sense of the Catholic traditions and beliefs about marriage in the Indians. Solutions to perceived problems with a culture are not usually as effective coming from an outside as they are coming from a well-known and respected member of the community, who fully understands and has lived as a part of that culture. Therefore, Lakota men, including Chief Big Turkey grew angry. However, polygamy and divorce were not going to be tolerated within the Catholic Church, even if the Lakotas had practiced these ways for centuries. In this, the Jesuits expected those who wished to convert to change their practices.

² Fr. Florentine Digmann, diary, Feb 10. 1892. Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 7, File 14, Folder 8.

³ Ibid. March 15, 1891.

⁴ According to the teachings of the Catholic Church, divorce is not an option. In the eyes of the Church, marriage is a sacrament, which once given, cannot be torn apart.

The Jesuit attempts to outlaw the Lakota *yuwipi* ritual also caused much trouble for the missions. The ritual was a traditional Lakota healing ceremony performed by the tribal medicine men, which the missionaries believed was contrary to the Catholic faith. Although the medicine men did successfully heal many sick Indians, the Jesuits believed that they were frauds, merely cheating their fellow Lakotas out of their money and possessions.⁵ In his diary, Father Digmann wrote of one instance that occurred in 1887, when a medicine man stole another man's horses and then charged the man an extortionate fee to find the supposedly lost horses through divination.⁶ The Jesuits believed that when the healing ceremonies took place, the medicine men were controlled by the devil, and did not possess the ultimate cleansing and healing power of God.

Their reputation once established, the medicine men acted as powerful, mysterious physicians who would drive out sickness by incantations and the beating of a drum – naturally for considerable remuneration. That now and then tricks alone did not suffice, but that the father of lies had a hand in the game to help his faithful servants can scarcely be doubted.⁷

The Jesuits did not trust the ways of the medicine men and believed that their pagan techniques ran contrary to the tenets of the Catholic faith and therefore banned the medicine men from practicing the *yuwipi* ritual. This prohibition was hard to enforce, however, and until some of the healers themselves converted to Catholicism, the Jesuits' ban showed little sign of success.

A Solution to the Problem – Native Catechists

Having realized that not only were there too few priests available to serve the needs of all the Lakotas on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, but also that the Lakota Indians took

⁵ Louis Goll, S.J., *Jesuit Missions Among the Sioux*, 15-16. Holy Rosary Mission Records. Box 7, File 14, Folder 8.

⁶ Digmann, diary, Sept. 1, 1887. Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 7, File 14, Folder 8.

⁷ Goll, *Jesuit Missions*, 15.

criticism better from one of their own rather than from an outsider, the Jesuits of South Dakota looked to Church and mission history and the writings of the Popes to solve their problems. Since its inception in the 1st Century AD, the Catholic Church has promoted the use of a native clergy.⁸ In 1926 in his encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae*, Pope Pius XI described the success of missions created with the aim of eventually having a native clergy and advocated their further use. He emphasized the fact that all peoples are equal in the eyes of God, regardless of race or color, and warned Catholic missionaries across the world against prejudice.

We call your attention to building up a native clergy. If you do not work with all your might to attain this purpose, We assert that not only will your apostolate be crippled, but it will become an obstacle and impediment to the establishment and organization of the Church in those countries.⁹

Pius XI recognized that the native priests knew their own culture and language better than any foreign priests and missionaries. Noting that even in the Bible, at the time of Jesus himself, the apostles put converted natives in charge of their own communities, the Pope declared that native Catholics made better missionaries to their own people than foreigners.¹⁰ Not only did they understand their culture better than any foreigner, but they also could affect more change, as people are more willing to accept constructive criticism of their lifestyle from a friend and neighbor, than from a stranger. Therefore, following the example of the apostles and the words and methods of the Popes, the Jesuits began in 1900 to make a determined effort to employ Lakota men to help serve the pastoral and spiritual needs of the Lakota Indians.

Although Catholic missions have historically attempted to establish a native *clergy*, this was not the case at the Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions in South Dakota. The Jesuits were

⁸ In this instance, the term 'native' does not relate particularly to the Native Americans, rather the 'native clergy' are a group of priests, who are from and/or are indigenous to the country or society that is being evangelized by missionaries. They are not 'outsiders' like a missionary clergy.

⁹ Pius XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae*. *The Papal Encyclicals: 1903-1939*, Claudia Carlin, ed., (Raleigh: McGrath Publishing, 1981): 285.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.286.

aware of the importance of the traditional Sioux culture to the Lakota people. In the Lakota tradition and in Native American society in general, the custom of respecting one's elders is greatly emphasized. Therefore, in order to affect the greatest change, the natives preaching and teaching Catholicism, and modifying certain aspects of Lakota culture to better correspond with Catholic doctrine, should be the tribal elders, who were well respected and admired by the Lakotas, and not the young male English-speaking Indians. The tribal elders, however, were all married, and the Catholic Church allows the ordination of married men only under special circumstances. Therefore in order to utilize the native Catholic population without subverting the Indian culture, the Jesuits employed the Catholic tribal elders as native catechists. In doing this, they showed that they were willing to accept some of the cultural traditions of the Native Americans, one possible reason why their missions were so successful.

From 1900 to 1940, about ten Lakota catechists were employed by each mission.¹¹ All of the catechists were men, and most of them were married elders of the tribe. They all spoke fluent Lakota, and although some could not speak English, they were able to communicate with most of the missionaries and all of the Lakota people. Some of the catechists were even former medicine men, who had converted to Catholicism and given up their old ways to spread the word of God. However, even though their work was incredibly time consuming, they did not receive much in the form of compensation as the missions were quite poor. Father Eugene Buechel, a German Jesuit who by his death in 1954 had served as Superior of both the Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions, attempted to acquire outside funding to support the catechists on the two reservations. Working in particular with the Isaac Jogues Mission Circle, a group of women in Jersey City, New Jersey, who supported the work of Indian Catholic missions, Buechel raised enough money

¹¹ See Appendix for complete list of catechists who served at either the Holy Rosary Mission or St. Francis Mission during the years 1900-1945.

to build community chapels and provide the catechists with a small monthly wage of \$5 to \$15. Sometimes they would also receive compensation in the form of clothing, housing and food, although this only occurred when it was available and feasible for the mission to do so.¹²

Life as a Lakota catechist was a vocation, not just a means of existence. Being elders, they were considered by the other Indians to be community leaders and were often called upon to serve the faithful during the day and the night. Their work was very demanding. However, the catechists took great pride in their work and often worked for the missions for several decades.¹³ Their duties were numerous. Some catechists were based at the mission building itself and some were based in the outlying villages. Those attached to the mission were constantly on the road, travelling with the priests on their monthly journeys around the reservation. Here they aided the priests in their duties, administering to the sick, helping to teach and clearly explain certain complicated Church doctrines, and also, on occasion, giving sermons. One catechist, who often worked alongside Father Henry Westropp, when asked where he lived, declared that his home was the horse and cart in which they travelled, for “that was the nearest address he could give.”¹⁴

The majority of catechists, who were based in the outlying communities, however, led a more sedentary, yet no less hectic, existence. During the three weeks of the month that a priest was not present in the village, the resident catechist would hold services in the community chapels, at which they would preach, read the Gospel and lead the people in Catholic prayers and hymns that had been translated into Lakota. During the season of Lent, they would go to the houses of each Catholic family in the community to pray the rosary, and then would gather the

¹² Letters from Alice Boyle and Viola Manning of the Isaac Jogues Mission Circle to Fr. Eugene Buechel. St. Francis Mission Records. Box 7, File 1, Folders 6-9.
Westropp, *Missionary Life Among the Sioux*.

In times of financial strife, Westropp mentions that the monthly wage of the head catechist dropped to a mere \$10.

¹³ Letters of Fr. Placidus Sialm. In the Bureau of Catholic Indian Mission Records.

Catechists who served for over 20 years include Silas Fills-the-Pipe, White Crow, John Foolhead, Ivan Star-Comes-Out and Nicholas Black Elk.

¹⁴ Westropp, *Missionary Life Among the Sioux*.

entire village together every day to pray the Stations of the Cross. When needed the catechists would offer marital counseling, and would visit and stay for several days at the houses of the sick and dying to pray over and with the invalid and their family, and to administer the sacraments.¹⁵ Their lives were incredibly busy, but they took a great deal of pressure off the shoulders of the Jesuit missionaries.

The main duty of the catechists, whether at the mission or in the outlying villages was to explain Catholic doctrine and convert more Lakotas to Catholicism. In this they were often more successful than the Jesuit missionaries because they could more easily see and focus on the similarities between the Lakota culture and the Catholic faith, and could explain Christian doctrine in a way that the Oglala and Brulé Indians would understand, using Lakota terminology and imagery. They were aided in this, particularly in the conversion of children, by the use of the “Two Roads” Pictorial catechism.¹⁶



Figure 3: Catechist Nick Black Elk teaching Broken Nose's children with Lacombe's Ladder. St. Francis Mission Records at Marquette University.

¹⁵ Westropp, *Missionary Life Among the Sioux*, 7.

¹⁶ Mark Thiel, “Catholic Ladders and Native American Evangelization,” *US Catholic Historian* 27 (2009): 49-70. This *Two Roads* pictorial catechism is also known as *Lacombe's Ladder*.

Made in the 1880s by the French missionary to the Canadian Blackfoot Nation, Father Albert Lacombe, the *Two Roads* was used by Catholic missionaries across North America at the turn of the twentieth century to explain Christianity, and more specifically Catholicism, to Native Americans. It was a large picture covered in drawings of biblical scenes, with two paths running along its length, one leading to heaven and the other to hell. It may have been inspired by Jacob's Ladder in the Bible. Along the road leading to heaven were pictures of virtuous acts, major events in Church history, and the main doctrines of the Catholic Church. On the road leading to hell were depictions of vices, heresies and certain heretics. As can be seen by the picture on the right, the catechism bore resemblance to a ladder, with the two paths to heaven and hell being the sides of the ladder and the routes between the two being the rungs. Examples of people on the rungs of the ladder include St. Paul, crossing from the path to hell to the path to heaven, and Arius and Martin Luther crossing in the opposite direction, The catechists used this pictorial catechism to explain the Trinity, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Jesus, the Passion, the Ten Commandments, the seven sacraments and the seven deadly sins. It helped to emphasize that the people who followed the good road went to heaven, whereas those that followed the evil road would suffer for eternity.¹⁷ This pictorial catechism was especially useful for converting the Lakota children because it was easier for them to understand theological concepts in graphic

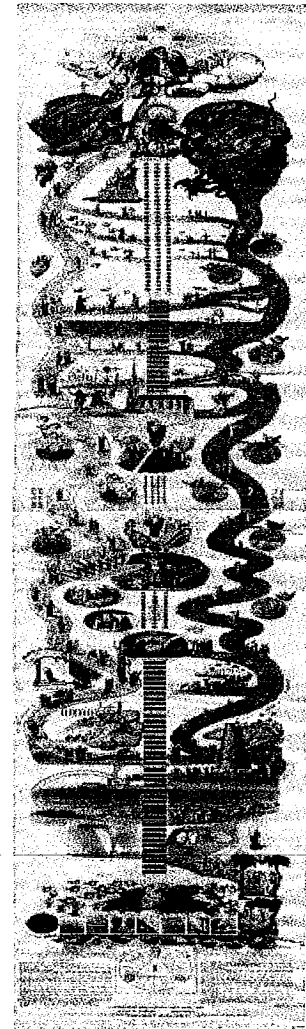


Figure 4: Lacombe's Ladder, 1874. In the Marquette University Archives and Special Collections.

¹⁷ "Instruction by Means of the Two Roads," p.3. Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 7, File 21, Folder 28.

rather than written form. Additionally it was effective in converting the Lakotas as a whole because, as historian Ross Enochs says, the method of teaching through pictures was appealing to the tribes, who traditionally recorded their history in images painted on buffalo skins.¹⁸

The Story of a Former Medicine Man

One of the most prominent catechists at Holy Rosary Mission was Nicholas Black Elk. Through a book written about part of his life by John Neihardt entitled *Black Elk Speaks*, he became famous, particularly during the 1960s, as a staunch supporter and advocate of the ways of *yuwipi*, the Ghost Dance, and other time-honored Lakota rituals and traditions. He was characterized by Neihardt, even in his later life, as a non-Christian, who wanted to pass on his knowledge of the old sacred ways of his people. Although he still discussed and participated in some of the Lakota ways as an old man, however, Black Elk saw the Lakota religion and rituals through a Christian lens. For example, when describing one aspect of the Lakota religion with historian Joseph Brown, Black Elk declared the sacred number to be seven, and explained the seven Lakota rituals in a way that paralleled the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church.¹⁹

Black Elk was not purely a Catholic, nor was he purely a Lakota. He was a syncretist, combining the two religions and cultures and making them his own.

When he discovered what *Black Elk Speaks* said about him, Black Elk declared that Neihardt had only written part of the story. As he had failed to report on his conversion to Catholicism, Black Elk decided to dictate a letter to his daughter Lucy Looks Twice, to set the record straight.

¹⁸ Ross Enochs, *The Jesuit Mission to the Lakota Sioux: A Study of Pastoral Ministry, 1886-1945*. (Sheed & Ward, 1996): 113.

¹⁹ Raymond DeMallie, "John G. Neihardt and Nicholas Black Elk", in *Black Elk Speaks The Premier Edition*. (SUNY Press, 2008), 296.

Thirty years ago I was a real Indian and knew a little about the Great Spirit – the *Wakantanka*... I was proud, perhaps I was brave, perhaps I was a good Indian: but now I am better. St. Paul also turned better when he was converted. I now know that the prayer of the Catholic Church is better than the Sun-dance or the Ghost-dance.²⁰

Later that year, he sent another letter that denounced John Neihardt, saying that he had asked the author to put at the end of the book that he was now a Catholic, that he had been a catechist for 25 years and that he had renounced his “pagan works.”²¹

Michael Steltenkamp, Jesuit priest and historian, said there was no controversy over Black Elk’s faith. In this he agreed with the writings of historian Raymond DeMallie, who famously denounced John Neihardt. Although at the beginning of his life he was an Oglala medicine man, by the end of his life he had become an amalgamation of the two: a devout Catholic, who took great pride in his Lakota heritage.²²

Even without the controversy over his religious beliefs, Black Elk led a fascinating life. He fought in the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. Later he toured the US and Europe as a performer in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. After his return to the Pine Ridge reservation in 1890, he became a proponent of the Ghost Dance – a pan-Indian religious movement and ritual, continued in his practices as a healer and medicine man and was at the Massacre at Wounded Knee.²³ It was during his time as a medicine man, and his travels around the United States and Europe with Buffalo Bill that Black Elk learned about and became interested in Christianity. Upon his return to Pine Ridge and after the Wounded Knee Massacre, Black Elk married Katherine War Bonnet, a Catholic Lakota, who would eventually bear him three sons. Although all of his children were baptized as Catholics, Black Elk would continue in his traditional healing

²⁰ Nicholas Black Elk, letter, Pine Ridge, Jan 26, 1934. Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 1/1, File 1, Folder 5.

²¹ Nicholas Black Elk, letter, Oglala, SD, Sept. 20, 1934. Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 1/1, File 1, Folder 5.

²² Michael Steltenkamp, S.J., in discussion with author, August 9, 2010.

²³ Fr. Joseph Zimmerman, S.J., “Catechist Nick Black Elk,” *Indian Sentinel* 30 (Oct, 1950): 101-102.

practices as a Lakota medicine man until 1904, when a specific event, late in the fall, would precipitate his full conversion and total dedication to Catholicism.²⁴

On November 29th 1904, Black Elk was called to a house in Payabya on the Pine Ridge reservation to heal a dying boy. Whilst conducting the *yuwipi* ritual, he was confronted by the Jesuit missionary, Father Joseph Lindebner, who had also been called to the house. The young boy had already been baptized by Lindebner, who was there to give him the Last Rites. As later described by Black Elk's daughter Lucy Looks Twice, Lindebner forcibly stopped the ritual from taking place.

He [Lindebner] took whatever my father had prepared on the ground and threw it all into the stove. He took the drum and rattle and threw them outside the tent. Then he took my father by the neck and said: "Satan get out!"... After he got through, he came out and saw my father sitting there downhearted and lonely, as though he lost all his powers... My father never talked about the incident normally but he felt it was Our Lord that appointed or selected him to do the work of the Blackrobes. You might think we was [*sic*] angry, but he wasn't bitter at all.²⁵

After Lindebner had left the house and found Black Elk sitting miserably outside, he invited Black Elk to return to the Holy Rosary Mission with him in order to study Christianity. Black Elk accepted, and then after two weeks of intense study of Catholic doctrine, was baptized by Lindebner on St. Nicholas' Day. In honor of the saint, upon whose day he was baptized, Black Elk took the name 'Nicholas' as his forename and was known as 'Nick' for the rest of his life.²⁶

Despite the evidence from Lucy Looks Twice, Black Elk's conversion story seems highly suspect. Although it is true that Black Elk converted to Catholicism on December 6, 1904, it does not compute that a well-respected man who had fought at Wounded Knee and had travelled the world would let a young priest embarrass him, running him out of a house and forcing him to

²⁴ Nicholas Black Elk to Rev. William H. Ketcham, Director of Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Manderson, SD, Jan. 12, 1912. In BCIM Records, Box 78, Folder 13, Reel 59.

²⁵ Michael Steltenkamp, *Black Elk: Holy Man of the Oglala* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993): 33-35.

²⁶ *Black Elk Timeline* produced by Marquette University for Exhibition on Nicholas Black Elk.

sit submissively outside. The historian Michael Steltenkamp provides a possible solution to this conundrum. According to Steltenkamp, many of the Pine Ridge residents who had heard Lucy's version of the story also believed that liberties were taken with her description of what had actually transpired. It was commonly assumed that most medicine men would not act as submissively as Black Elk supposedly did, and it was also known that Father Lindebner had a reputation for being very gentle and understanding. He would not have called Black Elk "Satan." Perhaps Lucy used the Lakota oral tradition and its many rhetorical techniques to embellish the event to demonstrate its importance in her father's life.²⁷ Although we may never know exactly what happened on November 29, we do know that this event propagated a radical change in Black Elk's life: his conversion to Catholicism.

After his conversion, Black Elk immediately became an active member in the Pine Ridge branch of the St. Joseph's Society – a men's Catholic group formed on each Sioux reservation to promote and encourage devotion to the Church, and then just three short years after his baptism, at the age of 44, he became a catechist. For the Jesuits, Black Elk, as an elder and former medicine man, was one of the most useful and effective catechists employed at the mission, as he could and was willing to persuade his fellow Lakotas to stop participating in *yuwipi*. According to his close friend and companion, Father Henry Westropp, Black Elk became one of the most enthusiastic and fearless catechists, eager to travel to other reservations to spread the faith to other tribes. Comparing him to St. Paul, Westropp declared that Black Elk "though half blind, had worked hard at studying his catechism and Bible history... Since that time he has been an apostle, a tireless worker."²⁸ Additionally Black Elk possessed the Lakota talent for enthralling rhetoric and used it to convince everyone he met to convert to Catholicism: "On a moment's

²⁷ Steltenkamp, *Black Elk*, 36.

For more information on this particular dilemma, read Steltenkamp, "Conversion" in *Black Elk*: 29-43.

²⁸ Westropp, *Missionary Life Among the Sioux*.

notice he can pour forth a flood of oratory holding his hearers spellbound. There are few that can resist him and none of whom he is afraid.”²⁹ On the Pine Ridge reservation, Nicholas Black Elk was hugely popular.

Nick Black Elk was perhaps the most enthusiastic catechist at both the Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions. He constantly wanted to travel to other reservations to use his oratorical skills to spread the word of God, and so appealed not only to the Superiors of the mission at Pine Ridge, but also to William Ketcham, the Director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions in Washington DC to provide the funds for him to do so. Ketcham, who worked with the Jesuits from 1905 to 1918 to acquire funding for the catechists, was a fervent advocate of Native American catechists, recognizing their effectiveness in converting increasing numbers of Indians to Catholicism. He worked alongside the Marquette League³⁰ to acquire financial support for the catechists and their travels, especially by publishing letters in their periodical *The Calumet*.³¹

Consequently, in March 1908 Nicholas Black Elk, along with fellow catechist Joe Red Willow, travelled to the St. Stephen’s Mission on the Wind River reservation of the Arapahos in Wyoming.³² Staying on the reservation for a month, their duties included talking to the Arapahos about Catholicism, establishing a St. Joseph’s Society for the Arapaho men, and teaching them how to pray. In order to do this, Nicholas Black Elk wrote to Henry Westropp asking him to send the Lakota translations of the Catholic prayers, so that they would be able to translate them into Arapaho. Although they managed to successfully establish a St. Joseph’s Society on the Wind River reservation, the two Lakota catechists did encounter difficulties on the new reservation. First, the Arapahos did not completely trust the Lakota catechists who came onto their land, at

²⁹ Westropp, *Missionary Life Among the Sioux*.

³⁰ The Marquette League was a Roman Catholic fundraising organization in America that supported Catholic missions and schools to Native Americans. The League was active from 1904 to 1991.

³¹ William Ketcham, *The Calumet* (April 1917) BCIM Records Box 14/1, File 4, Folder 2.

³² Letter to the Editor from Nicholas Black Elk. *Sinasapa Wocekiye Taeyanpaha*. May 31, 1908.

their food, and slept in their homes. They suspected that the catechists were there as spies, scouting for the rights to Arapaho lands and possessions. It was only after they were reassured by their own missionaries that Red Willow and Black Elk were there solely to teach the Catechism, and not to meddle in the secular affairs of the Arapahos, that they began to listen to the two Lakota men.³³

Additionally, despite declaring to the Arapaho people that “there is no difference between them and us because we are both Indians,”³⁴ they soon found that there were quite a few distinctions between the two tribes that would have to be overcome in order to successfully teach the Catholic beliefs. The largest setback was the language barrier – the Arapaho Indians did not speak Lakota, and neither Black Elk nor Red Willow was able to speak Arapaho. In fact Black Elk could not even speak English very well. In an effort to circumvent these difficulties, they employed a circuitous series of translations that were often confusing and time consuming. When Black Elk spoke in Lakota, Red Willow would simultaneously translate his words into English for retranslation into Arapaho.³⁵ This was not conducive to the swift transmission of the Catholic faith, and the St. Stephen’s missionaries and the Arapahos soon made it clear that they wished to have their own Arapaho catechists. Before Black Elk and Red Willow left the reservation, Father William McMillan suggested that they find and mentor two Arapaho men to take over their duties once they had gone home. In this Joe Red Willow was more successful. In a letter written on the 29th March 1908 to William Ketcham, McMillan wrote:

Nick Black Elk left here for Pine Ridge on the 19thish and Joe Red Willow leaves tomorrow. Of the two I believe Joe was the better, shows more manliness, is very devout,

³³ William Ketcham to Fr. William McMillan, Washington DC, March 21, 1908.

³⁴ Black Elk, *Sinasapa*, May 31, 1908.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

and can command the respect of those he is instructing, and in this respect I believe he was a great help to our two new catechists – the three always worked together.³⁶

On this trip, the two Lakota catechists learned how difficult it was to be a missionary in an unfamiliar place and culture, and once they returned to Pine Ridge, they explained and gave more flexibility to the Jesuit missionaries, who were not only living in an unknown culture, but were also in a completely foreign land.

Despite being more popular and successful as a catechist among his fellow Oglalas, Black Elk's enthusiasm ensured that he continued to travel to different Indian reservations, undertaking various missionary expeditions. Later that year, in November of 1908, Westropp and Ketcham financed Black Elk's month-long mission trip to the Winnebagos in Nebraska.³⁷ In 1909, Black Elk wrote to Ketcham asking him to finance an additional expedition to the Assiniboins in Canada, who had apparently asked specifically for Black Elk.³⁸ Both Westropp and Ketcham, but particularly Westropp, believed that the Lakota catechists were ideal missionaries to other reservations because as Native Americans themselves, they were able to influence the Indians that the Jesuits were not able to approach quite as easily. But, when in 1910 Ketcham attempted to recruit a Lakota catechist to travel to a new mission on the Mescalero-Apache reservation in New Mexico, he could find no one willing to travel such a long distance.³⁹ This expedition would essentially require the catechist to move to New Mexico. Although the Lakota catechists enjoyed traveling, they were reluctant to completely move to other reservations. Their lives, their homes and their families were at Pine Ridge and Rosebud, and they did not want to leave them completely behind.

³⁶ William McMillan to William Ketcham, Wind River Reservation, WY, March 29, 1908.

³⁷ Henry Westropp to William Ketcham, Nov. 8 1908; William Ketcham to Henry Westropp, Dec. 12 1908. BCIM Records. Box 1, File 58, Folder 26.

³⁸ Nicholas Black Elk to William Ketcham, Pine Ridge, Sept. 7, 1909. BCIM Records, Box 1, File 63, Folder 3.

³⁹ William Ketcham to Florentine Digmann, Nov. 5, 1910. BCIM Records Box 1, File 67, Folder 16. Secretary of the BCIM to Henry Westropp, Oct. 9, 1911. BCIM Records, Box 1, File 73, Folder 1.

In order to find a solution to both the physical and spiritual problems they encountered on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, the Jesuits turned to the Indians themselves to help them in their mission. They employed the newly-converted elders of the tribe – some former medicine men, some tribal chiefs – to explain, teach and spread the Catholic faith to their fellow Lakota Indians. Traveling around with the priests, these men held Mass, explained Catholic doctrine in terms that the Lakotas would more easily understand, used the *Two Roads* pictorial catechism, visited the sick and administered the sacraments. The Jesuits never managed to establish a native clergy at the Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions. However, their native catechists were so successful that the lack of a clergy did not hinder the aims of the missionaries. The Lakota catechists were respected, not only by the Jesuits on the Sioux reservations but also by the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions in Washington DC, which showed its confidence in the catechists' abilities by funding their expeditions to different Native American nations to spread the Catholic faith. The employment of Indian catechists at Pine Ridge and Rosebud ensured that the Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions were used as models for other Catholic Indian missions across the United States.

CHAPTER 3

THE MIXING AND ADAPTATION OF RELIGIONS

In order to live and prosper on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, two vast yet remote tracts of land populated mostly by the Lakota Sioux, the Jesuit missionaries had to adapt their lifestyles in order to mesh well with the Lakota culture. In order to endure in what they perceived as a bleak environment, the Jesuits had to live in relative harmony with the Indians, learning and listening to those who had managed to live, hunt, work and survive on the land for centuries. The Lakota religion and culture were intrinsically intertwined, being essentially one and the same. Hunting, farming, warfare, healing, feasting, smoking and grief all had religious connotations. For instance, the main theme of the Sun Dance, the most important religious ceremony for the Plains Indians of the nineteenth century, was the buffalo and the buffalo hunt.¹ Hunting these creatures was not simply a way of surviving and nourishment for the Indians, it was a religious experience. In order to remain at peace and protect the customs and culture of the Lakota, the Jesuits came to accommodate the aspects of the Lakota religion that were deemed morally sound and did not counter Catholic teaching during their evangelization of the Sioux.

In return, the Catholic Lakotas accepted the Jesuits into their extended families and encouraged the integration of their customs into the Catholic Mass and other ceremonies. In order to further and facilitate the conversion process, the Jesuit missionaries chose to perceive similarities between the Lakota culture and religion and Catholicism, seeing concepts that in the Western world were deemed entirely Christian and Catholic to be reflected in the Lakota religion. However, it was not just the Jesuit missionaries who opted to identify these similarities.

¹ The Sun Dance was the most religious ceremony for the Sioux. Consisting of a 12 day ritual of self-sacrifice, it showed the dancers' courage and endurance in serving the Great Spirit.

In justifying their conversions to Catholicism, Catholic Lakota also remarked upon the parallels that they recognized between the two religions. Near the end of his life, Frank Fools Crow, a Catholic Lakota, explained one of these likenesses between Catholicism and the traditional Lakota religion, particularly in regards to the Trinity.

We have three Chief Gods like the Christian do. Wakantanka is like the Father. Tunkashila is like the Son. The Powers (Four Directions) and Grandmother Earth together are like the Holy Spirit, and I call the five of them Wakantanka's Helpers. When I speak of all seven of the beings together, I sometimes call them the "Higher Powers." When I pray with my pipe I point the stem up to Wakantanka, then just a little lower to Tunkashila. But Wakantanka and Tunkashila think, act and watch over us as one. So there is only one God. Whenever I say Wakantanka, I mean Tunkashila too.²

The Jesuits also identified these similarities and realized that although there were some superstitions and rituals that seemed superfluous, the Lakota faith and culture was at heart honorable. Therefore they believed that with Catholic teaching, they could perfect that which was already good in Sioux society.

Death and the Afterlife

After only a few months on the reservations, the Jesuits noted that the traditional Lakota beliefs on the afterlife and death were similar to their own. Unlike some tribes of North American Indians, the Lakotas did not have a fear of the dead. Instead they greatly honored and respected their dead and believed that the actions and words of the living would help in the journey of the deceased to Paradise. According to customary Lakota beliefs, after a relative died, the family had to tend to the soul for the duration of one year. In order to do this, they would cut a lock of the deceased's hair and place it in a small bag, around which they would construct a *wanagi tipi* or spirit house. Every day the family would make the journey to the western edge of

² Frank Fools Crow <http://www.sittingowl.com/07.htm>

the settlement (where the spirit houses were located) and make offerings of food and prayers. After one year, the spirit was given its last meal and was allowed to travel to the afterlife. The spirit then walked south along the *wanagi tacanku* – the ghost road or the Milky Way, in order to meet the Owl Woman, an old woman who would pass judgment on their lives. If they had been good during their lifetime, they were allowed to walk past into paradise. However, if their souls were corrupt, they were pushed off a cliff and their spirit was forced to roam the Earth for eternity.³

The care and respect for the spirits of the dead rang true to the Jesuit missionaries, who had long prayed and felt responsible for the souls of the deceased. In the Catholic faith, all who die in “God’s grace” are assured of eternal salvation but must first undergo a form of purification in Purgatory in order to achieve the levels of goodness and holiness needed to enter Heaven.⁴ The living can help the deceased’s soul’s journey to Heaven and shorten their time in Purgatory by offering prayers and Masses, giving to charity and doing penance in the name of the deceased.⁵ In both Catholicism and the traditional Lakota religion, the acts and words of the living can affect the fortunes of the dead, and the Jesuits capitalized on this similarity in order to more easily explain the Catholic teaching on the afterlife and to smooth the converted Lakotas’ transition to the Catholic faith.

There were, however, some differences in the treatment of the dead bodies. Whereas Catholics would bury or cremate the corpses, the Lakotas would traditionally place the dead in a box raised on poles or hung from trees on hilltops. The most important factor for the treatment of the corpse for the Lakotas was that the body remain open to the elements, becoming food for

³ “Lakota Spirituality: Concepts of Life and Death” <http://1onewolf.com/lakota/spirit2.htm>
William Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1975), 93-95.

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1030-1031.

⁵ *Ibid.* 1475, 1498.

eagles and other birds of prey. Many Indians were concerned that if they were baptized as Christians and converted to Catholicism, they would have to be interred in the ground, away from the freedom of the air and sky.⁶ Although to a Western audience, this display of the body sounds quite gruesome, the Jesuit missionaries were tolerant of the Indian way of burial as it did not contradict Catholic teaching. Therefore if they wished, Catholic Lakotas were permitted to be buried in the Indian fashion, above ground. Additionally, accompanying the Lakota funeral was a mourning ritual, which involved the men and women of the community wailing and singing a song of death alongside the body. The Jesuits also declared this ritual to be acceptable under Catholic teaching and participated in it alongside the Lakota men and women. When Father Aloysius Bosch, the Superior of Holy Rosary Mission, died in 1903, the Lakota people followed his coffin to his burial site, and then spent the night around his grave, wailing and crying out.⁷ Not only does this show that the Jesuits were open to accepting and incorporating traditional Lakota customs into Catholic rituals, but it also shows that the missionaries were respected and liked enough by the Lakota community that the Indians would lament and honor their passing.

The only aspect of the Lakota funerary rite that the Jesuits discouraged was one that they believed was harmful to the Indians' well-being and financial situation. At every important milestone in the life of a Lakota Indian, whether it be a birth, marriage or a pow-wow, the family participates in *wopila* or "give-away" where a gift is given by the family to everyone in the village. However when a death occurs, such as that of a husband or wife, the surviving spouse gives away everything that the deceased owned, and sometimes even gives away their own possessions including their house.⁸ Although the Jesuits did not believe that this outstanding act

⁶ Digmann, diary, Sept. 1, 1887, pg. 12. In the Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 7, File 14, Folder 8.

⁷ "Chronicles of the Sisters of St. Francis," 1903 entry, pg. 18. In the Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 2/1, File 1, Folder 6.

⁸ Napecinkala, "Wopila! Giveaways make powerful medicine" *Widdershins* (2006).

of generosity opposed Catholic teaching, and even commended the Lakotas on their charity and hospitality, they did believe it was wrong to impoverish a family on the tragic occasion of a death and thought that the generosity displayed in the *wopila* was too extreme. However, in this respect the Jesuits were overruled. The *wopila* was a moment of both pride and humility for the Lakotas and it tied them to their community, whilst enriching their spiritual life. With the Sioux determined to continue with the time-honored *wopila* tradition, the Jesuits were forced to accept this act of generosity as an integral part of reservation life.

Wakan Tanka – the Supreme Being

Although disapproving of some rituals in the traditional Lakota religion, the Jesuits did acknowledge that at heart the Lakota faith was monotheistic. The Indians believed in and worshipped one eternal Supreme Being and therefore, according to the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (BCIM), even before their contact with Catholicism, the Lakota religion had “some virtue.”⁹ The Lakota name for the Great Spirit was *Wakan Tanka* and from the earliest meeting with the Lakota Sioux, the Jesuits used this term interchangeably with the expression “God” to describe the Christian deity.¹⁰

When Jean-Pierre De Smet first met with the Lakotas during the 1840s and began teaching the tenets of Christianity, a Lakota man was said to have commented that De Smet spoke of a Supreme Being similar in many ways to the Great Spirit, *Wakan Tanka*. The Lakota at this point could not understand how the people had killed and crucified this Supreme Being and asked De Smet whether his God and their *Wakan Tanka* were one and the same. He is said to

⁹ “Monsignor Stephan” *Indian Sentinel* (1902-1903): 4.

¹⁰ Albert Riester, S.J., used *Wakantanka* as a translation for God. In 1930, he petitioned for prayers that the Sioux Indians would come to know the love and service of *Wakantanka*, the Great Spirit.

have assured the Lakota that they were.¹¹ Although this story may not be completely true, its recording and repetition demonstrates that the Jesuits believed that the idea of the story was accurate: *Wakan Tanka* and the Christian God were identical.

The term *wakan* is often translated to mean ‘holy’ or ‘sacred’ but in actuality it is something much more mysterious than that. The Lakota Sioux describe things that are *wakan* as having similar traits as electricity – a force that stems from something seemingly invisible. Although most commonly translated as ‘holy,’ its meaning is also mysterious, inexplicable and awesome. The Jesuits often used the word *wakan* combined with other Lakota words to describe Catholic concepts that might otherwise be difficult to explain to the Sioux. For instance *yutapi wakan* meaning ‘holy food’ was the Eucharist; a guardian angel was a *ogligle-wakan* or ‘holy messenger’; the church building itself was the *tipi wakan* or ‘holy house’ and the devil was the *wakansica*, which in the Lakota culture were evil spirits – a supernatural evil.¹²

When first trying to explain the concept of the Eucharist to the Lakota people, the Jesuit missionaries encountered great difficulty. To the Catholic, the Eucharist is Jesus himself, present among us body, soul and divinity. Consuming the bread and wine – Jesus’ body and blood – not only strengthens Catholics in their faith, but also absolves their venial sins and helps to preserve them from mortal sins.¹³ However when telling the Sioux that they had to consume the body of Jesus Christ – who was *Wakan Tanka* – the Lakotas looked horrified, hardly believing that these Catholics sullied their god by taking him into their own bodies.¹⁴ From here, the story continues

¹¹ David Stroud, Jr. “We Wore Our Feathers High,” pamphlet Jan 16, 1958, pg 7. In the Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 8, File 7, Folder 5.

¹² Eugene Buechel, *A Dictionary of the Teton Dakota Sioux Language*, (Pine Ridge: Red Cloud Indian School, 1970) 370, 663, 689, 730. In Ross Enochs, *The Jesuit Mission to the Lakota Sioux: A Study of Pastoral Ministry, 1886-1945*. (Sheed&Ward, 1996).

¹³ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1436

¹⁴ Louis Goll, S.J., *Jesuit Missions Among the Sioux*. St. Francis: St. Francis Mission, 1940: 10. In the Holy Rosary Mission Records Box 7, File 14, Folder 8.

that the Jesuits simply solved the problem through a clearer explanation, but it does not state what that explanation was. I can only assume therefore that they explained the belief using Lakota terminology, calling the Eucharist the *yutapi wakan* or 'holy food'.

This use of Lakota terminology to describe Christian rituals and concepts was not limited to the portrayal of God and the Eucharist and the use of the word *wakan*. In the traditional Lakota religion, as in Catholicism, there were seven sacraments or sacred rites. These included the Sweat Lodge, the Vision Quest, Ghost Keeping, the Sun Dance, the Making of Relatives, Girl's Puberty and the Throwing of the Ball. In order to make some Catholic concepts and traditions easier to understand and explain to the Lakota, the Jesuits used the terminology of the seven sacred rites. For instance, from the 1890s until the 1940s, the Jesuits at the Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions took the children attending the mission schools on three day retreats to learn how to better know and live their faith. These retreats were the joint idea of Fathers Placidus Sialm, Florentine Digmann and Eugene Buechel and were often a great success. As described by Digmann in his diary prior to the first retreat, they decided to adopt the Lakota phrase *hamble iciyope* to advertise the retreat to the Lakota families.¹⁵ This phrase connected the children's retreat with the traditional Lakota vision quest: a three day private retreat for young Lakota men to pray to *Wakantanka* to either obtain or give thanks for good favor. Due to this connection, the Indians understood the significance and importance of the children's retreat.

The Jesuits also used the Lakota term when discussing their own individual retreats. In 1892, Digmann wrote in his diary that he was about to embark upon a personal silent retreat. In order to let the other missionaries know what he was planning to do, he decided to nail a sign to his door. All it said was "*Hamble iciya.*"¹⁶

¹⁵ Digmann, diary, Dec. 5-7, 1895. In the Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 7, File 14, Folder 8.

¹⁶ Digmann, diary, Aug. 2, 1892. In the Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 7, File 14, Folder 8.

As can be seen, the Jesuits not only strongly emphasized the similarities between Lakota and Catholic customs, but also adopted Lakota terminology to describe Catholic concepts. This not only convinced increasing numbers of Lakota to convert to Catholicism, but also eased the converted Lakota's transition into their new Catholic faith.

Names and Family

In addition to renaming Catholic rituals and practices with Lakota terms, most of the Jesuit missionaries were given Indian names by the Sioux living on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. Customarily the Lakota practice of giving Indian names to white people was an informal convention, simply indicating that they had accepted the person into their community. It would begin with a Lakota naming one of their white friends with a name that was easier for them to pronounce or that in some way reflected one of their characteristics. Less frequently, the Lakotas would name the Jesuits officially in a ceremony, showing respect for the missionaries more formally. Although it is unclear which Jesuits were named in this manner, it does appear that most of the missionaries at the Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions were given Lakota names.¹⁷ In fact even the Director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions in Washington DC, William Ketcham, was given the Indian name of *Wambli Wakita* or 'Watching Eagle,' perhaps because to the Lakota Catholics, he was the leader of a rather important organization.¹⁸

¹⁷ The Jesuit priests who were given Lakota names as follows: John Jutz "Iron Gaze", Henry Billings "Good Horse", Florentine Digmann "Putin Sapa" (Blackbeard), Henry Westropp "Little Owl", Leo Cunningham "Wambli Makeskan Un" (Eagle of the Lonely Country), Albert Riester "Canku Tanka" (Big Road), Otto Moorman "Wanbli Ska" (White Eagle), Eugene Buechel "Wanbli Sapa" (Black Eagle) and Joseph Zimmerman "Wambli Wankatuya" (High Eagle).

¹⁸ The eagle was a sacred animal for the Lakotas and therefore to give someone a name with 'eagle' showed great respect and deference.

As well as naming the Jesuit missionaries, the Lakota would occasionally adopt a priest or brother into their individual families. In a ceremony called the *hunka lowampi*, one of the sacred rites of the traditional Lakota religion, an individual Sioux man or woman would adopt another person into their nuclear family and they would become relatives. The ceremony could only happen, however, if both parties were eager for the bonding to take place. If the two people were the same age, they would become brother and sister; if they were close in age, they would become uncle and nephew, and if there was a large age gap, the elder would be the parent, and the younger the child.¹⁹ It was a great honor to participate in this ceremony and was a sign of utmost respect and love for the person being adopted. Over the years, several Jesuit priests and brothers were adopted. Prior to the founding of the missions, Chief Two Bears adopted Pierre Jean De Smet, and the family of Chief Spotted Tail adopted Father Francis Craft. Later Henry Westropp, Joseph Zimmerman and Otto Moorman were adopted, with Moorman's adoption ceremony lasting for an entire afternoon.

Not only did these naming and adoption ceremonies indicate that the majority of the Jesuits were respected and well-loved on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, but it also shows that the Jesuits did not think the rituals, which were fundamentally Lakota sacraments, in any way contradicted the rules and teachings of the Catholic faith. In fact the adoption ceremony in particular, which involved eating dog meat, painting one's body and smoking the calumet and dancing, gave the Jesuits great pride as they were being welcomed fully into the Sioux tribe.²⁰ The emphasis the Lakotas placed on family was often commended by the Jesuits, who valued and cherished the integrated familial structure of the Oglala and Brulé tribes.

¹⁹ Powers, *Oglala Religion*, 100.

²⁰ James R. Walker *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1980): 206

The Calumet

From Pierre Jean De Smet's first encounter with the Lakota Sioux in the mid nineteenth century, the Jesuits had participated in the smoking of the calumet and all the rituals associated with it. Not only did smoking the pipe endear the Jesuits to the Indians, it also demonstrated their knowledge and respect of Lakota culture, as well as an intention of peace and friendship.

Traditionally, the Lakotas believed that the sacred pipe had been given to them by the White Buffalo Calf Woman, who explained that the pipe was a symbol of everything in the world. The red bowl represented the earth, the buffalo carved into the side represented the animals, the pipe stem represented the plants and the eagle feather represented the birds. The woman told the Indians that smoking the pipe would forge connections between them and the rest of the universe including the Great Spirit *Wakantanka*. Therefore when people smoked the pipe together they were bound in friendship and harmony.²¹

As the pipe was the most sacred of all religious equipment, not only to the Lakotas but to Indians across North America, and because its use did not run contrary to Catholic teaching, the Jesuits on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations allowed its use and continued to participate in the smoking of the pipe itself. Due to its religious importance and meaning of peace, the pipe was even incorporated into the most holy of Catholic rituals: the Mass. At the mission on the Standing Rock reservation, Father Jerome Hunt allowed the Indians to come to the altar and light their pipes from the candles during Mass. Later, on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, Father Paul Steinmetz used and blessed the pipe during the Liturgy of the Eucharist in an attempt to establish the calumet as a sacramental in Catholic ceremonies.²² The Jesuits saw no

²¹ Joseph Eppes Brown *The Sacred Pipe* (1953), 3-5.

²² Sister M. Claudia Duratschek, O.S.B., *Under the Shadow of His Wings* (Aberdeen: North Plains Press, 1971), 86. Paul B. Steinmetz, S.J., *Pipe, Bible, and Peyote among the Oglala Lakota* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 178.

immorality in the pipe's message or in the act of smoking and therefore in the hopes of converting greater numbers of Lakota, willingly allowed the Indians to incorporate its use into its equivalent in Catholicism: the Mass.

Yuwipi

Despite allowing some aspects of the Lakota religion to continue, the Jesuit missionaries vigorously opposed the traditional healing ceremony of *yuwipi*. Believing it was sacrilegious and immoral, they forbade any Lakota Catholic from participating in the ceremonies and attempted to stop the practice altogether. The ceremony itself was conducted in complete darkness. Using herbs, the *yuwipi wicaša* or shamanic medicine man would invoke the spirits of humans, animals, birds and other inanimate objects in order to learn how to successfully cure the sick or injured. Then beating a drum and muttering incantations, the medicine man would banish the disease. He would finally charge a considerable fee for his time and skill.²³

The Jesuit missionaries were particularly alarmed by the invocation of the spirits as they believed the medicine men were being possessed by the devil. In many cases, however, they also thought that the medicine men were simply frauds. In his diary, Father Florentine Digmann described some of the tricks the healers used during the *yuwipi* ceremony in order to impress their audiences and earn some money. In 1887 he heard of a story of a healer, who in order to gain a little extra cash stole his neighbor's five horses. The neighbor, trusting that the healer would be able to help him find his lost animals and bring the thief to justice, paid the medicine man a great deal of money to locate the horses by divination. After receiving the money and sending his neighbor home so he could discern the whereabouts of the lost horses in peace, the

²³ Louis Goll, S.J., *Jesuit Missions Among the Sioux*: St. Francis: St. Francis Mission, 1940: 15. In the Holy Rosary Mission Records Box 7, File 14, Folder 8.

"Lakota Spirituality: Yuwipi... Curing Rituals" <http://lonewolf.com/lakota/spirit8.htm>

medicine man went to his hiding spot and brought the horses back to his neighbor with much fanfare and celebration. Surprisingly the thief was never found.²⁴ A few years later, a former medicine man, Dog Ghost, confessed to Father Digmann some of the methods he had used during the *yuwipi* ceremony to seem more mysterious and powerful. He admitted that under the cover of darkness, he would put flesh or blood in his mouth. Then after sucking in air over the patient, he would spit it out and declare that he had sucked the disease out of the sick man.²⁵ These two stories ultimately proved to Digmann the deceptive nature of the *yuwipi wicaša*.²⁶

Despite disapproving of the *yuwipi* ceremony and the flamboyant tricks used by the healers, the Jesuits recognized that the medicine men had some skill, particularly in their knowledge of herbal medicines. Therefore, they allowed those former medicine men who had converted to Catholicism, such as Nicholas Black Elk, to continue their healing practices with herbs, as long as they did not accompany their work with the chanting and mystery of the *yuwipi* ceremony. Some Jesuits, such as Father Eugene Buechel, even attempted to learn from the former medicine men and become skilled in the use and study of medicinal herbs found on the reservations.²⁷

Although they vehemently opposed the *yuwipi* ceremony itself, the Jesuit missionaries on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations understood the need for doctors and healers in such a remote location. Therefore they allowed the medicine men to continue treating patients with their knowledge of herbs, even though their wisdom had come from a practice that was so abhorrent to the Catholic missionaries.

²⁴ Digmann, diary, Sept 1, 1887, pg. 10. In the Holy Rosary Mission Records, Box 7, File 14, Folder 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Jan. 26, 1892.

²⁶ We cannot take these stories at face value to be completely true, as they come from Jesuit diaries and sources, which were attempting to prove the evil nature of *yuwipi*. However they are useful in that we can see how the Jesuits viewed the *yuwipi* ceremony, and we can note how they argued against its continuance.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1888, pg. 8.

Although there were some aspects of the Lakota religion and culture that caused the Jesuit missionaries on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations alarm, the majority of the beliefs, rituals and principles did not contradict the Catholic faith and teachings in any way. In these instances, the Jesuits allowed the customs to continue, even allowing the Lakotas to integrate some of their practices and traditions into Catholic ceremonies such as the Mass and the Eucharist. Overall, the Jesuits sought to convert Indians to Catholicism, whilst preserving the Sioux culture. Evidenced by the existence of Lakota customs on the reservations and at the missions two hundred years after the first Jesuit presence in the region, the missionaries did not want to impose foreign traditions and customs on the Lakota people. Instead they wanted to shape their religious beliefs, which the Jesuits consistently suggested were similar to their own, to perfectly fit a Catholic mould.

The similarities perceived by both the missionaries and the Lakotas, and the acceptance of blatant differences between Catholicism and the traditional Lakota religion allowed the Jesuits to successfully live and work in South Dakota and be accepted and welcomed as a part of Lakota culture and life.

CONCLUSION

In 1874, in a small village in central Germany, the man who would one day become Father Eugene Buechel, Superior of both the St. Francis and Holy Rosary missions in South Dakota, was born. He grew up as the tenth son of a local farmer, attending schools in both Germany and the Netherlands. By the time of his death, he would be a Jesuit missionary, living on the American frontier and speaking fluent Lakota, he would have published both religious and cultural works in Lakota, and he would identify himself as both 'Catholic' and 'Indian.' After Buechel's death, Joseph Karol, S.J., of the St. Francis Mission wrote in his obituary: "Through his missionary work, his language study, and his artifact collection, Fr. Buechel gradually so identified himself with the Sioux that he unconsciously got into the habit of saying, 'We Indians would say or do that this way.'"¹ As can be seen, Father Buechel became so entrenched in the mission life on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations that he began to instinctively call himself an Indian. In order to convert the Lakota to Catholicism, Buechel and his fellow missionaries chose to learn the Lakota language, live among the Indians, and participate in many of their ceremonies. Whilst living and working on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, attempting to convert the Lakota to Catholicism, the Jesuits adapted to the Lakota culture and slowly became culturally Indian themselves.

The Jesuits did not simply learn the Lakota language and participate in their customs, they also acknowledged that there was truth and virtue in much of the Lakota religion and culture. As a consequence, they actively tried to incorporate those Indian religious rituals that were not contrary to Catholic teaching into the Catholic celebrations and ceremonies. During

¹ Joseph Karol, S.J., "Chicken Feathers to War Bonnets – Fr. Buechel, S.J.," *Rapid City Journal*, Feb. 13, 1955, p.15. In the St. Francis Mission Collection Box 7, File 1, Folder 2.

their mission to the Lakotas, the Jesuits allowed the use of the calumet in Mass, called God *Wakan Tanka*, joined with Catholic Lakota in traditional dances and allowed the continuation of the traditional Lakota funeral ceremony. The Jesuits did not allow the Lakota traditions and customs that were too divergent from Catholic belief to continue, however. The *yuwipi* ceremony, which the Jesuits believed on a spiritual level was inspired by the devil, and on a human level was both fraudulent and larcenous, was expressly forbidden. The lives of the medicine men, proud elders in the community, were irrevocably changed. They essentially had four options: convert to Catholicism and become proponents of the faith as catechists, continue their lives as medicine men, change their ways and outlook on life, or leave their tribe and family and move to another reservation. In addition, polygamy was banned on the reservations. The Indians who wished to convert to Catholicism had to be married to only one person. If they were already married to more than one woman, the Jesuits would make them choose one wife, whose marriage they would then bless. The additional former wives were taken in by other families, causing financial strain. The Jesuits' arrival and work on the reservations did cause havoc and upset amongst the Oglala and Brulé Sioux, and some Indians left their homes and moved away from the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. However, the Jesuits did try to listen to the Lakota who were willing to convert, many of whom took the initiative and sought to integrate their cultural and religious rituals into Catholicism, actively trying to remain both Catholic and Lakota.

The Lakotas did not blindly follow the Jesuits' teaching. Some rejected the missionaries' presence and some ignored their existence outright. Many of the Lakotas, however, actively sought a way to live in harmony with the missionaries, and were curious about their beliefs. Chief Red Cloud of the Oglala, for example, went to Washington to petition the President to send

Catholic missionaries to the Pine Ridge reservation, and many of the Lakota parents sent their children to the mission schools to receive a Catholic education. The Catholic converts, not wanting to lose their Lakota heritage, were keen to not only include Lakota rituals in Catholic celebrations, but also to continue participating in the traditional Indian ceremonies. For instance, towards the end of his life, the catechist Nick Black Elk, in conjunction with instructing Catholicism, would teach about his Lakota heritage and participate in reenactments of the Sun Dance and other aspects of traditional Lakota life at pageants. There were many others like him on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, who were both fully Lakota and fully Catholic. They were not simply Indians who were Catholic. They actively participated in both aspects of their lives: their faith and their culture, and successfully managed to combine the two.

It must be conceded, however, that the Jesuits' acceptance of the Lakota way of life was in part a solution to the difficulties they faced trying to live and work on the plains of South Dakota. In addition to the location being very remote and common amenities being scarce, the weather conditions were very harsh. The Lakotas, who had survived in these circumstances for centuries, clearly had a lifestyle that endured. Being accepted into the Lakota society, in order to both continue their evangelization and to survive, was an imperative for the Jesuits. This is one of the reasons why they not only chose to immerse themselves in the Lakota culture and participate in the rituals, but also chose to target the chiefs and tribal leaders in their evangelizing. If they could convert the elders, perhaps the rest of the tribe would follow. However, the missionaries also recognized and welcomed the Lakotas' great hospitality, charity and sense of family. As they were mostly Europeans, who had left their families and homes across the Atlantic, the Jesuit missionaries valued the acceptance and new familial ties the

Lakotas provided, and as a consequence acknowledged and partook in many traditional Lakota activities.

In this respect, the work of the Jesuits at the St. Francis and Holy Rosary Missions is representative of missionary work across the world, both in the past and today. The approach of concentrating conversion efforts on the tribal elders is described in the *Constitution of the Society of Jesus*, and is used as an effective method of conversion by Jesuits across the globe.

Additionally the Second Vatican Council alludes to the cross-cultural participation of missionaries in order to increase the numbers of converts.²

Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than an epiphany, or a manifesting of God's decree, and its fulfillment in the world and in world history, in the course of which God, by means of mission, manifestly works out the history of salvation... And so, whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples, not only is not lost, but is healed, uplifted, and perfected for the glory of God, the shame of the demon, and the bliss of men. In order that [missionaries] may be able to bear more fruitful witness to Christ, let them be joined to those [indigenous peoples] by esteem and love; let them acknowledge themselves to be members of the group of men among whom they live; let them share in cultural and social life by the various undertakings and enterprises of human living; let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows.³

As can be seen, the Church intends for Catholic missionaries to immerse themselves fully in a foreign culture in order to ease the conversion process. In one way, that is exactly what the Jesuit missionaries on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations were doing. However, the Church does not expect the missionaries and their faith to be irrevocably changed by their interactions with the indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, in the case of the Jesuits and the Lakota Sioux, it was.

² Although the Second Vatican Council opened in 1962 and closed in 1965, 30 years after the scope of my thesis, the mission theology it discusses was a continuation of a trend occurring during the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries at Catholic missions across the world.

³ Chapter 2: Mission Work Itself, *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church – Ad Gentes*, promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7th, 1965. Paragraphs 9 and 11.
<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/v16.html>

The work at the Holy Rosary and St. Francis Missions came to be a true dialogue between the Jesuits and the Lakotas. Not only did the Lakotas take the initiative to integrate their traditional customs into Catholic rituals, but the Jesuits also showed their willingness and approval of Lakota culture by participating in many of the Indian traditions, encouraging the preservation of the Lakota culture and its incorporation into Catholic ceremonies. Although the Jesuits were teaching the Oglala and the Brulé Sioux Catholic doctrine, they were simultaneously adopting the lifestyle and deep spiritual nature of the Lakota people. Unlike the “Two Roads Catechism,” that clearly depicted missionaries helping the Christless cross from the ‘Path to Hell’ to the ‘Path of Salvation,’ there was no clear route for the missionaries and Indians on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. Instead the Jesuits and the Lakota Catholics travelled on a mutual journey, forging their own road to salvation that included aspects of both Catholicism and the traditional Lakota culture. In this way, they came to understand that it was possible to participate in the ceremonies and rituals of a non-Christian culture, and still be fully Catholic.

When they died or left the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations for new missions, the Jesuits and their faith had been changed. They did not have the same beliefs and lifestyle as they did when they arrived, as new missionaries, eager to convert the Lakotas and save their souls. Whilst still Catholic, they had become progressively more Lakota. Whilst converting the Lakotas, the Jesuits themselves had been changed, themselves becoming Lakota Catholics whilst the Indians they were instructing became Catholic Lakotas.

APPENDIX

List of Native Catechists at St. Francis and Holy Rosary Missions

Source: St. Francis Mission Records, compiled by Marquette University Archivist Mark Thiel in 1992 for the Lumen Christi Award Application of the Diocese of Rapid City.

NAME	KNOWN DATES SERVED
[Afraid of] Hawk, Emil	1930-1931
Apple, Charlie	1931-?
Apple, George	1928-1931
Arrow Side	1933-1934
Arrowside, Frank	1931-1948
Arrow Sight, Frank	1931
Bald Eagle Bear, Peter	1928-1931
Big Crow, John	1930-1935, 1946-1947.
Black Elk, Nicholas	1907-1936
Black Elk, Paul	1930-1944
Black Elk, Valandra	1933-1934
Blue Thunder, Harry	1935-1936
Bordeaux, Francis	1935-1936
Boyer, John	1928-1931
Broken Tail, Moses	?
Bulltail, Moses	1934, 1936
Catches, Paul	?
Chasing Hawk, Jesse	1930-1938
Crow Good Voice, William	1931-1952
Eagle, B.	1936
Fast Horse, Philip	?
Fast Wolf, Antoine	?
Fast Wolf, Ed	1928-1929
Fast Wolf, Philip	?
Fast Wolf, Tomas	1928-1931
Fills the Pipe, Silas	1928-1931
Fool Head, John	1928-1931
Grass Jr., Jim	1929-1930
Hernandez, Reyes	1928-1931
Hollow Horn Bear, Dan	1931, 1935, 1945-1948
Hollow Horn Bear	1930, 1935
Horn Cloud, Joe	?
Iron White Man	1928-?
Jackson, Narcisse	1935-1936
Larvie, Tom	1934-1935
Law Seeder, George	1935

NAME (cont.)	KNOWN DATES SERVED (cont.)
Leading Fighter, Ben	1933-1934, 1937-1951
Little Bull, Tom	1930-1936
Little Thunder, Clark	1932-1933
Long, Dave	?
Low Cedar, George	1934-1935, 1938, 1946
Marrowbone, Ben	1928-1931
Moccasin Face, George	1931-1937
Mousseaux, Louis P.	?
Night Pipe, Alfred	1934-1936
Patton, William	1931
Penneaux, Charles	1935-1936
Picket Pin, David	1934
Poor Bear, W.	1929
Randall, Charles	1931
Randall, William	1928-1931
Red Fish, Willaim	1931-1934, 1943-1945
Red Hair, William	1929-1931
Red Horn, Albert	1928-1931
Red Willow, Joseph	?
Richard, Joseph	1930-1931
Running Bird, Henry	1931-1934
Sharp Fish, Leo	1930-1934
Sleeping Bear, Paul	1932
Slow Bear, John	?
Star [Comes Out], Ivan	1928-1931
Thin Elk, Joe	1936
Two Two, Alex	1928
Walking Eagle, Felix	1934-1946
White Crane Walking, Isaac	1931-1933
White Crow, Paul Edward	1928-1930
White Hat, Joseph	1931-1936, 1938-1944
White Lance, Joe	1933
Yellow Bull, Tom	1931

List of Jesuit Superiors at St. Francis Mission from 1886-1950

Source: St. Francis Mission Records, compiled by Marquette University Archivist Mark Thiel.

DATES SERVED	NAME (BIRTH-DEATH)
1886-1893	Reverend Emil M. Perrig (1846-1909)
1893-1896	Reverend John B. Jutz (1838-1924)
1896-1916	Reverend Florentine P. Digmann (1846-1931)
1916-1923	Reverend Eugene Buechel (1874-1954)
1923-1924	Reverend Florentine P. Digmann (1846-1931)
1924-1930	Reverend Joseph A. Zimmerman (1885-1954)
1930-1936	Reverend Martin A. Schlitz (1891-1979)
1936-1946	Reverend Matthew A. Connell (1894-1957)
1946-1950	Reverend Lawrence C. Helmueller (1908-)

List of Jesuit Superiors at Holy Rosary Mission from 1888-1950

Source: Holy Rosary Mission Records, compiled by Marquette University Archivist Mark Thiel.

DATES SERVED	NAME (BIRTH-DEATH)
1888-1892	Reverend John B. Jutz (1838-1924)
1892-1895	Reverend Florentine P. Digmann (1846-1931)
1895-1896	Reverend John B. Jutz (1838-1924)
1896-1903	Reverend Aloysius Bosch (1852-1903)
1903-1908	Reverend Mathias Schmitt (1862-1936)
1908-1916	Reverend Eugene Buechel (1874-1954)
1916-1920	Reverend Henry Grotegeers (1871-1957)
1920-1926	Reverend Louis J. Goll (1877-1946)
1926-1932	Reverend Albert C. Riester (1874-1951)
1932-1934	Reverend Aloysius J. Keel (1876-1936)
1934-1936	Reverend Daniel B. McNamara (1895-1986)
1936-1941	Reverend Martin A. Schlitz (1891-1979)
1941-1947	Reverend Francis J. Collins (1903-1972)
1947-1950	Reverend Leo A. Doyle (1895-1981)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

Archives

Marquette University Archives and Special Collections, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

- Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Records
- Holy Rosary Mission – Red Cloud Indian School Records
- St. Francis Mission Records.

New York Times Online Archive, New York City, New York.

Other Sources

Pope Clement XIV. "Dominus Ac Redemptor." Speech given in Rome on July 21, 1773.
Accessed November 10, 2010, <http://www.reformation.org/jesuit-suppression-bull.html>.

Pope Paul VI. *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church – Ad Gentes*. Given on December 7, 1965. Accessed January 12, 2011. <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/v16.html>.

SECONDARY MATERIAL

Brown, Joseph Eppes. *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Sacred Rites of the Oglala Sioux*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989.

Caspar, Henry. *History of the Catholic Church in Nebraska*. Milwaukee: Bruce Press, 1960.

Chittenden, H.M., and A.T. Richardson. *Life, Letters and Travels of Pierre-Jean DeSmet: 1801-1873*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.

Costello, Damian. *Black Elk: Colonialism and Lakota Catholicism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

DeMallie, Raymond. "John G. Neihardt and Nicholas Black Elk." In *Black Elk Speaks The Premier Edition* by John G. Neihardt. New York: SUNY Press, 2008: 289-316.

Duratschek, Sister M. Claudia. *Crusading Along Sioux Trails*. Yankton: Grail, 1947.

----- *Builders of God's Kingdom*. Yankton: Sacred Heart Convent, 1985.

----- *Under the Shadow of His Wings*. Aberdeen: North Plains Press, 1971.

- Enochs, Ross. *The Jesuit Mission to the Lakota Sioux: A Study of Pastoral Ministry, 1886-1945*. Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 1996.
- Foley, Thomas W. *Father Francis M. Craft, Missionary to the Sioux*. Lincoln: Bison Books, 2007.
- Fools Crow, Frank. "Traditions – Black Elk and the Throwing of the Ball." *Earth People Productions*. Accessed on January 5, 2011. <http://www.sittingowl.co/07.htm>
- Ganss, George. *The Constitution of the Society of Jesus*. St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970.
- Holler, Clyde. *The Black Elk Reader*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.
- . *Black Elk's Religion: The Sun Dance and Lakota Catholicism*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- Napecinkala. "Wopila! Giveaways make Powerful Medicine" *Widdershins* (2006).
- Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks The Premier Edition*. New York: SUNY Press, 2008.
- . *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt*, edited by Raymond DeMallie. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.
- Pasquier, Michael. *Fathers on the Frontier French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Pope Pius XI. "Rerum Ecclesiae." In *The Papal Encyclicals: 1903-1939*, edited by Claudia Carlin. Raleigh, McGrath Publishing, 1981.
- Powers, William. "When Black Elk Speaks, Everybody Listens." *Social Text* 24 (1990).
- . *Oglala Religion*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1975.
- Rahill, Peter. *The Catholic Indian Missions and Grant's Peace Policy: 1870-1884*. Washington: Catholic University, 1953.
- Steinmetz, Paul. "The Sacred Pipe in American Indian Religions." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 8 (1984).
- . *Pipe, Bible and Peyote among the Oglala Lakota*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990.
- Steltenkamp, Michael. *Black Elk: Holy Man of the Oglala*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.

Thiel, Mark. "Catholic Ladders and Native American Evangelization." *US Catholic Historian* 27 (2009): 49-70.

Vecsey, Christopher. Introduction to *The Crossing of Two Roads: Being Catholic and Native in the United States*. Edited by Marie Therese Archambault, Mark G. Thiel, and Christopher Vecsey. New York: Orbis, 2003.

Walker, James R. *Lakota Belief and Ritual*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1991.