

Three Uses of Christian Culture in the Numbered Treaties, 1871–1921

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ABSTRACT. Historians have stressed the importance of Native spirituality in the negotiations of the numbered treaties (1871–1921), but the Christian culture of Dominion officials in this same context has been generally neglected. In an attempt to correct this one-sided view of treaty-making, this article examines three ways in which Euro-Canadian statesmen drew on the resources of their own religion to convince Natives that they too grasped the sacred dimension of treaty: they made frequent use of religious terminology, they depicted the British monarch in terms that were quasi-divine, and they enlisted the help of well-known Christian missionaries. While it is possible that Christianity was sometimes used by Dominion officials to manipulate Native audiences, it cannot be ignored that their religious appeals had a force and a significance in the late nineteenth century that is all but lost today. Sincere or not, the uses of Christian culture during negotiations by Dominion representatives were a crucial dynamic in the treaty process.

SOMMAIRE. Les historiens ont souligné l'importance de la spiritualité autochtone lors des négociations des traités numérotés. Par contre, l'importance de la culture chrétienne des fonctionnaires du Dominion au cours de ces négociations est généralement négligée. Cet article essaie de rectifier ce point de vue partiel des conclusions de traités en examinant trois façons dont les hommes d'État euro-canadiens s'appuyèrent sur les ressources de leur propre religion afin de convaincre les Autochtones qu'ils saisissaient également la dimension sacrée des traités. Pour se faire, ils utilisèrent fréquemment des termes religieux, ils décrivent le monarque britannique en utilisant des mots quasi divins et ils firent appel à des missionnaires chrétiens bien connus. Quoiqu'il soit possible que les fonctionnaires du Dominion utilisassent le christianisme afin de manipuler le public autochtone, il est impossible d'ignorer que leurs appels à la religion avaient

une force et une signification qui a pratiquement disparu aujourd'hui. Qu'elle soit sincère ou non, l'utilisation de la culture chrétienne par les représentants du Dominion au cours des négociations amena un dynamisme crucial au processus des traités.

The spiritual emphasis placed by First Nations on the 11 numbered treaties (1871–1921) has been well documented. Scholars today understand, as legal expert Sharon Venne has put it, that “It was within the spirituality of Indigenous peoples, their beliefs and practices of respect, kindness, honesty and sharing that the treaty-making process took place.”¹ By contrast, the Christian culture of Dominion officials, especially those aspects of it that impressed Native representatives, tends to get short shrift. Yet this omission distorts the historical record. Along with such traditional practices as the exchange of gifts and the rhetoric of kinship, the government’s negotiators couched their strategy in broadly Christian cultural terms. Three ways in which these men drew on their own religious culture will be illustrated by reference to selected treaties concluded between 1871 and 1921.

First, Euro-Canadian negotiators tried to convince First Nations that they too honoured the sacredness of treaty by using religious terminology and rituals. For example, officials like Alexander Morris, who represented the Crown at Treaties 3, 4, 5, and 6, guaranteed these documents for all eternity in speeches interspersed with pious appeals to the “Great Spirit.” Secondly, the British Crown was depicted by Dominion statesmen as providential, omnipresent, and perfectly just—in short, quasi-divine. Thirdly, government officials associated themselves and their objectives with Christian missionaries well known to and respected by the Indians. Because of their acceptance by and immersion in First Nations societies, clerics from several Christian denominations made their presence known at treaty sites and wielded an influence over the Indians unparalleled by that of any government diplomat.

At this distance in time, one can neither take at face value nor dismiss out of hand the Christian cultural component of treaty-making. To understand fully how the strategic use by Dominion officials of Christian terminology, ritual, and men of the cloth came into play during negotiations is not to attribute motives to the principals involved, but rather to study a cultural dynamic which historians have hitherto neglected.

Religious Terminology

Of all the religious words and images used by treaty commissioners, their appeal to the idea of the everlasting was among the most effective. While

this imagery was designed to harmonize with the spiritual beliefs of their Native counterparts, it also echoed scriptural passages beloved by Christian believers. Psalm 88 is a case in point: "His [David's] seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven."² As well, the Book of Genesis refers to the "everlasting mountains" and the "eternal hills."³ Echoes from such biblical passages were discernible in the promise made by treaty commissioners that these documents would "last ... as long as the sun shines and the river runs."⁴ The Indians were also told that "The work we have done to-day will stand as the hills."⁵ Such language did much to convince them that, as Elder Norman Sunchild of the Thunderchild First Nation has pointed out, the Government saw the treaties as sacred:

The Treaty Commissioner said these promises were forever ... the Elders would say the treaties are very spiritually sacred including what was enshrined in [Divine] law by force of the treaty-making process. ... Till the sun passes by, and this Saskatchewan River continues to flow, and the grass grows, those were the sacred promises. Those were the sacred words that they were using. ... We are not to change anything.⁶

But if the treaties were presented as timeless, at least one Indian chief solemnly warned Dominion officials that the collective memory of the First Nations was as well: "You must remember that our hearts and our brains are like paper; we never forget."⁷ The promise of eternity was a two-edged sword.

The religious aura of treaty proceedings was also enhanced by having a band of North West Mounted Police (NWMP) play "God Save the Queen" at key moments. Peter Erasmus, an interpreter for the Plains Cree at Fort Carlton in 1876, noted that the presence of the NWMP was "an important factor in establishing in the minds of the tribes the fairness and justice of government for all the people regardless of colour or creed—something they had no concept of in its broader sense."⁸ At treaty sites, the NWMP, which represented the tradition of military alliance and the protective role of the Crown, functioned almost as a sort of spiritual stage prop. As Alexander Morris noted in *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories*, they "exercised a moral influence which contributed most materially to the success of the negotiations."⁹ When Morris placed the Queen's medal around the neck of Sweet Grass at Fort Pitt in 1876, the police band played "God Save the

Queen,” thereby involving the Almighty in the process. In a bold move, Dominion officials even directed the band to play this anthem at the same time as Indians performed their own rituals. For example, in one case Morris recorded that “four pipe-stems were carried about and presented to be stroked in token of good feeling and amity ... during [which] performance the band of the Mounted Police played ‘God save the Queen’.”¹⁰ When one recalls that *God Save the Queen* is, after all, a prayer, the symbolism of this ceremony becomes unmistakable: the Euro-Canadians, like the First Nations, used their own religious traditions to give the treaty-process legitimacy.

Treaty commissioners further sought to invest treaty with a religious dimension by referring frequently to the “Great Spirit,” a god whom they made synonymous with their own. As Morris revealingly wrote, “There is common ground between the Christian Churches and the Indians, as they all believe, as we do, in a Great Spirit. The transition thence to a Christian God is an easy one.”¹¹ Treaty commissioners promoted this “transition” by stressing the spiritual kinship of First Nations and Euro-Canadians. For example, Indians were told during the negotiations to Treaty 3 in 1873, “We are all children of the same Great Spirit.”¹² Similarly, in 1874 Morris informed the Indians assembled at Qu’Appelle that treaty negotiations would be adjourned until Monday since, as he put it, “In our land we worship the Great Spirit, and do not work on Sunday.”¹³ Finally, at Fort Carlton in 1876 the First Nations were reminded by the Euro-Canadians that “We are of the same blood, the same God made us.”¹⁴

Stressing that the Great Spirit and the Christian God were one and the same gave treaty commissioners a tactical advantage at the bargaining table. If the “Great Spirit” were seen as common to both cultures, the First Nations would be more likely to see Dominion officials as men bound by a moral code as strict as their own. Determined to stress the spirituality they shared with the Indians, treaty commissioners indiscriminately alternated between “God” and the “Great Spirit.” While Indians on one occasion might be told, “May the Great Spirit guide you to do what is right,”¹⁵ on another they heard, “God has given us a good day, I trust his eye is upon us, and that what we do will be for the benefit of his children.”¹⁶ Emphasizing the oneness of the Great Spirit and the Christian God was advantageous in another way: Dominion officials were able to argue that the Euro-Canadians, as children of the Great Spirit, had as much right to the land as the First Nations. During negotiations for Treaty 6 Morris stressed this point: “The Great Spirit made this earth we are on. He planted the trees and made the rivers flow for the good of all his

people, white and red; the country is very wide and there is room for all."¹⁷ Refusing to make treaty, at least according to Morris's logic, would therefore fly in the face of divine intention.

The God-like Monarch

In addition to invoking the concept of eternity, enlisting the ceremonial function of the NWMP, and making frequent references to the Great Spirit, Dominion officials also presented the British Crown in subliminally religious terms.¹⁸ Recalling his role as treaty commissioner for Treaty 9 (1905–06) in northern Ontario, Duncan Campbell Scott explained why government officials frequently invoked the image of the British monarch during negotiations. Rather than confuse Indians with the complex legal questions of the day or seek to impress upon them "a sense of the traditional policy which brooded over the whole," Scott argued that government representatives focused instead on "simpler facts," the most important of which was the "parental idea ... that the King is the great father of the Indians, watchful over their interests, and ever compassionate."¹⁹ Scott rightly observed that this imagery made complex legal matters more accessible. For Indians caught up in a whirlwind of change, there was something deeply reassuring about this benevolent monarch. In their minds the image of the monarch as a nurturing parent became indissociable from that of a provident God. It is unclear to what degree (if any) the commissioners realized that they were constructing a religious image of the Crown; it is equally impossible to determine how much the Indians themselves consciously grasped the religious implications of this royal image. What is certain, however, is that the idea of the King or Queen as a caring deity helped to make the treaties more acceptable to Indians.

One instance of the tacit divinization of the British monarch can be found in Alexander Morris's *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories*. As treaty commissioner, Morris constantly endowed Queen Victoria with a religious aura. Take, for example, his comments during negotiations at Qu'Appelle in September 1874: "I will give you the Queen's message. The Queen knows that you are poor; the Queen knows that it is hard to find food for yourselves and children; she knows that the winters are cold, and your children are often hungry; she has always cared for her red children as much as for her white. Out of her generous heart and liberal hand she wants to do something for you, so that when the buffalo get scarcer, and they are scarce enough now, you may be able to do something for yourselves."²⁰ In these lines the Queen is made to appear both all-knowing and profoundly good. The passage

studiously avoids mentioning the contractual nature of the treaty, that is, that the Indians had certain obligations to meet, such as surrendering their land, if they wished to be protected and to receive succour; rather, it appears simply that the Queen, possessed of a "generous heart and liberal hand," wishes to provide for her Native people. One is struck here by the omniscience attributed to the Queen. The Indians are made aware that the British monarch has a perfect understanding of the dire state of their existence. Nowhere does Morris say that the Queen has been "told" or has been "informed" about the Indians' life in Canada: she simply "knows," and in the light of this knowledge acts benevolently.

The idea of the Queen as providing for her Native subjects was patently religious. A belief in providence is based on the conviction that God is directly involved in the affairs of the world. The Bible is replete with examples of this beneficent care by God of humankind, a familiar instance being Christ's Sermon on the Mount:

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?²¹

Like God, the British monarch did not abandon loyal subjects, leaving them alone in a hostile world; instead, as government officials stressed to the Indians, she aimed to uphold and to sustain them. The means of this salvation, of course, was the treaty itself.

Writing about the Indians at Fort Carlton, Morris noted that they were "apprehensive of their future [in that] they saw the food supply, the buffalo, passing away, and they were anxious and distressed."²² Fully aware of these fears, treaty commissioners described the Queen as farsighted in her understanding of the First Nations' situation, in a dark world their sole beacon of hope. In a statement with striking religious overtones, Morris reminded a group of Indians, "The Queen cares for you and for your children, and she cares for the children that are yet to be born."²³ In her ability to preserve the Indians "as long as the sun rises and the water runs," the Queen of the treaty commissioners seemed endowed with supernatural powers. For Indians disturbed by the prospect of an uncertain future, statements to the effect that "The Queen has to think of what will come long after to-day" would have been highly reassuring.²⁴

Closely related to the notion of the Queen as providential was the idea

of the monarch's omnipresence. Although the Great Mother resided across the ocean, treaty commissioners often used language that suggested that she was somehow mystically present. For example, in 1874 Alexander Morris told Indians at Qu'Appelle that only last year bands had taken treaty because "In our hands they feel the Queen's, and if they take them the hands of the white and red man will never unclasp."²⁵ Of course the main emphasis here is on kinship—a concept central to Indian culture—but the line also suggests that the Queen, transcending space and time, hovered over the consummation of the government-Indian union in a way that was almost palpable.

An even more striking example of the Crown's omnipresence can be seen in the answer given an Indian spokesman who asked government officials, "Is it true that my child will not be troubled for what you are bringing him?" Morris's reply to this query was simple yet powerful: "The Queen's power will be around him."²⁶ It transformed the monarch into an invisible force protecting the vulnerable from all harm. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles at Pentecost comes to mind in this connection. Just as the Apostles, once fearful of the outside world, were emboldened to go out and face it, so too would the Indians be strengthened by their powerful circumambient Queen. Or, from the Old Testament, the words which God spoke to the prophet Haggai suggest another parallel: "According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not."²⁷

Building on their implicit divinization of the British monarch, treaty commissioners also hinted that the agreements between the Crown and the First Nations were a covenant. Today the word "covenant" means simply a formal agreement or "contract," yet it has, as it did at the time of treaty, definite biblical overtones. In the Bible, covenant refers to an engagement entered into by God with a person or a nation. Examples of such covenants in the Hebrew Testament include those made with Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Significantly, each of the three was accompanied by a sign: the rainbow in the clouds after a downpour, the circumcision of all male descendants, and the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. Given the biblical background of the word "covenant," then, government officials were certainly aware of its religious connotations when, during Treaty 4 negotiations, they told the Indians that "the treaty concluded last year was a covenant between them [the First Nations] and the Government."²⁸ This statement is all the more striking when one considers that it was made in response to Indian demands that the annuity from the previous year's treaty be increased to \$12 per

head. Seen in this light, treaty commissioners perhaps used the word “covenant” to convey the idea that the treaty was sacrosanct and thus—conveniently for a government notorious for its frugality towards First Nations—unchangeable.

Lest the Indians become disillusioned with the unalterable nature of their covenant with the Queen, treaty commissioners assured them that the monarch “always keeps her word”²⁹ and “acts in daylight.”³⁰ Along with chiefs’ uniforms, medals, and the payment of annuities each year, an important sign of the First Nations’ special relationship—their covenant—with the Queen was of course the treaty itself, copies of which were entrusted to the chiefs and headmen as if they were the tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. It is revealing that David Arnot, former Treaty Commissioner for the province of Saskatchewan, entitled his final report *Treaty Implementation: Fulfilling the Covenant* (2007). Moreover, on at least one occasion, Arnot stated publicly that, much like “an Old Testament Covenant, treaties are of the *highest moral order* [emphasis added].”³¹ This belief in a covenant’s sacredness is one that is still held by First Nations today. As Elder Danny Musqua remarked only a few years ago, “We made a covenant with Her Majesty’s government, and a covenant is not just a relationship between people, it’s a relationship between three parties, you [the Crown] and me [First Nations] and the Creator.”³² This term would have resonated just as compellingly with an earlier generation of Native treaty negotiators.

If talk about the providence of the Queen and her desire to create a covenant with First Nations were not enough to inspire confidence, treaty commissioners such as Morris also stressed the British monarch’s perfect justice. In the Christian tradition, justice, along with prudence, fortitude, and temperance, constitutes one of the four cardinal virtues. The Bible contains numerous references to justice, the following verse from Amos being a case in point: “Then let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unfailing stream.”³³ Speaking to Indians at Qu’Appelle, Morris attempted to impress upon his audience the Queen’s unique brand of justice: “You are the subjects of the Queen, you are her children, and you are only a little band to all her other children. She has children all over the world, and she does right with them all. She cares as much for you as she cares for her white children, and the proof of it is that wherever her name is spoken her people whether they be red or white, love her name and are ready to die for it, because she is always just and true.”³⁴ The biblical echoes here are unmistakable.

Indians unfamiliar with the vastness of the British Empire would have

been impressed by Morris's reference to the Queen's many territories. Just as the whole earth was the domain of the Great Spirit (God), the Queen too seemed to reign in every part of the globe. The line "wherever her name is spoken her people whether they be red or white, love her name and are ready to die for it" is particularly interesting. The willingness of the Queen's followers to lay down their lives for her inevitably suggests religious allegiance. The reason advanced by Morris for this self-sacrifice was not a love of the monarchical institution in and for itself, but the simple recognition that the Queen, like God, "is always just and true."

During treaty negotiations, Indian demands nonetheless tested the British monarch's God-like capacity for perfect justice. In 1874, for example, an Indian spokesman named Kamooses requested that his people's debts to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) be annulled: "Now, I am going to ask you that the debt that has been lying in the Company's store, I want that to be wiped out. I ask it from the great men of the Queen."³⁵ Morris's response to the request was clever. Stressing that nothing could be done about the debts, he formulated his reply in reasons that were consistent with the ideal of perfect justice embodied in the Queen: "[I]t would not be right for the Queen to come in and take away either what is between you and the Company, or what is between you and the traders, or what is between you and each other. If one of you owes the Chief is it right that the Queen should wipe it out? I would be very glad if we had it in our power to wipe out your debts, but it is not in our power."³⁶ The "always just and true" monarch depicted by Morris could not possibly sanction an agreement that was inherently unfair. Morris seemed oblivious to the irony that a Queen revered for "her generous heart and liberal hand," not to mention her "bounty and benevolence," refused to write off Indian debts.

Although the religious image of the British monarch at times seemed at odds with the practice of her representatives, the First Nations people who took treaty appeared to be impressed by it. Speeches made by Indian spokesmen during treaty negotiations often echoed Morris's language and imagery. During negotiations in 1876 at Fort Pitt, for example, Little Hunter, a leading chief of the Plains Cree who had converted to Methodism, stated that "he was glad from his very heart; he felt in taking the Governor's hand as if it was the Queen's."³⁷ Little Hunter's observation that he felt the presence of the Queen when taking the commissioner's hand is worth noting, since Morris himself was fond of telling his Indian audience that the Crown was mystically among them when they shook hands to confirm treaty. As well, Little Hunter perceived the Queen

as God's vice-regent and the recipient of special graces: "When I hear her words that she is going to put this country to rights, it is the help of God that put it into her heart."³⁸ Perhaps the best example of the degree to which the Queen and God had become intertwined in the mind of Indians—not to mention in the minds of commissioners—was a comment made by Sweet Grass, himself a Christian, to Big Bear at Fort Pitt in 1876: "My friend, you see the representative of the Queen here, who do you suppose is the maker of it. I think the Great Spirit put it into their hearts to come to our help; *I feel as if I saw life when I see the representative of the Queen* [emphasis added]."³⁹ The religious aura about the Queen had become so strong that she became an icon of life itself.

For most Indians who participated in the numbered treaties, the British monarch was also a mysterious figure. Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant might have begun the tradition of Canadian Indians petitioning in person the Crown in 1775, but such pilgrimages were rare.⁴⁰ As late as the era of the numbered treaties (1871–1921), the majority of First Nations people possessed only an indirect knowledge of the Queen or King of England. Consequently treaty commissioners had a relatively free hand in shaping the Indian perception of the Crown. While, as one commentator has noted, Morris and his successors invoked the Crown in order both to distance themselves from the Hudson's Bay Company and to tap into ideas of kinship central to First Nations culture,⁴¹ their religious terminology made the Crown appear a light in the darkness. The bearers of this light were of course the treaty commissioners, who were almost hieratic in proclaiming the Crown's message of salvation to all Indians.

The Missionaries

While the priest-like demeanour of treaty commissioners no doubt inspired confidence, if not awe, in Indian participants, the attendance at the negotiations of actual priests and ministers, specifically the missionaries representing various Christian sects, did even more to elicit their trust. The influence of these clerics is not easy to assess. Most first-hand accounts of treaty negotiations—that of Alexander Morris comes to mind—feature chiefly the grandiloquent speeches of both Dominion officials and Indian spokesmen. The religious delegates have been largely relegated to the dustbin of history, their role at treaty sites either ignored or deemed harmful. Any indifference to the importance of the missionaries in the treaty process, however, is a serious mistake.⁴² The commissioners themselves praised the missionaries for their "willing [and] ... substantial service,"⁴³ for having "zealously assisted"⁴⁴ in the proceedings, and, perhaps

most importantly, for having “tranquilized,” or calmed and reassured the Indians.⁴⁵ If this praise was merited, the role of missionaries in treaty negotiations was more central than has been acknowledged. As Gabriel Breynat, a Catholic missionary present at negotiations for both Treaty 8 and Treaty 11, noted, “dans plusieurs circonstances critiques, les autorités supérieures à Ottawa n’hésitèrent pas à faire appel à cette influence des missionnaires catholiques pour les tirer de mauvais pas ou prévenir des complications.”⁴⁶ Breynat’s assertion could equally well have been made by an Anglican, Methodist, or Presbyterian missionary serving in the region of the numbered treaties. Where the Crown was impersonal and mysterious—a mystique treaty commissioners exploited—the missionary was by contrast a familiar and comforting face.

The acceptance of the missionaries by the Indians had been won by years of hard work in their midst. One explorer of Western Canada in the second half of the nineteenth century gave an eye-witness account of the role of the missionaries in First Nations societies:

Presque seuls, [les missionnaires] ont pu acquérir une influence sur les Sauvages, par leur esprit conciliateur et tolérant. Faisant plus de civilisation que de prosélytisme, voyant dans les Peaux Rouges des hommes et non des parias, s’efforçant de redresser toutes les injustices qui leur sont faites, ils ont acquis sur eux une influence infiniment supérieure à celle de tous les représentants de l’*Indian Office*.⁴⁷

A key point emerges here: in virtue of their immersion in Aboriginal societies, Christian missionaries became far more influential among First Nations tribes than any government official.

That evangelization gave rise to certain problems, no one disputes.⁴⁸ This charge does not alter the fact, however, that many Indians not only trusted the Euro-Canadian clerics but also deeply admired them. As one Indian from Fond du Lac (Saskatchewan) observed, the arrival of missionaries into his First Nation community brought them joy and peace:

Le premier Priant est arrivé parmi nous “les mains vides.” Il avait ... sa croix sur la poitrine. Après lui, plusieurs priant [*sic*] sont venus. Ils nous ont parlé de “Celui-qui-a-fait-la-terre,” qui nous a créés par amour, qui nous a aimés jusqu’à nous envoyer son Fils pour nous tracer le chemin qui mène au Ciel. Celui-ci est mort sur une croix pour nous obtenir le pardon de nos péchés et nous sauver. Nous avons accepté la parole du “Priant” et aussi les commandements de “Celui-qui-a-fait-la-

terre" et qui est notre Maître et Père. ... C'était dur pour nous de changer de vie et d'obéir au "Priant." Ce n'est pas simplement sa parole qui nous a changés. S'il n'y avait pas eu quelqu'un de tout-puissant qui parlait par sa bouche, éclairait nos esprits et rendait nos coeurs forts, jamais nous n'aurions pu changer de vie; nous ne serions pas heureux et en paix comme nous le sommes maintenant.⁴⁹

As this passage makes clear, certain Indians not only adopted Christianity but also profoundly revered the men through whose mouths God himself spoke.

Dominion officials were quick to perceive that the missionaries seemed to command greater respect from First Nations people than did commissioners such as Alexander Morris or David Laird. Where the missionaries represented God, the treaty commissioners stood for something more ominous: an advancing settler society which, as the Cree chief Mistawasis apprehensively noted, would spread over the land "like the grasshoppers that cloud the sky and then fall to consume every blade of grass and every leaf on the trees in their path."⁵⁰ Wishing to project a more compassionate—not to say familiar—face to the Indians, Dominion officials sought the inclusion in treaty parties of missionaries well known to the First Nations. The lengths to which the government went to secure the services of the priests were considerable. Catholic priest Albert Lacombe, for example, was recruited by the committee in charge of assembling the party for Treaty 8 because he had "been so long in the country" and enjoyed the trust of the Natives of the region.⁵¹ The task of inviting Lacombe fell to Clifford Sifton, the minister of the interior at the time. The irony was palpable. Lacombe had been a bitter opponent of Sifton only two years earlier when the two had locked horns over the Manitoba-schools question. As one commentator has noted, Sifton conceded the importance of the 72-year-old Lacombe to the government's objectives, then he "girded his loins" and invited Lacombe to the table.⁵² Given their mutual antagonism, Lacombe's initial answer to Sifton's request may have been somewhat coy: "C'est trop beau pour moi. ... je suis trop vieux maintenant pour entreprendre un tel voyage. ... Je ne serais qu'un embarras."⁵³ Eventually Lacombe changed his mind, his participation proving invaluable to the Treaty 8 commission.⁵⁴

At treaty sites, the mere arrival of a missionary was an event, and that of a bishop an even greater one. According to the biographer of Vital Grandin, the Catholic bishop of the vast diocese of St. Albert exerted a

magnetic attraction on a large group of Indians who recognized him: [Au Fort Pitt] les Cris et les Montagnais avaient répondu à l'appel du gouvernement. A la vue de Monseigneur, ils l'entourent, les Montagnais surtout, que l'Evêque connaît presque tous personnellement."⁵⁵ Similarly, in 1921 during Treaty 11 negotiations, an RCMP inspector noted that one Euro-Canadian participant enjoyed an almost cult-like following among the locals: "I remember [Gabriel] Breynat at Providence, they had an Indian school there, and Bishop Breynat appeared. They were crawling all over him, he could hardly move. Now, they loved him."⁵⁶ Such clerics were truly celebrities.

Conversely, if priests and bishops well known to them were for some reason absent from negotiations, the Indians sometimes became restless and even suspicious during the proceedings. At Fort Pitt, for example, when Alexander Morris sought to start negotiations without Grandin, the Native negotiators refused to participate until he arrived:

A l'heure dite, le lieutenant-gouverneur se rend très solennellement, musique en tête, à la place où doit se conclure le traité. ... Les Montagnais, remarquant l'absence de l'Evêque, l'envoient chercher. Ils ne veulent ni s'occuper du traité, ni consentir à rien, en son absence.⁵⁷

Philip Moses, an Indian inhabitant of Fort Wrigley, underlined the importance during negotiations of Bishop Breynat in 1921: "The Bishop did not talk. Only the white people talked. But the Bishop was with them. ... that is why we thought it was a good thing to sign the treaty."⁵⁸ It is not surprising that the Christianized chiefs were generally much more amenable to making treaty than the non-Christians, the contrast between Sweet Grass and Big Bear at Fort Pitt in 1876 being a case in point.

In his memoir Duncan Campbell Scott observed that the attitude of Indians towards a settlement often depended on whether or not a mission was in close proximity to the negotiation site:

At the upper river posts the Indians had been stoical, even taciturn but at Fort Albany and Moose Factory the welcome was literally with prayer and songs of praise and sounds of thanksgiving. The Hudson's Bay Company separates the buildings of the Roman Catholic mission from those of the Anglican Mission. Moose Factory was until lately the seat of the Anglican Bishop of Moosonee. ... The Indians are adherents of either one faith or the other ... so the religious

element was largely mingled with the business, and here they thanked God as well as the King.⁵⁹

Although Scott mentioned no priest specifically, the missionaries of Fort Albany and Moose Factory had clearly fostered a spirit of amity between Euro-Canadians and First Nations, an entente from which the treaty commission benefited. Where Indians at other locales could be "taciturn," the atmosphere was friendlier in communities served by missionaries. It is significant that Scott's most vivid memory of the expedition of 1905 centred on the actions of a Christianized Indian:

The James Bay Treaty will always be associated in my mind with the figure of an Indian who came in from Attawapiskat to Albany just as we were ready to leave. The pay-lists and the cash had been securely packed for an early start next morning, when this wild fellow drifted into the camp. Père Farfard, he said, thought we might have some money for him. He did not ask for anything, he stood smiling slightly. He seemed about twenty years of age, with a face of great beauty and intelligence, and eyes that were wild with a sort of surprise—shy at his novel position and proud that he was of some importance. His name was Charles Wabino. We found it on the list and gave him his eight dollars. When he felt the new crisp notes he took a crucifix from his breast, kissed it swiftly, and made a fugitive sign of the cross. "From my heart I thank you," he said.⁶⁰

It is not unreasonable to conclude from this passage that the mysterious "Père Farfard" had managed to persuade certain Indians that the intentions of the Canadian government were noble and that a treaty with it was nothing to fear. Profound gratitude to, not suspicion of, the treaty commissioners on the part of the Indians was often the result.

If the mere presence of the missionaries reassured First Nations about treaty, the religious duties they performed at negotiation sites were equally potent in giving the event a religious aura, thereby preparing the way for an entente. The negotiations for Treaty 6 provide some striking examples of this phenomenon. At Fort Carlton, for instance, Morris recorded that both John McKay of the Church of England and the Rev. Mr. Scollen, a Catholic priest, conducted "divine service" on Sunday. Not wishing to be left out, "At noon a messenger came from the Indian camp, asking that there should be a service held at their camp, which Mr. McKay agreed to

do; this service was attended by about two hundred adult Crees.”⁶¹ Similarly, Grandin made the following entry in his diary at Fort Pitt: “9 September: Solemnity of the treaty. The Montagnais send for me; I go to confess them in their camp in the evening. 10 September: I sing High Mass on the buttes helped by Father Scollen; Sermon in four languages.”⁶² The reference here to the sacrament of confession speaks to the intimate relationship between Grandin and many of the Indians present at Fort Pitt. That the Indians were purified of their sins during the whole treaty process might also have strengthened their conviction that the treaty was religious, pure, and inherently good for First Nations signatories.

Although it was not “confession” in the Catholic use of the term, a conversation between one particular Indian and Emile Grouard, the Catholic bishop of Athabasca and Mackenzie who was also a member of the 1899 Treaty 8 commission, strongly resembled the sacrament. At one of the treaty posts Grouard recalled having counseled an Indian chief tormented by “un cas de conscience”

A la Petite Rivière-Rouge, j'eus à résoudre un cas de conscience d'un nouveau genre. Le chef cris de l'endroit, converti récemment et dans la ferveur de sa foi nouvelle, avait des scrupules au sujet du traité ... Voici comment il m'exposa lui-même son embarras : “Le gouvernement nous propose de lui céder notre pays, en retour il nous offre de l'argent. Or moi, je n'ai pas fait ce pays, c'est le bon Dieu qui a fait le ciel et la terre. Donc, si je reçois cet argent, je me rendrai coupable de vol, puisque je serai censé vendre une chose qui m'appartient pas.”⁶³

Grouard was thoroughly impressed by the Indian chief's “grande délicatesse de conscience,” that is, his moral aversion to treaties becoming an occasion of sin. The Bishop impressed upon this pious individual that “cet argent [the treaty money] était une compensation,” an explanation which the First Nations man “comprit” and “sans scrupule il accepta les offres faites, signa le traité.”⁶⁴ That a spiritual consultation was an integral part of treaty underlines the place of religion in the process.

The services performed for the Indians by McKay, Grandin, and Grouard, while greatly enhancing the religious dimension of treaty negotiations, pale in comparison to the work of Methodist missionary John McDougall.⁶⁵ In his memoirs he recalled how at Fort Pitt he capitalized on an unforeseen opportunity to create trust between the Indians and Alexander Morris:

During the Sabbath that intervened while the treaty proceedings were going on, I held a service out on the hill behind the fort. This was very largely attended. A White Fish Lake Indian and his wife brought their child to be baptized. When I asked the parents to name the boy the father requested me to do so instead. Just then, Lieutenant-Governor Morris and Col. Macleod, who were beside me in the service, stepped up close. So with happy thought I named this little fellow after the Lieutenant-Governor and surprised the Indians and the whites present by giving the governor's full name to a native child. This seemed to please everyone and the governor thanked me and when the service was over shook hands with the parents and laid his hand on the baby as in benediction.⁶⁶

The symbolism of McDougall's action was patently clear. Although Morris was not formally the infant's godfather, he was so in effect. Of course in later years, when the name Alexander Morris became synonymous in the mind of First Nations people with the Canadian government's broken promises, the native who carried his name must have cursed McDougall. In 1876, however, the baptism was merely another poignant symbol of the unity the treaty was supposed to engender.

While missionaries, simply by being present at negotiations and carrying on their ministry in that context, did much to reassure First Nations people that treaty was good, they were most effective when speaking directly to the Indians on the government's behalf. The treaty commissioners were generally perceived by the Indians as outsiders. By contrast, the missionaries, having lived among the Natives for so long, were viewed as more Indian than white. The treatment accorded to John McDougall, whom Indians at Fort Pitt in 1876 summoned to their camp during a break in the treaty proceedings, is a case in point:

The next afternoon a messenger from the Head Chief Sweetgrass brought a request that I should go up to their council lodge. Having made sure that the request was bona fide, I went up the hill to the gathering of Indians. There I was taken forward to sit immediately beside the head chief. Sweetgrass introduced me as an old friend and the one white man he had found with an Indian heart. He had known my parents who were, without a doubt, the true friends of the Indian peoples. "Moreover this young man speaks and understands our language just like ourselves. I have sent for him to

tell us what the proposals of the treaty mean, to give us fully what the white chief said, to go over all his promises and interpret them to us, so that I and you, my people, may truly understand what was said to us yesterday. Remember that this young man whom I call my grandson has my full confidence and when he speaks I always believe him." Then turning to me he said, "Now, John my grandson, tell these Chiefs what you understood the white Chief to say when we met him yesterday."⁶⁷

Sweet Grass's statement that McDougall, whom Sweet Grass called his "grandson" and his parents "true friends" of the First Nations, had an "Indian heart" makes abundantly clear what degree of trust the missionaries could command. In telling Sweet Grass what the "white Chief" had proposed, McDougall basically restated what Morris had said a day earlier; unlike the treaty commissioner, however, he enjoyed the "full confidence" of the Indians when doing so.

The missionary's position within the treaty commission was unique in that he could claim membership in both the Euro-Canadian and the Indian cultures. In his instructions to McDougall, Sweet Grass advised the missionary to "go further and put yourself in our place ... Forget that you are a white man and think you are, for the time, one of us, and from that standpoint speak out your mind as to what we should do at this time."⁶⁸ In his reply, McDougall simply reiterated Morris's points: "I first thanked the chief for his confidence and [then] spoke fully of British justice and Canadian Government fair play."⁶⁹ Treaty commissioners might use impressive rhetoric to make the case for treaty, but whether or not the missionary echoed these sentiments was a key factor in determining the Indians' openness to treaty.

Although private consultations such as that described above were often effective, Christian ministers were even more persuasive when they were actually seated at the bargaining table. During the negotiations for Treaty 8 at Lesser Slave Lake in 1899, for example, the initial response to treaty commissioner David Laird's speech was generally positive, but, as one eye witness noted, "Il restait encore quelque indécision dans les esprits."⁷⁰ The Indian spokesman Keenooshayo tersely asked the Euro-Canadians present, "Do you not allow the Indians to make their own conditions, so that they may benefit as much as possible?"⁷¹ Suspicion of the government was largely allayed, however, when the Catholic missionary Albert Lacombe rose to speak. After reminding his audience that he was an old friend who

had been among them seven years earlier, Lacombe proceeded to make his own case for the benefits of a treaty:

Knowing you as I do, your manners, your customs and language, I have been officially attached to the Commission as adviser. To-day is a great day for you, a day of long remembrance, and your children hereafter will learn from your lips the events of to-day. I consented to come here because I thought it was a good thing for you to take the Treaty. Were it not in your interest I would not take part in it. I have been long familiar with the Government's methods of making treaties with the Saulteaux of Manitoba, the Crees of Saskatchewan, and the Blackfeet, Bloods and Piegans of the Plains, and advised these tribes to accept the offers of the Government. Therefore, to-day, I urge you to accept the words of the Big Chief who comes here in the name of the Queen. I have known him for many years, and, I can assure you, he is just and sincere in all his statements, besides being vested with authority to deal with you. Your forest and river life will not be changed by the Treaty, and you will have your annuities, as well, year by year, as long as the sun shines and the earth remains. Therefore I finish my speaking by saying, Accept!"⁷²

Lacombe's statement assuaged the fears of the Lesser Slave Lake First Nations on a number of levels: he touched upon the importance of treaty for their children, he vouched for the sincerity of Laird, and he stressed that their traditional way of life would go on unaltered. There was little that was unique in Lacombe's speech. Indeed, in the context of the negotiations to the previous numbered treaties, it seems almost hackneyed. Yet he was effective, his power deriving entirely from his office as priest and from his almost legendary reputation for missionary work in the Canadian Northwest. While the words of David Laird and Albert Lacombe might have been almost identical, it was Lacombe who commanded the trust of First Nations. Immediately after Lacombe had finished speaking, Laird asked the Indians whether they were now satisfied and, if so, if they would stand up. According to the *Edmonton Bulletin*, "A native named Jerou jumped to his feet before the interpreter had finished speaking and threatened to club any man who failed to stand up. They all arose amid much laughter."⁷³ Not a single question was put to Lacombe. All that remained, it appeared, was assent.

On certain occasions the missionaries seemed to function as treaty commissioners in their own right. At Fond du Lac in 1899, Dominion officials who were not familiar with the region and its leaders encountered resistance there. The Chipewyan Chief Moberley nearly got into a fight with the interpreter Louis Robillard. Only the intervention of the police prevented the two men from coming to blows. Insulted, the chief jumped into his canoe and paddled off. The response of treaty commissioner David Laird to the debacle is worth noting. He promptly sought out Gabriel Breynat, the resident missionary at Fond du Lac, to whom he lamented that the whole project was an "Echec complet," that is, a complete failure. "Nous devons plier tentes et bagages et nous en retourner," he added. "Les larmes aux yeux," Laird concluded that "Evidemment, il n'y a plus rien à faire."⁷⁴ Breynat's reply was terse: "Laissez-moi faire, lui dis-je, et peut-être tout s'arrangera."⁷⁵

Although the source here is Breynat's own memoir, and thus may contain an element of self-dramatization, it is nonetheless clear that the missionary effectively took on the job of unofficial treaty commissioner. Recognizing that the wounded pride of Chief Moberley constituted a barrier to treaty, Breynat appealed instead to one of the elected councilors of the First Nations:

Je fis venir un des conseillers élus, "Le Sourd," réputé pour son excellent esprit, son grand Coeur et son bon jugement. Sans difficulté, je lui fis comprendre que si le Chef Moberley, excellent chasseur mais grand orgueilleux, pouvait rejeter avec mépris les secours offerts par le Gouvernement, il y avait un bon nombre de vieux et de vieilles, sans moyens d'existence, ainsi qu'un bon nombre d'orphelins, à qui la rente annuelle de cinq dollars par tête, avec une petite provision gratuite de poudre, de balles, de filets, etc, rendrait grand service. . . . Accepte donc de signer le Traité au nom de tous ces malheureux. D'ailleurs, vous autres, Mangeurs de Caribous, vous n'y pouvez rien. Que vous acceptiez ou non le Traité, le Gouvernement de la Reine viendra et s'organisera malgré vous dans le pays, les Blancs viendront, etc. Refuser la compensation que vous offre le Gouvernement sous prétexte qu'elle n'est point suffisante, serait priver les malheureux de secours précieux.⁷⁶

Not only was Breynat able to circumvent Chief Moberley by working with another respected figure in the community, but in making the case for

treaty he combined diplomacy with pragmatism. By stressing the need to avoid harm to the people of Fond du Lac through the advance of “les Blancs,” the priest gained an ally in the councilor. The episode proved a turning point: influenced by the councilor’s support for treaty a number of Indians who had initially backed Chief Moberley reversed their position, including one of the chief’s best friends who asked Breynat, “Puisqu’un si grand nombre de gens ont accepté le Traité, ne penses-tu pas que ce serait aussi bien que je l’accepte moi aussi?”⁷⁷ Realizing that his community fully supported treaty, Chief Moberley also decided to sign the document, “le coeur content.”⁷⁸ While the interpreter with whom he had fought “souriait dans sa barbe” as they shook hands, it was Breynat who had the most reason to smile.⁷⁹

Given their role in making treaty acceptable to First Nations signatories, the missionaries might be dismissed as simply the pawns of the Canadian government. Indeed, when one takes into account the latter’s dismal record of fulfilling its treaty obligations, the participation of the Christian clerics becomes problematic.⁸⁰ This negative appraisal of the missionaries’ role, however, fails to take into account how the priests often viewed the treaty process in ways that were not consonant with those of the Dominion government. In the indignant words of Reverend W.G. White, an Anglican missionary operating in the Treaty 8 region, government officials viewed the Natives as a “set of stupids” and treated them accordingly.⁸¹ As well, because treaties represented the encroachment of Euro-Canadian society and all its vices on regions in which they operated, some missionaries feared that the less troubled era of “Fur-and-Mission” days would come to an end. As Emile Grouard, Catholic Bishop of Athabasca and Mackenzie, wrote in a letter to Lacombe, “You know that the Government will make a Treaty with the Indians. This makes me extremely worried. Alas, our good days are over!”⁸²

Another reason that the missionaries should not be considered mere puppets of the Canadian government was the interest sincerely held by many of them in the welfare of First Nations. Such clerics hoped that treaties would provide access to material benefits, including assistance with the transition to agriculture (if necessary) in the south, and cash that would help bands that were hard-pressed because of a prolonged decline in fur prices in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, even before treaty had been signed in their region, it was not uncommon for missionaries to offer instruction in agriculture to willing First Nations. For example, Anglican missionary John Hines—who was present at Fort Carlton in 1876—was allowed to settle in Ahtakakoop’s community at Sandy Lake in 1874 on

the understanding that he would assist the Natives there with the transition to farming.⁸³ Even earlier than this, the McDougalls (both the father, George, and his son, John) had similar relations, first with the Cree along the North Saskatchewan and, later, among the Stoney in the foothills west of Calgary. According to his son, George McDougall warned a group of Cree in the Saskatchewan country about the “extinction of the buffalo, and the suppression of tribal war, and the necessity of this people’s preparing for a great change in their mode and manner of life; that it was the business of himself and brethren to teach and prepare them for the change which was bound to come.”⁸⁴ These words were spoken in the summer of 1862, long before any treaty commissioner set foot in Rupert’s Land.

As the treaty relationship between Canada and the Indians deteriorated in subsequent years, missionaries who had played key roles in the negotiations grew increasingly uneasy about them. In 1939, even before the horrors of the Second World War increased Canada’s awareness of its shabby treatment of racial minorities in general and of its First Nations population in particular, Gabriel Breynat, who had played a key role in both Treaty 8 and Treaty 11, expressed his malaise to a reporter from the *Toronto Star*:

That is why I am so interested in seeing that the Indians of the north receive fair treatment. I gave them my word. And I have always been taught, and taught others, that promises should be kept. So I must see that the promises I made to those Natives on behalf of the commissioners are respected.⁸⁵

This statement, made at a time when the problems of First Nations people were of little interest to Canadians, points up the continuing pressure which the missionaries put on the government to honour its commitments.

The emphasis placed on spirituality by the Dominion officials who negotiated the 11 numbered treaties—whether it was by their language, their religious portrayal of the Crown, or their alliance with Christian missionaries—would seem to validate Karl Marx’s famous statement that “religion is the opium of the people.” It could be argued that treaty commissioners deliberately and consistently emphasized airy spiritual concepts to blind First Nations to the more tangible fact that they were being systematically dispossessed of lands they had roamed since time immemorial. So, for instance, the title character of George Ryga’s play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* declares, quoting her dying uncle, “long ago the white man comes with Bibles to talk to my people, who had the land. They talk for hundred years ... then we had all the Bibles, an’ the white man had our

land... .”⁸⁶ In a secular age, however, we tend unthinkingly to see hypocrisy where religion—particularly Christianity—is concerned. It is easy to forget that the religious words spoken and the sacred images evoked by treaty commissioners and missionaries between 1871 and 1921 had a power and a meaning then that is largely lost today. This is not to say that religion was never used by Dominion officials to manipulate the First Nations. For example, Alexander Morris’s explanation to Indians that in her perfect justice the Queen was unable to forgive their debts to the Hudson’s Bay Company seems just such an exercise. Nevertheless, the use of religious terms, rituals, and ministers by Dominion officials, whether sincere or not, was a crucial dynamic in the treaty process, making it all the more necessary that the Canadian government today recognize the sacred commitment its officials made to First Nations people over a century ago. In her discussion of the role of Native spirituality during treaty-making Sharon Venne notes that “It is by Indigenous peoples reinforcing and practising these values and spiritual principles that the treaties will be understood and honoured.”⁸⁷ Venne’s statement is only half right. Understanding and honouring the treaties in the future will depend just as much on Canadians recognizing the influence on these documents of Euro-Canadian Christianity.

Notes

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1. Sharon Venne, “Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective,” in Michael Asch (ed.), *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equity, and Respect for Difference* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 206.
2. Psalms 88.36–37, King James Bible (hereafter KJB).
3. Genesis 49.26, KJB.
4. Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories Including the Negotiations on Which They Were Based* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1991), 235.
5. *Ibid.*, 237.
6. Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000), 28.
7. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, 69.
8. Peter Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights* (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1976), 239.
9. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, 52.

10. Ibid., 230.
11. Ibid., 296.
12. Ibid., 58.
13. Ibid., 107.
14. Ibid., 199.
15. Ibid., 93.
16. Ibid., 199.
17. Ibid., 231.
18. Although I argue that in their words treaty commissioners tacitly deified the British monarch, it cannot be ignored that their descriptions of the Crown often simultaneously invoked the rhetoric of kinship, a concept central to Indian culture. See Sarah Carter, "'Your Great Mother Across the Salt Sea': Prairie First Nations, the British Monarchy and the Vice Regal Connection to 1900," *Manitoba History* 48 (Autumn 2004/Winter 2005): 34–48; Raymond J. DeMallie, "Touching the Pen: Plains Indian Treaty Councils in Ethnohistorical Perspective," in Frederick Luebke (ed.), *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 38–53; John Tobias, "The Origins of the Treaty Rights Movement in Saskatchewan," in F.L. Barron and James B. Waldram (eds.), *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986), 241–52.
19. Duncan Campbell Scott, "The Last of the Indian Treaties," in *The Circle of Affection* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1947), 115.
20. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, 92.
21. Matthew 6.28–30, KJB.
22. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, 177.
23. Ibid., 92.
24. Ibid., 96.
25. Ibid., 95.
26. Ibid., 118.
27. Haggai 2.5, KJB.
28. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, 86.
29. Ibid., 95.
30. Ibid., 106.
31. David Arnot, "Treaty Implementation: Fulfilling the Covenant," University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, March 16, 2007.
32. Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan*, 32.
33. Amos 5.24, KJB.
34. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, 94.
35. Ibid., 118.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 191.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 239–40.

40. J.R. Miller, "Petitioning the Great White Mother: First Nations' Organizations and Lobbying in London," in *Reflections on Native-Newcomer Relations: Selected Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 219.
41. J.R. Miller, "I will accept the Queen's hand': First Nations Leaders and the Image of the Crown in Prairie Treaties," in *Reflections on Native-Newcomer Relations: Selected Essays*, 249, 254.
42. Not only have missionaries been largely overlooked in accounts of treaty-making, but this indifference has extended to Christianity as a whole. A reluctance to engage with the religious dimension of these historical events has negatively affected our understanding of them. As Lewis H. Thomas observes, for a long time a "glaring defect" in the historiography of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan was the failure of scholars to appreciate the influence of the social gospel on the ideology of the Saskatchewan CCF. "All these writers are secularists," Thomas wrote, "who are probably incapable of either appreciating the significance of the social gospel and Christian Socialism, or of realizing its influence on the more important leaders of the CCF." Lewis H. Thomas, "The CCF Victory in Saskatchewan, 1944," *Saskatchewan History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 1–2. In the realm of English-Canadian Women's history religion has fared little better, despite the fact that personal spirituality is crucial to an understanding of the subject. According to Ruth Compton Brouwer, historians have been unwilling (or unable) to study a realm of experience largely alien to the modern worldview. Making matters worse, we have unfairly imposed our own societal values on the past. Brouwer quotes a *Globe and Mail* columnist's apt assertion that, as products of the late 20th-century western society, "[w]e have trouble believing that other people can be truly religious." The result of all this is that religion has become an "unacknowledged quarantine" into which few historians have chosen to penetrate. Ruth Compton Brouwer, "Transcending the 'Unacknowledged Quarantine': Putting Religion into English-Canadian Women's History," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 52.
43. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, 180.
44. Charles Mair, "Report of Commissioners for Treaty No. 8, 63 Victoria, A. 1900, Sessional Paper No. 14," in *Through the Mackenzie Basin: An Account of the Signing of Treaty No. 8 and the Scrip Commission* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press), 181.
45. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, 173.
46. Gabriel Breynat, *Cinquante ans au pays des neiges: chez les mangeurs de caribou*, vol. 1 (Montreal: Fides, 1945), 198–99. The translation reads: "in several critical situations, higher authorities in Ottawa did not hesitate to invoke the influence of Catholic missionaries either to help them get out of a tough spot or to prevent further complications."
47. Emile Jonquet, *Mgr Grandin, Oblat de Marie Immaculée, premier évêque de Saint-Albert* (Montreal: n.p., 1903), 293. The translation reads: "The missionaries stood virtually unrivalled in the influence they had managed to acquire

among the Savages by their spirit of conciliation and tolerance. Civilizing rather than proselytizing, seeing in the Red Skins human beings and not pariahs, making an effort to redress all of the injustices done them, they exercised among them an influence that was infinitely greater than that of all the officials from Indian Affairs."

48. In *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada's Indians*, the late Harold Cardinal attacked the work of Christian missionaries among First Nations in a chapter entitled "Bring Back the Medicine Man: The Missionary Fifth Column." "If the Great Spirit is dead the Indian knows who killed him," wrote Cardinal, "It was the missionary." While Cardinal's assessment of the missionaries was overwhelmingly negative, he did concede that relations between priest and Indian were at the start relatively smooth. Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada's Indians* (Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig Publishers, 1969), 80–83. Historian Sarah Carter echoes this view by arguing that criticism of the missionaries increases in the post-treaty era, focusing especially on their involvement in residential and industrial schools. Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 77. It is clear that the relationship between missionary and Indian deteriorated over the years, but it could be argued that at the time of treaty the bond between the two groups was still strong.
49. Breynt, *Cinquante ans au pays des neiges*, vol. 1, 299–300. The translation reads: "The first Man of Prayer came among us 'his hands empty.' He had ... his cross on his chest. After him came several other Men of Prayer. They spoke to us of 'the One who created the earth,' who out of love created us, who loved us so much that he sent us his Son to show us the way to Heaven. That person died on the cross to obtain for us the forgiveness of our sins and to save us. We accepted the word of the 'Man of Prayer' and also the commandments of 'He who made the earth' and who is our Lord and our Father... It was hard for us to change our ways and to obey the 'Man of Prayer.' It was not only what he said that changed us. If there had not been an all-powerful being who spoke through his mouth, enlightened us, and strengthened our hearts, we never would have been able to alter our lives; we would not have been happy and at peace as we are now."
50. Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights*, 249.
51. James G. MacGregor, *Father Lacombe* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1975), 309.
52. Ibid.
53. *Le Père Lacombe: "l'homme au bon coeur," d'après ses mémoires et souvenirs recueillis par une soeur de la Providence* (Montreal: *Le Devoir*, 1916), 446. The translation reads: "It's too grand for me. ... I am too old now to undertake such a voyage.... I would only be an encumbrance."
54. Sifton justified the inclusion of Lacombe in the Treaty 8 commission to Parliament in this way: "Everyone who has lived in the northwest for the last

- fifteen or twenty years, Protestant and Catholic, knows well that there is no man in the northwest looked upon by the Indians with the same reverence and affection as Father Lacombe." Katherine Hughes, *Father Lacombe: The Black-Robe Voyageur* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1911), 379.
55. Jonquet, *Mgr Grandin*, 291. The translation reads: "[At Fort Pitt] the Cree and the Chipewyan had answered the government's summons. Upon seeing the Monsignor, they surrounded him, the Chipewyan primarily, almost all of whom the Bishop knew personally."
56. René Fumoleau, *As Long as this Land Shall Last: A History of Treaty 8 and Treaty 11, 1870–1939* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 204.
57. Jonquet, *Mgr Grandin*, 291. The translation reads: "At the appointed time, the Lieutenant-Governor solemnly made his way, heralded by music, to the place where the treaty was to be concluded. ... The Chipewyan, noticing that the Bishop was absent, sent for him. They did not wish either to deal with the treaty or to agree to anything, in his absence."
58. Fumoleau, *As Long as this Land Shall Last*, 218.
59. Scott, "The Last of the Indian Treaties," 120.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians*, 184.
62. Brian M. Owens and Claude M. Roberto (eds.), *The Diaries of Bishop Vital Grandin 1875–1877: Volume 1* (Edmonton: The Historical Society of Alberta, 1989), 46.
63. Emile Grouard, *Souvenirs de mes soixante ans d'apostolat dans l'Athabasca-Mackenzie* (Lyon: Oeuvre Apostolique de M.I., 1924), 374. The translation reads: "tormented by 'a qualm of conscience': 'At the Little Red River I had to resolve a different kind of qualm of conscience. The Cree chief of the region, a recent convert who was fervent in his new faith, had scruples about treaty... Here is how he himself explained his difficulty': 'The government proposes that we give it our land, in return for which it offers us money. As I see it, I did not make this country, it is the good Lord who made the heaven and the earth. Thus, if I take this money, I will make myself guilty of theft, since I will be ostensibly selling something that does not belong to me.'"
64. *Ibid.* The translation reads: "impressed by the Indian's 'great delicacy of conscience' ... the Bishop impressed upon this pious individual that 'that this money was compensation,' an explanation understood by the First Nations man who 'without the slightest scruple accepted the offers made and signed the treaty'."
65. For a more critical assessment of John McDougall's actions at Treaty 7 negotiations see Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Dorothy First Rider, and Sarah Carter, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).
66. John McDougall, *Opening the Great West: Experiences of a Missionary in 1875–76* (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1970), 60.

67. *Ibid.*, 58.
68. *Ibid.*, 59.
69. *Ibid.*
70. Grouard, *Souvenirs de mes soixante ans d'apostolat*, 370. The translation reads: "They remained somewhat doubtful."
71. Mair, *Through the Mackenzie Basin*, 60.
72. *Ibid.*, 63.
73. Fumoleau, *As Long as this Land Shall Last*, 74.
74. Breynat, *Cinquante ans au pays des neiges*, vol. 1, 189. The translation reads: "We have to pack up our tents and baggage and go back.' 'With tears in his eyes,' Laird concluded that 'Obviously there is nothing more we can do'."
75. *Ibid.* The translation reads: "Leave it to me, I told him, and perhaps things will work out."
76. *Ibid.*, 190. The translation reads: "I summoned one of the elected councilors, 'Le Sourd,' known for his excellent mind, his generous heart and his good judgment. Without any difficulty I made him understand that if Chief Moberley, an excellent hunter but a very arrogant person could scornfully turn down the help proffered by the Government, there was a good number of old men and women with no means of subsistence, as well as a good number of orphans, for whom a yearly income of five dollars a head, together with a small annual supply of powder, bullets, nets, etc. would render a great service. ... Do agree, then, to sign the Treaty in the name of all those wretched people. Otherwise, you people, you Caribou Eaters, can achieve nothing. Whether you accept the Treaty or not, the Government of the Queen will come and get organized without you in the land, the Whites will come, etc. To refuse the compensation that the Government is offering you by pretending that it is not enough would be to deprive the unfortunate of precious aid."
77. *Ibid.* The translation reads: "Since such a large number of people have accepted the Treaty, don't you think that it would be just as well for me to accept it too?"
78. *Ibid.* The translation reads: "his heart at ease"
79. *Ibid.* The translation reads: "laughed up his sleeve"
80. As historian John Webster Grant writes, "Although they acted in good faith, missionaries who promised that the government would respect treaties expected by the Indians to 'last as long as the sun shines and the rivers run' were accepting a moral responsibility that would not be forgotten." John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 155.
81. David W. Leonard, "Introduction: Charles Mair and the Settlement of 1899," in *Through the Mackenzie Basin: An Account of the Signing of Treaty No. 8 and the Scrip Commission, 1899* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1999), xxxv.
82. Fumoleau, *As Long as this Land Shall Last*, 67. Interestingly, Lacombe—

- perhaps naively—was more optimistic in his response: “Are not the Church and the Government going to work together, and open officially this great Northern district to civilization and to brotherly relations and harmony between the White man and the Indian? Does not the Government seem to acknowledge what the Church has done so far for the good of the poor Indians?” (Ibid., 68). While Grouard might have had his doubts about treaties, historian John Webster Grant notes that the provision for reserves embodied in the agreements actually “constituted a charter of missionary advance”: “No longer would the Indians disappear for months into the trackless plains or be distracted from their catechisms by a sudden exchange of raids with a neighbouring tribe.” “Instead,” as Grant adds, “a centrally located mission would ensure a conspicuous presence on the reserve and enable the missionary to keep a close watch on behaviour and religious observance” (Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 155-156).
83. John Hines, *The Red Indians of the Plains: Thirty Years' Missionary Experience in the Saskatchewan* (Toronto: McLelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1916), 87-88, 90, 130, 133.
84. James Ernest Nix, *Mission Among the Buffalo: The Labours of the Reverends George M. and John C. McDougall in the Canadian Northwest, 1860-1876* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1960), 27.
85. Fumoleau, *As Long as this Land Shall Last*, 82.
86. George Ryga, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe and Other Plays*, edited by Brian Parker (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 96.
87. Venne, “Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective,” 206.