

addition to the body of work on settlement of the northern Plains. It tackles the complex question: how did people adapt? Further, it effectively deals with the various levels of human adaptation (individual, family, community). It explores variables that are not easily examined, such as gender issues, ethnicity, community, and kinship networks. This book has introduced a whole new way of studying the settlement history of the northern Plains.

References

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Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and Metis, by Raymond J.A. Huel. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996. Pp. 388.

The subject of this book is the missionary work of the Oblates among the Indian and Metis people living in what are now the prairie provinces. The period covered is 1845, the year of the arrival of the first Oblate missionaries at Red River, to 1945, the one hundredth anniversary of the Oblate Apostolate in the Canadian North-West and also, according to Huel, the beginning of a period when First Nations became more assertive and organized in the defence of their rights.

The book deals with the relationship between the Oblate Order and other institutions, including the female religious communities who were their partners in evangelization, the Protestant clergy who were their rivals, the Hudson's Bay Company with whom Indians had extensive commercial dealings, and, last but not least, the federal government who assumed a dominant role in the region after the transfer of Rupert's Land to the Dominion in 1870 and the signing of the treaties. Although many pages are devoted to each of these topics, the heart of the book is, of course, the interaction between the Oblates and the people they came to serve.

Prior to the era of treaties, reserves, and government-financed residential schools, Oblate intrusions were relatively non-disruptive of the Indian way of life. Missions were held at places and at times where Indians congregated for some other purpose decided by themselves — to hunt, fish or trade furs. Evangelization was carried out in the Indian languages. The Oblates also practiced the "mission à la prairie" or "mission ambulante" in which they accompanied the Indians in their travels, lived with them, and instructed them in their camps. These initial contacts left Indian society more or less intact because the Oblates were in no position to effect a total transformation of Indian ways.

All of this changed with the extinction of the buffalo and the federal government's drive to establish the Indians as farmers on reserves. The industrial school was a joint missionary/government project. As Huel carefully explains, the architect of Catholic Indian education policy in the North-West was Vital-Justin Grandin, who volunteered for the mission field in 1854 and became bishop of the newly created diocese of St. Albert in 1871. He believed that the only way to "save" the Indians was to concentrate all efforts on their children. "Save" in this context had two meanings: to save souls and to save Indians as a people from the onslaught of the advancing agricultural frontier, for Grandin was firmly convinced that Indians would be wiped out if they did not abandon nomadism and adapt to the new order. He saw, in the industrial school, a controlled environment in which Indian children would be both Christianized and "civilized." Under this scheme, children had to be kept away from their parents to prevent their reverting to traditional ways and beliefs. Interestingly, Huel notes that Grandin's concept of the industrial school was shaped, in part, by his visit in 1878 to a reformatory prison for young offenders in Citeaux, France.

Huel makes a negative judgement about the Oblate-run industrial schools and, indeed, about Oblate missionary endeavours in general. He describes the industrial school as an "artificial, cultural creation unwanted by the local majority but maintained by the power and influence of the alien minority" (p. 139). He says "the church implanted by the Oblates was not a living, dynamic church, rooted in the social and cultural traditions of those whom it served. Like all missionary churches, it was a foreign, colonial institution, a clone of its West European parent" (p. 239).

These quotations fairly represent Huel's overall view, but throughout the book he presents a great deal of evidence that the Oblates were not totally alien to the Indian community, but rather became part of it or showed solidarity with it. A few examples will suffice. Huel points out that Father Joseph Hugonnard persuaded Chief Piapot to send his children to the Qu'Appelle Industrial School. Admittedly, it took Hugonnard three years, but in the end Piapot entrusted his children to the missionary. Hugonnard arranged that pupils be taught first in Cree and then in English, he composed and used English-Cree primers, and he had religious instruction given in Indian languages — all of which were contrary to Department of Indian Affairs' English-only policy. Huel quotes Jacqueline Gresko's conclusion that the Qu'Appelle Industrial School under Hugonnard's direction "was part of community education and community history rather than a strict imposition on the Native population" (p. 270).

Huel also cites several instances of Oblates acting as advocates for Indians vis-à-vis the Department of Indian Affairs. In 1887, for example, Alexandre-Marie Blanchet asked for a resident doctor at Riviere Qui Barre because of the high Indian mortality rate. Bishop Emile Legal in 1902 supported a petition from the Chipewyan of Onion Lake to have the size of their reserve increased. In 1924 Jean-Louis Le Vern denounced the leasing of a part of the Peigan Reserve to a political friend of the government. It is too simple to say that the Oblates were allies of the state in the oppression and colonization of Indians.

Huel devotes a chapter to the canonical visit of Superior General Theodore Laboure in 1935. Laboure asserted, among other things, that an Indian could be a good Christian without adopting European ways and without abandoning his language. He said that Oblates should strive to maintain in the hearts of Indian children a love of their race and language. Huel concludes that this fusion of Christianity with aboriginal culture was not really possible because of the doctrinal rigidity of the pre-Vatican II church. In his view, the church established by the Oblates was, as quoted above, "a foreign, colonial institution, a clone of its West European parent." The result was a "collective conviction within the Indian community that the Oblates, through their activities and residential schools, had participated in a programme of cultural genocide aimed at depriving the First Nations of the language, traditions and identity" (p. 222).

A weakness of Huel's book is that his interpretation of the overall impact of Oblate missionary endeavours is at odds with much of the evidence he presents. In order for the interpretation to be coherent, it needs to be more nuanced. As it stands, the reader is pulled this way and then that way by statements that go in opposite directions. On page 141, for example, we read, "The French-speaking Oblates were interested only in weaning the Indians of the North West away from their former traditions and spirituality, not in depriving them of their language and culture," but on page 144 we are told, "The Indians very quickly realized, however, that industrial schools were not a product of the society they served, that parents had no voice in the educational process and that these institutions were designed not to enhance a lifestyle but replace a traditional one with another." How can both of these statements be true?

In the introduction, the author states that this book should be regarded as an introduction to the missions of the prairie provinces. Much research remains to be done, including, he says, "in-depth case studies of missions such as Ile-à-la-Crosse and St. Albert that played a pivotal role in the expansion of the missionary frontier." With this statement, the reviewer wholeheartedly agrees. From such studies we may arrive at a deeper understanding of the person-to-person relationships between missionaries and Indians and what really happened in the life of an Indian when he decided to become a Christian or decided not to. In the meantime, Huel has given us a fair-minded overview of Oblate activities in the course of a century over a broad expanse of territory. He succeeds in steering a middle course between hagiographic religious history and "politically correct" secularism.

Finally, mention should be made of the large number of typographical errors disfiguring the text, samples of which can be found on pages 24, 27, 29, 37, 38, 60, 81, 83, 89, 129, 141, 144, 152, 154, 202, 207, 215 and 224.

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