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RELIGIOUS ACCULTURATION

of the

FLATHEAD INDIANS

of

Montana

by

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B.A., Montana State University, 1949

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of Mas-
ter of Arts.

Montana State University

1950

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INTRODUCTION

No Indian tribe of the United States professed such ready willingness to accept the Christian faith as did the Flathead Indians of Montana. There is little reason to doubt that the famed Indian delegations to St. Louis during the years 1831 to 1839 consisted of Flathead and Nez Perce Indians, seeking the bearers of the Christian dogma.¹ Active endeavor to learn Christianity is a rare phenomenon among the Indian tribes of the United States. For this very reason, the Flathead present a unique problem to the students of primitive religion, and an interesting anomaly to the students of acculturation.

Acculturation is a relatively recent term. It has not been incorporated in the Oxford dictionary. However, the 1940 Funk and Wagnalls dictionary contains the word. Three distinguished anthropologists, Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, in 1935, developed the following formulation:

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original patterns of

¹H. M. Chittenden and A. T. Richardson, Life, Letters, and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S. J., 1801-1873, 4 Vol., (New York, Francis P. Harper, 1905), I, p. 29.

either or both groups.²

Under this definition, acculturation is to be distinguished from culture-change, of which it is just one aspect, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation. It is also to be differentiated from diffusion, which, while occurring in all instances of acculturation, is not only a phenomenon which frequently takes place without the occurrence of the types of contact between peoples specified in the definition above, but also constitutes only one aspect of the process of acculturation.³

The subject of this study is the extent to which Christianity has displaced native Flathead religious doctrines, rites, and beliefs.

The results of the study may be of some value to students of acculturation because of the difference in approach to Christianity by the Flathead as compared to usual response that white missionaries customarily received among most American Indian tribes. While the Flathead received their Jesuit teachers with open arms, other tribes reacted belligerently against the Christians. These are typified by the Indians of Isleta Pueblo.⁴ Of still another generalized type were the Naskapi, who accepted Christian belief without skepticism, but also without particularly de-

²R. Redfield, R. Linton, and M. J. Herskovits, "Memorandum on the Study of Acculturation," American Anthropologist, n.s., 38:149, Jan.-March, 1935.

³Loc. cit. (footnote).

⁴Frank G. Speck, Naskapi, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), p. 17.

siring it.⁵ To them, acceptance was the easiest course of action.

It may have been noticed that Christianity has been equated with religion. Indeed, the title of this study would remain unchanged if the word "Christian" were to replace the word "Religion." This is explained by the fact that this study is concerned with the results stemming from "continuous first-hand contact." Since the history of contacts between other religions, primitive or modern, with Flathead religion is practically unknown, the problem automatically limits itself to the Christian acculturation of the Flathead Indians.

The problem of the religious acculturation of the Flathead Indians will be dealt with historically and ethnologically. First of all, a picture of Flathead religion before the arrival of any bearers of the Christian dogma will be attempted. Then each group--Iroquois, trappers, missionaries, white settlers, and government--will be discussed and it will be shown how much influence each of these groups had in changing the religious beliefs of the Flathead from their primitive religion to Christianity. Much of the data concerning pre-white religion and concerning present beliefs were obtained through personal interviews with the Flathead

⁵Elsie Clews Parsons, Pueblo Indian Religion, 2 Vol., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), II, p. 924.

Indians and by personal observation of the author. The conclusion will recapitulate the changes and lack of significant changes in the Flathead religion as it is today; and it will summarize the effect of Christianity in Flathead culture.

CHAPTER I

FLATHEAD COSMOLOGY AND MYTHOLOGY BEFORE 1840

The cosmology of the Flathead Indians is largely lost through the unconscious neglect of it by literate travelers of the early days. That which remains today is often contradictory and fragmentary. Often, Flathead mythology has been combined with mythology in our culture so that the essence of the story is European or African, while the characters acting the parts are the traditional Indian players--Coyote, Wolf, Rabbit, Bear, Beaver, and multitudes of others. Today, the Indians separate that which is known as tradition from that which is known as mythology. Tradition is supposedly true; it represents information passed down from father to son verbally and is thought to have referred to an established fact. Mythology, on the other hand, is today considered as a collection of stories chiefly told for amusement. The assumption here is that mythology was, before the impact of white culture, regarded as tradition; that is, mythology was thought of as true. For example, the Flatheads do not now think of beavers as a fallen race of Indians, but there was a time when they did.⁶ For another reason, too, the mythology of the Indians has become obscured. Without an integral

⁶Ross Cox, Adventures on the Columbia River, (New York, J. & J. Harper, 1832), p. 127.

basis on which to hold their stories together, the basis generally having been destroyed by the information of the whites, the myths no longer conform to any standard. They have become obscured and distorted.

In this paper, the cosmology of the Flathead Indians shall be regarded as their explanation of the world, and the myths associated with the cosmology shall be looked upon as a means of indoctrination, a means which was not used by adults with cynical desires to create a deluded generation, but by adults who regarded their mythology as an eminently satisfactory manner of explaining the natural and the supernatural world. If the cosmology of the Flatheads before the whites came among them is granted, then the mythology is a logical development from the given premises, erroneous though they may be.

It should also be said that there is so much vagueness connected with all this preliterate religion that it is utterly impossible to give definite authenticated descriptions, and, in some cases, manifest contradictions did not even seem to bother the Indians. As an example of this, Mengarini, when he heard the Flathead had only one name for the sun and the moon, which they thought were merely different phases of the same phenomenon, asked them:

. . . whether they really believed the fable; and they answered that they did, not knowing better; then I asked them what they thought when they saw

the sun and the moon at the same time during the day. They all started, looked at one another in surprise, looked up, as though searching the sun and moon, then joined in a general laugh, and covered their faces as if ashamed; and one of them, looking at me with only one eye across his fingers, said, "Well, we were all beasts, and like enough no one of us has ever observed and remarked what you say now."

Skemelten was a very powerful woman who existed before the creation, and who created herself. She bore a son without assistance, and his name was Amòtkan. This man was the creator of heaven, earth, and all else. In some unexplained way, Amòtkan gained many sons, though he had no wife. Judging literally from his name, Amòtkan lived on the mountain tops, from where he could see his people. But what he saw displeased him. All the animals he created disregarded his words and became extremely wicked, so that Amòtkan brought a flood upon the earth and drowned everyone. He then created a second race of people, twice as tall as the first, but morally they were worse than the first generation, so Amòtkan also destroyed them, but these he decimated by fire. The third generation was no better, and Amòtkan brought a pestilence down upon them, and all were again destroyed. A fourth time Amòtkan endeavored to place on the earth animals who

⁷Rev. Gregory Mengarini, "Indians of Oregon, etc." Journal of the Anthropological Institute of New York, I: 85-86, 1871-72.

would obey him, but they too committed sins unto him, and Amòtkan was filled with wrath. At the moment he was about to destroy them too, Skòmelten interceded with him on behalf of mankind, and, in deference to his mother, Amòtkan restrained his action, and allowed the people to live. Moreover, he agreed with Skòmelten never again to destroy what he had created.⁸

It is permissible to use people and animals interchangeably when speaking of this early condition for

there was a time when all the animals and men were alike, and the old men say they all talked together. The animals could lay off their skins and feather like shirts, and go about like human beings. Then came a time when men spoke different words, and did not wear skins like the bear, the wolf, and the cougar, or feathers like the eagle and the goose.⁹

For some reason, the world was plunged into total darkness during the time when animals and people were the same. The people felt that the sun had been taken away because they were evil. Feeling that the task of relighting the world rested with them, they called a council to decide how to replace the sun. Coyote, trickster and transformer, undertook the task and succeeded only slightly less than the sun itself, but he also possessed one serious disadvantage. Since animals could talk and since Coyote was in a position

⁸Ibid., p. 81 et seq.

⁹Edward S. Curtis, Indian Days of Long Ago, (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York, World Book Company, 1932), p. 81.

to see and hear everything that everyone did or said, he knew the private lives of all the animals, and he was not reticent about letting all the other animals know the gossip. Eventually, Coyote, by his indiscretions, became the object of the people's vindictive anger. They tied him to the ground by his tail and prevented him from acting his role as the sun. Crow offered to take Coyote's place, but he was so black that he provided little light and retired in shame.

Amòtkan, sensing the plight of his people, finally relented, and sent one of his sons, Spakaní, to act as sun. Before assuming his position, Spakaní wished to marry, and after refusals by people, including the Flatheads, eventually succeeded in marrying a Frog Girl. The people were enraged at the temerity of the Frog Girl and came forth to kill her, but at the moment they approached, Spakaní, at the wish of his wife, ascended into the sky. So angry was Spakaní with people that he never allowed them to see him clearly, and at night, when he was the moon, he revealed himself only with his frog wife attached to his cheek.

It was stated before that Amòtkan had agreed never again to destroy his creations. Mengarini does not elucidate on this, and consequently the presence of evil is not explained. Teit, the Thompson Indian ethnographer, however, discovered the existence of "the bad chief Amte'P [who] sits

at the bottom of the tree,"¹⁰ and is thus opposed to Amòtkan who resides at the top of the tree or mountain. Amte'p according to Teit, "is mysterious, and often tries to harm people, to blight the crops, and to make game and food scarce."¹¹ Here, then, is the evil principle who acts as Amòtkan's foil.

Amte'p was not alone. In close alliance with him were wicked beings who formerly inhabited the earth. Still existing as part of Amte'p's wicked assemblage are spirits of the lakes, rivers, and mountains, and these spirits harm people.

Coyote, the son of Amòtkan, is

Trickster par excellence of the Great Basin, Plains, central Californian, and some Plateau and Southwestern North American Indian groups; also, for the majority of these tribes, creator and culture hero. Usually, as a trickster, Coyote is accompanied by a companion--very often by Wolf. . . . Both Coyote and his companion are presented as behaving and talking like human beings; sometimes they are represented as looking like men, at other times, like animals. Coyote's activities as a trickster--culture hero almost always belong to the pre-human mythical age, when animals lived and talked as people. . . . The dual character of Coyote--as the culture hero who releases impounded game, imparts knowledge of arts and crafts, secures fire or

¹⁰James A. Teit, "The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus," edited by Franz Boas, Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, (U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1930), p. 383.

¹¹Loc. cit.

daylight or the sun, etc. and as a bullying licentious, greedy, erotic, fumbling dupe,--is hard for Indian narrators of tales to resolve, and is frequently commented upon by them.¹²

Trickster and transformer are not mutually exclusive roles for Coyote. For example, he acted foolishly in the first section of the myth wherein he licentiously joined a group of dancing females, who encircled him and danced him into the river where he drowned. When he was resuscitated by Wolf, he returned to destroy these malicious characters in the second section in the role of culture-hero.

It would be well to state that the tales of Coyote are not grouped in any particular sequence. There is a loosely connected cycle, hinging generally on locations. For instance, there is a sequence devoted to Coyote's trips from Spokane Falls to the buffalo country. None of the individual stories, however, is related to another, except insofar as Coyote is the central figure, while other animals may or may not play a part in each different story.

As far as can be determined from the Flathead myths still extant, Coyote's main function as a culture-hero was to destroy evil beings who formerly inhabited the earth.¹³

¹²Erminie W. Voegelin, "Coyote," Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend, (New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1949), pp. 257-258.

¹³For some of the original myths, compiled by white men, see: Mengerini, op. cit., pp. 86-88; Franz Boas, editor, "Folk-Tales of Salishan and Sahaptin Tribes," collected by

Besides the sirens whose actions were described in the previous paragraph, there were also man-eating giants. Coyote finally succeeded in changing them into large stones, in which form they remain today. Then too, there was a dragon or serpent which lived in the Jocko Valley and which, with its powerful breath, inhaled all living creatures within haling distance. None could free himself from the monster's belly until Coyote entered and organized all the animals inside the stomach. Then he cut the dragon's heart, and all escaped before the dragon deflated and crushed them. The heart of the dragon can still be seen. It is a small butte just north of the place where Highway 93 bisects the Jocko river.¹⁴ On another occasion, he was eaten by a treacherous

James A. Teit, Marian K. Gould, Livingstone Farrand, and H.J. Spinden, Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society, XI:114-118, 1917; W. J. Hoffman, "Selish Myths," Bulletin of the Essex Institute, IV:23-40, 1884; Louise McDermott, "Folk-Lore of the Flathead Indians of Idaho: Adventures of Coyote," Journal of American Folk-Lore, XIV:240-251, Oct. 1901; and Arthur L. Stone, Following Old Trails, (Missoula, Montana, Morton J. Elrod, 1913), pp. 179-186.

¹⁴ Interview with Pierre Pichette. Of French, Chippe- wayan, and Flathead ancestry, Pichette is regarded as a full-blood Flathead. Sixty-eight years of age this year [1950], he was born in the Bitter Root Valley in 1882. After a severe attack of measles when he was eighteen, Pichette lost his eyesight. He manifested a singular desire to learn the history of the Flathead, and concentrated his energies toward this objective. From talks with the old-timers, he has garnered and remembered many important Flathead facts. A reliable informant, Pichette is considered by both whites and Indians as a foremost authority on the Flathead.

baby. All his flesh was gone when Wolf happened by and re-embodied Coyote, who then avenged himself by killing the child. In another instance, he was tricked into falling off a cliff. Later he was revived by his friend Wolf, and then he returned to push the evil creature herself (?) off the precipice. All these stories reveal a destructiveness on the part of Coyote, but destructiveness which was beneficial, if only coincidentally as far as Coyote was concerned, to mankind. Occasionally, he helped people because his assistance was essential to their preservation.

A number of "why" stories are connected with Coyote myths. Although only a few have been recorded for the Flathead, it would probably be safe to say that every animal had at least one story concerning some distinctive characteristic. All animals occupied some position in the mythology of the Flatheads. Next to Coyote, Beaver seems to have occupied their thoughts to the greatest extent. Cox, an early trader, told that:

They have a curious tradition with regard to beavers. They firmly believe that these animals are a fallen race of Indians, who, in consequence of their wickedness, vexed the Good Spirit, and were condemned by him to their present shape; but that in due time they may be restored to their humanity. They allege that the beavers have the powers of speech; and that they have heard them talk with each other, and seen them sitting in council on an offending member.¹⁵

¹⁵Ross Cox, Adventures on the Columbia River, (New York, J. & J. Harper, 1832), p. 127.

Wolf, or Fox, who was conceived as Coyote's brother-in-law, occupied an important position. He invariably rescued Coyote from the land of the dead after Coyote had suffered some mishap. Wolf's power seemed to consist of jumping over Coyote, after which Coyote revived. Wren was characterized by his prowess at shooting, and it is by his skill that the animals reached heaven and there obtained fire. Bluejay was exceptional because, of all the beings on earth whose bodily form was both human and animal at alternate times, he alone is still able to revert from human to animal identity, although this prerogative is limited to the fifth and sixth nights of the Winter Spirit Dance.¹⁶ The white-headed eagle was thought of as a bum who stole from other birds, but the golden eagle was a sort of "national emblem" to the Flathead. The latter frequented the heavens, and was in close contact with the powers above. Grizzly bear symbolized death, but the brown bear was a sign of friendliness.¹⁷

As far as it is possible to determine at the present time, some ethical and moral behavior of the Flathead Indians was to a large extent due to fear of supernatural reactions to ill conduct. The Flathead did not conform to approved standards merely because they saw the wisdom of performing

¹⁶Verne Ray, "The Blue Jay Character in the Plateau Spirit Dance," American Anthropologist, n.s., 39:593-601, 1937.

¹⁷Interview with Duncan McDonald by Dr. Paul G. Phillips.

ethically; rather, they did not dare to offend their guardian spirit.¹⁸ Apparently in virtually all cases, the seeker of a guardian spirit was told, during his vision, to conform to the cultural standards established by his society. If he did not obey the rules laid down for him by his guardian spirit, then the spirit was free to withdraw. In this case, the individual was left vulnerable to the forces of nature, unprotected by his supernatural alter ego.

The Flathead child was taught that when he disobeyed orders from his parents or when he disregarded the morals and ethics of his tribe, he would be taken away by a spirit. If the child persisted in his malevolent actions, a neighbor would dress himself in some guise, enter his household, and threaten to take him to the mountain tops and leave him there.¹⁹ Many customs of the tribe were taught to children by means of some of the Coyote myths, generally with the advice that the child should act opposite of the manner in which Coyote acts, for Coyote frequently encumbered himself in quarrels and strife by his immoral acts.

For adults, punishment was dealt out to offenders of the code of ethics. Stealing was punished by flagellation, and by the enforcement of regulations to require the thief

¹⁸See Chapter II for the Guardian Spirit Concept.

¹⁹Interview with Pierre Pichette.

to return stolen property. This indicates that while there was a supernatural sanction forbidding thievery, it was also a concern of society. Secular punishment covered secular crime. Liars were punished in a different manner. From the time that a prevaricator's weakness became known, he was not trusted again, until he exonerated himself by proving trustworthy. If, however, the liar persisted in the ways of falsehood, he was not trusted. Instead he was laughed at by the whole tribe. This custom still remains in Indian to Indian relationships. The sister of a well-known palterer on the reservation refers to her brother as "Johnny Lie." Indian-white relationships now, however, are vastly different from what they were in the old days. It was not uncommon for early trappers and explorers to eulogize the Flatheads as most honest Indians; but today these same Indians maintain that lying to a white man is perfectly ethical, especially if there is anything to be gained thereby. Formerly, still other ethical sanctions lay on the members of the tribe. Bravery, attention to parents, love of wife and children, and obedience to chiefs were all valued. Since it was impossible to coerce a man into performing these duties, more than likely they relied upon prestige factors for their enforcement. Social position, judging by the scant information available on the subject, seems to have been roughly proportional to the degree to which an individual followed

the standards set forth by Flathead society. However, there is little reason to doubt that there was some element of the fear of the supernatural which intimidated many men into conformity.

The Flathead had a concept of an afterworld which seemed to contain happiness for those who conformed to the Flathead concepts of good and evil. In an often-quoted passage, Cox described the two afterworlds left open for the good and evil Flathead.

The Flatheads believe in the existence of a good and evil spirit, and consequently in a future state of rewards and punishments. They hold that after death the good Indian goes to a country in which there will be perpetual summer; that he will meet his wife and children; that the rivers will abound with fish, and the plains with the much-loved buffalo; that he will spend his time in hunting and fishing, free from the terrors of war, or the apprehensions of cold and famine. The bad man, they believe, will go to a place covered with eternal snow; that he will always be shivering with cold, and will see fires at a distance which he cannot enjoy; water which he cannot procure to quench his thirst, and buffalo and deer which he cannot kill to appease his hunger. An impenetrable wood, full of wolves, panthers, and serpents separates these "shrinking slaves of winter" from their more fortunate brethren in the "meadows of ease." Their punishment is not however eternal, and according to the different shades of their crimes they are sooner or later emancipated and permitted to join their friends in the Elysian fields.²⁰

The Ferris account of the afterworld differs somewhat with the Cox version. It is true that Ferris wrote a general

²⁰Cox, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

description of all mountain tribes in respect to their beliefs concerning the afterworld, but he specifically stated that he meant it to apply to all mountain tribes, of which the Flathead were a part. Telling of the eschatology surrounding Coyote, he said that after Coyote had performed his duties on earth,

at length, he promised the people happiness in a fine hunting ground after death, where brave men would be loved, and have much less trouble in their excursions for game than cowards, who would always be miserable and distressed. With these words he left them, and was seen no more.²¹

The prayers of the Indians were not addressed to the great spirit in an altruistic fashion. When the Flathead prayed, they expressed a wish for their own personal good and happiness. Mengarini furnishes an excellent example of a Flathead prayer in the following sentences:

I asked an old man, well nigh a hundred years of age, if he ever prayed when he was young, and how he prayed. "Oh! yes," he answered, "every morning my mother took me into the woods, and having found a dry pine-tree, broken and rotten from old age, she told me, 'My son, go and rub yourself against that tree, and pray.' And so I did, saying, 'Oh good tree! have pity on me, and let me live as long as you lived;' and I repeated always the same prayer; my mother did the same at another tree not far from mine, until our sore shoulders compelled us to put an end to our prayers."

Generally, the prayers of our Indians consisted in asking to live a long time, to kill plenty of ani-

²¹Warren Angus Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, ed. Paul G. Phillips, (Denver, Colorado, The Old West Publishing Company, 1940), p. 299.

mals and enemies, and to steal the greatest number of horses possible; and this was the only instance when to steal was not a fault, but a great merit and bravery, since no man could ever hope to become a chief unless he had killed at least seven Blackfeet and stolen twelve horses.²²

Thus, it is evident that the prayers of the Flathead were concerned with asking for material blessing, not for spiritual benedictions.

²²Mengarini, op. cit., p. 87.

CHAPTER II

PRACTICAL FLATHEAD RELIGION BEFORE 1840

To the average Flathead, the guardian spirit represented the principal means by which he could contact supernatural forces. The complex built around the guardian spirit probably was the most important phase of Flathead religion, at least for everyday living.

The benefits of having a guardian spirit were manifest to every individual in Flathead culture. Since the guardian spirit was looked upon as a helper, it ably aided and abetted his protege in war, in hunting, in curing, and in acquiring wealth. Mengarini tells how the spirit was used "to charm away the arrows of his enemies."²³ A shaman's power, of course, was totally dependent on the aid of his guardian spirit, and all the accomplishments of a shaman [medicine-man] along magico-religious lines were due to the powers and favors granted by this spirit. A woman often had power to relieve the pains of childbirth for other women as well as herself, and could save lives with her ability. Some men had a peculiar power to charm and to call animals, or to inform hunters where animals could be found. Guardian

²³ Albert J. Partoll, "Mengarini's Narrative of the Rockies, Memoirs of Old Oregon, 1841-1850, and St. Mary's Mission," Frontier and Midland, 18:10, 1938.

spirits were not always benevolent. They had power to cause misfortune if they were disobeyed. As an example, Chief Charlot attributed his father's death to the fact that Victor had been baptized, and in so doing had implicitly professed his disbelief in the efficacy of his guardian spirit.²⁴ Incurring the displeasure of a guardian spirit was tantamount to suicide, since the spirit would leave and its former owner was left susceptible to innumerable evils, even death.

The adults in the culture began early to inculcate the concept of the guardian spirit into the young boys and, to a lesser extent, the girls. When they were still very young, the children were sent by their fathers on unimportant missions purely for the sake of training the children by forcing them to find their way around in the forests. At puberty, by which time they had a clear idea of what was expected of them, they were sent to the top of some hill or mountain, or up a canyon, to seek their visions. They were not required to fast, but they were directed to eat and drink sparingly.

Once on the mountain, the suppliant obeyed all the restrictions placed on him and, to some extent, tortured himself while he prayed to find a guardian. If all went well,

²⁴Edward S. Curtis, The North American Indian, (New York: The Plimpton Press, 1911) VII, p. 49.

the spirit appeared to him either when he was awake or asleep, and gave him certain directions which would enhance his power in certain respects, and, at the same time, imposed on him restrictions.

The spirit consisted of any natural or supernatural entity. It could be a bear, lightning, a lake, a flea, or a dwarf. No spirit had preëminence over another: they were all equal. Also, no spirit consistently gave the same power. Usually the power was different and in all cases it was accorded with to status of an individual, so that he or she could use the power. For instance, a man often obtained sumesh, or supernatural power, to increase his bravery in war, but he never would find himself with the ability to assist in childbirth, for men were not tolerated in this particularly feminine field. Those who were given powers had to use them whenever they were required or requested, unless the spirit specifically stated that they could not use them. In all cases, songs were given to the searcher, and often a fetish was left for the man. This token was deposited in a medicine-bag, and was exclusively the property of the one to whom it had been given.

When the youth returned to the camp, it was permissible for him to tell whether or not he had succeeded in his mission, although generally speaking, he was not allowed to reveal any more than that fact, even to his father and

brothers. Whether the guardian spirit had come to him or not, he was permitted to try again, either for his first or for still another spirit. Youths who failed to receive the spirit usually tried several times during puberty, since the chances of success decreased as the suppliant grew older. For those who once had been visited by a spirit, there was a certain advantage in trying again, for the more spirits an individual had, the more power he possessed. If suppliants had considerable success, they could collect several guardians, but an optimum point was soon reached when the powers conferred upon him were duplicated or if the restrictions on him already had bound his life in supernatural ties.²⁵

During the Winter Spirit Dance, which will be discussed later in this chapter, guardian spirits told of their adventures in their search for the tutelary spirit. Of course, there were some who were still under an oath of secrecy, but the special occasion of the dance relaxed some of the bonds. Since the first visitation was not the last, the Indians could also tell of several other encounters with their power. Explanations of visits with spirits were augmented with their spirit doings and interspersed with appropriate spirit dances. All this was done without the

²⁵Interview with Pierre Pichette.

slightest fear that another individual, by seeing exhibitions, would steal the distinctively personal property given by the guardian spirit. The power was non-transferrable, even if others knew all the dances, rituals, songs, restrictions, and capabilities of the owner.

The medicine bundle was intimately connected with the guardian spirit. Its core was some small object given the suppliant by his new-found spirit. This and many other things held to have supernatural power were encased in the medicine bundle. The contents of the bundle may or may not have been secret, depending on the agreement made by the possessor with his spiritual counterpart. The owner could not sell his bundle, although he could, but rarely did, will it to someone when he died. In deference to the contents of the bundle, the owner never laid it on the ground.

Medicine bundles had two characteristics of significance. First, they contained power sui generis, and in certain cases could be counted upon to yield specific results. Second, they were used when the owner wished to summon his guardian spirit.

When an individual under the aegis of a guardian spirit died, his spirit also died. Consequently, the power of the medicine bundle was dissipated at least by half, and it was not capable of being utilized to call the dead spirit. The fact that the guardian spirit can die, leads to another

integral concept in Flathead religion. When the spirit died, it was felt by the Indians that the spirit became transformed into a ghost--a "spirit-ghost." It was inconceivable to the Flathead that an entity so intimately connected to the man as his guardian spirit should not undergo a major transformation.²⁶

While the Flathead recognized natural causes of disease and had discovered medicinal roots and herbs for curing these types of illnesses, they also recognized that the guardian spirit was closely interrelated to the welfare of man's physical being. Sickness due to supernatural powers could be cured by those who had power to relieve the particular illness afflicting a man or woman. Like individuals with power for success in hunting or power for averting misfortune, shamans with curing power used their abilities only when absolutely necessary. Until the time for its use was mandatory, they kept it strictly secret. More than specifically stating that a person had ability to cure sickness, the type of sicknesses were also specified. For certain types of illnesses, the shaman had no trouble at all in healing; but for general practice, the problem was more difficult. Any shaman could attempt to cure an unspecified disease, but a cure was not

²⁶Verne Ray, Cultural Relations in the Plateau of Northwestern America, (Los Angeles: Publications of the Frederick Webb Hodge Anniversary Publication Fund, Vol. 3, 1939), p. 85.

insured. Nevertheless, since most cases were of a general nature, they received the greatest attention.

It has been previously mentioned that if a person had offended his guardian spirit by conduct not condoned by his spirit, he might have died as a result. In a case like this, the soul left the man. Among the Flathead, there were two possible causes of loss of the spirit. First, some shaman may have stolen it for one reason or another. Sometimes it was stolen merely for malignant reasons, and at other times it was at the behest of a layman. Second, the soul may have left because of deliberate mistreatment. If the loser could not gain back his soul within a certain length of time, he was surely doomed to die. The soul sometimes returned at the request of its material partner, but often it was necessary for a shaman to visit the land of the shades in order to recover it.²⁷

Ray indicates that shamans among the Flathead did not draw out intrusive objects which were believed to cause disease.²⁸ However, this is not true. There were both intrusive objects and corresponding treatments by sucking and blowing to bring them out. The object withdrawn was usually in the form of a thorn, feather or stone.²⁹ Illness was also

²⁷Ibid., p. 95.

²⁸Ibid., p. 97.

²⁹Interview with Pierre Pichette.

caused by intrusive spirits.³⁰ This represented a refinement of the object-intrusion theory, the spirit having been substituted for the object. Spirit-intrusion was regarded as more powerful because the spirit not only could bring illness with it, but it also could act of its own will. Consequently, it was not so easily expelled as an ordinary object.

The guardian spirit concept among the Flathead was eminently suitable for the type of life the people lived. It was highly individualistic, and the greatest part of the religious powers of the Indians lay in their own hands. Almost every person had as much power at his command as any other individual. Nor was it necessary to center power around one particular place in space; it was as readily available on the Plains as in the mountains. No consecrated person was necessary to perform religious functions, for all the people with guardian spirits had some control over the supernatural. They dealt directly with God. A man alone was actually not alone: his helper remained constantly at his command in case of need, and in desperate situations the spirit could reappear and delegate new powers to the man who needed them. The Weltanschauung did not depict nature and

³⁰Ray, Cultural Relations. . . ., op. cit., p. 98.

man in an antagonistic struggle. Rather, men and nature worked in harmony through the media of the guardian spirit. If a man were in danger, if he needed help, if death were near, he summoned partner who brought food, or bounteous protection, or cured him of his illnesses, or rendered any one of a thousand and one services through intercedence with the forces of nature.

The major rite of the Flathead was, and still is, the Winter Spirit Dance, which is also known as the Medicine Dance, and more simply, as the Spirit Dance.³¹

The Leader of the Flathead Winter Spirit Dance had wide authority over all participants. He gained his position by receiving a call from his guardian spirit during the preceding year, a call which told him how to prepare the dance lodge and how to conduct the dance. If two or more people had visions, the selection of the Leader was decided during the first four days of the dance, which was not actually the dance proper, but was a preparatory period. Naturally, the requirements for a leader stipulated that he must be under the tutelage of a guardian spirit, but it was not required

³¹For other descriptions of the Flathead Winter Spirit Dance, see: Verne Ray, Cultural Relations. . . ., op. cit., pp. 102-131; Verne Ray, "The Bluejay Character. . . ." op. cit., pp. 593-601; H.H. Turney-High, "The Bluejay Dance," American Anthropologist, n.s., 35:103-107; H.H. Turney-High, Flathead Indians of Montana, Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association, No. 48, 1937, pp. 37-39.

that he be a shaman.

Two major duties were performed in the preparatory period of the dance. First, a special sweat-house was built for the purification of the participants of the dance. All Bluejay dancers were obliged to set aside the middle of the afternoon for this purpose, together with others who, like the leader, were to take ritual positions in the dance. This was a time for singing and praying to the respective guardian spirits. The sweat-bathers underwent a limited fast, and others who intended to watch the ceremony began their meals with a spirit song.

Secondly, the Leader prepared the physical arrangements for the dance. Before the dance, he had selected the medicine tree, and now he told two men to go chop it down and bring it back to the place he had determined to have the dance. The power in the Medicine Tree lasted the duration of the dance. The "lumberjacks" were directed how to cut the tree, and in what direction to fell it. Spirit cries were uttered before the tree actually descended. The small evergreen, however, never touched the ground, but was caught and carried aloft by the delegated men back to the dancing place. There, it was taken into the lodge and guarded by the leader, who stripped off all but its top branches. Guarding the tree was mandatory to make certain that its spirit was not stolen.

The lodge was an elongated tipi, made from the tipis voluntarily loaned by some Indians. Its construction, position, and size were determined by the leader of the dance. The lodge was erected on the afternoon of the fourth day, that is, on the last day of the preparatory period. Immediately after its construction was completed, the Medicine Tree was placed in the center of the lodge by fixing it in the ground. In the meantime, the Leader made a rattle, either of shell or of deer hooves. The wooden handle was approximately three and one-half feet long, and the shell or hoof rattles added another two inches to this.

Ideally, nothing in the Medicine Dance was made by white men, and none of the participants or spectators was supposed to be of Caucasoid origin. Today, however, when white material culture has superseded the older Indian material, and when there is hardly an Indian without a trace of white ancestry, such an ideal is, of course, impossible to attain.

At dusk of the fourth day, just before the arrival of the others, the Leader and his assistant, the Repeater, seated themselves in the Medicine Tent. The Leader sang his medicine songs and told of visions he had experienced in the past. His rattling stick, held vertically, and pointed downward so that the rattles hung loosely at the bottom, was employed to accompany his singing. The Leader faced the

eastern, or dawn entrance, while the Repeater watched the western, or twilight entrance. They were separated by the Medicine Tree. The fires blazed in readiness for the dance.³²

Meanwhile, in their tipis, the participants and spectators were dressing and painting. If possible, they had a shaman with them, one to each tipi, to ward off evil, since the Indians were particularly vulnerable to harmful influences at this time.

When the people were ready, they came into the Medicine Tent through the dawn entrance, circled the Medicine Tree, and then sat wherever they wished, except in front of the doors or in the center of the lodge, near the Medicine Tree. The only other seating requirement was that men and women had to take opposite sides of the lodge.

When everyone had arrived, the Leader no longer sang spirit songs, but now led the audience in dancing. Singers seconded the Leader whose rattle provided music for the dance. Drums and flutes were not used. The Leader sang while the people danced, until the Leader tired and passed his singing position to another shaman. Each shaman was given an opportunity to lead the dance during the night

³²This paragraph and some other portions of this description are from a MS by Pierre Pichette.

and the dance continued until dawn. Everyone present participated, even the children. While unnecessary talking was prohibited, it was permissible for shamans to confer about visions, and for a shaman to describe his vision to the audience.

There were other restrictions during the night which all participants had to conform to: there could be no laughter, no eating or drinking in the lodge, no smoking, except of a ritual nature, no gambling, and no gluttony. Each individual, for his own protection, had to take care not to think evil or foolish things. Shamans were capable of reading such thoughts and were prone to reveal what they knew to the audience. While it was possible to leave the dance hall, no one could be excused without the leave of a shaman.

On the arrival of dawn, the dancers circled the lodge four times, thus symbolizing the end of the first day's dance.

On the afternoon of the fifth day, the Leader announced that during the night the fires would be extinguished for the Bluejays. All the dancers prepared themselves as they had the first night of dancing, but some added black spots on their cheeks. In the early part of the dancing, the procedure followed the same pattern it had the first night, until the Leader announced that it was time to call

for the Bluejays, then four special songs were sung. During the last of these, one dancer uttered some animal cries and began to stamp out the fires. There was much noise and confusion following this. Then, after a short period of time, the Leader ordered the fires to be relit, and when there was light enough to see, it was apparent that some of the dancers were missing. The Leader, therefore, ordered the audience not to laugh at the Bluejays when they reappeared.

All who had blackened their cheeks before the dance had now gone outside to paint their faces, hands, and clothing black, and to make a crude miniature bow and arrow. Upon reentering the lodge, they began to

"speak in tongues," talking backwards, in gibberish, and making bluejay sounds. They profess to have no knowledge of what they say, and persons are delegated to remember all their words and noises, so that they may use them for prophesy and prediction when they have recovered from the influence. Wildly they run about the lodge, everyone avoiding their touch, as the person touched by a shaman at this time will faint on the spot. Chirping and cawing they ascend the ledgepoles and run about the rafters with remarkable agility, perching and twittering in bird fashion.³³

Some of the bluejays left the lodge for firewood; others for water. The atmosphere was more relaxed and the restrictions on laughing, drinking, and smoking were removed. While all other participants resumed the normal dance, the Bluejays

³³Turney-High, Flathead Indians. . . ., op. cit., p. 39.

danced in their own peculiar way, at their own tempo, irrespective of the others.

Soon the Bluejays were seized with a desire to escape. The normal dancers tried to impede their progress, but since it was unwise to touch the Bluejays in this state, blocking them was difficult. It was necessary, however, to catch them after they had left the lodge and to bring them back by force, since to leave them with the Bluejay spirit still in them meant that they would stay out indefinitely, living and acting like Bluejays until they starved to death or died of exposure. Generally the possessed ones went no farther than a nearby tree, in which they perched until they were forcibly ejected. On being taken back to the medicine lodge, they were held over a fire of sweetgrass, which had previously been prepared, and the Bluejay spirit was smoked out of them, so that they again became normal. The black paint was washed off them and they resumed their place among the normal dancers, conforming to all the restrictions laid on the other dancers. Some of the Bluejays, however, were allowed to remain untransformed until the following evening. Again at dawn, the dancers encircled the lodge four times, and the dance of the fifth night ended.

Except for curing, the dance of the sixth night resembled that of other nights when the Bluejay character was absent. It commenced, as before, with spirit singing

and dancing. Later, the ill came for treatment, treatment which had been offered on the first night, but which was not usually accepted until the sixth night. The patients preferred to wait longer because the shamans were supposed to have more power after they had returned from their sojourn with the Bluejay spirit. The sick, incidentally, could go either to the Bluejays or to the regular shamans. In either case, curative procedures were highly ritualized and brief. Unless the individual invested with the Bluejay character had some shamanistic penchant for healing, his power for curing disappeared as soon as he became normal.

It was on the afternoon of the seventh day that most people went for curing. All Bluejays had been smoked out by this time, so the people relied entirely on the services of shamans. The dancing and singing during the seventh night repeated that of the fifth night, except that the Bluejays were absent. Every dance was followed by prayers and the expression of wishes. After any dances when the Leader did not call for communal prayer, each person would voice some desire of his own. Later in the evening the Leader called for the people who wished to present gifts to the medicine tree. Those who had such wishes to be fulfilled placed some small token on the tree, simultaneously making their wish, and giving the tree a slight tug. The Leader then pulled the Medicine Tree from the ground and placed it under the

charge of two or three dancers.

On the following morning these dancers took the tree, and, after wrapping it in a blanket or robe, they hid it in the forest where it was to remain undisturbed. When these guardians had returned, there was some undirected dancing while the lodge was being dismantled, and then the ceremony was considered ended.

Perhaps the next most important dances of the Flathead were those which purported to affect their fortunes in war. The purpose of these dances was to obtain the interposition of the supernatural on the side of the Flathead. Dances connected with war were taken almost in toto from the tribes of the Plains. Teit describes the war dance in the following manner:

In the old style of war dance all bore weapons and the dancers advanced making motions as if looking for the enemy, looking for tracks, scanning the horizon, attacking an enemy, stabbing with spears and striking with tomahawks. The dancers dress in their best clothes and best bonnets. In the old style dance the dancers performed in their war dresses or in very little clothing. Some had only moccasins, breechclout, and head-dress. Others wore a shirt besides. Those who had bare legs wore garter rattles and ankle rattles of deer's hoofs, and armlets and wristlets were worn by those having bare arms. Rattle belts and rattle pendants and hand rattles were also used. . . . The face was painted and the hair done up as for war. Red was the color of the common face paint; but stripes of red, yellow and black were common. . . . In the old-style war dance many kinds of head-dresses were used. Besides bonnets of eagle-tail feathers, which were common, head-dresses of entire skins of birds, head skins of

animals, and others set with buffalo, antelope, and deer horns were in use.³⁴

Within two days after the return to camp of a successful war party, the chief called the people to assemble for the scalp dance. Dancing was reserved for women exclusively, and only those who had brothers or husbands among the victorious warriors were permitted to engage actively in the dance. Scalps were hung on poles and were kept in front of their owner's ledge before the dance, and for a short time after the dance. They were either preserved for future use or cut into tassels and used in the manufacture of a scalp shirt. During the dance, the women carried the scalps on poles in front of the dance procession. Then the women formed a circle and the tribal chief from the center of the circle related the incidents of the encounter with the enemy. He was followed by warriors who had distinguished themselves, and his female relatives dressed in the habits of warriors and held pantomimes of his exploits. When this phase was finished, the women danced and sang in time with the beating of the drums. The step was a sliding side-step. After about two hours, the women ceased, and took a short respite. Then they again formed a dance circle and again repeated the dance. During this time, the warriors repossessed their scalps, and

³⁴Felt, op. cit., pp. 392-393.

the dance ended.

When no scalps were taken, the scalp dance was replaced by the victory dance, which is identical with the scalp dance, but which disregarded those features of the dance contingent on the presence of scalps.

How much religious feeling lay behind war dances is impossible to determine. It is reasonably certain, however, that ceremonies so intimately connected with death were colored to some extent by manifestations of religious fervor.

The Flathead combined with their war dance a dance to insure an abundance of buffalo at their destination. They also had a

ceremony for calling buffalo, Eshatltstema ("they call buffalo"). If game of this sort was scarce, a medicine-man would announce to the people that it was necessary to call the buffalo, and that a lodge should be erected. When at night all had assembled in this lodge, the medicine-man joined in the dancing, and after a long time he announced what he had seen with reference to the buffalo. He would say, for instance: "The buffalo are a long distance from here, and if we have cold weather here, it will be certain that the buffalo will arrive and will be found mingling with the horses." This closed the ceremony.³⁵

There were other dances in respect to animals. Some utilized a brand of imitative magic. In the turkey dance, for instance, the dancers wore feather bustles and imitated the walking and actions of a wild turkey, stooping forward, walking stiff-legged, holding one hand up to the forehead and

³⁵Curtis, North American Indian, op. cit., p. 92.

the other at the backside. Most of the dances were named in honor of the principal victim, such as deer, bear, dog, raven, and chicken.³⁶

In order to assure an abundance of bitter root, camas, and berries, the first-fruits ceremony was held by the Flathead early in May, at the time of the bitter root harvest. The chief called his people together, prayed to Amòtkan, and offered him the first-fruits, which had been placed on a dish. After this, the chief called on the men to sing individually, while the people danced to each song. The women accompanied the men as they danced.³⁷

While in our culture, marriage ceremonies are strongly felt to have the need of supernatural sanction, the Flathead marriage dance appeared to have been strictly secular. The Indians had other dances which were primarily for amusement. Among these were the Round, or Gift dance, and the Owl dance. However, since none of these bear any particular relation to religion, they lie out of the realm of this study.

³⁶Teit, op. cit., pp. 387-388.

³⁷Ibid., p. 387.

CHAPTER III

FLATHEAD RELIGIOUS ACCULTURATION BEFORE 1840

Champlain, the French explorer, in the early history of North America, allied himself with the Algonkian speaking tribes of the northeast against the Iroquois confederacy. Not willing to forget this incident, the Iroquois henceforth declared themselves against the French, and in future conflicts aligned themselves with the British, an allegiance which lasted until after the war of 1812, when its usefulness ended.

The French government, seeing the initial mistake of Champlain, tried to rectify the matter through Jesuit intermediaries. They were so successful that a considerable number of Mohawk and Onandage left their tribes, and in 1668, migrated to La Prairie, on the St. Lawrence river opposite Montreal, in what was then French territory. When they had exhausted the soil at La Prairie, the Christian Iroquois moved to Caughnawaga and Two Mountains, or Oka.³⁸ "The tribes of the league repeatedly tried, but without success, to induce them to return, and finally, in 1684, declared them

³⁸William B. Fenton, "Problems Arising from the Historic Northeast Position of the Iroquois," in "Essays in Historical Anthropology in North America," Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, 100:208, May 29, 1949.

to be traitors. In later wars the Catholic Iroquois took part with the French against their former brethren."³⁹

During the Revolutionary War, most of the Iroquois tribes took the British part. When the colonies emerged victorious, many of them left the newly-founded United States and emigrated to Canada.

Shortly before the end of the eighteenth century, the fur companies were employing Iroquois to clear the way for the fur traders. In a few years, after the whites had penetrated the Northwest, Iroquois served in the parties organized by traders in the dual capacity of canoe-men and trappers.⁴⁰ ~~The evidence seems quite strong that these Iroquois were largely Catholic in faith. The Caughnawaga Mission was strategically located at La Chine, just above the rapids from Montreal, on the St. Lawrence River. Here it was where many expeditions to the West had their inauguration. Therefore, although many of the Iroquois who accompanied the fur traders were the recently displaced Indians from the United States, many also were drawn from the older mission~~

³⁹J. N. B. Hewitt, "Iroquois," Bulletin 30, Bureau of American Ethnology, Handbook of American Indians, (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1907), p. 618.

⁴⁰Alexander Ross, Fur Hunters of the Far West, (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1855), Vol. I, p. 295.

stock. Alexander Ross mentioned that "Among the people employed are a set of civilized Indians from the neighborhood of Montreal, chiefly of the Iroquois nation. . . ."41

Mengarini made it even clearer that the Iroquois, or at least some of the Iroquois, who settled among the Flathead, had been educated in Christianity. The following paragraph is important in that it specifies what the Flathead were taught about Catholicism by their new friends.

Big Ignace especially may be considered the first whom God made use of to dissipate the thick darkness which up to that time had enveloped the mind of our Indians. His words, reinforced by very virtuous behavior (the latter being a thing quite difficult, I should say almost impossible to find among whites who live with the Indians), made a breach in the hearts of several, especially among the older ones, who spent not only days but sometimes entire nights in the tent of this precursor, as I may call him, in order to hear him talk of God, religion, and especially baptism. Then it was that the Flatheads heard of certain white men clothed in black whose practice it was to instruct people, bring them to know God and all good things, and enable them to live after death. Every time he spoke to the Indians (so old Cerve J. B. Gervais told me recently), he would finish by saying 'what I tell you is nothing compared with what the black-robos (robe nere) know.' Ignace would not teach the Indians any prayers, as he was asked to do, for fear, as he said, 'of changing the word of God.'42

⁴¹Loc. cit.

⁴²Mengarini, unpublished Italian m.s.: Memoria delle Missioni delle Teste Piatte, 1648, in Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J. The Jesuits of the Middle United States, (New York, America Press, 1938), Vol. 2, pp. 238-239.

Supplementing this account, Ferris noted, before the arrival of the missionaries that:

The Flatheads have received some notions of religion either from pious traders or from transient ministers who have visited the Columbia [Unknown to Ferris, the Iroquois were chiefly responsible]. Their ancient superstitions have given place to the more enlightened views of the christian faith, and they seem to have become deeply and profitably impressed with the great truths of the gospel. They appear to be very devout and orderly, and never eat, drink, or sleep, without giving thanks to God.⁴³

And John Wyeth, in 1833, presented another account of their activities when he wrote:

I know not what to say of their religion. I saw nothing like images, or any objects of worship whatever, and yet they appeared to keep a sabbath; for there is a day on which they do not hunt or gamble; but sit moping all day and look like fools.⁴⁴

Certain traits obtrude from these accounts. First, Big Ignace seems to have given a general account of Catholicism. He talked about God and religion. Secondly, and it should be carefully noted, Mengarini emphasized the fact that the baptism was given a special place. The reason for this is not clear until it is discovered that, even as late as 1855, the Indians thought "that when [they receive] baptism they can conquer any enemy whatsoever."⁴⁵ Especially

⁴³Ferris, op. cit., pp. 88-89.

⁴⁴John Wyeth, Oregon, or a Short History of a Long Journey from the Atlantic Ocean to the Region of the Pacific, (Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor, Early Western Travels, Cleveland, The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1905), p. 75

⁴⁵Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, p. 952.

important to note, also, is the fact that the Iroquois told the Flathead of their Christian concept of life after death. It is interesting that Big Ignace refused to teach the Flathead any Christian prayers. A trait that may have an ancient origin is giving thanks to God, which the Flathead are said to have said before eating, drinking and sleeping. There is little reason to think that keeping the Sabbath, as it was mentioned by Wyeth, is older than the Iroquois settlement among the Flathead. The fact is substantiated by De Smet, who wrote that "The Flatheads had already for some years a custom of never breaking camp on Sunday, but of passing that day in devotional exercises."⁴⁶

De Smet's accounts reveal a few more traits accepted by the Flathead from the Iroquois. In 1841 he wrote "For twenty years they had not ceased to supplicate the Father of Mercies. . . ."⁴⁷ and that for twenty years they had, at the behest of the Iroquois, "conformed, as nearly as they could, to our creed and manners, and even to our religious practices."⁴⁸ Repeating Mengarini, De Smet states that they had

⁴⁶Ibid., I, p. 230.

⁴⁷Ibid., I, p. 289.

⁴⁸Ibid., I, p. 289-290.

"had heard of the Savior and of his holy laws to mankind."
 One specific element, and one of great importance, is the fact that "The sign of the cross is especially exalted, by those who have already given their hearts to the true God, as a pledge of victory. . . ."49

Judging from these reports, it would be hard to overestimate the importance of the Iroquois in the Catholic acculturation of the Flathead Indians. During the twenty-odd years before the arrival of the Jesuits, the Flathead became acquainted with virtually all of the basic tenets of the Catholic faith through their Iroquois comrades. There was one serious flaw, however. The Flatheads did not correctly understand the religion. They thought the priests were superior types of shamans, who could secure them worldly blessings and who could intercede with the supernatural on behalf of the Indians. Posing the question to himself, De Smet concluded that the reason that the Flathead wanted the Black Robes was this:

Because they think that all other imaginable blessings will come with them; not only courage to fight, but also every species of remedy to enable them to enjoy corporeal health.⁵⁰

As a result of the influence of the Iroquois settlers, the Flathead were induced to send four delegations to

⁴⁹Ibid., II, p. 592.

⁵⁰Ibid., IV, p. 953.

St. Louis to request Black Robes to come and live with them.⁵¹ The first delegation arrived in St. Louis in 1831. However, due to the language barrier, it is doubtful that they accomplished their mission. Two of the four Indians died in St. Louis. The other two were accompanied part of the way on their return trip by George Catlin, well-known American artist, who adds to the reasons that the Flathead wanted the Jesuits. He said that the Indians reported to him they had been told that the religion of the whites was superior to their own "and that they would all be lost if they did not embrace it."⁵² One of the remaining two Indians died before reaching the Bitter Root Valley, and the other reported the failure of the mission. The second delegation reached St. Louis in 1833, but it too returned profitless. The third expedition was decimated by the Sioux before it reached St. Louis. The fourth, and last, mission finally proved successful. The individuals who comprised this party were all Iroquois, capable of speaking French and communicating with the priests. The Indians arrived in St. Louis in the latter part of October, 1839. Less than one year later,

⁵¹The question is still open as to what tribe the delegates in the St. Louis delegation came from. That they were either Flathead or Nas Percé seems certain. The case for the Flathead sending for the missionaries appears strong enough to allow their name to be applied to the seekers of the Christian dogma. Very likely the quest was a joint enterprise.

⁵²George Catlin, North American Indians, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1846), p. 106.

Father De Smet met an escort of Flathead on the Green River, and shortly after joined the main Flathead camp.

To summarize the effects of the Iroquois upon the Flathead religious pattern, generally it might be said that they were responsible for the introduction of most Catholic concepts to the Flathead.

Specifically, the Iroquois introduced (1) the Christian concept of life after death; (2) the concept of baptism, and a thoroughly disreputable account of the powers of baptism; (3) the Sabbath, (4) prayer to the Father of Mercies; (5) the Cross; and (6) a general account of Catholicism. One of their most important contributions to Flathead acculturation was their influence in getting priests to come and live with them.

To assess the impact of the traders upon the Indians is virtually impossible. David Thompson was a deeply religious man, who, by act and deed, set himself up as an example to the Flathead and to other Indians of the Northwest.⁵³ Like other traders, he endeavored to learn the Salish tongue and may have told the Flathead some of the precepts of Christianity. In contrast, Lewis and Clark were uncommunicative and, in any case, were not missionaries, even of a lay sort.

⁵³J. B. Tyrrell, David Thompson's Narrative, (Toronto: Publications of the Champlain Society, III, 1916), p. 461.

Cox, however, imposed his Christian concepts of right and wrong on the Flathead. After having watched the torture of a Blackfoot, he observed the Flathead leading forth a young girl, with obviously cruel intentions. He tried to persuade them not to treat her maliciously and when they refused, he and his white companions

ordered our interpreter to acquaint them, that, highly as we valued their friendship, and much as we esteemed their furs, we would quit their country for ever unless they discontinued their unmanly and disgraceful cruelties to their prisoners. This had the desired effect, and the miserable captive was led back to her sorrowing group of friends.⁵⁴

Unless the Flathead had desired to commit ethnic suicide, they would not have dared to disobey this threat for

In the latter half of the eighteenth century the powerful Blackfoot tribes, with the Piegan in the lead, pushed southwestward through present-day Alberta towards the Rockies, and the northern tributaries of the Missouri River. Armed with deadly firearms, obtained from the white traders on the Saskatchewan, and mounted on swift horses stolen from their southern and western enemies, these aggressive intruders could not be repulsed by the bows and arrows, lances, and war clubs of the Flathead and their neighbors.⁵⁵

And the Flathead knew this. In 1810, after they had finally obtained firearms from the white traders, the Flathead, in

⁵⁴Cox, op. cit., p. 120.

⁵⁵John C. Ewers, "Gustavus Schon's Portraits of Flathead and Pend d'Orielle Indians, 1854," Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, 110:14-15, 1948.

consort with the Kalispel, Spokane, and Kutenai, defeated the Blackfoot Piegan for the first time in many years. The Blackfeet themselves would have turned against the whites if it had not been for the fact that such an action would have deprived them of white ammunition and supplies.⁵⁶

The influence of the traders, then, was not detrimental to the interests of the missionaries. In fact, from the first white contact, the Indians were exposed to the Christian ethic of conduct, and their response was gratifying. However, the early traders [1809-1840] were not interested in proselyting the Indians. Their concern with religion was incidental; they wanted furs. With the material benefits they had at their command, the traders could undoubtedly have effected a drastic change in Flathead non-material life, but they weren't interested.

⁵⁶Oscar Lewis, "The Effects of White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture," Monographs of the American Ethnological Society, VI, 1942, p. 20.

CHAPTER IV

THE INTRUSION OF CATHOLICISM

The Catholics did not respond to the first Flathead delegations to St. Louis. The Protestants, however, delighted that the Indians wished to hear of Christianity, sent forth several expeditions in response to the Flathead call. Strictly speaking, this was not the first occasion on which the Protestants and the Flathead had met. Governor George Simpson, on April 8, 1824, recorded that he

. . . Had a long interview with Eight Chiefs belonging to the Flat Head Couteuais Spokane and other tribes who assembled here for the purpose of seeing me. . . . The Spokane and Flat Head Chiefs put a son each under my care to be Educated at the Missionary Society School Red River and all the Chiefs joined in a most earnest request that a Missionary or religious instructor be placed among them. . . .⁵⁷

Some doubt exists as to whether it was a Flathead boy who was taken back to Red River. More likely, he was Kutenai. But the important point is that Red River was a Protestant mission, not a Jesuit one, so that close neighbors of the Flathead learned Protestantism. Three Nez Percé boys were taken east to be educated, two of them by Presbyterian Marcus Whitman, and another by Nathaniel Wyeth.⁵⁸ These historical

⁵⁷Frederick Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), p. 135.

⁵⁸Leslie Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest, (Menasha, Wisconsin, The George Santa Publishing Company, 1935), p. 65.

facts show that the Flathead were already acquainted with Protestantism before the arrival of the Protestant missionaries.

Frost, Lee, Whitman, Spalding, and Gray, all Protestants, moved west in response to the first Flathead delegation to St. Louis. There was no indication on the part of the Indians that only Catholics were desired. Palladino, however, supposed that the Flathead would accept only the Black Robes. In his account of the arrival of the Whitman party, he states that, to the great disappointment of the Indians,

the supposed Black Robes were none other than the Rev. S. Parker and Dr. M. Whitman.

These gentlemen, having assembled the Indians, introduced themselves as envoys and missionaries, who had been sent to preach to them and establish missions in their midst.

But our "Little Chief and Great Warrior," Insula, and his followers, were not quite satisfied with the looks nor the message of the missionaries. They appeared too much like the others, the Lee party, who had passed through their country the preceding summer. They too married and they, too, like the others, had no black gown, no cross, nor the great prayer. From all this Insula concluded that neither were these the teachers spoken of by their adopted brethren, the Iroquois. Consequently, he and his band would have nothing further to do with them.⁵⁹

Whitman's account is in direct contrast to Palladino's. Of his first meeting with the Flathead, he described the

⁵⁹Palladino, op. cit., p. 22.

following events.

16 June, 1836 We had a talk with the chiefs of the Flathead and Napiersas tribes, in which they expressed great pleasure in seeing us and strong desires to be taught. Little Chief of the Flatheads said he was rejoiced when he heard there was a teacher from the Almighty and physician coming among them; that he immediately set out to meet us; that on their way they were robbed by Crow Indians and that he lost a horse he loved very much, but that since he had seen us he did not lament the loss of his horse. He had been told some things he said about the worship of God, but he did not practice them. But now, if a teacher would come among them, he and his children (meaning all over whom he had authority) would obey all that he should say.⁶⁰

Only the most naive credulity would allow one to choose the Palladino account over the Whitman journal. In the first place, Whitman wrote what he saw on the spot, and there is good reason to believe that his account was written in good faith and honestly. Palladino, besides what he inferred, obtained his information from De Smet, whose only source was the Indians. This is not to say that the Flathead were not honest, but four years had elapsed between the time the Whitman party left and the good Father arrived among his Indians. Time fogs everything, and the truth would almost certainly become distorted, even though unintentionally, during this extended length of time. In the second place, Insula, the

⁶⁰F. G. Young, "Journal and Report by Dr. Marcus Whitman of His Tour of Exploration with Rev. Samuel Parker in 1835 Beyond the Rocky Mountains," Oregon Historical Quarterly, 28: 247, September, 1927.

Little Chief mentioned in both accounts, was notably diplomatic in his relationships with whites. Given the opportunity, he never failed to humor his conversant, and this flattery went so far as to include harmless lies, designed to please his friends. Insula would surely not have allowed such a juicy opportunity of telling Father De Smet his "true" feelings towards the white missionaries who had come before, especially when there was no anticipation of a harmful result. He told Father De Smet what he calculated would please him most.

Whitman left the Flathead with the intention of returning^{east,} and there communicating to the governing body of missionaries of the Presbyterian Church the wishes of the Flathead Indians to have a missionary among them. The Indians were gratified to know that some action was forthcoming on the part of the whites, and expressed to Whitman their hope that the result of his efforts might be to have a missionary come and live among them.⁶¹

However, for one reason or another, there was no response from either Protestants or Catholics to the appeals of the Indians to have teachers of the Christian faith come to them. Whitman's appeal apparently went unanswered, very

⁶¹Young, op. cit., p. 248.

likely for the same reason that the Jesuits refused, namely, that they were "too weak in numbers to respond."⁶²

The most significant fact concerning the Whitman party is the fact that the Flathead Indians did not reject Whitman as a fraudulent priest. Instead, Whitman decided to establish his mission farther to the west where he had greater access to larger numbers of Indians.

The first missionary to go live with the Flathead was Father Pierre-Jean De Smet. He was born in Termonde, Belgium, in 1801. Zealous for missionary work among the Indians, he sailed to the United States when he was twenty. Immediately upon arrival here, he entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Whitemarsh, Maryland. Two years later, the Jesuits established the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus. Father De Smet joined this group and remained in St. Louis until 1838, when he established St. Joseph's Mission at Council Bluffs, Iowa, among the Pettawatomies. One year later, in 1839, when he was thirty-eight years of age, Father De Smet saw the last Flathead delegation pass through his parish. In response to this appeal, Bishop Rosati sent Father De Smet to the Flathead in 1840. On June 30, 1840, he met a Flathead committee on the Green River who escorted him to the

⁶²Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., p. 28.

main camp of the Flathead and Pend d'Orielle at Pierre's Hole, in the present state of Wyoming. "Bear Looking Up was chief when Father De Smet came. . . Bear Looking Up and a number of the tribe embraced Christianity at that time. The old chief died soon after and Victor took his place. . . ."63 It seems that this authoritative statement would negate the statement by De Smet that Big Face was the head chief. Teit states that "Standing Grizzly Bear" was chief at the time of the arrival of the missionaries and this, of course, is only a variation of Bear Looking Up, of whom Martin Charlo spoke.

At any rate, Big Face told Father De Smet:

This day Kaikolinzueten (the Great Spirit), has accomplished our wishes, and our hearts are swelled with joy; Our desire to be instructed was so great, that three times we deputed our people to the Great Black-gown (the bishop) in St. Louis to obtain a father.⁶⁴

That Father De Smet was as enthusiastically received as this statement reveals is proved by the fact that so many Indians went to greet him, and also by the fact that six hundred Indians of the Flathead and Upper Pend d'Orielle tribes were baptized by him.⁶⁵ This was a sizable proportion of the

⁶³Martin Charlo, "Souvenir Selish Indian Festival and Celebration at Medicine Tree, Twelve Miles South of Darby, Mont., Sept. 20-21," translated by Pierre Pichette, Darby, Montana, Compiled and Printed in the Office of the Darby Dispatch, 1924, p. 8.

⁶⁴Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., I, p. 263.

⁶⁵Ibid., I, p. 226.

two thousand Indians De Smet estimated to have been there.⁶⁶
Those baptized, however, did not include Victor.⁶⁷

"Begun on the very day of his arrival, Father De Smet's missionary work among those good Indians continued unabated to the moment of his departure."⁶⁸ On the evening of his arrival, he assembled the Indians to recite evening prayers in common.⁶⁹ On the Sunday after he came, Father De Smet conducted Mass for the Indians. This was a practice which was to continue. In the words of De Smet himself,

During all my stay in the mountains, I said the holy mass regularly Sundays and feast-days, as well as on days when the Indians did not break camp in the morning; the altar was made of willows; my blanket made an altar cloth, and all the lodge was adorned with images and wild flowers; the Indians knelt within a circle of about 200 feet, surrounded by little pines and cedars, set out expressly; they took assiduous part with the greatest modesty, attention, and devotion, and since various nations were among them, they chanted praises of God in the Flathead, Nez Percé, and Iroquois languages.⁷⁰

De Smet's summer exploration of the mountains was actually a reconnaissance to assay the needs of the Flathead. He had no intention of staying through the winter, but had planned to return to St. Louis with his appraisal and then

⁶⁶Ibid., I, p. 264.

⁶⁷Curtis, North American Indian, op. cit., p. 49.

⁶⁸Palladino, op. cit., p. 34.

⁶⁹Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., I, p. 224.

⁷⁰Ibid., I, p. 230.

to rejoin the Flathead the next year, 1841.

Before leaving the Flathead in 1840, De Smet said:

I gave them for the spiritual head a very intelligent Indian, whom I had taken pains to instruct myself in a most particular manner; he was to represent me in my absence, call them together evening and morning, as well as Sundays, say the prayers to them, exhort them to virtue, and anoint the dying, and in case of need, little children. There was but a single voice, a unanimous assent to all my recommendations.⁷¹

Meanwhile, Bishop Rosati, in St. Louis, had sent an appeal throughout Europe for missionaries to work among the Indians. His response among the Jesuits was gratifying, and by the time Father De Smet was prepared to leave again for Flathead country, on April 24, 1841, he had with him Father Gregory Mengarini, Father Nicholas Point, Brother William Claessens, Brother Charles Huet, and Brother Joseph Specht. Father Mengarini was a trained philologist, and an excellent singer; Father Point had a talent for drawing which was his passport to the various Indian tribes he lived with; and Brother Claessens was a blacksmith, Brother Specht a tinner, and Brother Huet a carpenter.⁷² This party had travelled to Fort Hall in a party of emigrants. At that post, they parted company with the emigrants and joined the welcoming committee of Flathead Indians who had come to greet them. This was on

⁷¹Ibid., I, p. 234.

⁷²Ibid., I, p. 278.

the 15th of August, 1841. Somewhat over a month later, the Indians and whites found themselves in the Bitter-Root Valley. Immediately the missionaries began to construct the Church of St. Mary's, in the site of present-day Stevensville,⁷³ on September 24.⁷⁴ The Flathead men helped cut and place the logs in position; the women made mats of rushes to cover the ceiling and to hang around the walls.

Rather pessimistically, Father De Smet had apparently wondered during his winter in St. Louis whether his Salish converts would keep his dictates, for, on his return to the Indians, he stated that

the Flatheads are distinguished by the firmness of their faith, and the ardor of their zeal. Not a vestige of their former superstitions can be discovered. . . . They believe without any difficulty the most profound mysteries of our holy religion, as soon as they are proposed to them, and they do not even suspect that we might be deceived, or even would wish to deceive them. . . . Their conduct during my absence has been truly regular and edifying. They attend divine services with the greatest punctuality, and pay the most serious attention to the explanation of the Catechism.⁷⁵

Established in the church at St. Mary's, the missionaries furthered their course of instruction to the Indians.

⁷³The Flathead have a legend that a young Indian girl named Mary died at the very spot where the Mission was later erected, before 1841, and that she had a vision which told her that her tribe should receive the missionaries and do all that they said.

⁷⁴Chittenden and Richardson, *op. cit.*, I, p. 40.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, I, p. 322.

They devoted themselves to teaching both religious and non-religious elements of white culture to the Indians.

If De Smet had confined his activities to improving the morals of the Flathead, he might as well have spent his time preaching to the angels. Like so many other white men who passed some time with these Indians he says of them:

They are scrupulously honest in buying and selling; they have never been accused of having committed a theft; everything that is found is taken to the lodge of the chief, who cries the articles and returns them to the owner. Slander is unknown even among the women; lying is hateful to them beyond anything else. They fear, they say, to offend God, and that is why they have only one heart, and they abhor a "forked tongue"; a liar. Quarrels and fits of rage are severely punished. No one suffers without his brothers interesting themselves in his trouble and coming to his succor; accordingly, they have no orphans among them. They are always polite, always of a jovial humor, very hospitable, and helpful to one another in their duties. Their lodges are always open to anyone; they do not so much as know the use of keys and locks. . . . The vivacity of their young people is surprising, and the amicability of their character and their dispositions among themselves are remarkable.⁷⁶

And again in praise:

I was not able to discover among these people the slightest blameworthy act, unless it was their gambling, in which they often venture everything they possess.⁷⁷

But then, by way of reforms he says

These games were unanimously abolished, as soon as I had explained to them that they were contrary to

⁷⁶Ibid., I, p. 227-228.

⁷⁷Ibid., I, p. 227.

the commandment of God, saying, "Ye shall not covet anything that is your neighbor's."⁷⁸

Perhaps it may have been the apparent ease with which De Smet reformed the Indians in respect to gambling that induced him to try to effect other reforms. At any rate, it would be a serious error to suppose that the only blameworthy act he found among the Flathead was participation in games of chance. He was indignant at the Flathead mode of marriage, and he was shocked by the brutality of their punishment. One of his first moves was to declare that marriages consummated by "savages" were not valid; to him this was obviously true, since they had not been married in the Catholic Church. Perhaps De Smet would not have prosecuted original Flathead marriages if it had not been for the fact that no one, "not even among the best disposed . . . did not believe himself justified in sending away his first wife, whenever he thought fit, and taking another."⁷⁹ Of course, this condition could not be allowed to continue, and De Smet endeavored to inculcate in them the Christian concept of marriage, so that by 1846, he was able to report that

Polygamy--or rather a connection, if possible still more loose--is now, thank God, entirely abolished among our newly converted Indians. . . . The

⁷⁸Loc. cit.

⁷⁹Ibid., I, p. 332.

reckless abandonment of the helpless infant--the capricious discarding of wife and children--the wanton effusion of human blood--are no longer known amongst them. Our feelings are not outraged by brutal practices, heretofore so commonly witnessed, of a father considering a horse a fair exchange for his daughter; the justice of allowing the young Indian maiden to choose her future partner for life is now universally allowed; --the requisite care for the offspring is regarded in its proper light, as a Christian duty. . . .⁸⁰

Having settled the question of marriage to his satisfaction, Father De Smet turned to flagellation. In an institutional setting remarkably similar to a court of law, the chiefs of the tribe gathered together to sit in judgment of crimes and accusations. In some cases, individuals came forward of their own free will, and offered themselves for punishment if they felt that had committed an illegal or immoral act. Like those who had not volunteered, they would lie on a robe where someone delegated with authority by the chiefs, or perhaps a chief himself, would flog him with a raw-hide lash. At the end of the whipping, the chiefs called upon the assembled people to ask the penitent's forgiveness and reformation.⁸¹ This is closely analogous to the Catholic confession, of course, and may have come to the Flathead via the Iroquois. However, Father De Smet did

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 572-573.

⁸¹Interview with Pierre Pichette.

not approve of 'the wanton effusion of human blood,' and strove to prevent future flagellation.

Father De Smet realized that the Flathead were a peaceful people, and that they would not have been at war with the Blackfeet if they had been left a choice. Furthermore, he sympathized with the Flathead's proclamation that the buffalo grounds were traditional Flathead hunting territory, and he did not try to discourage their biennial treks to the Plains, for he was aware that the buffalo provided the main source of their sustenance, and that without buffalo, his converts would starve. During the first year among them, he accompanied them on their hunts and watched them fight when the Blackfeet attacked them. He made no recommendations to them at this time; in fact, his journals reveal a sprightly taste for battle, and a delight with the audacity and courage of the Flathead braves. Little Chief's conduct aroused his special approbation when, as he was pursuing and fighting a Bannock raiding party ten times the size of his own, he stopped his pursuit and proclaimed to his men that it was the Sabbath and time for prayer.⁸²

Father De Smet recognized war as a necessary evil, but nevertheless he sought to reconcile the Flathead and the

⁸²Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., I, pp. 332-333.

Blackfeet. While all his attempts to secure peace failed, they give sufficient evidence that the good Father detested the brutality and vindictiveness that are concomitant with martial conflicts. These brutish qualities, he thought, prevented the Flathead from acquiring a Christian sense of justice.

Under the influence of the priests, the war patterns of the Flathead were somewhat changed. When Father Point accompanied the Flathead on a winter hunt in 1841-1842, in which they met and fought the Blackfeet, the Salish captured some of the Piegan, who appealed to Father Point for mercy. He prevailed upon the Flathead and they released the beleaguered Blackfeet, but became "highly incensed against the Father for his meddling in the matter."⁸³ Mengarini urged the Flathead chiefs to release a Blackfoot warrior whom they had found wounded near the mission. Above the protest of some of the tribe, he was given his freedom to make his way back to his own people.⁸⁴ In still another way, the missionaries influenced them. As Father Point said, "The Flatheads have abolished the barbarous custom of reeking vengeance

⁸³Palladino, op. cit., p. 52.

⁸⁴Partoll, op. cit., p. 8.

of the mutilated body of their enemy. They even carry their generosity so far, as to give sepulture to all who die among them."⁸⁵

By 1845, Father De Smet had noticed that "Buffalo and beaver are becoming every year more scarce, and will soon fail them altogether."⁸⁶ If this condition continued, it would have been nothing short of catastrophic for the Indians.

These buffalo which were found in such large numbers on the northwestern range played a very important part in the economy of the Indians. First of all the meat of the bison was the "staff of life" of the red man. He not only ate the meat fresh but he also cured great quantities of it for winter use. Although the Indian may have been improvident and wasteful as a rule, he was so dependent on the meat that he, or rather his squaw, laboriously preserved what was not consumed when fresh.

Every part of the buffalo was utilized by the Indian. The carefully tanned hides served him both at home and abroad. Not only were his tipi and lodge covered with them, but his shield and canoe as well. From the hair he made cord and cloth. Lewis and Clark record that the buffalo dung was the only fuel save dry grass and weeds. . . and both the Indians and the whites used it extensively for this purpose.

In addition to using the bison as above described, the Indians secured most of his firearms and other

⁸⁵Pierre-Jean De Smet, Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains, (Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor, Early Western Travels, Cleveland, The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), p. 417.

⁸⁶Chittenden and Richardson, III, op. cit., p. 995.

supplies from the whites by exchanging buffalo robes and tongues for them.⁸⁷

Basically, De Smet's policy was to prepare the Indian for the coming of white culture, which he realized would overwhelm them and necessitate a change in their ways. They were hunters and gatherers. De Smet hoped to convert them to agriculture. Thus, he extended his desires far beyond the bounds of pure Christianity. Like the Catholics in medieval Europe, De Smet wanted to make all aspects of life subservient to the Church and to Christianity.

Shortly after his second arrival, Father De Smet journeyed to Fort Colville to obtain some seed for spring planting. Later he went to Vancouver and from there back to the Flathead for a short stay. After that, he traveled to Europe, endeavoring to get supplies and volunteers to work among the western tribes. During this time he became convinced that agriculture was the only solution to the Indian's dilemma. When he returned to St. Mary's he was pleased with the crops, and told of the delight of the Indians on seeing the mature vegetables. Potatoes, carrots, beets, parsnips, turnips, all grew in abundance. The Indians were astonished and, according to De Smet, "all thank[ed] God and promised

⁸⁷H. A. Trexler, "The Buffalo Range of the Northwest," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 7:348, March 1921.

to work."⁸⁸ But the promise failed to materialize to any significant extent, partially because Father De Smet's earnest appeals for farming implements were not granted.

The introduction of agriculture split the Flathead into two separate, but still friendly, factions. On the one hand were those who followed the example of Iroquois Peter and farmed the land under the direction of the Jesuits; on the other hand, the conservative group under Victor still relied on the summer and fall hunts for their sustenance. They ignored agriculture if it interfered in any way with their traditional hunting activities.

To summarize, from the very first, De Smet had endeavored to teach basic Catholic doctrines to the Indians. Before he left, in 1840, his progress in achieving this goal was considerable. Many Indians had learned the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Credo, the Ten Commandments, and the acts of Faith, Hope, Charity, and Contrition.⁸⁹

The period at St. Mary's terminated with these results:

- (1) Catholic doctrines and rituals were introduced to the Flathead in an orthodox manner by qualified priests. The garbled misinterpretations of Christianity given by the Iroquois were corrected.
- (2) Polygamy, which had never been a

⁸⁸Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., III, p. 995.

⁸⁹Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., I, p. 226.

factor of any considerable importance among the Flathead, was abolished. Marriages were sanctified in the Church. (3) Whipping as a form of punishment and absolution was abandoned. Hitherto, this was also an important method of social control. (4) War patterns were modified. There is reason to believe that the Flathead acquired more confidence in their martial exploits and consequently won more battles. The Catholics insisted on humanity to the prisoners. (5) Agriculture was introduced as a substitute for buffalo hunting. Although it gained a foothold with the Iroquois-Flathead, it failed to arouse any enthusiasm among the Flathead proper.

CHAPTER V

APOSTASY OF 1850

In 1850, less than nine years after it had been established, St. Mary's mission closed its doors and its priests moved west away from the Flathead. This chapter will be devoted to showing why the Church was given up by the missionaries and why the Indians showed so little remorse at the incident.

In 1846, the Indians left for their summer hunt in the customary manner. They were on the best of terms with the missionaries.⁹⁰ However, when they returned in the fall, they betrayed a complete change of heart. In a pathetic letter to Rootan, Father Ravalli described the condition in these words:

. . . we were not a little astonished when on their approaching the reduction last fall. . . their camp, which was broken up in various bands, took different courses. Part of the Indians were unwilling or afraid to come up to their village, while the others on entering took up again their old-time barbarous yells, which we had not heard since we came among them. They gave a chilly salute to the missionaries and then drew off with their lodges far from the latter nor did they show themselves to the priest except rarely and then only to smoke in his cabin. They sold us grudgingly a little dry meat and that of the worst quality. We heard a little later that

⁹⁰Mengarini, quoted in De Saet à Nobili, May 25, 1850, in Garraghan, op. cit., p. 376.

on Father De Smet's departure from their hunting-camp to descend the Missouri they had given themselves up to their old war-dances, to savage obscenity and to shameless excesses of the flesh We know that we were not to blame for such a change and we bewailed it all the more when we saw that they went on constantly getting worse.⁹¹

What caused this disaffection? Certainly the shock must have been a severe one to provoke the Indians into deserting the mission. Probably one reason was the regret on the part of the Indians at the departure of Father De Smet, who had become almost a brother to them. He had left on short journeys previous to 1846, but that year he departed with no assurance that he would return. Mengarini, who assumed leadership at the mission, had never been popular with the Indians. Instead of promising the liberal material rewards that De Smet had offered,⁹² Mengarini threatened to operate the mission on a business-like basis. As a result, the Indians were dissatisfied.

The fact that De Smet left St. Mary's, however, could hardly account for the hostility of the Flathead Indians toward the missionaries. There was a far more important incident which aroused the anger of the Indians. It will be

⁹¹Father A. Ravalli, Ravalli à Roothan, June 29, 1847, in Garraghan, ibid., pp. 376-377.

⁹²Loc. cit.

remembered that one of the most inducing facets of Christianity was its supposed power to shape the Flathead warrior into an invulnerable superman. While on his way east, De Smet jeopardized the monopoly that the Flathead had on Catholicism. He not only discussed the possibility of Christianizing the Blackfeet [and Father Point did go to the Blackfoot country in 1847] but he also baptized some of the Blackfeet.⁹³ By performing this single act, which was in the Indian's eyes the source of power, he destroyed the spiritual balance of power that had given the Flathead their superiority over the Blackfeet. Undoubtedly this played a vitally significant part in the disaffection of the Indians from the missionaries.

The priests were credited with another singular power. They could, according to the Indians, "excite diseases and cause the thunder to roll when [they] were not satisfied."⁹⁴ Offhand, this might appear to be a desirable attribute, but the priests did not want it ascribed to them. In 1847, Dr. Marcus Whitman had been killed at Wailapatu for causing an epidemic. The power to cause an epidemic was dangerous because whatever the reason for an outcrop of disease, the

⁹³Chittenden and Richardson, op. cit., II, pp. 584-599, passim.

⁹⁴Ibid, IV, p. 953.

priests and preachers were held responsible.

In the field of social change the priests had not been as cautious and forbearing as they might have been. This was especially true in respect to polygamy. Instead of examining the possible consequences of establishing monogamy in the Flathead culture, Father De Smet threw polygamy out as harmful. As a matter of fact, polygamy was of primary importance to the prestige of an Indian. A man with many wives was well thought of. Since men could generally provide more buffalo than one woman could prepare, it was also an economic asset to have enough wives so that they could prepare hides and food to barter with the traders. Furthermore, many women were left without a visible means of support. De Smet also tried to encourage the Flathead to forgo their life on the chase and settle on farms near St. Mary's. One reason for this was to make them independent of the buffalo. Another reason was "The buffalo hunt has a demoralizing effect on them, bringing them, as it does, into contact with the pagan Blackfeet. . . the Sioux. . . and the worse than pagan whites in both regions."⁹⁵ The Flathead did not cease hunting. Earlier, it was shown

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of monogamy
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⁹⁵James O'Connor, "The Flathead Indians," Records of the American Catholic Historical Society, III: 85-110, 1888-91.

that the priests, especially De Smet, discouraged the Flathead from using the whip. This was an important means by which the chiefs kept their followers under control. Other influences joined together to stultify effective social control. Owen pointed to the result when he wrote that "The old Chiefs can do Nothing with them. The young men are growing heedless and will not listen to the Council of their sages."⁹⁶

Now if the Flathead had simply taken over every aspect of white culture that the priests had introduced, they would have had no trouble at all. But of course it was as impossible for them to change that completely as it would be for a man of forty or fifty to drop his old habits and adopt a new way of life; more difficult, in fact, because in changing, every member of the tribe of five hundred individuals was asked to modify his behavior to conform with the European standard. Due credit must be given the Indian for a gallant effort, but it was an effort that could never have succeeded. The changes required by the priests were too great.

⁹⁶Seymore Dunbar and Paul C. Phillips, editors, The Journals and Letters of Major John Owen, (The Montana Historical Society, 1927) II, p. 333.

Smohalla was an Indian "dreamer" who lived among one of the Salish tribes of the upper Columbia. About 1850, he began spreading his nativistic doctrine, urging the Indians to "return to their primitive mode of life, refuse the teachings of the white man, and in all their actions be guided by the will of the Indian God, as revealed in dreams to Smohalla and his priests."⁹⁷ This type of cataleptic preacher was not uncommon on the Plateau. They obtained their reputation by visiting the land of the dead and reporting to their respective tribes what was expected of them.

It is hardly conceivable that the Flathead were not acquainted with the religion of Smohalla. However, the Flathead did not join the cult, even though there are some indications that they accepted, in part, the belief that they should reject the culture of the white man. They did not feel the violent reaction to white culture that many other Salish and Sahaptin tribes experienced, since they were subject to different conditions; but they did, to a considerable extent, revert to their traditional pattern of existence. Probably this touch of nativism played a part in the closing

⁹⁷James Mooney, "Smohalla," Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Handbook of American Indians, pt. 2, 1910, p. 602.

of St. Mary's Mission and in the rejection of Christianity. In the final analysis, the Messiah Smohalla should be interpreted as representing the current thought of the Indian of the Plateau in regard to white civilization. The violence, evidenced by the Yakima War, or the intractability evidenced by the Flathead, expressed the sum of their feeling towards the disappointing Christian doctrines and towards the inadaptability of European ways into Indian life.

The Indians had expected greater things from the whites.

The Flathead. . . word to designate the Frenchmen is "Seme". . . ; this is their word of exclamation or astonishment. It was probably given to the Frenchmen--the first white men to come among them--for the reason that the Indians thought these white men were supernatural--not of this world. An Indian account of the coming of the first white man. . . to the Spokane country states that "the Indians got word that a number of wonderful strangers were coming to the places where they were, and the simple Indians thought that if these wonderful 'Frenchmen' came they would die no more, etc."⁹⁸

Several years later, even after the establishment of St. Ignatius mission, Father Palladino tells of an incident which occurred while he was there. The priest had just received news that Father Veracruz had died in California

⁹⁸Angus McDonald, "A Few Items of the West," The Washington Historical Quarterly, 8:199, 1917.

and they offered Mass and the Indians participated in Communion. One Indian was amazed. When Palladino asked the reason for his surprise, he found that the Indian thought that priests did not die. On being asked to elucidate, he said to Palladino that he thought Black Robes did not die "Because you can keep for yourselves the good medicine which holds death away from you, whereas, to us poor Indians you give medicine that is itenemus (worthless) and lets us die."⁹⁹

Where the Indians obtained these ideas regarding death and the white people is impossible to ascertain. It is possible that, since black was the color of death, they felt that white was the color of life, and this could account for the first incident. The second, however, happened about twenty years after the abandonment of St. Mary's, and the Indian should have known from practical experience that even the priests died. The significant feature, however, is that the Indians, or at least some of them, had this idea, and it was a fact to them. Perhaps others had felt the same disappointment when Father Zerbinatti died during the early days of St. Mary's.

Father Ravalli, well-known Jesuit doctor, often found himself the object of the Indian's wrath. They would

⁹⁹Palladino, op. cit., pp. 463-464.

bring him a sick man, after having taken him to a shaman, and if the man died, Ravalli was assigned as the cause of his death, no matter in what condition the sick man had been brought to him. This antagonism was based on an underlying attitude of the Indians. They thought that the priests wanted to kill the Indians so that they could have their land. Some even thought that the Jesuits were not able to make a living elsewhere so they had come to the Flathead to take what the Indians had.¹⁰⁰

Moiese had still another complaint with Christianity. While his reasoning is not supported by history, it is more important in that it gives the thought of the Indians. He said that the Indians had sought the priests. "They came to us and they taught us. Since then our people have died. I think it is too much study."¹⁰¹ Moiese was convinced that the Indians should never have learned how to think, and that they would have had none of their ailments if they had not subjected their mental processes to work. From Moiese's account, it is apparent that the coming of the whites had quite an opposite effect from that on which the Indians had counted. The whites failed to make the Indian immortal.

¹⁰⁰Father Accolti, Accolti à De Smet, May 5, 1851, in Garraghan, op. cit., pp. 382-383.

¹⁰¹Stone, op. cit., p. 94.

Increased contact between the whites and the Flathead undoubtedly had a very disturbing effect on the ideas that the Indians had built up about the whites. The medicine of the whites, both spiritual and material, proved in many cases to be more detrimental than useful. The Indians began to notice the disparity between practice and belief of the whites. In any comparison, at least of the moral life of the two groups, the Indians could not fail to notice their superiority. At the last Easter ceremony which the Catholics held in St. Mary's, the Indians simply stated, "You told us the religion of the whites would make us better men, yet the whites we see are worse than we are."¹⁰²

They had come to doubt that the priests were invested with magic that could be turned to the uses of the Indians. Since this had been their principal object in seeking the priests, in learning the ritual and dogma, and in acting in the manner prescribed by the Jesuits, when the Indians found that there was little connection between Christianity and mana, they felt no further need in continuing the absorption of the new beliefs and customs of the Europeans. This "constituted a bloodless revolt against the planned

¹⁰²Anonymous, The Sunday Missoulian, August 24, 1941, p. 2.

socio-economic program inaugurated by Father De Smet."¹⁰³

Father Accolti ascribes Angus McDonald as one of the causes for the Indian's apostasy of 1850.¹⁰⁴ That is true. He established Fort Connah in the Mission Valley in 1847. McDonald was a Scotch trader, working for the Hudson Bay Company. He had no particular religious affiliations, but was a staunch supporter of the Indian's religion, and belittled the differences between it and Christianity. To him, they were essentially the same, in that they both appreciated a force higher than man.¹⁰⁵ By failing to recognize the importance of the beliefs the Jesuits sought to impose on the Flathead, McDonald discouraged the Indians from placing their undivided faith in Christianity.

Catholic writers invariably disclose as one of the reasons for the decline of Indian faith in Catholicism the belief that rascals, wolfers, trappers, and malcontents "poisoned the minds of the Salish against their benefactors."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³Ewers, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁰⁴Accolti, in Garraghan, op. cit., pp. 382-383.

¹⁰⁵Angus McDonald, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶Lewis W. Reilly, "Father Ravalli, Pioneer Indian Missionary," Catholic World, 125:70, April 1927.

There may be some truth to these assertions. The Hudson's Bay Company was particularly vehement against discouraging the Indians from hunting. This was directly opposed to the policy of the Jesuits. Undoubtedly the Indians were exploited by the fur companies. The traders demanded that the Indians pay enough beaver skins for a gun so that when the furs were piled one on top of another they would reach the top of the six-foot blunderbuss.¹⁰⁷ Since it was to their best interest, then, the fur traders found it useful to deprecate the missionaries. The means consisted of whiskey.

The Indians went out of their way to be corrupted by the traders. Father Accolti reported that they obtained cards and silver money from the Mormons in Salt Lake City. for their furs.¹⁰⁸ Using money as a means of exchange gave the Indians greater freedom in satisfying their demands, which, inferring from Accolti's account, were not salubrious to the Indians in their relations to the missionaries.

There is another theory to account for the Catholics' closing St. Mary's. According to Judge Woody,

The St. Mary's Mission was abandoned for the reason that the missionaries were continually

¹⁰⁷Interview with Pierre Pichette.

¹⁰⁸Accolti, in Garraghan, op. cit., pp. 382-383.

harrassed by the numerous war parties of Blackfeet that visited the valley on their marauding expeditions. These war parties were so numerous and murderous that no man's life was safe away from shelter.¹⁰⁹

This is mentioned here because it was also given by the Catholics as one of the reasons why the mission was closed in 1850. However, this reason is highly suspect. The Blackfeet had been attacking the small settlement ever since it was established, in 1841. No Jesuit was ever killed at St. Mary's, either by the Blackfeet or by the Flathead. If the danger was as great as it was supposed to have been, the question might well be asked why the Catholics ever built their mission there in the first place. And even if they had not known of the Blackfoot depredations in the beginning, they found out about them shortly afterwards, and had ample time to move out before 1850.

It has been seen that in 1846 the Flathead suddenly became haughty and overbearing to the missionaries, largely as a result of the belief that Father De Smet was passing the mana of Christianity to their Blackfoot rivals.

Then for three years there is a blank space as far as historical records go. But in 1849, Father Ravalli was

¹⁰⁹ Judge Frank H. Woody, "A Sketch of the Early History of Western Montana," Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana, Vol. 2, 1896, p. 91

pleased to write that "At present the Indians are all well-affected toward our holy religion and toward us."¹¹⁰ But in 1850, the situation had reversed itself again. This time, the reason for their disaffection is lost. Most likely, the cause was multiple, a combination of the various reasons mentioned above. Father Joset leased the improvements at St. Mary's to Major John Owen on November 9, 1850. Father Ravalli, commenting on the state of affairs at St. Mary's before the lease was signed, stated that:

The majority gave up 'private prayer' and vented insult and injury every day upon the missionary. Though we were making sacrifices for their sick, even so far as to deprive ourselves of a morsel of bread, they refused to sell us necessary provisions while under our very eyes they sold to an agent of the Hudson Bay Company, [a declared enemy of the mission.]¹¹¹

The Flathead reverted to their primitive mode of entertainment, the night "orgy," and practiced customs which the Fathers expressly forbade.¹¹² Also, from the time that the Flathead became embittered toward the missionaries for the second time, they stayed around St. Mary's so little that the Jesuits felt their continued efforts were useless.

¹¹⁰Ravalli, in Ravalli à Roothan, April 5, 1849, in Garraghan, op. cit., p. 378.

¹¹¹Ravalli, in Ravalli à Roothan, April 5, 1851, in Garraghan, op. cit., p. 380.

¹¹²Accolti, in Accolti à De Smet, in Garraghan, op. cit., pp. 382-383.

Consequently, the Catholics left, with the intent to punish the Indians and bring them to a sense of duty.¹¹³

¹¹³Ravalli, in Garraghan, op. cit., p. 380

CHAPTER VI

FROM APOSTASY TO MODERN TIMES

St. Mary's was to remain closed for sixteen years. It was the intent of the priests to return shortly after 1850, in the hope that the Indians would again submit to Christianization. The Jesuits realized the hopelessness of trying to inculcate the ideas of their faith into unwilling minds.

Perhaps this pause was actually a stroke of good fortune for the missionaries. It seems obvious that until the apostasy, the Indians had obtained a fallacious misinterpretation of the powers of Christianity. That they believed in some miraculous power of Catholicism can hardly be denied. Their success in war and hunting after the arrival of the Jesuits confirmed their faith. The Jesuits had never succeeded in dispelling this erroneous notion from the obstinate mind of the Indians. Eventually, it was inevitable that some incident would happen that would manifest the misunderstanding and create difficulties between the Indians and the Catholics--a severe defeat in war, an epidemic, a famine, or any unfavorable event over which the Jesuits were thought to have control. It has been seen that the principal reason that the Indians grew irate against the Jesuits

was the fact that De Smet offered the powers of Christianity to the Blackfeet.

The period from 1850 to 1866 served as a kind of test period to the Flathead. There were no missionaries with them. After 1854, St. Ignatius Mission was moved from Pend d'Orielle Lake to St. Ignatius, Montana, but the contact between the priests and Flathead Indians was slight. The situation was ideal, then, for comparing the time when they had a priest with them to the time when the priests had left.

To assume that most Flathead Indians were acquainted with most of the rituals and doctrines of the Catholic Church at the time the Mission of St. Mary's was closed would seem to be reasonable. Therefore, they had, in addition to their baptismal shielding, some access to the powers of Catholicism. To the Flathead mind, then, the priests were no longer absolutely essential to their continued success in beckoning the good will of the great spirit. No doubt the priests had retained certain powers which could not have been duplicated by the Indians, but the Indians had the basic forms of ritual and prayer which were supposed to yield effective results. It would seem that the priests were dispensable, although they still retained their importance in some fields of magic.

There was nothing during the period of the apostasy which would indicate that the Indians suffered from not having a priest with them. As usual, they went on their journeys to the buffalo country and succeeded in living prosperously in this manner. Wars became so uncommon that they failed to cause alarm to the Indians. The camas and the bitter root bloomed as before. In all, the Flathead were living a contented and plentiful life. However, during these years after the abandonment of St. Mary's white settlers slowly infiltrated into the Bitter Root Valley. They caused no small concern to the Indians, who complained to Major Owen that ". . . we Will all be Swallowed by the White tribe." White settlement, in any case, was something the priests could not have stopped even if they had remained at St. Mary's.¹¹⁴

With the blessing of Father Adrian Hoecken, Governor Stevens made a treaty with the Flathead in 1855. Under this agreement, the Flathead conditionally ceded their claim on western Montana to the United States government in return for certain material benefits and for inalienable rights to

¹¹⁴Seymore Dunbar and Paul C. Phillips, editors, The Journals and Letters of Major John Owen, (The Montana Historical Society, 1927, 2 Vol), II, p. 193.

the Bitter Root Valley. The condition was this: if the government surveyed the Bitter Root Valley and found it less desirable for the Indians than the Jocko Valley, the President could order the Indians to move to the Jocko. With increasing settlement in the Bitter Root, the government found it expedient to send the Indians to the Jocko in 1872. Over half the tribe rightfully refused to move, rightfully * because the Bitter Root had never been surveyed. By 1891, however, even this obstinate band, led by Charlot, were forced by economic necessity to leave their traditional home and move to the Jocko Valley. The buffalo had virtually disappeared from the Plains and the government stubbornly refused to provide rations to the Indians. The supply of small game in the mountains and of fish in the streams was insufficient to satisfy the hunger of Charlot's Flathead. In 1891, they left the Bitter Root and wended their way north to the reservation.

The new land of the Flathead remained their own for less than twenty years. During the interval from 1891 to 1909, the agent had persistently demanded that the Indians take their land in severality. This policy was in accord with the policy of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Finally, in 1909, the Flathead were forced to take their land individually, and the remainder of the reservation was sold

from under them.

The social and religious concomitants of splitting the Indians into atomistic families far outweighed the strictly economic effects. No effective leadership can be maintained when the distances from one family to another are so great that they virtually exclude the possibility of communication. Without effective communication, effective leadership and organization are almost impossible. As a result, the Indians on the reservation now live in small clusters which act independently of each other. Atomizing the population of the Flathead has hastened intermarriage with the whites. It would also seem that splitting the Indians into small groups has cost the Indians some prestige and social position. Outnumbered by economically superior whites, the Flathead have been relegated to socially inferior positions.

Difficulties in communication, due to the divide-and-conquer policy of the whites, have helped to perpetuate the pre-white Flathead religion. Catholicism requires its members to attend worship at regular intervals. Perhaps it might even be called an urban religion. At any rate, proper and conscientious practice of Catholicism calls for a body of consistent and regular followers. On the other hand, as

it was shown earlier, the Guardian Spirit is ideally suited for the individual worshipper. Only the Winter Spirit Dance [and that comes at a rather slow time of the year] is a more or less obligatory ceremony for persons with guardian spirits. It would be hard to imagine a form of religion better suited to the conditions which surround the Flathead.

This should not be taken to imply that the Flathead have "reverted" to their traditional religion. In the first place, they had never entirely discarded their ancient concepts. The guardian spirit and the Winter Spirit Dance can be found in every stage of Flathead history since the whites first arrived. Most Indians have only superimposed the Christian religion onto their old religion. The combination has not been amalgamation. The two religions stand side by side, contradictory in some spots, supplementary in others. In every-day life, the contradictions are reconciled by one means or another.

Complete and irrevocable "reversion" to their ancient religions would be manifestly impossible. The traditions and myths which served an integral part in the old days have now been lost. Much of that which remains is explicitly denied as fact by the Indians themselves. White science and philosophy have destroyed and replaced much of the lore of the Indians. The guardian spirit, however, is one concept

which has survived to this day. Pierre Pichette grants that it may sound foolish to a white man, but foolish or not, it is what the Indians believe in.

There is still another cogent reason why the Flathead have not "reverted" to their ancient religion. To go back into history for a moment, in 1864, Fathers Giorda and Grassi opened a parochial school at St. Ignatius, the first of its kind in the Northwest. Although the Treaty of 1855 had expressly stipulated that the Indians were to be provided with a school at government expense, the promise had failed to materialize. The ostensible object of the mission school was (1) to remove the Indians from their objectionable surroundings, and incidentally to emphasize the comparison between home and school, and (2) to train young Indians to understand all phases of an occupation.¹¹⁵ Possibly the primary purpose of the Jesuits really was to accomplish these goals. Much more likely, however, their principal aim was to make complete Christians of the Indians. If this is true, the method they chose was the method most likely to succeed. Under the boarding-school system, the children were to remain subject to Jesuit supervision from the time they

¹¹⁵Palladino, op. cit., pp. 113-116.

were three or four years old until they were

thoroughly, but imperceptibly, formed to the ways of whites in their habits, their thoughts, and their aspirations. They will not know, in fact be completely ignorant of, the Indian language; they will know only English.¹¹⁶

Nothing could have provided a better opportunity to the Catholics for impinging their creed on the Indians than a school wherein the Indians were subject to constant teaching. The day had passed when the Indian voluntarily submitted himself to continuous indoctrination. Forceful methods were necessary and forceful methods were used.

The Catholics could hardly have failed to introduce during the St. Mary's period the concept of sin. Apparently this idea made little headway. Many Indians, especially those in positions of authority, resented the implication that their conduct had not been sanctimonious. Obviously Christianity could have little appeal, on purely Christian grounds, to such as these. For Catholics, it is imperative that man be sinful, otherwise there is no need for a Redeemer. Beginning with the mission school, the Jesuits succeeded in pounding this concept into the Flathead. The devil and hell achieved real meaning.

¹¹⁶Major Peter Ronan, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1890, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1890), p. 127.

The Jesuits gained another significant advantage by establishing their school. Children brought up in the routine of the Catholic Church could never forget the Church. They developed patterns of thought and action which revolved around the Church. The habit of Church attendance became so regular, the habit of confession so normal, the habit of conformance to Church edicts so usual, that the practice of Christianity may be said to have evolved into a custom. Today, the Church is a vital part of the lives of most Indians.

How successful the Church has been in making genuine Christians of the Indians is a problem of considerable difficulty and depth. If approached from a relative standpoint, a comparison should be made between the Indians and some group of contiguous whites. Since the question would then arise concerning the Christianity of the chosen group of white Catholics, the relativistic approach will not be used. An absolute approach, on the other hand, would reveal a picture of the situation which does not approach reality. However, recognizing that no people could achieve an ideal, the Flathead will be compared to the ideal.

As far as memorizing the written and oral formal lessons of Catholicism, the Flathead have, in general, attained the Catholic goal. The Catechism has been successfully drilled into pupils at the mission school. They have

also been taught to come to Church and to confession. While attendance at Church is restricted because of transportation problems, confession receives its share of attention. Slowly

Slowly and subtly, the missionaries wrought a change in the mold of Flathead thought. Almost unconsciously, the Indians adopted the terminology of the Catholics. New terms and unfamiliar concepts were introduced.

De Smet first introduced the term *Kaikolinsueten* when he came to the Indians in 1840. There is no mention of this word in the mythology of traditional lore of the Flathead. Apparently *Kaikolinsueten* or *Kolinsuten* has usurped the place formerly held by *Amòtkan*, the Great Spirit. *Amòtkan* now has no religious significance, but refers sometimes to the President of the United States, the Great Father. *Amte'p*, the foil of *Amotkan*, is a word of recent origin. Probably *Amte'p* is the Indian counterpart of the Devil, and its origin dates from after the time of the introduction of Satan to the Indians.

There are three types of words utilized in expressing Christian concepts in the Salish language. The first type includes words which were borrowed from the whites, these words either retaining the same phonetic values or being transliterated into Flathead. This type is illustrated by words such as lu lbatém, which is recognizably similar to

the English equivalent, "baptism". The second type consists of words compounded from native terms, or from native words and words of the first class. This class is exemplified by the Flathead term for apostle, which is Lu skulkulstélts Jesu Kli, or "the messengers of Jesus Christ." The last type of word formerly referred to a native ceremony similar in purpose to the new Christian rite which the Catholics brought with them. Illustrating this category is the Flathead word for Mass, which is Nueimen.

This word was used for old sacrifices offered to the sun, etc., by Indians; they even offered pieces of their own flesh cut off with a sharp bone from their arms or other parts, for their relatives deceased or other purposes; even enemies were offered and hung on trees in cruciform way by some of the more barbarous tribes. Some use this word for the sacrifice we offer to God; some shrink from using this word. . . because it recalls their old rites.¹¹⁷

This description hardly seems to fit the Flathead; it sounds more like a Plains tribe. But the point is that Nueimen was a word already in use by the Flathead in connection with a ceremony which the Indians likened to Mass, and consequently they applied their native term to the Mass rather than to adopt the English word.

¹¹⁷Missionaries of the Society of Jesus, A Dictionary of the Kalispel or Flat-Head Indian Language, Part I, (St. Ignatius, St. Ignatius Print, 1877-8-9), p. 435.

These changes in the conceptual terminology of the Flathead are particularly significant to a full understanding of Catholic acculturation of the Flathead. They reveal an unconscious acceptance by the Indian of Christianity.

Polygamy, while not common among the Flathead, in previous times had been a customary mode of marriage. Today, the practice of monogamy is circumvented by devious means. Forbidden to marry more than one wife by both church and state, the Flathead either neglect the marriage ceremony or indulge in adultery. Both of these methods, of course, are used surreptitiously, since they also are contrary to the teachings of the Church.

Funerals were somewhat religious in content. The corpse was wrapped in a blanket or robe and inhumed. In very early times, close relatives cut off their hair. Some concept of the afterworld permeated the culture, but the burial was not prepared so that the corpse would be ready to meet life in the afterworld. A horse was sometimes killed on the grave of a dead chief, not for use in the land of the dead, but out of respect for the chief.¹¹⁸ After the burial, the Flathead distributed the property of the dead man. The mourners gathered at the relatives' lodge where

¹¹⁸Mengarini, op. cit., p. 82.

they ate food provided by the relatives of the deceased. This custom still exists. Today, they have a Catholic ceremony and burial, then the relatives gather at the house of the relatives and feast. The property of the dead is still distributed to friends and relatives.

Dances of all kinds remain. The war dances, scalp dances, owl dances and other dances serve to provide entertainment to the participants and spectators. The participants sometimes expect to profit financially. One dance, however, still retains its religious color--the Winter Spirit Dance. Every year, shortly after New Year's, those Indians who have guardian spirits, and those who seek to be cured, gather together for this important festival. From the Indians' point of view, this is the most important ceremony in their religion.

Although the Jesuits have consistently endeavored to turn the Indians toward agriculture, their success has not been particularly noticeable. Random observation gives the impression that the more white blood in the Indian, the more he tills the earth. There is little reason to suppose that the Indians have accepted agriculture because the priests have desired it. Those who can live on their tribal dividends, on meat obtained from the hunt, and from extra

money picked up at dances, pageants, and other minor tasks.

While it seems that the Catholics have failed to modify the Flathead in many important respects, it also appears that they have consolidated their position among the Indians. To some extent, their position is secure because they have instilled a dread of the Church into the Indians so that the Indians are afraid to leave. Another factor which has kept the Indians in the Catholic fold is the superior physical plant of the Catholics. Many Protestant denominations have not yet started to convert the Indians to their faith, and consequently the Catholics have a one hundred year head start. Recently, Mormons, Lutherans, and Methodists have sent missionaries or established facilities for proselyting the Flathead. In time, they may convince the Indians to change. More than likely, however, the change will be from nominal Catholicism to nominal Protestantism.

The Flathead have never accepted any of the religions whose geneology can be traced back to the Christianized version of the Prophet Dance.¹¹⁹ Specifically, these are the

¹¹⁹The Prophet Dance was a ceremony common to the Plateau tribes. It has been traced, by archaeology, back to the early part of the eighteenth century. The dance was performed by people shuffling in a large circular pattern. Characteristically, the end of the world was predicted by those who had visited the land of the dead. The Ghost Dance was derived from the Prophet Dance. There is little adequate evidence to prove that the Flathead participated in the Prophet Dance. See: Leslie Spier, The Prophet Dance of the Northwest, General Series in Anthropology, I, (Menasha, Wis.: George Hart Publishing Co., 1935).

Smohalla cult, the Pompon-Feather Religion, and the Shaker religion of the Pacific Coast. None of the developments of pure Prophet dance forms are found either, neither the Messiah Cult of the Mackenzie area, nor the Ghost dance. Peyote, and its associated religion, the Native Church of North America, is non-existent in the Flathead region, though a few Flathead have tested the "button" on other reservations.

RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION

For well over one hundred years, the Flathead have been subject to Christian acculturation. First the Iroquois, then the Jesuits endeavored to convert them. The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent Christianity has succeeded in replacing Flathead religious doctrines, rites, and beliefs. It was felt by the author that the Flathead presented an unusual case--unusual because these Indians were exceptionally anxious to embrace Christianity.

The religious history of the Flathead seems to fall into two definite periods. The first, which lasted from the time of the arrival of the Iroquois until the apostasy of 1850, represents the period when the Flathead Indians eagerly incorporated Christianity into their lives. The second period, from the time of the apostasy until the present, reveals a singular lack of enthusiasm on the part of the Indians.

The first period began when the Iroquois trappers first told the Flathead of the wonders of Christianity. Apparently, they gave an account of the miraculous powers of baptism and of the powers of the priest and his religion. This account, it seems, was not accurate. Either the Iroquois misrepresented the religion of the white man, or

the Flathead misinterpreted the meaning of the Iroquois. At any rate, the Flathead built a false conception of Christianity. From the Iroquois, the Flathead obtained a general description of Christianity, baptism, prayer, Sabbath, and of the Cross and genuflection. The trappers who employed the Iroquois somewhat modified Flathead moral life.

Father De Smet and his colleagues tried to straighten out the misconceptions the Flathead had taken from the Iroquois. They instituted regular, orthodox, Catholic worship. They also insisted that the Indians abandon polygamy and whipping. Not content to confine their activities to strictly religious fields, the Catholics interfered in the war patterns of the Flathead, and tried to effect their change from hunters and gatherers to agriculturalists.

The apostasy was caused by a variety of factors. Foremost was the fact that De Smet was ready and willing to give the mystical power of Christianity to the Blackfeet, bitter foes of the Flathead. At the same time, there seems to have been a general feeling in the Flathead camp that the Jesuits had little special power. Apparently, this belief was later confirmed when the Indian discovered that he prospered as well without Christianity as he had with it. Since the time of the Treaty of 1855, wars have been so

infrequent that the Indians hardly felt any need for whatever protection the priests had given them.

As a result of the modified attitude of the Flathead in respect to Catholicism, the Jesuits found themselves confronted with a problem already familiar to them. No longer were the Flathead the receptive tribe they had been in 1840. While they were not hostile to the Jesuits, neither were they particularly friendly. They evinced a passiveness that the Jesuits had seen in many other Indian tribes of the United States. However, the Indians had already been partially converted, and the rest of the second period has been devoted to completing this conversion. Educational facilities in the Catholic mission at St. Ignatius have furthered this process. Difficulties in communication and transportation have hindered it.

Thus, as a result of the apostasy, the Flathead have lost their unique singularity. The problem they present is not particularly unusual. Since 1850, they have not given ready and willing acceptance to Christianity, although they had given promise of readily accepting it before that time. Instead they have been passive and submissive. Christianity has been incorporated in their lives, but the "pagan" Guardian Spirit and its "pagan" ceremonial counterpart,

the Winter Spirit Dance, have never disappeared from their lives. Christianity has been superimposed on their pre-existing religion. While Christianity has its sphere, the Guardian Spirit maintains its grasp.

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G. PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

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