

THE OJIBWA WORLD VIEW AND ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRISTIANITY
ALONG THE BERENS RIVER, 1875-1940

By

Susan Elaine Gray

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A dissertation

presented to The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

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ISBN 0-612-13152-1

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SUSAN ELAINE GRAY

A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Conversions and the taking on of Christianity had multi-dimensional meanings and were interpreted in a myriad of different ways by Ojibwa people living along the Berens River between 1875 and 1940. Christian rituals and practices were integrated into the Saulteaux world view in ways that were controlled by and meaningful to the participants. Today, both Christian and Ojibwa ideas are interwoven in the lives of Berens River residents. Both strands hold power, meaning and sincerity. There is no doubt that aspects of Christianity sustain many in their daily life and it is equally true that many of the same people's beliefs remain grounded in such Ojibwa concepts as the Thunderbirds, the power of medicine men and conjurors (terms still used at Berens River when people speak in English) and the use of dreams as vehicles of prediction, guidance and foreshadowing. Ojibwa people living along the Berens River experienced and still live a deep, dynamic and complex religion based on the power of belief and yet which is adaptive and flexible. New ideas arriving in their midst, such rituals as the Dream Drum Dance, have often been welcomed if seen as valuable. Contrary to the assumptions of generations of Westerners, the Saulteaux employed empiricism and critical thinking at deep levels. The ability to incorporate outside ideas into an existing world view does not imply an inability to think empirically nor

does it suggest a superficial belief system.

In positive encounters with Christianity, native people along the Berens River were influenced by a number of factors. These included a wish for literacy and Western education and technical resources, a desire to understand the Bible as a source of potentially helpful and beneficial messages, added divine protection from illness and other crises, protection against bad medicine, access to Western medicine and added dimensions and powers to existing ones derived from traditional ones such as rituals.

Where mission efforts were successful in these communities, it was usually as a result of the sustained presence of a devoted missionary who stayed long enough to achieve respect and earn trust. By the late nineteenth century, most Berens River Ojibwa were second generation Christians; thus a tradition and loyalty had been established among families.

Christianity, however, was not always accepted out of hand. Lack of support by missionaries, lack of agreement with the lessons taught to children in schools, or lack of need to take on aspects of a new religion and lack of respect by a missionary for sacred Ojibwa rituals could all yield cold responses. Clearly, native people were in control of making choices here - it was they who decided when and how they would or would not accept Christianity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to a number of people who helped me in the preparation of this work: Jennifer S.H. Brown provided keen insight, immeasurable support and constant encouragement both personally and professionally. John Kendle, throughout my academic career, inspired and grounded me. W.H. Brooks has been "a light through the trees and into the darkness" in both the life and the work.

I would also like to thank Diane Haglund, the United Church archivist at the University of Winnipeg, Gilles Lesage, archivist at the Oblate Archives, Manitoba Province and Ruth Dyck Wilson, Reference Coordinator at the United Church Archives at Victoria University, Toronto.

Percy Berens, Walter Green, Ida Green, Betsey Patrick, Fred Baptiste, John Edward Everett and Virginia Boulanger, all residents of Berens River, Manitoba, opened their hearts, minds and lives to me; I will never forget their kindness and their sincere interest.

Maureen Matthews was always anxious to discuss my new ideas and encouraged me enormously during a number of times in the desert. Karen Morrow, Graduate Programs Secretary of The University of Manitoba History Department provided me with invaluable support throughout my Ph.D. program. Theodore Dueck guided me through many hysteria-ridden times when my computer, The Antichrist, went completely crazy.

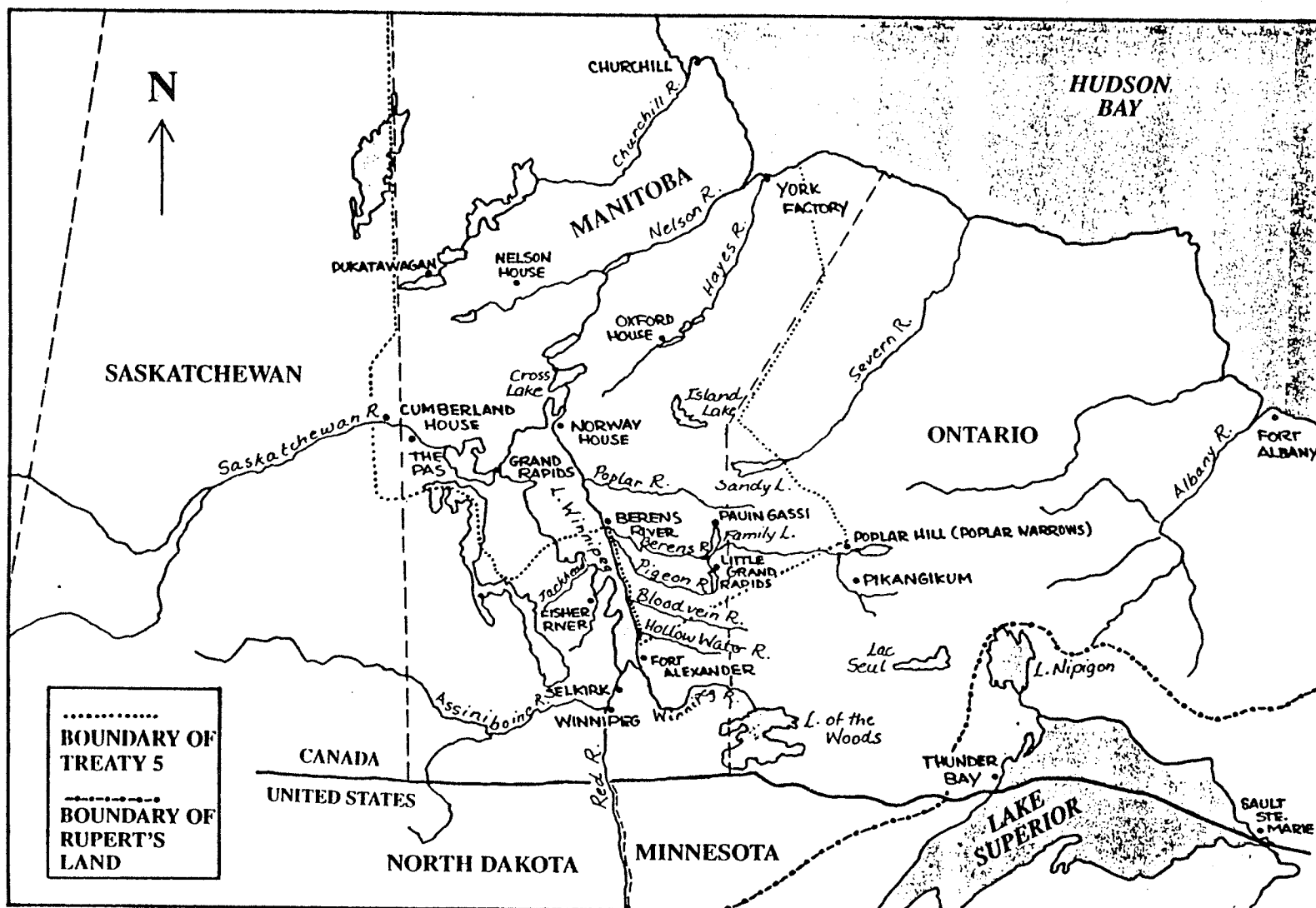
My sincere thanks also to The University of Manitoba, and to Western Canadian Publishers and Dr. Raymond Huel for financial assistance.

Finally, I need to express deep gratitude to my friends and family...to Anne and Rudy Regehr who gave me a home in every sense of the word... to Shelagh Carter, Linda Christian, Wayne Foster, Val Regehr, Margerit Roger, Suzanne Irvine, Gilles Lesage - who were always there for me in spite of and because of it all...and to my parents Elaine and Al Gray who were, as ever, eternally encouraging. My thanks and my love to you.

May you all have good dreams.

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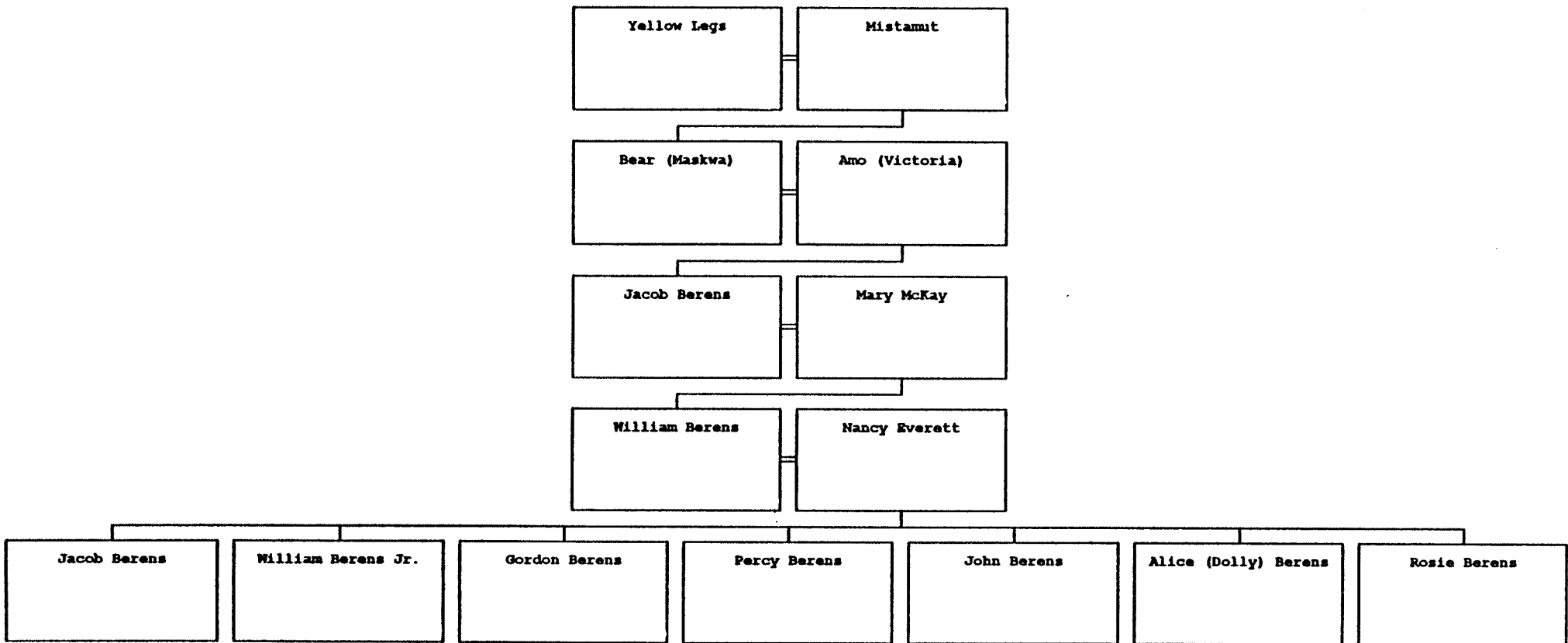
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Map 1. The Cree-Ojibwa country of northwestern Ontario and Manitoba, showing also the historical boundaries of Rupert's Land (which the Hudson's Bay Company held by royal charter from 1670 to 1869) and of Treaty 5 (signed in 1875). (Map drawn by Erica Smith)

Source: A.I. Hallowell, *The Ojibwa of Berens River, Manitoba* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1992), p. 2.

BERENS FAMILY TREE



CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on Ojibwa encounters with Christianity along the Berens River, Manitoba between 1875 and 1940. Christianity and mission work have had considerable impact on the lives of native peoples in northern Manitoba. During this time, many native people in this area actively took on and participated in Protestantism or Roman Catholicism, adopting and adapting a number of beliefs and rituals into their world views.

Until recently, historians have written about Christian missions largely from European perspectives, using ethnocentric criteria for evaluating their success and failures. Indian responses have received far less attention than the goals of the missionaries; often, in fact, the diversity of Native responses has not even been perceived. Some writers, for example Carol Devens and Elizabeth Graham, interpret native people as helpless or passively responsive to Euro-Canadian stimuli.¹

Many church historians, in contrast, have written glowing accounts of missionary endeavour, glorying in native conversions and the usurping of "paganism" by the stronger, more legitimate and dynamic Christian faith. John Carroll's

¹Carol Devens, Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Elizabeth Graham, Medicine man to Missionary: Missionaries as Agents of Cultural Change Among the Indians of Southern Ontario, 1784-1867 (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1975).

five-volume Case and his Cotemporaries (1866-77), Lorne Pierce's James Evans (1926) and Nan Shipley's The James Evans Story (1966) are examples of uncritical hagiographies which celebrate the successes of their denominational missionary heroes. Works such as A.G. Morice's History of the Catholic Missions in Western Canada (1910), J.H. Riddell's Methodism in the Middle West (1946) and T.C.B. Boon's The Anglican Church from the Bay to the Rockies (1973), while offering more depth, still provide narratives generated solely from the perspectives of the missionaries. Robert Choquette's The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest (1995), a comprehensive history of Oblate missions is, despite its recency, conspicuous in its lack of attention to the perspectives of native people. Once again, we have a landscape painting that shows us the leaves of trees which contain no branches, trunks or twigs to lend shape and depth.²

Another type of interpretation presents missionaries and government agents as cultural murderers, bent on smashing Indian lifeways. The only "real Indians" were pre-contact, and any native groups which had experienced

²John Carroll, Case and his Cotemporaries (Toronto: Wesleyan Office, 1867-77). Nan Shipley, The James Evans Story (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1966). A.G. Morice, History of the Catholic Missions in Western Canada from Lake Superior to the Pacific, 1659-1895 (Toronto: Mission Book Company, 1910). J.H. Riddell, Methodism in the Middle West (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1946). T.C.B. Boon, The Anglican Church from the bay to the Rockies (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1973). Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995).

change through contact were seen as weakened victims who existed in a state of suspension, being neither Indian nor white. Robert Gustafson's work, The Education of Canada's Indian Peoples: An Experience in Colonialism (1978), for example, portrays the recent history of Canada's aboriginals as one of dependency, paternalism, the failure of government to meet native needs and the failure of Indians to organize efficiently and lobby effectively for change.³

Conversions, according to this model, were blind-deaf-and-dumb affairs with confused natives merely going through the motions. Though marred by contact, their minds were sufficiently Indian to ensure that they would never be able to truly succumb to the foreign lethal white religion. This view of Indians as "Others" satisfied the romantic hopes of many scholars that a primitive or traditional consciousness survived. Often, however, a compulsion to patronise native intellects and condemn Christianity and missionaries as agents of the dominant society has produced bad history which does not do justice to any of the cast of characters: Indian or white.

The best new writing however, recognizes that native perspectives are crucial to a full understanding of mission history. Recently, scholarship has made exciting advances in studies of syncretism (creative ways by which

³Robert W. Gustafson, "The Education of Canada's Indian Peoples: An Experience in Colonialism," M.Ed. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1978.

Christianity and traditional native religions met, mixed and blended ideas) and integrations (ways in which Christianity and traditional religious world views co-existed as separate and authentic ideas within individuals). Native people had many reasons for acceptance or rejection of Christianity and through studying syncretic and integrative phenomena we begin to glimpse a fascinating range of adaptations to and adoptions of selected aspects of Christianity. Many outside ideas, once thought to have been forced on unwitting native victims, were actually filtered and moulded to suit native cultures within native frameworks. These processes can only be understood by studying individual native communities and missions with as open a mind as possible, in order to carefully examine individual perspectives and responses over generations. Our scholarship must incorporate new ideas and break from old views. In recognizing, accepting and exploring the multitude of different responses to Christianity we can place indigenous perspectives at the centre of our interpretations.

In the North American context, a small but growing body of literature on syncretism and Christian missions provides a useful context for this study. Raymond DeMallie, in The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John Niehardt, and DeMallie and Parks in Sioux Indian Religion:

Tradition and Innovation⁴, study the influence of Christian teachings on Lakota culture in this century and the blending of many strains of cultures over time. In the western subarctic, Jean-Guy Goulet discovered in his research on Athapaskan Catholics that these people have two religious systems available to them, experiencing both aboriginal and Christian ideologies as, "socially available and meaningful."⁵

As well, a more balanced scrutiny of individual missionaries - their personalities, backgrounds, motivations, knowledge of Indian language and culture, sensitivity to Indian values and their interactions in the field - etches pictures that, as Ann Fienup-Riordan puts it, are "subtle and full of nuance."⁶ While missionaries have long been faulted for imposing themselves and their cultural values on native people, the history of Indian/missionary encounter must be seen as interactive - as meetings between different systems of meaning. Such encounters did not involve total acceptance or rejection. Rather, what Fienup-Riordan found among the Yup'ik Eskimos

⁴Raymond J. DeMallie, The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John Niehardt (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). Raymond DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, eds. Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

⁵Jean-Guy Goulet, "Religious Dualism Among Athapaskan Catholics," Canadian Journal of Anthropology, 3,1, 1982, p. 1.

⁶Ann Fienup-Riordan, The Real People and the Children of Thunder: The Yup'ik Eskimo Encounter with Moravian Missionaries John and Edith Kilbuck (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 7.

was "a subtle internalization of selected cultural categories" and it is this negotiation which, she explains, "characterizes the relationship between natives and Westerners in Alaska."⁷

The mission of John and Edith Kilbuck was successful in that, by 1895, it had drawn many converts, implanted many aspects of Western technology (such as sawmills, boats, printed language) and reduced the credibility of shamans. The real basis of success, though, was the integration of native and white ideas. Although the Kilbucks' efforts represented some beneficial aspects of Christianity, the power of these elements was, as Fienup-Riordan explains, traditionally defined. Both Christianity and Yup'ik religion was based on a connection between thought and action. The Christian idea that prayer would evoke a favourable response from God was compatible with traditional Yup'ik ideas of hunting magic. Because the Yup'ik were familiar with the idea that ritual performance would ensure the success of future action, they were ready for the Kilbucks' message. In addition, the missionaries' use of Indians as preachers and translators provided still more integrative dimensions in their work.⁸

⁷Ibid., p. 8.

⁸Ibid., p. 361.

The real impact of the Kilbucks' work was that it created a transformed world with a place within it for the Yup'ik.

Preaching the value of time, money, and the written word, their practical mission engendered a novel perception of the world and the "Real People's" place within it....Although the [Yup'ik] increasingly spoke English, lived within four walls, worked for wages, and attended church, they remained independent, their lives focused on extended family relations and the pursuit of the fish and game on which they had relied for centuries...the people ignored...eminently "civilized" activities when they conflicted with traditional subsistence and settlement patterns. Though much had changed, much also remained of the Yup'ik Eskimos' traditional view of the world.⁹

When the Indian/missionary encounter is presented as a black and white "failure or success?" model rather than as a dialogue between the two, the result is a superficial interpretation that does justice to none of the actors.

James Axtell emphasized some years ago that historians must evaluate mission success by asking the question: why did Indians convert to Christianity?¹⁰ Similarly, when studying interactions between Methodists, Catholics and Ojibwa, we need to ask why many Berens River Ojibwa converted, what meanings those conversions held for new Christians and how the Ojibwa and Christian world views interacted in following years.

⁹Ibid., p. 363.

¹⁰James Axtell, "Some Thoughts on the Ethnohistory of Missions," Ethnohistory, 29,1, 1982, pp. 35-41.

For Indians in colonial New England, Axtell concludes, Christianity provided a viable solution to urgent social crises.¹¹ Smallpox had a devastating impact on these Indians in the 1660s. The ensuing need for cultural revitalization probably explains the success of the fourteen "praying towns" founded by missionaries John Eliot and Daniel Gookin in eastern Massachusetts before 1675. Eleven hundred Indians populated these burghs which were erected on or near their homelands, a fact that saved them from having to relocate (indeed, in some cases, the close proximity of enemies made a move an impossibility). Native people in these towns, says Axtell, used Christianity just as they drew upon other new options and ideas: it provided them with a means of revitalization and a means of getting on with their lives. From an Indian perspective, the towns were successful because they were the means by which Indian societies survived on their own home grounds with their own leaders. True, the inhabitants took on Christianity and many facets of European civilization in the process, but their ethnic core remained (thanks, in large part, to Europeans who insisted on seeing Indians as separate beings no matter how many trappings of Christianity and European culture they acquired).¹²

¹¹James Axtell, After Columbus: Essays on the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 49.

¹²Ibid., pp. 50-51.

Did this move into the praying towns and the taking on of Christianity entail a tragic loss for the Indians? While the situation certainly involved losses, it is simplistic hindsight to romanticize pre-contact peoples as the only "real Indians". Axtell's explanation takes into account Indian perspectives and the needs they experienced during a specific time.

English disease, armies, attitudes, rum, and land greed...presented the natives with a wholly new set of cultural problems and imperatives. But at the same time...the subculture of the missionaries...offered their hapless "victims" ...moral rearmament, social reconstruction, and religious revitalization...the initial effectiveness of the Christian mission program cannot be denied for those Indians faced with accommodation or annihilation.¹³

The analysis of religious encounters from a native perspective is not always easy. James Axtell himself evaluated late seventeenth-early eighteenth century efforts to convert Mohawks to Protestantism from a European perspective, judging the first generation of Protestant missionary endeavour among Mohawk Iroquois to be a failure.¹⁴ As Daniel Richter argues, however, this conclusion is valid only when measured against the missionary goal of complete cultural change.¹⁵ Richter, in

¹³Ibid., pp. 52-53.

¹⁴James Axtell, The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 242.

¹⁵Daniel K. Richter, "'Some of Them Would Always Have a Minister With Them': Mohawk Protestantism, 1683-1719," American Indian Quarterly, 16,4, 1992, p. 472.

his study of the Indians and Anglican missionaries at Tiononderoge (in the area of the Upper Hudson Valley, New York), suggests that historians look outward from Tiononderoge rather than inward from London and Albany. Once this is done, the tale becomes very different: "natives appear not as passive recipients of what missionaries taught but as active seekers of intercultural religious exchange."¹⁶

In this case, the Mohawks at Tiononderoge, far from rejecting European Protestant advances, asked specifically that clergy be sent to them to serve their religious needs, albeit on their own terms. Christian prayer and especially baptism were important. The Iroquois response to Protestant missionaries stemmed from three veins of experience, religious, political and historical. Initially, they saw missionaries as spiritually powerful men and decided that it would be advantageous to them if they followed the Jesuits' ceremonial advice as long as it yielded favourable results. "Christian baptism, prayers for the sick, and other rituals could thus join various native practices in a syncretic repertoire of devices for mobilizing spiritual power."¹⁷

Christian missionaries, as representatives of another people, were also politically important and a relationship with Protestant missionaries would potentially build

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 473.

alliances with the English. This would strengthen Mohawk political power and unity; however, to the extent that it created disunity, it would generate the opposite effect. In the case of the preceding Jesuits, disunity had certainly been the result of contact. Mohawks, in a state of social chaos, had welcomed the priests warmly; as their own spiritual power weakened, they responded in very traditional ways "to men they must have seen as French shamans...[seeking] religious and political alliance with those who promised to rejuvenate it."¹⁸ Unfortunately, conversion of some Iroquois had the disastrous effect of dividing and fragmenting some Mohawk communities. The situation culminated in a large exodus of Catholic Mohawks to Canadian communities. The remaining non-Christian Indians who entered into relations with Protestant missionaries developed a strong anti-Catholic feeling.¹⁹ These Mohawks specifically demanded a sharply contrasting alternative to Catholicism. Albany Dutch Reformed clergy presented just such a solution, which also served to stop further Mohawk emigration. Anglican missionaries, in contrast, had a difficult time making any converts at all, due in large part to their High Church orientation which

¹⁸Ibid., p. 474.

¹⁹Ibid.

smacked of Catholicism (Dutch Reformers delivered explicitly anti-Catholic sermons).²⁰

Despite their sincere embracing of prayer and baptism, however, Mohawks at Tiononderoge retained and returned to many traditional customs. Worries about their lands led them to demand that missionaries not reside in their community and the language barrier set up a further buffer. Mohawks did not like the harsh discipline or irrelevant curriculum of mission schools and had no intention of exclusively following Christian rituals. Consequently, in the face of the 1716 smallpox epidemic, many of the staunchest converts participated in ceremonial feasts and in acting out wishes expressed in dreams.

Significantly, however, they did not abandon their Christianity as they defined it either. After 1716, when the Anglican missionary, William Andrews, left in disgust over his poor conversion record and the return to traditional practices, they continued to pray to the Christian God and teach their children the Bible lessons taught to them by the missionaries. In the late 1720s, Anglican missionaries found these Indians still well-instructed in Christianity and "a distinctly Mowhawk variety of Protestantism still survived."²¹

²⁰Ibid., p. 479.

²¹Ibid., p. 480.

The work of Methodist missionary Thomas Crosby who worked with the Tsimshians in Port Simpson, British Columbia between 1874 and 1897 is another example of Indians assuming "a decisive role in the conversion process and in determining the success of the mission."²² Clarence Bolt shows that although the fur trade did alter traditional assumptions and practices, the Tsimshians "did not become demoralized puppets, an easy prey for European treachery."²³ Prior to Crosby's arrival, these people had rejected the overtures of Anglican missionary William Duncan because at the time, they saw no need to take on Christianity.

The situation had changed for them by the 1870s for a number of reasons including a desire to acquire Western material goods, a love of the music and drama in Methodist worship services (a phenomenon which had parallels with their own rich ritual and ceremonial life), a confusion among some regarding traditional assumptions, a wish to acquire additional power from Christianity that could help ward off disease and a hope that their Christianity, by serving to show that they had taken on white Canadian life, would bring them economic and political power.

²²Clarence R. Bolt, "The Conversion of the Port Simpson Tsimshian: Indian Control or Missionary Manipulation?" B.C. Studies, 57, 1983, p. 42.

²³Ibid.

The essential point is that conversion was the decision of the Tsimshians; this is clear from the fact that they themselves sought out a missionary and later rejected the same missionary. By 1885, they were disillusioned; they had worked hard and spent much money in improving their village and building a school and church. Money and work were scarce and the land question had not been settled to Tsimshian satisfaction. The economic and political power that they sought was, in the end, denied them.

Although their conversion was sincere and the Tsimshians changed their village into an ideal Victorian Canadian town and "offered little resistance to the dismantling of their way of life",²⁴ many traditional customs were retained. Christianity, education and medical aid changed the lives of the community members who got rid of communal longhouses, dancing, gambling, feasting, potlatching, the idea of communal ownership and replaced their traditional leadership with a village council led by Crosby. The giving of hereditary names, property rights, rules of exogamy, customs controlling marriage and laws pertaining to funerals "remained operative beneath the veneer of western mores."²⁵

Sergei Kan, in "Shamanism and Christianity: Modern-Day Tlingit Elders Look at the Past" and Symbolic Immortality:

²⁴Ibid., p. 39.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 45-46.

The Tlingit Potlatch of the Nineteenth Century²⁶ studies traditional beliefs and practices which are still flourishing among Tlingits who consider themselves to be Christians. Kan shows how Christian rituals and objects were incorporated into older ceremonies. In studying the Tlingit potlatch, he shows that aspects of the pre-contact culture have remained despite colonisation. Still flourishing are beliefs about reincarnation, memorial rites and the potlatch.

Beyond North America, the Ojibwa-missionary contacts studied here may be compared with the ways in which Maori charismatic religious movements in the nineteenth century blended Christianity with traditional Maori beliefs.²⁷ In Central Africa, the work of Terence Ranger traces parallels in the transmission of ideas from missionary to African and subsequent African reinterpretations.²⁸ Similarly, T. Lynn Smith found syncretism to be a key process in the growth and development of the cult of Maria Lionza in Venezuela, combining Christian, Amerindian and hybrid Christian

²⁶Sergei Kan, "Shamanism and Christianity: Modern-Day Tlingit Elders Look at the Past," Ethnohistory, vol. 38, no. 4. Sergei Kan, Symbolic Immortality: The Tlingit Potlatch of the Nineteenth Century (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

²⁷Hans Mol, The Fixed and the Fickle: Religion and Identity in New Zealand (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1982).

²⁸Terence O. Ranger and John Weller, eds. Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

beliefs.²⁹ In Dahomey, Leslie Desmangles has studied the interaction between African religious traditions and European Catholicism, offering an innovative interpretation of Catholic saints in Dahomean temples and in the use of Catholic symbols in Vodun ceremonies. Contrary to older assumptions that the use of the crucifix shows the Christian character of Vodun, Desmangles shows that the use is African rather than Catholic in nature.³⁰ The problem of syncretism is examined by David Hammond-Tooke, who shows that even among African Christians, one finds continuing belief in ancestors, witches and "alien" spirits; when the independent evangelical churches emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit, they unknowingly reinforce traditional ideas.³¹

The above is a sample of the exciting developments occurring in history, anthropology, religion and sociology. This study of the Berens River area draws upon these new ways of interpreting the transmission of ideas, highlighting the growth of new belief structures as well as the strength, flexibility and influence of traditional native world views in the ongoing processes of Aboriginal peoples reshaping their cultures and dealing with change.

²⁹T. Lynn Smith, "Three Specimens of Religious Syncretism in Latin America," International Review of Modern Sociology, vol. 4, no. 1, 1974.

³⁰Leslie G. Desmangles, "African Interpretations of the Christian Cross in Vodun," Sociological Analysis, Vol. 48, no. 4, 1988.

³¹David W. Hammond-Tooke, "The Aetiology of Spirit in Southern Africa," African Studies, vol. 45, no. 2, 1986.

Conversions and the taking on of Christianity had multi-dimensional meanings and were interpreted in many different ways by Ojibwa people along the Berens River. This study examines the Methodist and Roman Catholic conversion experiences and other religious encounters that took place during the chiefships of Jacob Berens (ca. 1835-1916) and his son William Berens (c.a. 1865-1947).

The early chapters will set a context for study. Chapter II deals with Methodists and Oblates in the larger context of nineteenth and early twentieth century Canada. In the case of Protestantism, is there evidence to support the traditional view that religion became secularised? Conversely, did missionaries in the field and at home really see themselves in an ever spreading tide of glorious change that was occurring because the destiny of Christ's second coming was being fulfilled? Can the new social historians' claim regarding the interweaving of the sacred and secular be supported? Is there evidence that missionaries believed that the Christian message could transcend time, place and circumstance? Did they really think that their converts, upon receiving the Gospel message and taking the moral high road could lift themselves to a new life?³²

³²William Westfall, Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture in Nineteenth Century Ontario (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1989), p. 124-125. Michael Gauvreau, The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada From the Great Revival to the Great Depression (London: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991), p. 201. See also, Michael Gauvreau, "Beyond the Half-Way House: Evangelicalism and the Shaping of English Canadian Culture," Acadiensis, vol. XX, no. 2, 1991, pp. 158-178.

In the case of the Roman Catholics, the passion that fuelled nineteenth and early twentieth century Protestant missions around the world also warmed the zeal of Catholic endeavour. The nineteenth century rise of ultramontane thought, the Catholic Church's view of its place in the world and the impact of secularization within the church will be examined to provide context for a look at the history, techniques, aims and mission theory of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who established a Catholic mission at Berens River in 1919.

Although Methodism and Catholicism are both Christian denominations, the two embody some very different theological elements. Since these groups shared the mission field along the Berens River, it is necessary to understand some of the salient differences between Catholic and Protestant theologies and ideologies (especially around the meanings and implications of conversion) and the relationships that existed between Catholics and Protestants. Only then can real meaning be ascribed to the encounters among these Christian and Ojibwa world views. Chapter III will explore these areas, giving special attention to the Berens River area.

In Chapter IV, a background sketch of the Berens River area and its communities between 1875 and 1940 will provide readers with an idea of the changes and stresses that were taking place in the lives of these Lake Winnipeg

"Saulteaux", to use the French-derived English term still common in Manitoba. Chapter V provides a discussion of the Ojibwa social, cultural and religious background which illuminates native interpretations of ideas and events occurring during the period of study. It explores different interpretations of the Ojibwa world view, looking at the depth and complexity of a dynamic religious life that, like other great religions of the world, was founded on the power and passion of belief and yet which possessed an enormous capacity for flexibility and adaptation. The chapter highlights, also, the extent to which Ojibwa people engaged in keen critical thinking about religious matters.

Chapters VI, VII and VIII analyze mission records, Department of Indian Affairs Records, the studies of anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell and oral history sources to explore the meanings of conversions for Berens River Indians. Chapter VI will examine the period 1875 to 1916, the years when Jacob Berens served as chief of the Berens River community. Encounters between missionaries and Ojibwa in this period were characterized by both acceptances and rejections of Christianity, integrations of Saulteaux with Christian beliefs among individual Ojibwa, and survivals of Ojibwa religion. Chapters VII and VIII look at these topics during the time of Chief William Berens, 1917-1940.³³

³³The terms Saulteaux and Ojibwa can both be used to describe Berens River Ojibwa. When the French first encountered the early ancestors of these Indians at Sault Ste. Marie, they referred to them as

Key questions include: why, to what extent and with what meanings for them, did Indians convert? Did the meaning of Christianity change for different generations of converts? How did the Ojibwa adapt Christian rites and theology to their own lives, culture and world view? What overall patterns can be seen: for example, were there particularly noticeable waves of conversions at specific times? What was the role of the church/mission in the community? Did Ojibwa along the Berens River seek out spiritual or other kinds of help from the churches and, if so, how and why? To what extent and how directly did Indians participate in mission and church life? What effect did the rivalry between two missions have on Berens River communities?

Throughout, ways in which the Berens River people incorporated Christian rituals and practices into the framework of their traditional world view will be illuminated. Jacob Berens, for example, was converted by the Methodists in 1861 and the missionaries were thrilled at this transformation. Chief Berens raised his children to be

Saulteurs (a term which later became Saulteaux) and Outchibouec (which later became Ojibwa or Chippewa). Interactions and intermarriages within the French fur trade blurred distinctions between local ethnic groups and fostered the spread of Saulteaux and Ojibwa to name generally many formerly separate peoples who, as Laura Peers explains, had been connected to the Outchibouec and Saulteurs through trade relationships and kinship. Records written by post employees, Indian agents and missionaries reflect an understanding that the "Saulteaux" of the West were the same people as the "Ojibwa" of the East. Today, there exists some debate regarding which term, Saulteaux or Ojibwa is more proper. Some Aboriginal people reject the term Saulteaux, seeing it as a European word. See Laura Peers, The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780 to 1870 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), pp. xv-xviii.

participating Methodists. Anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell, however, found that some of these children had extensive knowledge of the Ojibwa Midiwiwin and the shaking tent rituals and Jacob's son, William, proved to be the key collaborator in Hallowell's studies of the Ojibwa world view and history. A statement that truly reveals the essence of syncretism and integration at Berens River was made by William Berens when he said to Hallowell, "My father used to say to me...you will see lots of new things and you will find a place in your mind for them all."³⁴

³⁴A. Irving Hallowell ed., "Reminiscences of Chief William Berens," (1940), p.1 (transcribed by Jennifer S.H. Brown).

CHAPTER II

MILLENNIALISTS, ULTRAMONTANISTS AND GROWTH IN GRACE,
1875-1940Millennialists

The years 1875-1940 were characterized by profound changes and tensions within the Methodist Church and in Canadian Protestantism as well as within the Roman Catholic Church. A look at these developments provides essential context for analysis of the mission effort at Berens River.

The work of Richard Allen and Ramsay Cook provide good examples of one dominant interpretation of Protestantism in Canada³⁵. In his book, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914 -1928³⁶, Richard Allen describes the rise of the Social Gospel's reforming tide as religion's attempt to keep up with the effects of industrial capitalism between 1890 and 1930. Allen credits the Social Gospel with initiating substantial clerical reforms and, although he believes that the movement hastened the loss of the church to secularism, he allows that it did give birth to the agenda of the "progressives" and was formative in the development of democratic socialism.

³⁵For an excellent discussion that outlines the work of these historians and their position in the debate, see: Michael Gauvreau, "Beyond the Half-Way House: Evangelicalism and the Shaping of English Canadian Culture," Acadiensis, vol. XX, no. 2, 1991 pp. 158 - 178.

³⁶Richard Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Reform in Canada, 1914 - 1928 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

Allen discusses phases through which Canadian society passed, beginning with a pre-industrial stage where society was influenced by evangelical concepts of sin and individual responsibility. From 1890 to 1920, the middle class sought a more activist role and the Social Gospel was born. The church's duty became the improvement of society; thus the emphasis shifted from the individual to society as a group. Within this movement, there were radicals who completely lost sight of theological concepts such as sin, plunging directly into efforts to reform industrial capitalism. After 1920 and before 1940, the lines of the Social Gospel became blurred together with those of secular reform ideologies and all remaining theological baggage was shed.³⁷

In The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada³⁸, Ramsay Cook also describes a secularization of thought and culture in English Canada before 1930. Where Allen, however, credits the Social Gospel with a role in producing strong reform movements and sees it as an active contributor to later philosophies, Cook describes a different history. He sees nineteenth century clergymen as essentially ineffectively trying to compete in a world where industrial capitalism was swallowing them and

³⁷Ibid., p. 17.

³⁸Ramsay Cook, The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

Social Darwinism was making a mockery of their Biblical convictions. Cook explains that the sacred and secular united to substitute the science of society for the science of religion. The result was modern secularism.³⁹

Looking at the intellectual and cultural atmosphere from 1860 to 1890 (the period in which the Social Gospel was articulated), Cook outlines the collision between what he calls the outlook of "evangelical orthodoxy" based on the Bible, and with Darwinism's secular explanations of human origins⁴⁰. This encounter heralded the birth of Protestant conservatives who damned Darwinism as atheistic and of the Devil, and liberal Protestants who tried to compensate for the ensuing contradictions by altering Protestantism, emphasising "character" instead of "doctrine" and merging Christianity with evolutionary thought.

The socially-conscious Christianity they produced was based on an inept understanding of science and an illusion of social regeneration; a distraction that they hoped would draw peoples' attention away from the gaping holes in their theology. In this way they hoped to bypass evolutionary philosophy's glaring contradictions. It was on this flimsy ground of "theological liberalism" that the Social Gospel put up its first foundations. These tenets marginalized religion, rendered theology static and based the modern

³⁹Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 12

outlook on the evolutionary sciences.⁴¹ The encounter also produced a third group of radicals who made up a rather motley crew of secularists, spiritualists and feminists all of whom worked to separate the Christian message from the mainstream churches which they believed to be sanctioning the immorality and selfishness of capitalism.⁴² Although their avowed goal was the union of the sacred and the secular, secularism peeped out from between the cracks. Alas for the radicals, Cook says that their "spiritualism" was really about instant gratification and that their "regeneration" of earth was devoid of any thought of heaven.⁴³

The works of Richard Allen and Ramsay Cook have received some vigorous critiques. Michael Gauvreau describes these historians as expressing an "anti-modern reactionary mentality [which] removes religious experience from meaningful historical interaction with the wider culture and society."⁴⁴ According to Allen and Cook, industrial capitalism and social Darwinism were the agents that caused Protestant clergymen to gather up their robes and begin to struggle towards a more activist role for the churches. They see nineteenth century Protestantism as

⁴¹Ibid., p. 229.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 73, 122, 163, 183.

⁴³Ibid., p. 73

⁴⁴Gauvreau, "Beyond the Half-Way House", p. 1.

repressive, Puritanical and a barrier to modern, scientific or critical thought. Michael Gauvreau, in contrast, believes that religious history must be viewed as a central element in all historical discussion dealing with the nineteenth century since evangelicalism was, in fact, a key cultural force that helped shape the framework of those ideas and attitudes that we in the twentieth century call "modern".

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the attitudes and assumptions of missionary movements in Britain, the United States and Canada were evangelical. Evangelicalism is distinguished from other forms of Protestantism by its absorption of the message of the cross of Christ; the atoning death of Christ was the essence of the message and the only means of regeneration of individuals and societies. Rejecting formal theological systems and religious hierarchies of authority, evangelicalism emphasised conversion of the individual, a belief in the truth of the Bible and stressed Christ's forgiveness of human sin. Far from being a narrow and inflexible theology, evangelicalism was a popular creed which gave meaning to a whole structure of ideas concerning the individual and the place of the individual in society.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Discussions of this can be found in: Brian Stanley, The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Leicester: Apollos, 1990) chapter III; and in Nancy J. Christie, "In These Times of Democratic Rage and Delusion: Popular Religion and the Challenge to the Established Order, 1760 -

Michael Gauvreau emphasizes the contrasts between the evangelicalism in Canada and that shared by Britain and the United States. Nineteenth century American Protestants were faced with the challenge of the Enlightenment, which upheld commitment to reason. The Enlightenment, appearing in Scotland in the late eighteenth century, took a particularly potent manifestation which came to be known, in the nineteenth century, as the Scottish School of Common Sense. Gauvreau suggests that this School infiltrated American Protestantism through Presbyterian colleges, such as Princeton. The encounter between the two elements resulted in battle with the emergence of a distinctive brand of American (and British) Protestantism.⁴⁶

In England, as Brian Stanley explains, although evangelicals were hostile to the temper of the Enlightenment in theory, they borrowed a great deal from it in practice. While they denied the all-sufficiency of reason, they placed a high value on it once they realised that reason could declare probable what religion declared to be true. In discussing the ultimate decline of evangelical Christendom, Stanley refutes the traditional view that Protestantism abandoned the public sphere to secularism.

1815," in G.A. Rawlyck, ed., The Protestant Experience in Canada, 1760 - 1990 (Burlington: Welch Publications, 1991), pp 9-47. Christie discusses the role of evangelical thought in shaping liberal individualism and, thus, English Canadian popular culture.

⁴⁶Michael Gauvreau, The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada From the Great Revival to the Great Depression (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991), pp. 286-290.

in anxiety to claim the public sphere for Christ, they [evangelicals] mixed evangelical insights with the assumptions that Enlightenment thought had interwoven into the fabric of Victorian discourse about human social development...the worst confusion was the assumption that the regenerative power of the gospel would propel a society along the same lines as "progress"...the distortion came from the mechanistic imprint of Enlightenment thought.⁴⁷

As Gauvreau explains, the Enlightenment/Scottish School of Common Sense never came to Canada. Instead, Baconianism was forged into the tenets of the Canadian evangelical creed since the late eighteenth century.⁴⁸ Britain and American Protestantism's contact with the Enlightenment brought them into contact with the thinking of Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, Berkeley; it brought them into the discussions of Darwinian evolution and into the midst of the developments in the

⁴⁷Ibid., p 173.

⁴⁸Between 1800 and 1860, the name of Francis Bacon underscored a number of cultural, scientific and religious strategies in Britain and America. Baconianism's popularity was "closely associated with the distinctive features of Scottish moral and natural philosophy. It was invoked by men such as Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart because it appeared to successfully apply the methods of the physical sciences to investigation of the moral sciences." (Michael Gauvreau, The Evangelical Century, p. 39.) Baconianism, however, was not a philosophical system. "Emerging with the beginnings of the evangelical rejection of the primacy of reason, so vaunted by the cosmopolitan culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, it encompassed attitudes particularly suited to the evangelical creed. First, the Baconian ideal was based on the inductive methodology of current science, which derived its general laws of nature from a meticulous survey of particulars. Second, exponents of the inductive method propagated an emphatically empiricist approach to all forms of knowledge and generally preferred objective fact to theories or hypotheses. Finally, clergymen and scientists who subscribed to these beliefs indicated a distrust...even of reason itself. Evangelicals in British North America would turn to this call for sound inquiry to confirm the supremacy of theology and the Bible in formulating the agenda and direction of scientific philosophical inquiry." Ibid., p. 41.

natural sciences. Baconianism, as we shall see, brought Canadians into the historical arena.⁴⁹

Gauvreau suggests that the Canadian Methodist clergy, taking as fact traditional Scripture, revealed religion and the existence of God, were sheltered from many of the currents of the Enlightenment. They believed that as sources of information, traditional Scripture and revealed religion were as factually reliable as the physical world. For example, if asked for scientific proof of the validity of the Scriptures, they, as Baconians, would have answered: God's revelation of religion in the Scriptures is the proof of their validity. The Baconian bottom line, "God moves in mysterious ways," allowed them to hang onto their ideologies through all criticism. For example, if one had said to a Baconian thinker: the Gospel according to St. Mark contradicts the account given in St. Luke, the Baconian would have been free to agree, adding, however, that the validity of the Scriptures remained intact because this new interpretation was simply a product of God choosing to reveal Himself in a chosen (mysterious!) way.

Before 1860, Canadian Methodist colleges allied themselves closely with the study of history, not philosophy or science. Between history's cultural integrity and the evangelical clergy's commitment to the transformation of humanity, a marriage of theology and history emerged as an

⁴⁹Gauvreau, The Evangelical Century, p. 38, 39 and pp. 41-44.

indispensable discipline. Gauvreau explains that history's cultural link with religion's moral certainty:

ensured the survival, coherence and unity of the ...evangelical creed from 1860 to 1890. This sustained challenges posed by evolutionary science and the higher criticism...Protestants encountered evolutionary naturalism in the sphere of history and the application of ideas to the Bible.⁵⁰

Between 1890 and 1920, theology and the social sciences occupied two separate realms. The social sciences developed from the traditions of evolutionary thought and made no contribution whatever to the secularization of religion.⁵¹ Since Methodist clergy believed that all historical study testified to the Bible and not to natural science or social laws, the supremacy of God's presence which directed individuals toward taking on active roles in society was preserved.

In tracing Protestantism's formative role in English Canada's society and culture, it is first necessary to look briefly at the Protestant consensus. The works of John Webster Grant⁵² and William Westfall⁵³ provide excellent analyses. Grant outlines the bitter competition that occurred between rival evangelical churches in the early

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 287.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 289.

⁵²John Webster Grant, A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

⁵³William Westfall, Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1989).

nineteenth century. The 1850s were a watershed which saw a settlement of this competition. The ensuing similarity between previously-rival Protestant churches, especially in the realm of social function, is termed the "Protestant consensus" by Grant.⁵⁴ By 1870, says Grant, "most Protestants saw themselves as a member of one of four large churches in which religion legitimated the new capitalist and social economic order by encouraging hard work, sobriety, thrift and enterprise"⁵⁵ This, however, does not imply an absence of individual denominational loyalty.

William Westfall presents a more detailed outline of the creation of the consensus, describing the bitter clash between the "religion of order" (Anglicans) and the "religion of experience" (led by Methodist Egerton Ryerson). Between 1850 and 1870, changes in the social and cultural environment forced these two religious "cultures" closer together. Concessions and adaptations were made on both sides. Methodists toned down their emotionalism and ceased trying to accomplish complete conversions in mere seconds while Anglicans moderated their drive to control and direct life. Anglicans also accepted the evangelical idea that society should be built, not on a divine hierarchy complete with order and restraint, but on a "materialistic...

⁵⁴Grant, Profusion of Spires, p. 223.

⁵⁵Ibid. p. 223.

understanding of politics and the state."⁵⁶ It is here that we see the genesis of Protestantism's sacred and secular interweaving.

Westfall observes that the Protestant churches' similarity to one another can be seen in their architecture. This Gothic design provides us with a taste of the new culture that was beginning to dominate the life of Protestant Ontario. Nineteenth century church buildings made important cultural statements about the place of God in the world. In order for a culture to be integrated into a society, says Westfall, forms and symbols must be in close proximity to its people. In this way, both Gothic architecture and romantic art "were adapted to meet the needs of Ontario life and Ontario society."⁵⁷ As these medieval forms merged with Ontario society, the romantic form was embedded into the social consciousness. The buildings' combination of a rich aesthetic style with everyday use actually defined Ontario architectural mode. The transcendence of Gothic style shows the authority of the place of the "sacred" in Ontario's English Canadian culture since "Gothic" had become synonymous with "religion". Thus, "the Gothic style assumed attributes of sacredness by

⁵⁶Westfall, Two Worlds, pp. 107-109.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 128.

shaping the way society defined sacred space and by placing itself in the midst of everyday life."⁵⁸

The influence of romanticism is important, here, because it valued inspiration and moral regeneration. The Romantic Revivalists believed that God spoke through the "heart" as opposed to the intellect; the Gothic arch spoke to the power of God "the beauty of the church inspired the heart with great thoughts and the mind with noble deeds; rather than striking down...and leaving the sinner writhing in agony."⁵⁹

The task of the Protestant alliance was to draw together the sacred and the secular world and ultimately to transform the latter into the former. As Westfall says, this moral earnestness, which was the key to the transformation of the world, became one of the distinguishing features of Ontario religious life. A powerful religious world was formed by the marriage of the moral foundation of romantic evangelicalism and the "sacred independence enhanced by the rich fabric of revived medievalism."⁶⁰ It was this world which stood up against the increasing materialism of the Victorian age.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 158.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 140. Here we can see the results of the religion of experience's attempts to tone down its emotionalism, address the power of the church and still maintain the link with an appeal to the heart.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 125.

Before discussing the decline of Protestantism in Canada, it is important to look at the religion in its heyday, as the formative element in nineteenth-century Ontario that the "new historians" say it was. Evangelicalism was based on a dynamic view of God's activity on earth. This movement equated knowledge, progress and social improvement with the religious revival. After 1870, a new age had dawned.

According to John Webster Grant, evangelicalism, being one of the foremost intellectual influences of the age, "supplied the language and encouraged the construction of institutions that would promote capitalism's attendant ideologies of political and economic liberalism."⁶¹ William Westfall asserts the centrality of religion in history, saying that Protestantism shaped English Canadians' interpretation of the world by shaping their attitudes.⁶² He observes that religious and cultural history can also be linked by the "Protestant consensus" simultaneous emergence with the transition of Ontario to market capitalism. Michael Gauvreau observes that the waves of revival coincided exactly with the decades in which English Canadian society took form. He believes that the evangelical

⁶¹John Webster Grant A Profusion of Spires, p. 223.

⁶²William Westfall, Two Worlds, p. 13.

religion often supplied the model for the creation of new values and institutional arrangements.⁶³

Postmillennialists represented the mainstream of Protestantism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to their view of history, the life of the individual and the unfolding of history were founded on the Biblical belief in Christ's redemption of human sins. Adherents firmly believed that God's plan would triumph over evil and that this struggle would be resolved in earthly time.

These people lived in an era rife with religious revival, social and intellectual improvement and a rising tide of discovery in science and technology.⁶⁴ These phenomena were believed by Protestants to be interconnected and proof of God's work. Postmillennialists saw themselves as living at the end of history, at a time when the world was living its last days. Far from being frightened by the idea (as were the premillennialists) Methodists and Presbyterians were convinced that the mix of theology and politics was ushering in the millennial dawn. The millennial vision was a union between religious revival, moral and social improvement, scientific discovery and

⁶³Michael Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed: Personal Piety and the Evangelical Social Vision, 1815-1867" in Rawlyk, ed., The Canadian Protestant Experience, pp. 48-97.

⁶⁴Michael Gauvreau, The Evangelical Century, p. 118.

nationalism. Its roots can be traced to the progressive philosophies of the 1780s.⁶⁵

Alexander Sutherland's Address to the 1884 Toronto Annual Conference provides us with a poignant glimpse of the Methodist view of themselves.

we inherit the language, the traditions, the literature, the intellect and spirit of the noblest race of man that has ever walked the earth...our nationality is deeply rooted in the incomparable history of the British people in all times and in all lands.⁶⁶

The writings of members of the Methodist Missionary Society and the columns of The Christian Guardian, an influential voice of Methodism, tend to support the side of the "new historians" in the debate concerning the nature and role of Protestantism in Canada. These sources are full of letters, editorials and articles that testify over and over to their unshakeable belief in the tenets of their evangelical faith and the validity of the Bible.

Missionaries in the northern Manitoba field believed, as did missionaries around the world who dealt with the conversion of non-Christian peoples, that their duty was to eradicate all aspects of indigenous culture in order for salvation to be achieved. Their perceptions of their native

⁶⁵Ibid., p.122. See also William Westfall's description of the postmillennialists and the relationship between this group and the accompanying interweaving of sacred and secular; in William Westfall, Two Worlds, p. 188.

⁶⁶Alexander Sutherland, "Address of the Toronto Conference of the Methodist Church," Minutes of the Toronto Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, 1884 (Toronto: William Briggs, 1884) p. 85. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario).

clients ran along a continuum which placed the latter as falling anywhere from degraded species to children of the forest to fairly noble savages. "For years the Indians have been pleading for a missionary," wrote Egerton Ryerson Young from Berens River in 1875, "It is...cheering to hear voices...once accustomed to...unmeaning mutterings of a vile and debasing superstition, lifted up in prayer."⁶⁷

In 1878, John Semmens reported a theological discussion he had with Chief Jacob Berens. His pleasure at the chief's acceptance of the benefits of Christianity were obvious as was his impression (and his rhetorical construction) of the man with whom he spoke.

This very day the chief came in to me and, with sufficed [sic] eyes blessed the day that he first heard about Jesus and His love..."every hour my mind is stayed upon God and I find contentment and peace." My heart was warmed as I listened to the happy old man, blackened by poison, broken by hardship, feeble with hunger⁶⁸

Discussing the work among the Ojibwa of Little Grand Rapids in 1905, Thomas Neville lamented that, "if all Canada were examined, I don't think a worse condition could be met.

⁶⁷"Annual Report of E.R. Young for Berens River, 1874-1875," Annual Reports of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 1873-1876 (Toronto: Wesleyan Conference Printing Office, 1876) p. xxix. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario).

⁶⁸"Report of John Semmens for Berens River, 1878," Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada, 1877-78. (Toronto: Methodist Conference Office, 1878) p. xviii.

Space will not permit to tell of the beliefs, practices, customs and modes of life of these people."⁶⁹

In 1915, in a letter to Rev. T. Albert Moore, General Secretary, Social Services and Evangelisation, Joseph H. Lowes discussed immoral behaviour at Berens River. He was indignant about, among other things, the abusive way a woman had been treating her husband. Lowes defended the man, giving him the highest possible praise, saying, "He is practically a White man and doesn't belong here."⁷⁰

Missionaries usually thought in black and white terms regarding what they saw as differences between pagan versus Christian religions. They believed that Indian medicine men were evil enemies and worked hard to eradicate their influence. The records are full of such stories.

For example, writing of the work of the Ojibwa lay missionary James Kirkness, who served at Pikangikum between 1927 and 1932, Rev. John Niddrie commented that:

In the face of fierce opposition from the medicine men he continued labouring...people began to gather and listen to this new evangel which meant so much more to them than their own faith had to offer....The clouds of darkness and superstition began to recede.⁷¹

⁶⁹"Report of Thomas Neville for Berens River," Eighty First Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1904-05 (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms, 1905) p. xxiv. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario).

⁷⁰Board of Home Missions Files 83.050C, File 12, Box 88. (Victoria University Archives).

⁷¹John W. Niddrie "North of the Northwest," p. 111.

Luther Schuetze, a missionary at Little Grand Rapids from 1927 to 1938, wrote proudly about his "victory" over a local medicine man in 1928. He had been called to see a sick man and when he arrived, he found seven medicine men squatting by the bedside. One of the damnable drums stood at one end of the room. Schuetze said he would not give any medical help unless "the room was cleared out and the drum taken out too." After what the missionary described as "an awful row," the room was cleared and Schuetze went on to cure the sick man: "he did recover and this was our first real big victory, for the medicine men had done their best and had failed, recognizing the failure, they called me in."⁷²

Methodist records yield many telling passages regarding their attitudes to their Ojibwa clientele. By the 1920s, we find less emphasis on the degradation of the native character and an increasingly prevalent view of these people as possessing noble, albeit childlike qualities. The Indian in the overall picture, however, was still always deficient.

Possessed of certain remarkable qualities
inherited from...centuries of noble ancestry, the

⁷²Personal Papers of Luther L. Schuetze PP36, File A p. 10. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario). Luther Ludwig Schuetze was born on 17 March 1891 at Joinville Station, Brazil. He studied at the Lutheran Seminary in Wiesbaden, Germany. In 1921, he married Augusta Hoffman and in 1926, he was asked by Dr. Arthur Barner, Superintendent of Methodist Missions, and Rev. John Niddrie to build a United Church Mission at Little Grand Rapids. He and his family ministered there from 1927 to 1938 and then moved to Berens River where he served from 1938 to 1942. Schuetze was ordained in 1949. He died on 21 December 1979. (Victoria University, Biographical Files.)

Indian should have made a much larger contribution to Canada....He has too frequently taken the path of least resistance and copied the vices rather than the virtues of his white associates.⁷³

It is important, however, in the writing of mission history, not to over-generalize about missionaries' attitudes. These people were individuals who, though working under a common cause and moving toward a shared vision, brought unique personalities and outlooks to their work. John Semmens's personal papers contain many stories that show a hard-edged disdain for Ojibwa culture and religion. For example, to illustrate what he termed the "ignorance and shallowness of pagans and pagan religion," he told of seeing a young Norway House woman crying at the graveside of her child. After he told her that she should be glad her baby was "safe in the Happy Hunting Ground," she responded, "Oh, if only I knew." Semmens blamed the pagan religion for giving her no assurances.⁷⁴ Elsewhere in his memoirs, he described the Ojibwa vision quest ritual as, "a cry, a prayer for light, for knowledge - but paganism had no clear light which would teach a young man how to cleanse his way."⁷⁵

⁷³"Board of Home Mission Report," The United Church of Canada Year Book, 1927 (Toronto: Offices of the United Church of Canada, 1927) p. 110.

⁷⁴John Semmens, "Under Northern Lights: Notes on Personal History" Personal Papers of John Semmens PP34, File M p. 30 (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario).

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 31.

On the other hand, Rev. J.A. Lousley, who served at Norway House from 1902 to 1916, wrote in a gentler tone. In his manuscript autobiography, he told a story of Sandy Saunders, a young native man who had just come to the mission after spending two weeks in the woods on the winter trapline. During that period, he had not had enough to eat and Lousley said it would be all right if they ate a meal immediately and then prayed later. Saunders replied, "No thank you, Praying master, I will be glad to worship God first." "It was always so with these devout people," wrote Lousley. Roscoe Chapin's memoirs, while embodying the usual contemporary view of the Indian as a different breed, also reflect a genuine liking for the people of the Island Lake Mission. Writing of his work there in 1922, Chapin said:

The early missionaries...had laid splendid foundations. The people, naturally spiritual, had great reverence for the Kiechie Manitou, the Great Spirit....They had a deep, though primitive, faith in the Ruler of all things, and a firm belief in the hereafter. I think our task was to make their religious faith in God more practical for everyday living.⁷⁶

Certainly, different missionaries evoked different responses from communities. In the 1950s, the teacher at Little Grand Rapids wrote to Luther Schuetze, asking him about the methods he had used in his work among the people. She was not achieving success at teaching English and the

⁷⁶Roscoe Chapin, "Memories of a Happy Journey Through Life" c. 1940, p. 41. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario.)

only Ojibwa on the reserve who could speak this language were the ones Schuetze had taught. His answer reflected a philosophy that shows a genuine love for his work. He answered that he had combined a sincere love for the children and community with the fact that he, unlike those who had proceeded him, had stayed in the mission long enough to be effective. He and his wife had made their own paddles and snowshoes and so earned the Ojibwas' respect. The following is simple, respectful and a far cry from the pompous tone of others who wrote with condescension:

somehow they sensed that we knew what we were talking about for these Saulteaux Natives often described by writers as black hearted and stiffnecked people, were not so at all, when you got to know them you found them to be kind hearted and generous, who would do anything for you.⁷⁷

Finally, despite typical Christian dualism and evangelical concerns which saw native religion in the oppositional terms of Satan against Christ, some missionaries in the field actually learned to bend a little sometimes. Schuetze, for example, changed his attitude toward the Drum Dance while F.G. Stevens remained hostile toward the practice, denouncing it as evil without so much as a passing study of its real elements.⁷⁸ Luther Schuetze said that when he first arrived at Little Grand Rapids, he felt the same way as the missionary who had preceded him

⁷⁷Luther L. Schuetze, "Personal Papers" p. 33.

⁷⁸See Jennifer S.H. Brown with Maureen Matthews, "Fair Wind," p. 67.

"who saw in the Drum Dances something pagan that had to be done away with." He thus took "forcible action and kicked the drum in and said it was of the devil." But, in the winter of 1931, there was much illness and many deaths in the community. Schuetze concluded that much of the problem stemmed from the "modern dances" that had begun to be held in peoples' homes. Participants became overheated and then chilled in the night air. He wrote:

later when I became accustomed to it I still more or less talked against these seemingly pagan dances....But now I used all means to stop these modern dances in small crowded houses, for I saw the evil they caused, and since the Drum Dance was always outside in the open, I was all for them, if they were done in a thankful mood of happiness and so I encouraged them to go back to their Drum Dances.⁷⁹

Missionaries in the field worked hard to convert lost souls to Christianity. Their success rate was often dreadful and yet they persevered, writing eagerly of each tiny indication of progress. On the surface, some of their accounts seem almost pathetic. These men wrote glowingly of the smallest steps forward. They thrilled to any words, no matter how brief, that offered praise for the mission and recorded each change, no matter how small, in the life of a newly converted Indian. Rarely did missionaries seriously question the significance of the fact that they may have been working among those people for ten years and their conversion rates were abysmal. Seldom did the fact that

⁷⁹Luther L. Schuetze "Personal Papers," p. 24.

"their Indians" were constantly backsliding and slipping into sinful activities (such as participation in the Drum Dance) when they were supposed to have been changed forever through conversion cause him to become cynical or to put the conversion of one person in a dimmer light. They almost never questioned the validity of his source, asking who was telling them information and why they might be telling him. They wrote their optimistic letters, confident in the knowledge that administrators of the Methodist Missionary Society would accept their good news unquestioningly and with pleasure.

Missionaries were, as a group, no less intelligent than any other group of human beings. Something had to sustain them in their work in difficult conditions and in the midst of countless disappointments. The fact that the smallest events gave them so much hope and pleasure and that they seldom questioned the validity of or the proportion of the good they were doing in relation to their failures surely shows some sincerity of their faith and their belief in the vital importance of their Christianizing task.

In 1913, Reverend Thompson Ferrier wrote a long article on training Indians for citizenship.⁸⁰ In view of the above discussion, it may seem surprising that he said almost nothing about God and the Christian message. However, Ferrier had important practical matters to discuss and might

⁸⁰Rev. Thompson Ferrier, "Indians and Training."

well have assumed that by his readers would understand that the heart of the message lay in the validity of the Christian message and goal of conversion. Clearly, Ferrier believed that the Indians could be evangelised by moral means and that, once they took the higher road, ceasing their "heathen" practices, they would certainly be transformed. He wrote, "it is possible to civilise him...it is possible to Christianise him...that he may fill a place in our civilisation."⁸¹ And also:

charity of the Christian church is...charity that lends a hand, not silver or gold, but a new spirit...Divinely imparted...that gives strength...to rise out of pauperism into self-support and self-respect.⁸²

It is also true that, by 1880, much of the Methodist Missionary Society correspondence was caught up with administrative matters. More was written about the task of civilizing than Christianizing. While this may indicate growing secularization among missionaries, it was more likely the result of the correspondent's need to focus on practical administrative matters and the content of letters ran accordingly. The practical aim of civilizing was an accepted twin of the aim of Christianizing in missions throughout the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Far from indicating growing secularism, this shows the continuing commitment of

⁸¹Ferrier, "Indians and Training," p. 21.

⁸²Ferrier, "Indians and Training," p. 18.

Protestants to win the world for Christ and to win Christ for the world.⁸³

By 1903, the Christian Guardian had changed its layout. World news began to occupy the front pages and church news was placed second. Some might interpret this as more proof of the growing worldliness, and thus secularization, of religion. While this might suggest that religion was taking a back seat, the Guardian can also be seen as affirming the viability of Methodism in Canadian life and the permeation of religion through the world. Methodism was not a static religion set apart from society but was keeping abreast of what was going on in the world context. At the same time, a strong sense of the sacred and spiritual prevailed in the attitudes of the missionaries and their administrators. Alexander Sutherland displayed a classic view of the Methodists' unshakeable belief in the truth of the Bible and revealed religion when he wrote in 1906:

In these days of religious as well as social unrest, when there is more disposition to criticize God's Word than to prove it, there are certain great truths...the Word of our God shall stand forever...to undermine the Bible... [one must] assume...that the Bible could be treated like an ordinary book to be treated like any other...it could contain no supernatural element. Thus, a miracle could be ruled out by the stroke of a pen⁸⁴

⁸³See Brian Stanley, The Bible and the Flag, and Torben Christianson and William R. Hutchison, eds., Missionary Ideologies (this discusses missionary efforts in all European countries).

⁸⁴Alexander Sutherland, The Methodist Church p. 251.

Sutherland's book proclaimed the strengths of Methodism in general and the Methodist missions in particular. He did not waver from his unmitigated belief in the power of the Gospel. His argument is a closed system, with its Baconian emphasis that God works in mysterious ways. "The missionary enterprise is...Christianity itself," wrote Sutherland, "their foundation is the revealed will of God."⁸⁵ He believed that the spirituality and success of a church could be judged more by the strength of its missions than by any other way.

At home and in the field, missionaries' reports and letters were often full of zeal for the passion of religion and a clear sense of the sacred. Rev. Thomas Crosby, missionary at Sardis, British Columbia, wrote in 1904:

What we need most is a mighty revival like we had in '92 and '93 when so many dear people were so mightily stirred up....The Lord help us, don't we all need stirring up? Had we waited in the past till all the poor souls were educated, where would these hundreds of dear souls who have gone to Heaven, where would they have been?⁸⁶

In 1891, the Christian Guardian reprinted an article by Professor W.J. Zuck originally published in the Quarterly Review of the United Brethren. Zuck wrote of the boldness and flippancy of the critics of the Bible. Like

⁸⁵Alexander Sutherland, The Methodist Church, p. 250.

⁸⁶Rev. Thomas Crosby, Missionary Bulletin (vol.I, no.4, March, 1904) p. 431

Sutherland's, his rationale was comfortably based on its Baconian foundations and set up an irrefutable base.

The key [to the Bible] is the Divine origin. The result is a record of events taking place among men; while on the other side, these facts of history and supernatural leading are given...meaning infinitely beyond the power of the natural alone to express.⁸⁷

Finally, an editorial in the Christian Guardian shows a typical response of mainstream Methodism to the supposed infiltration of science. Far from taking a desperate defensive position, the editor welcomed the illumination of new knowledge.

We know that all truth is harmonious; that in reality there can be no contradiction between the facts...in God's great empire...those who fear that science is about to extinguish religion [should] remember that all the attested discoveries of science are fully believed by men of learning and culture, who at the same time maintain an unshakeable confidence in the truths of the Christian religion.⁸⁸

What of the interweaving of the sacred and secular described by Grant, Westfall and Gauvreau? The sources support these historians' theses regarding this ideology.

In 1891, for example, the Christian Guardian published a piece on "Applied Christianity." It is a poignant example of the Methodist goal of interweaving religion with all parts of society. Applied Christianity, it explained, was

⁸⁷Christian Guardian, 22 July 1891.

⁸⁸Christian Guardian, 5 December 1877. In his study of British missionaries, Brian Stanley also discusses evangelical Protestantism's openness to scientific discovery. See Brian Stanley, The Bible and the Flag, p.63.

the world's greatest need. While a sound theological creed was important, those creeds were considered useless unless its principles and spirit were wrought out in life and character.

Applied Christianity is the only solution for the social and political problems of our times....Let Christianity be applied to all the business relations of life, and let the results be honesty and integrity...let it be applied in the common social intercourse in life and the results will be harmony...let it be applied to the...church and the results will be...such as will promote a glorious extension of the Kingdom of Christ in the world.⁸⁹

Similarly, an editorial printed in 1885 testified to the place of religion in its world, as conceived by evangelical Protestants.

It is extremely unwise for the Methodist people to isolate themselves from those public interests which mould and direct the country's life. Religion...is light and strength and inspiration for all the business of public and private life. It should come into play in politics, commerce and all departments of human action...Methodism should be flexible...but we cannot afford to have any falling off of aggressive evangelical work.⁹⁰

Methodists believed they were living in a wonderful progressive age where the Second Coming was sure to arrive with thrilling speed, where all Christian nations were at work to create the Kingdom of God and where there was an ever-spreading tide of glorious change. Within this was their conviction that those to whom they ministered really

⁸⁹Christian Guardian, 31 October 1891.

⁹⁰Christian Guardian, 21 October 1885.

could transcend time, place and circumstance thereby taking the Godly route to progress and success. This 1896 article in the Christian Guardian declared:

it is now the supreme duty of every man to make the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of God and of His Christ...men and women can be patriotic in the quiet walks of everyday Christian life as in the fierce excitements of...battle. The time has come when every Canadian shall assume the duties and bear the responsibilities of true citizenship. This world belongs to Christ. He made it, upholds it, owns it and will judge it...He...desires the regeneration of the State⁹¹

Writing from the field in 1904, Rev. John McDougall said of work at Red Deer, Alberta, "We saw the assimilation process working and the coming together of the different branches of our race being accomplished and the foundation of a new nation being laid."⁹²

The Methodists' underlying belief was that individuals could transcend their circumstances through the power of the Gospel. In 1876, Egerton Ryerson Young wrote of unconverted Berens River Ojibwa, "While rejoicing [that many desire to learn the plan of salvation] we have to mourn over the absence of...the genuine conversion of the inner man by the transforming power of the Holy Ghost."⁹³ Writing of the conversion of Nelson House postmaster William Isbister

⁹¹Christian Guardian, 4 June 1896.

⁹²Rev. John McDougall The Missionary Bulletin vol. 1, no. 4, March 1904, p. 440.

⁹³"Annual Report of Egerton R. Young for Berens River, 1875-76" Annual Reports of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 1873-1876 (Toronto: Wesleyan Conference Printing Office, 1876) p. xxii. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario.)

in 1875, John Semmens noted, "He became a child of God and utterly changed. The people...were amazed at the sudden and complete change of character."⁹⁴ And, of the Nelson House community he boasted that by 1876, the mission was intact:

Those who have not seen such a transformation cannot properly realise what is implied in all this. Our poor imperfect human efforts did not account for this great change...they who had been born in the shadow of death rejoiced in the dawning of the gospel morning.⁹⁵

It was this belief that must have been the greatest sustaining force in all mission work when many other ideals from home must have seemed, at times, to have been drowning in rains, freezing in cold and being trampled over by the "heathen." Sometimes it must have been easy to hang onto this belief, and at other times not so easy. On one hand, Alexander Sutherland wrote:

These Indians [the Mississaugas] were notoriously the most drunken and filthy in the country, the very lowest of the low, and yet they received the Gospel more readily than any others and its transforming power upon them was wonderful...now they began to live in a Christian fashion.⁹⁶

Similarly, in British Columbia, Sutherland proclaimed:

As a direct result of missionary efforts among the Indians...tribal wars have ceased entirely, heathen villages have been transformed into Christian communities and the gross

⁹⁴Rev. John Semmens, "Under Northern Lights," p. 26.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 39.

⁹⁶Alexander Sutherland, The Methodist Church, p. 248.

immoralities...have given place to assemblies for Christian instruction.⁹⁷

At other times, the records were full of disappointments. Yet there was always a strong accompanying current of hope and an expectation that true conversion was just around the corner. As missionary S.D. Gaudin wrote in 1903:

I do so long for a real deep spiritual work among our people, and yet it seems not to come, or at least permanent results are often so disappointing. And yet, I thoroughly believe... these poor people are sincerely longing and hungering after God.⁹⁸

The following article in the Christian Guardian, reprinted in 1886 from the London Methodist Recorder, is an ideal summary of the Methodist position:

the message of the Gospel...will solve...problems [of the poor] in an indirect but most real way. The Gospel lays down principles and forms for men...and a score of social problems are half solved all at once. Locks that political economy has no key to unfasten open of their own accord as the Gospel spreads.⁹⁹

Between 1870 and 1920, Protestantism was a strong and central element in English Canadian culture. Traditional historians such as Brian McKillop and Ramsay Cook have said that Protestants tried to save their religion by making it

⁹⁷Alexander Sutherland, The Methodist Church, p. 248. Undoubtedly, the Indians involved had a rather different view of what had been going on; however the thing to note here is the perspective of the missionaries who were on sincere, if shaky, ground.

⁹⁸S.D. Gaudin, Missionary Bulletin, vol. 1, no. 3, September 1903, p. 308.

⁹⁹Christian Guardian, 6 May 1885.

relevant to the times and by modernizing its tenets and its God. It seems clear, however, that while Protestants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could not ignore the changes of their day, they were confident that they could make good use of new concepts and integrate them into their mission to regenerate the world. Marguerite Van Die makes an insightful point when she says, "the tension at the heart of Methodism, between human reason and God's transcendence is what gave the movement its dynamism and "moral momentum".¹⁰⁰ "Revivals are reported from numerous points," proclaimed the "Annual Address of the Niagara Conference of the Methodist Church" in 1884, "This is as it should be...we cease to be Methodistic when we cease to be evangelistic and aggressive."¹⁰¹

Writing of this dynamism, A.R.M. Lower poignantly described his childhood and what it was like to be a Methodist at that time. He recalled, "they [Methodists] heated you up white hot and then plunged you into the cold water of decision."¹⁰² Of Methodism between 1870 and 1914 he wrote:

¹⁰⁰Marguerite Van Die An Evangelical Mind, p. 195.

¹⁰¹John A. Williams, President, Minutes of the First Annual meeting of the Bay of Quinte Conference of the Methodist Church, 1884 (Toronto: William Briggs, 1884), p. 58. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario).

¹⁰²A.R.M. Lower, My First Seventy-Five Years (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1967), p. 24.

Methodists set the pace for other evangelical denominations and gave a lasting set to Canadian life. If there was anything in you, the Methodism of the day would bring it out....It would make you feel responsible for your neighbour next door. It would underline to you that it was your duty to keep the whole thing going through your efforts and your money.¹⁰³

It is unfortunate that the opposition between religious thought and "secular" thought has for so long clouded rather than clarified the place of religion in the intellectual life and the culture of Victorian English Canada. Missionaries undoubtedly believed the Gospel would create a tangible connection between Christ and the world. It is clear that they did not abandon their sphere to secularism. It was the questioning of the same Baconian ideas (that had for so long bolstered Canadian Protestant thought) occurring in the 1920s that ultimately caused the decline of Protestantism. Between 1870 and 1920, however, evangelical Protestants certainly perceived themselves and their world to be growing in Grace for the coming of the millennium.

Ultramontanists

The flame of mission zeal that burned through Protestant churches in a world-wide sweep during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was met by an equally impassioned blaze within the Catholic Church. The rise of ultramontanism (most apparent in the 1870

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 8.

declaration of papal infallibility), generated a great renewal of church life, a revitalization of its clergy accompanied by major clerical expansion, an increased impact on the lives of Catholic citizens and an explosion of mission effort across nations.¹⁰⁴

Ultramontanist thought was infused with the early nineteenth century spirit of Romanticism. In medieval times, church and papacy had worked in close collaboration. The fascination with supernatural and miraculous phenomena, a pivotal aspect of Romantic literature and theatre, became a hallmark of nineteenth century Catholicism and many devotions had their origin there.¹⁰⁵ Piety, then, became emotional and romantic. Sentiment and the Sacraments were also cornerstones of this brand of piety. As Martha McCarthy explains, piety in Roman Catholic life was put "in place of Jansenist rigorism and personal responsibility for one's own salvation, it provided for attendance at Sacraments and the multiplication of pious exercises...as a means to achieve individual salvation."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴Ultramontanism focused on centralization under papal direction and papal control of the church. The Pope lived beyond the mountains in Rome (as opposed to the king who lived in France): hence the name ultramontanism. It was a reaction to the effects of the French Revolution with its liberal secularism.

¹⁰⁵Martha McCarthy, "The Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to the Athapaskans, 1846-1870" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1982), p. 43. For example, Mary's appearance to the Blessed Catharine Labouré spawned a worldwide devotion to the Miraculous Medal.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 44.

Like Protestant groups, French Canadians believed strongly that they had been chosen by God to fulfil an important mission in North America. Quebec's Catholic clergy was sufficiently isolated from France to escape the impact of the anti-clerical ideas that grew up in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. They were, however, very much influenced by the ultramontane currents which invigorated their clerical ideology. Isolated by the British Conquest of 1760 and the crushing of the 1837 rebellion which closed the door to liberal or secular nationalism for Quebec, they turned, in the 1850s, to a spiritual nationalism; hence European ultramontanism became an attractive option. Raymond Huel believes that the Quebec clergy began to see French Canada as "a source of revitalized Catholicism which spread across North America and continued the glorious mission of France, the eldest daughter of the Church."¹⁰⁷

Bishop Ignace Bourget invited the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to Montreal in 1841. This order was devoted expressly to mission work, steadfastly insisting on Roman

¹⁰⁷Raymond J.A. Huel, "Gestae Dei Per Francos: The French Canadian Experience in Western Canada," in Benjamin G. Smillie ed. Visions of the New Jerusalem: Religious Settlement on the Prairies (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983), p. 40.

supremacy and the opening up of mission fields across Canada.¹⁰⁸

It is true that French Catholic and Protestant missionaries saw Canada from different perspectives regarding Canadian citizenship. The former, who outside of Quebec held a minority status in terms of language and religion, tended, as we shall see, to be more sensitive to Indian communities who wished to maintain their cultural identities. The latter, especially after Riel, saw things French as aberrations and advocated total assimilation. Both, however, were committed to the idea of civilization. John Webster Grant concluded that both groups were:

committed to the venerable program of civilization and the inculcation of loyalty to Canada....[Catholic] desire to emulate Protestants led them...to claim greater effectiveness for their schools in imparting skills required to compete in Canadian society.¹⁰⁹

Roman Catholicism came to see itself as a vehicle for modernism in missionary work; bourgeois Catholicism, arising in the nineteenth century, allowed the church to be accessible to middle and lower class missionaries and was

¹⁰⁸Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault, p.16. The significance of the Oblate entrance to the Canadian scene cannot be underplayed; as Choquette says, they "were among the first ultramontane Catholic clergy." (p. 15). Bishop Forbin-Janson was a revivalist preacher from France whose zealous flame impassioned French Canadian churches - an opportune time for a people who had recently experienced such demoralizing episodes as the crushing of the 1837-1838 rebellions, the issuing of Lord Durham's report and the union of Upper and Lower Canada (p. 17).

¹⁰⁹John Webster Grant, Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 184.

Catholicism's response to modernity. This is clearly seen in Archbishop Adélarde Langevin's insistence in 1907 that both religious and national hymns such as "The Maple Leaf Forever", "Vive le peuple Canadian", "God Save the King" and "L'ombre s'étend sur la terre" should be sung in Manitoba's Catholic schools.¹¹⁰

Twentieth century Catholic statements about missions sound remarkably similar to Protestant efforts to rally support. In the shadows of the two Wars, both groups spoke passionately of religion having reached its place in the sun and of the opportunity to create the Kingdom of God on earth. Joseph Etienne Champagne's Manual of Missionary Action, based on the mission experience of the previous half century, was a widely read and influential tome. Writing of contemporary nineteenth and twentieth century missions, Champagne's statements were bold. "According to Pius XII himself, this period [1900-1948] undoubtedly constitutes an incomparable historical and missionary movement."¹¹¹ He attributed the causes of this phenomenon to "central and organized impulsion given...by the Popes [and] the universal interests and ardent zeal of the faithful."¹¹² Like

¹¹⁰Rosa del C. Bruno-Jofré, "The Oblate Sisters, A Manitoban Order: Reconstructing Early Years, 1904-1915," in Rosa del C. Bruno-Jofre ed. Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba: From the Construction of the Common School to the Politics of Voices (Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), p. 543.

¹¹¹Joseph Etienne Champagne, Manual of Missionary Action (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1948), p. 165.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 165.

Protestant writers, Champagne integrated progress and developments in science and technology with the overall success of the mission effort, saying:

The progress of science and education, colonial expansion itself...were important factors of mission progress. Many pagans have sensed the emptiness of their lives on contact with the Christian civilization and have turned towards Christianity...never were there circumstances so favourable to the propagation of the faith.¹¹³

As in Methodist publications, we see a tension between optimistic proclamations about the zenith of the church in the history of human progress on one hand and concern about a growing dearth of missionaries heading out into the field on the other hand. The following examples are representative:

Because of the increasing decadence of Protestantism, its supporters eventually will find themselves faced with this choice: paganism or Catholicism...We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth...It is high time that we became conscious of it...Our particular mission as Christians is to win the world over to Christ. Therefore today, in the wake of a world war, we should make haste, even more than ever before.¹¹⁴

And:

Our last popes have passionately raised their voices, calling on Christians to provide the Church with...missionary vocations to fill the

¹¹³Ibid., p. 168.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 631.

gaps in the ranks caused by the First World War.¹¹⁵

This chapter has already proposed that the secularization of Protestantism in Canada really began to occur from the 1920s onward, and not earlier. What of secularization in Canadian Catholicism?

Certainly the church was well aware of the influence of the modern world upon its members. In 1938, The Indian Missionary Record printed "An Indian Inquirer" which revealed the attention paid by Catholicism to the perils of secularization, the rise of science and the threat of Bolshevism. Father Guy de Bretagne, O.M.I., the author, employed a typical style involving an innocent Indian questioning a priest and receiving illuminating answers.

Indian: Father, white people are as bad as we are. Their girls undress themselves and we do not, they prevent or kill their children and call their legal prostitution "birth control"...many other things can be objected to them on moral grounds. Why should the Indians have to follow the White people?

Answer: ...do not follow these modern pagans.

Indian: Yet...many of those white people are good, charitable, chaste...and outstanding citizens and yet they proclaim that they do not believe anything but Science.

Answer: Well if they are good, it is in spite of their negation of God, not thanks to it. Atheism is a source of immorality and selfishness like the modern Capitalism or the ruthless Bolshevism...They are living in a Christian society which is permeated with Christian ideals and so these outstanding

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 493. Indeed, in 1926, Pius XI wrote, "the last war has gravely imperiled the propagation of the faith. Of the missionaries, some were recalled to their own countries and perished in the horrible conflict; other were driven from their fields of action." (p. 494).

citizens...more or less [have] moral standards...inspired by Christ.¹¹⁶

In 1940, Father Gontran L. Laviolette had this to say in his editorial entitled, "Our Youth: its Problems":

The atheistic propoganda is active throughout the world and even our own country is not immune....Even our Indian youth is struggling...between the two ideals...the easy attractions life offers or...the white banner of true Christianity....our young Catholics should organize wherever they are, and prepare themselves for the re-Christianizing of society.¹¹⁷

An awareness of the moral pitfalls of the world in the late 1930s, however, does not prove whether, or to what extent, secularization occurred within Canadian Catholicism. In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution combined with the growth of wealth, a general belief in progress and the expansion of European empires created an optimism borne of an exponentially progressing civilization. Martha McCarthy, like Richard Allan and Ramsay Cook, sees apparent secularization occurring in Canada as early as these times.¹¹⁸

David B. Marshall traces the roots of Protestant secularization back much further, to Europe and the Reformation which generated what he terms "an independent

¹¹⁶The Indian Missionary Record, 1,8 September 1938.

¹¹⁷The Indian Missionary Record, 3,1 January 1940.

¹¹⁸Martha McCarthy, "The Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate," p. 52.

cast of mind."¹¹⁹ This allowed people to fundamentally question the church. Religious toleration, then, was "an important pre-condition for secularization."¹²⁰ Marshall argues further that in Protestant Canada, from the earliest European settlement period, religious pluralism was a significant facet of life because there was often no resident minister. People simply attended whichever camp meeting or church services led by visiting ministers happened to be nearby, regardless of denomination (in Rupert's Land, for example, Presbyterians attended Anglican churches at Red River for thirty years before Rev. John Black arrived in 1851). Among Protestants, the threads of secularization were thus woven within the fabric of the Canadian frontier.

In the case of Roman Catholicism in Canada, however, Marshall reads the history of secularization very differently. With the crushing of the 1837-1838 rebellion in Lower Canada and the continuing fears of assimilation, the Catholic Church became strongly linked with French Canadian cultural and ethnic survival and thus experienced a strong renewal in the 1840s under the strong ultramontane leadership of Bishop Bourget. In Toronto, English-speaking Irish Catholics also looked to their church to provide a

¹¹⁹David B. Marshall, "Canadian Historians, Secularization and Problem of the Nineteenth Century," Canadian Catholic Historical Association Historical Studies, 60, 1993.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 61-62.

crucially needed sense of nationalism and ethnic identity.¹²¹

Another important factor was lay devotion. Nineteenth century Protestantism, with its great reliance on the Bible as the Word of God and the single source of truth and doctrinal authority, was much affected by the rise of modern science and biblical criticism. While Roman Catholicism was also affected by these developments (hence the publication of The Syllabus of Errors) modernism could cause much upheaval. Ironically, the very aspects of Catholic theology that roused the most Protestant contempt were the elements that best protected it from the outside world. Insulation and buffers were provided by the authority of the Church Fathers, the emphasis on the Eucharist over the printed word, veneration of saints, Marian devotion and the maintenance of traditional Latin liturgy. These supporting walls remained strong in the face of the storming of biblical criticism.¹²²

Marshall concludes by saying that:

Catholicism was the religion of minorities struggling to maintain their identity and that it was a sacramental faith not dependent on the Word meant that sacredization was a more powerful force than secularization in the nineteenth century.¹²³

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 64-65. In the end, however, Toronto - never a homogeneous society like Quebec - was the scene of a significant amount of Protestant-Catholic intermarriage and this created a decline in Catholicism in the early twentieth century.

¹²²Ibid., p. 65.

¹²³Ibid., p. 65.

In order to understand encounters between Ojibwa people and Roman Catholics, it is necessary to examine the Catholic understanding of salvation, conversion and baptism. Writing a piece for The Indian Missionary Record entitled, "The True Religion," the editor, Father Guy de Bretagne, provided a view of Catholicism that was representative of the position of the church as a whole.

there is no fanaticism in the heart of a true Christian Catholic. Broadmindedness does not mean [however] that he thinks all the religions are good: there is only one God and one Faith and one Church.¹²⁴

For Roman Catholics, salvation could only be attained through the Church and the sacraments which integrated the newly initiated into the institution and its structure. Clergy and hierarchy thus lay at the heart of mission work. Conversion involved a rejection of customs that ran contrary to church doctrine and a change of heart and belief. Original sin could only be transcended through the conversion of the individual who, through baptism, would join the Catholic Church which was sanctioned through the redemptive blood of Christ to provide the mechanism for salvation.

Christ, the sole repairer of heaven and earth, unites Himself with the Church in the unity of the same body for the work of Redemption. The Church...integrates Christ, priest and victim, the entire world....Thus the mission of the Church is that of Christ Himself....she has the power and the duty of universal expansion...the hypothesis

¹²⁴The Indian Missionary Record, 2,9 November 1939.

and theory of mission rest on the existence and universality of original sin. All men have sinned in Adam, thus destroying their supernatural resemblance to God and becoming...subject to death and eternal damnation. It is impossible for man to escape this state through his own strength and means. But God provides for this powerlessness. In an excess of love and mercy, He gave him a Redeemer...the plan of Redemption is...the salvation of all men through Christ.¹²⁵

For Catholics as well as Protestants, conversion was expected to produce complete change. In the words of Father de Bretagne, "the Truth...will bathe their life in a new light, and make them partakers of the divine gifts, and live a life honest, pure and beautiful."¹²⁶

Inspiration for conversion and baptism could come from God, from Mary or from the saints. To this end the distribution of amulets or medals in the mission fields was a common technique. Reporting on "The Conversion of an Indian," Father Francois Poulin attributed his success in this case to Mary. He had been working with an Indian for some time, asking him to "choose the right path and become baptised" but to no avail. Then one night, after a powerful dream, the Indian approached the priest, asking to be baptised. Poulin puzzled for some time over the change, finally concluding that it:

is because the Blessed Virgin Mary wanted to prove...even by means of a vision, any soul trusting in her help will not be forsaken. I had

¹²⁵Joseph Etienne Champagne, Manual of Missionary Action, pp. 277, 324.

¹²⁶The Indian Missionary Record, 2,1 January 1939.

previously given him a miraculous medal of the Blessed Virgin Mary and confided him to our Mother's care. She did the rest.¹²⁷

The following story illustrates the Catholic expectation of the transformation that conversion and baptism would yield in the life of the individual.

"Kinebikons" was a well-known serial story about the salvation and subsequent leading of a Christian life by a young Ojibwa woman named Kinebikons. Kinebikons and her grandmother Teweigan had just been found by a missionary and taken to a school at the Fort Frances Mission. The two were residing there and Kinebikons had recently been baptized and renamed "Lucy." For a long time, it looked as if Teweigan would never convert; she daily showed "her strong adherence to the pagan rites." When she visited the Mission, "how careful she was then not to forget any of her pagan paraphernalia. The Sister naturally tried to show her the vanity and falsehood of all these pagan rites but Teweigan did not want any advice from her."

One day, Teweigan was very excited over the possibility of Kinebikons representing her band in the Okimaw dance, as one of the few chosen by the Medicine Man. Lucy, however had been baptized and so, of course, could not and did not want to take part in the dance. For Catholics as for Protestants, the situation was black and white. "You know she is baptised and cannot take part in the dance; she

¹²⁷The Indian Missionary Record, 1,8 September 1938.

cannot serve two masters at once...nor does she care for the Indian heaven," said the Sister in no uncertain terms.¹²⁸

A spiritual change gave life to the soul, but certain conditions had to be met in order to keep that life in the soul. Any serious wilful breaking of God's law as set out in the Ten Commandments would deprive the soul of life and grace. There were a number of ways, however, of infusing one's soul with divine life. Baptism was necessary to receive life, confirmation would strengthen life, holy penance would keep the soul disease free, holy matrimony and holy orders existed for the purposes of special organization and adaptation to different circumstances, and extreme unction provided help for the sick and dying.¹²⁹ The sacraments and the cult of Mary would keep a pre-modern mystery in spite of the tenor of the times, and maintain affinity with the mysteries of native faith (such as the use of dreams as vehicles of prediction). Although baptisms in the mission fields could take place after a short exposure to Catholicism, the church saw the conversion process as a fairly gradual evolution of steps. Throughout a process of tutelage, divine grace shaped the course of the potential convert towards Catholicism. As Champagne said, "Despite all the zeal and science of a sincere apostle, God refuses,

¹²⁸The Indian Missionary Record, 1,5 May 1938.

¹²⁹The Indian Missionary Record, 2,7 September 1939.

grants or delays the grace of conversion according to the plan of His wisdom."¹³⁰

Champagne laid out a series of recognized steps involved in the conversion process. These show Catholic expectations and interpretations of the meaning of conversion.¹³¹ The first he termed "The First Sympathetic Impulse." This included the initial reactions of a potential convert which would involve "sympathy towards Catholicism, and...delight...and at the same time the fear of falling into a trap....The struggle between prejudice and the allurement of truth has already begun."

The next step was "Progressive Victory." During this phase, potential converts found themselves drawn into defending Catholicism wherever it was attacked or criticized. An increasing interest in religious questions would, similarly, be ever centred on Catholicism.

During the third phase, "The Discovery of the Church," prejudices were gradually and steadily shed. This was "a consoling stage in the march towards conversion...the stage in which the man is unconsciously trying to be converted."

Resistance was to be encountered in the fourth stage, however. During "The Temptation to Retreat" the convert would experience some panic, feeling that "he is bonding himself so much that he is compromising himself....These are

¹³⁰Joseph Etienne Champagne, Manual of Missionary Action, p. 631.

¹³¹Ibid., pp. 706-709.

signs of maturation in the interior evolution; this is a personality willing to readjust itself."

The final stage involved "Preparation For The Act of Faith."

these preparations do not become identified with the gift of faith....Faith does not always wait until the instructions and exhortations are completed....Doubtless...a great deal of "Catholicism" is already present in the soul, but what a difference there is between these scattered rudiments and the living unity of the synthesis....A soul, on entering Catholicism, reaches the centre of the universe.

While Catholics and Protestants shared the view that conversion would produce a complete transformation in the life of a new Christian, the two religions differed in their ideas about actually getting into heaven. Methodists believed that conversion and faith ensured a safe passage. For Catholics, however, getting into heaven depended on continual good works and actions such as mission work or penance. This conviction seems to have bolstered missionaries in the tough conditions they often encountered in the field. In the winter of 1926, for example, Brother Frederick Leach at Berens River frequently wrote in his journal about the great loneliness and feelings of isolation he experienced in the long periods when his partner, Father Joseph De Grandpré, was away at other communities. Just as often, however, he recorded making those sacrifices in order to get into heaven. Even an Oblate Brother could not rest on the laurels of his baptism, church membership and faith in God.

Leach never took for granted that he was assured a place in the hereafter. On 5 May 1929, one of the Berens River women, Pat McKay died. Leach wrote, "Pat, pray for me so that when my turn comes I may go and join you in Heaven forever." Writing on 15 May 1929 of Catherine Goosehead who had died a month earlier, Leach said, "I often think of Catherine and Pat [McKay]. If I have been even a little help to them on earth may they help me with their prayers to gain Heaven."¹³²

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, whose motto is "evangelizare pauperibus misit me" (Luke 4:18, "He hath sent me to preach the gospel to the poor"), are a Roman Catholic order founded in France by Eugène de Mazenod who received papal approval for his group from Pope Leo XII in 1826. De Mazenod wished to spiritually revitalize post-Revolutionary French society and held strong ultramontane ideals of fidelity to Rome. The order was borne out of "a new mood in Catholicism, a new militancy, a new urge to conquer the world for Christ and his Church."¹³³

As Raymond Huel outlines, the Oblates were to Western Canada what the Jesuits had been to New France. They

¹³²Journal of Brother Frederick Leach (Oblate Archives, Manitoba Province).

¹³³Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault, p. 2.

reinforced the uncompromising ultramontane Catholicism of Quebec with all that it entailed, zealously guarding and enhancing the prerogative of the Church."¹³⁴ By 1847, the See of St. Boniface, established in 1818, stretched from Lake Superior to the Rocky Mountains and it was to serve this area that Father Joseph-Octave Plessis, Bishop of Quebec, sent father Provencher to Red River in 1818. The order made a great commitment to the field in the North West.¹³⁵

Father Etienne Bonnald led Oblate expansion into northern Manitoba. In 1902, under his leadership, the order moved onto Protestant turf, establishing a mission at Cross Lake near Norway House, straight across the lake from S.D. Gaudin's Methodist mission. Both ran schools and competed for children. In 1905, the Oblates dared to enter Norway House territory - the stronghold of Methodism in the north. At Norway House, they built their first chapel in the summer of 1907.

Writing about the aims and purposes of Catholic missions, Joseph Etienne Champagne outlined the following:

To preach the faith, to make the Redeemer known,
to bring every race and every individual to adhere
to His doctrine, to graft them unto Christ, to
give them life by their participation in the one

¹³⁴Raymond J.A. Huel, "Gestai Dei Per Francos," p. 40.

¹³⁵For an excellent discussion of this expansion see Gaston Carrière, "The Early Effects of the Oblates in Western Canada," Prairie Forum, 4,1 1979.

and unique Sacrifice of universal redemption - this is...the mission of the Church.¹³⁶

The missionary, he said, must plant faith (convert non-believers to the faith), solidly establish the church so that faith could take root, imbue converts with the Spirit of Christ and "establish a sound and complete Christian life in the new Christian community."¹³⁷

Champagne's statement of the essential purpose of missions as "the extension of the Kingdom of Christ...to lay the foundation for the establishment of the faith, to increase the number of Christ's disciples" would have fitted as easily into the Christian Guardian.¹³⁸ Indeed, the primary objective of nineteenth century Protestant and Catholic missionaries was essentially the same: conversion through evangelization and civilization with the goal of ultimate assimilation as the bottom line. They diverged, however, in their interpretations of Christian theology, Christian life, the degree of acceptance of Indian cultures and views of the dominant British culture.

In 1853, Eugène de Mazenod issued his "Instructions for Foreign Missions." Missions were a means for souls to attain salvation. They existed for God's glorification, for adding to the glory of the Oblate Congregation and they were

¹³⁶Joseph Etienne Champagne, Manual of Missionary Action, p. 27.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 30-31.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 29.

proof of the divine mission of the Catholic Church. Knowledge of and commitment to faith were to be ensured before the baptism of a convert. Basic religious principles should be taught by missionaries and written in a basic question/answer format in native languages. New converts were to learn simple catechisms by heart with images and pictures conveying ideas more clearly and aiding in this memorization. Oblates were instructed to work closely with the people to help them live a Christian life. Civilizing methods were to be integrated within mission work for the best results. Missionaries were to keep peace within communities, visit the people, especially the sick, ensure that everybody worked hard and bring spiritual and medical aid whenever possible. This embodied the essence of nineteenth century Catholic missions and the inherent Eurocentrism is clear.¹³⁹ A final instruction, of course, involved the use of schools as a cornerstone of mission life.

Education, for both Catholics and Protestants, was pivotal to nineteenth and early twentieth century mission efforts. Archbishops Langevin and Taché were typical of their times. Langevin attached enormous importance to education, viewing it as the preservation of the Catholic Church. His goal was to have as many nuns as possible teaching as well as maintaining as many private and

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 104-105.

parochial schools as possible. To this end, he created the Missionary Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart and Mary Immaculate, an order whose main devotion was to teaching. Langevin believed that these Sisters would multiply converts to the Catholic faith, thus preserving Catholic education.¹⁴⁰ Alexandre Taché, too, "had no uncertain views concerning education. To him the school was but an adjunct of the church and the complement of the Christian home. He could not conceive of any divorce between religion and instruction."¹⁴¹

A story in the Indian Missionary Record entitled, "Wedding Bells" from the Pine Creek Reservation at Camperville, Manitoba, shows the goals and expectations held by Catholics for ideally converted Indians. Elizabeth Catcheway, a graduate of the Pine Creek Indian Residential School, had just married Roderick Ross. The writer's glowing descriptions of a clean, orderly home and the bride's domestic and agricultural skills, and of the centrality of Christianity in the wedding ceremony and the couple's new home, paralleled the effusiveness of Methodist literature on such successes.

The bride, clad in spotless white, was accompanied by three bridesmaids, her chosen friends from the [Pine Creek Residential] school...the Nuptial Mass is said....The children sing the hymns with

¹⁴⁰Rosa del C. Bruno-Jofré, "The Oblate Sisters", p. 532.

¹⁴¹Rev. A.G. Morice, History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada vol. 2 (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1910), p. 152.

unusual heartfelt voices....[In her new home] Everything is so tidy in there. A...house...adorned with lovely gay curtains. Cream coloured furniture, painted floors and plastered walls on which hang several lovely pictures, making it ever so bright! In the sitting room a large framed picture of the Sacred Heart...awaits the day of the consecration when He will reign as King....In the kitchen, a row of equal sized cans painted in cream and on which are written: Bread, Sugar, Eggs, Tea...stand on a neat little shelf by the shining stove; embroidered bedspreads and pillowcases, tables centres and doilies make the home very attractive. Elizabeth...is able to bake bread, cook and attend to all the work of a housewife. Seeds are ready to be confided to a large neat looking piece of land. We all have reasons to believe that economy will bring her prosperity.¹⁴²

And so Catholics and Protestants worked on, individual missionaries ever-conscious of themselves as being parts of a great whole that strove to inculcate European civilization. Protestants endeavoured to evangelize and create the Kingdom of God on earth. Catholics were motivated by their desire for the unity and universality of the Catholic religion.

¹⁴²The Indian Missionary Record, 2,6, July 1939.

CHAPTER III

PROTESTANT-CATHOLIC ENCOUNTERS IN THE MISSION FIELD

Northrop Frye grew up in a Methodist family. In an interview with David Cayley, he explained Methodism as well as the fundamental difference between it and Catholicism:

Methodism is an approach to Christianity that puts a very heavy emphasis on the quality of experience....The Catholic approach, for example, is very much doctrinal. You learn a structure of doctrine, you step inside of it, and the doctrine performs instead of myth. In Methodism you listen to the stories of the Bible.¹⁴³

In order to provide a context for understanding mission efforts along the Berens River and the dynamics of the encounters between the Ojibwa and Christian world views, it is necessary to understand the differences between Catholic and Protestant theologies and ideologies (especially around the meanings and implications of conversion) and the relationships that existed between Catholics and Protestants between 1875 and 1940.

Some concrete theological differences between Protestantism and Catholicism are reflected even in the context of their Bibles. For Catholics, the interpretation of the Bible was made by the Holy Mother Church; theological college faculties made these intellectual decisions for Protestants.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³David Cayley, Northrop Frye In Conversation (Concord, Ontario: House of Anansi Press, 1992), pp. 39-40.

¹⁴⁴Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 211-212.

Although Catholics interpret sin as "a transformation of man into...deteriorization," the Council of Trent held that humanity's freedom was not lost by the Fall but merely weakened.¹⁴⁵ Thus pre-baptismal sins are forgiven through baptism. While concupiscence remains, this concupiscence is not sin. Sin, according to the Catholic Church, is a lack of faith; thus while concupiscence originates from and inclines to sin, it is, in and of itself, not sin. Humanity, then, is not completely corrupted because its natural drives are sinful. Therefore, while Catholicism can be radically ascetic, it is not fundamentally puritan.¹⁴⁶

Protestant Reformers established the idea that, because of Adam's fall, humanity perpetually lost its freedom to contribute to its relationship to God. For Reformers, concupiscence was a sin and they could, therefore, admit fewer liberties in daily life than could Catholics.

Where Protestant doctrine defines sin as unbelief, Roman Catholics hold that sin is not unbelief or separation from God. Rather, sin consists of violations against the laws of God. Sins, in fact, are particular acts which can be forgiven. Catholics can confess their sins to a priest and receive pardon. For Protestants, however, "sins" are of

¹⁴⁵The Council of Trent (1545-1563) was formed to meet the crisis of the Protestant Reformation. It proclaimed the Bible and Tradition as rule of faith, rigidly defined Catholic doctrine and issued decrees on marriage and clerical reform.

¹⁴⁶Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, p. 212.

secondary importance because humanity is already separated from God through the original sin, and this can never be corrected no matter how well one keeps the laws of God. In Protestantism, then, the fundamental happening is not confession; it is rather the total transformation and re-union with God that can only come about through conversion.¹⁴⁷

Along with the role, function and infallibility of the pope, the importance of the sacraments represent another significant theological difference between Catholicism and Protestantism. For Catholics, salvation is only possible through the sacraments which are the saving power; for Protestants, however, the sacraments are merely the strengthening of power.¹⁴⁸

In the Oblate mission fields, then, Indians were required to become educated in Catholicism, participate in rituals, memorize prayers, become acquainted with doctrine, believe what the Oblates believed and do as the Oblates said. Sacramentalism was a crucial aspect of mission work and one that frequently gave them an edge over Protestant missionaries due to the popularity of ceremony among their clientele.

Sacramental administration was colourful and dramatic and the Oblate goal of inculcating the Indians' faith

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 215.

through leading them toward sanctity which was achieved via sermons, catechism and sacraments. For these missionaries, Christian health depended more upon their clientele's exposure to the sacraments than on their personal history or accomplishments.¹⁴⁹

Differences in theology specifically affected ways in which the two groups saw the native peoples they encountered. Protestant theology is based on the idea of humanity's separation from nature. Humankind is corrupt; only Christ's blood can save sinners who receive the necessary illumination in these matters through the grace of God and who change their ways through the cathartic transformation of conversion.¹⁵⁰ There is nothing gradual in this event; salvation is sudden, radical and dramatic, producing a total change of heart in the converted. Either one was saved or one was not saved. There was no middle ground.

Methodism was not born in the Reformation but appeared in the eighteenth century in the context of the Age of

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p.192.

¹⁵⁰In Protestant sacraments, the change is in the heart and the sacrament is often "in memory of" Christ's sacrifice. In the Lutheran instance, the bread and wine are permeated by the spirit. Catholic and High Anglican sacraments imply, at least, a power that changes matter itself (as the bread and wine change into flesh and blood).

Reason, or the Enlightenment. Its emphasis therefore was on practice or experience.¹⁵¹

The Methodist notion of grace was non-Calvinist. Calvin held that grace was irresistible, due to the power of God. In Methodism, however, grace could be resisted in spite of the power of God; unlike the Calvinists, they were not caught up in predestinationism. Methodists, in fact, called themselves Arminians, after the Dutch theologian Arminius who clearly opposed Calvinism. Methodist theology left much room for individual initiative and social action. By the 1850s, Methodism in Canada had joined the Protestant mainstream.¹⁵² Methodism was very much an agency of modernism (the idea that we are constantly in an open-ended state of improvement and that the new is always better than the old) with an increasing stress on organization and the lack of mystery.¹⁵³ The Berens River missionaries belonged to the Canadian Methodist mainstream (although sects did exist within Methodism). It was thus much more an agency of the modern state than was Catholicism - although ultramontanists cooperated with the government, they represented the forces of reaction against the efficiency of

¹⁵¹Methodist roots, although in the Church of England, included a Puritan influence (through Wesley's mother), medieval Roman Catholic influences, Moravian influences and a notion of grace derived from the Eastern Orthodox Church.

¹⁵²W.J. Townsend, H.B. Workman, George Eayrs, A New History of Methodism (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), p. 496.

¹⁵³E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (England: Penguin Books, 1981), pp. 441-444.

the modern state. For them, perfection was never to be attained this side of the grave.

Robert Choquette writes that, for Catholics, all things can bear God's grace, suggesting that the Church tends to be much more appreciative of the ways of nature and the ways of the Indian.¹⁵⁴ Catholics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries tended to see "Indian religion" as embodying aspects of a genuine religion, while Protestant groups who tended to dismiss with contempt all that came under the banner of 'Indian religion'. Father Guy de Bretagne, writing an article for the Indian Missionary Record on "Indian Religion" in 1938, expressed a representative Catholic view.

the old Indians were eminently religious. And...in spite of many mistakes, their religion is an outstanding example of what is called Tradition...their traditions were, after thousands of years, still influenced with the purity of natural religion and moral law and the last glimpses of the primitive revelation made by God to the first man. [Unfortunately] the need for prayer, of penance, of sacrifice...the necessity of morality and many other truths became overburdened with superstitious rites and magic [and] denigrated into polytheism...I respect the old pagan who is godly; but I pity the modern pagan who is godless, who has...tasted the Love of God, but through immorality, laziness, selfishness, a shameful and sinful life...throws himself back to paganism in all its errors.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault, p. 191.

¹⁵⁵The Indian Missionary Record, 1,3 March 1938.

To Guy de Bretagne, "the old pagans" were vastly superior to the modern atheists and incredulous scientists of his day because,

when you see [them] smoking their pipes [and] smoking toward the four corners of the earth, however superstitious this is...they believe in the supernatural, though their way is wrong and superstitious.¹⁵⁶

Unfortunately, Indians declared sacred all that was old and because "they had no written records, no learned men who could distinguish the false from the true and decide among the practices which were worthy....Their only way was to keep the good and bad together."¹⁵⁷

Catholicism was the only religion that could finally truly satisfy Indians who, as a race, were "naturally very religious, sociable and sensible" but whose religion left a spiritual dearth inside their souls.

Their hearts could not be filled and satisfied. When the missionaries brought them the Gospel, the greatest majority of them...received Baptism. At last their thirst for religion was quenched. For that was the religion their fathers were longing for, a divine religion, old as the world, perfect making perfect, where nothing rebukes their common sense.¹⁵⁸

Pierre Duchaussois, writing in 1937, provided a concrete example in support of de Bretagne's theories about the

¹⁵⁶The Indian Missionary Record, 1,5 May 1938.

¹⁵⁷Ibid. At this point, de Bretagne made the point that this was remarkably similar to Protestantism "where you get leaders who jump from the frying pan into the fire [and] form an unavoidable scattering" of all manner of ideas with no code or authority to pull together the Truth.

¹⁵⁸The Indian Missionary Record, 1,10 December 1938.

"naturally religious" state of Indians, discussing the encounter between the Oblates and the Denes of Athabaska and Mackenzie in 1848, he was adamant that the missionaries found these people "sunk in superstition" with sorcery, cruelty to women and children and polygamy running rampant. He was equally clear, however, about their religious nature:

In spite of the survival of some abuses, the conversion of the Denes, which did not take very long, was sincere and lasting. In spite of all their ignorance and superstition, those Indians had considerable respect for the natural law....To their naturally Christian soul the Missionary Fathers attribute the ease with which they were brought into the Church.¹⁵⁹

Although de Bretagne and Duchaussois wrote with some tolerance and respect, both Catholics and Protestants emphasized the error of pagan religion and held that the only road to salvation was a wholehearted acceptance of Christianity. Mathias Kalmes's story of "Kinebikons," made this point blatantly clear. The Sister in the story, working to make old Teweigan see the errors inherent in Ojibwa religion, spoke fairly brutally:

Open your eyes, Teweigan....Where are all those Indians who lived around Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods? At the end of the last century they were four thousand. Why have they nearly all disappeared? And those little wooden huts which you erect on their graves...what happened to them? Were they not supposed to protect [your dead]? They have fallen away and their dust mingled with

¹⁵⁹Pierre Duchaussois, Hidden Apostles: Our Lay Brother Missionaries (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1937), p. 24. From 1915 to 1921, Duchaussois (1878-1940) toured the northern missions in an effort to record their work and history. Aux glaces polaires was translated into five languages and sold 100,000 copies in the French language.

the dust of the dead has blown all over....Look at the White people living around you. They do not offer themselves to Manitou and yet they live long and are increasing so rapidly that they are invading all your lands....And you, followers of sorcerers, your population decreases. If some metis had not come to mix with you your Reserve would be empty.¹⁶⁰

Like Protestants, Catholics of the time saw Indians almost as a different species of humanity. Adrien-Gabriel Morice, writing in 1910, expressed the typical view:

The [North] American Indian is a being possessed of aspirations, ways of thinking and standards of judgement which are entirely different from ours....A degraded creature who partakes more of the child than of the adult, without being blessed with the innocence of the former or the control over the passions of the latter, the redskin must be treated with firmness, the prudence and foresight required by the government of youth, to which must be added a little persipacity, so that the wiles of a naturally shrewd, though naive, nature might not lead to false conclusions. Above all, the missionary must aim higher to hit lower....he should ask for more, because he is sure to get less....Being a grown-up child, the native must constantly be watched, often reprovded, and...at times tested.¹⁶¹

As Rosa del C. Bruno-Jofré explains, late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century Oblate fathers saw the Indian as "an unfortunate natural being", a "sad offspring of an ignored race" who lacked an intellectual culture, a sense of morality and "a comforting religion."¹⁶² Their useless and barbaric state was capable of redemption only through

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Rev. A.G. Morice, History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada, vol.2 (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1910), p. 350.

¹⁶²Rosa del C. Bruno-Jofré, "The Oblate Sisters," p. 552.

the Oblate Fathers in Canada, with intensive follow-up work given, if possible, by the work of Sisters from various congregations.

Of course, the clergy working in the field in actual personal encounter with native peoples exhibited varied reactions depending on their individual character and background, the group of people with whom they worked, the nature of circumstances occurring during contact, the length of experience and the degree to which Christian ideas were accepted or rejected in the field. By 1937, Brother Frederick Leach had spent many years among the Ojibwa along the Berens River. His views, by the late 1930s, reflect a tolerance and understanding that came from working amongst a people for a long time. On 19 November 1937 he wrote:

It's quite a problem to know what to do for some of these people; one can see that some are badly in need of extra food but some don't seem to try sufficiently. Then again...if I were continually living in a half-starved condition would I find much energy to do things?...Only those who are in charge of issuing the destitute rations can know what a problem it is.¹⁶³

One thing that Leach and his fellow Oblates were certainly not tolerant of were Indian medicine men. This was one area where they were in agreement with their Methodist contemporaries. Leach wrote of these men with contempt, sarcastically putting quotation marks around the word "doctor" whenever he could appropriately add it to his

¹⁶³Journal of Brother Frederick Leach, (Oblate Archives, Manitoba Province).

text. Medicine men were pagan, irritating, pathetic blocks to the mission effort. On 12 April 1927, Leach, stationed at Little Grand Rapids, recorded in his journal, "Charley [Dunsford] had a very bad spell this afternoon. Consented to be baptized. Gets John Duck to doctor him. Dr. (?) Duck plays his drums in Charley's tent during the night." On 18 April, Charley was still ill and Leach was even more frustrated. "James Keeper," he wrote, "beats his drums and sings lustily until 2:15 a.m. Butcher Duck gets drunk and hits Chief Boucher in the jaw."¹⁶⁴

Especially after 1900, mission fields were the frequent scenes of Protestants and Catholics occupying the same turf. The dynamics of co-existence, which were complex, varied from territory to territory. Official spokesmen often expressed mutual fundamental contempt and distrust. Champagne, writing out of the Canadian Catholic mission experience of the previous half century, listed lack of stability, lack of unity and confusion of doctrines as the weaknesses inherent in Protestant theology. As for what he called Protestant psychology, Protestants were fundamentally weakened by their sense of individualism which "rejects "authority"...as a "support" and a "guide". Deprived of this...they find themselves alone."¹⁶⁵ This solitude, he wrote, generated religious anxiety and distress, emptiness

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Joseph Etienne Champagne, Manual of Missionary Action, p. 564.

of soul and depression which was aggravated by "the pollution of contradictory religious opinions."¹⁶⁶ This solitude, he went on to say, created "a great danger of becoming immersed in subjectivism....never forget that [a Protestant] lacks the unfailing magistry and effective ex opere operato of the sacraments."¹⁶⁷ Concluded Champagne,

Protestant theology has no system. The whole "credo" is drawn up on...intimate, personal intercourse with the Holy Spirit of private inspiration. The foundation of Protestant religiosity...lives on this non-dogmatic and consequently purely psychological and humanitarian mysticism...a...fanatic formalism seeks to make up for the dogmatic void.¹⁶⁸

Father Guy de Bretagne also wrote critically of Protestantism as a "deliquescent, creedless, codeless modernism [with] no supernatural and unique 'authority.'" It would, thus, never hold up over time.¹⁶⁹

Writing about denominational rivalry, J.R. Miller describes an overall animosity between Protestants and Catholics in the last century.¹⁷⁰ Catholics saw themselves as embodying the one true church and viewed Protestantism

¹⁶⁶Ibid., p. 599.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 600.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 600.

¹⁶⁹The Indian Missionary Record, 1,7 July/August, 1938.

¹⁷⁰R. Miller, "Denominational Rivalry in Indian Residential Education," in Raymond Huel ed. Western Oblate Studies 2 (Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992). Religious enmity between Protestants and Catholics did not become rampant in the Canadas until the 1840s and 1850s. See J.M.S. Careless, The Union of the Canadas, 1841-1857 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971).

as, at best, a poorly refined religion - and at worst, heresy. Quebec ultramontanism, he says, was the main bastion of this outlook that infiltrated prairie Catholicism during the 1880s and 1890s. As Champagne wrote in his Manual of Missionary Action:

When we speak of Catholic missions and Protestant missions, we speak of two totally different things... Properly speaking, the only Christian missionaries are the Catholic missionaries, because Christ has given the missionary mandate only to the Catholic Church... [Protestant missionaries are] missionaries of a human society of a church which is not the Church of Christ.¹⁷¹

For their part, Protestants chafed against this arrogance and became embroiled in the "Papal Aggression" controversy which "conditioned them to regard Rome's representatives with suspicion at the best of times and active hostility at the worst."¹⁷² Miller argues that all non-Catholic bodies at this time shared animosity towards Catholicism.

Certainly, Protestants were guilty of the same arrogance concerning the superiority of their religion. In 1918, Methodist missionary, Percy E. Jones wrote an item for The Missionary Bulletin entitled, "Our Work With the Indians at Berens River." A Roman Catholic Ojibwa woman told the missionary that Jesus had visited her at her bedside during the night. According to Jones, Christ had said to her,

¹⁷¹Joseph Etienne Champagne, Manual of Missionary Action, p. 37.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 40. Church Council, Vatican I (1869-1870) defined, among other things, papal infallibility.

You see two churches here at Berens River, the Catholic and the Methodist; one teaches that which is right, the other does not...go to your Catholic friends and tell them that they must go to the Methodist Church to hear the gospel...for there it is preached right.¹⁷³

One must not, however, generalize too much in the interpretation of Catholic-Protestant relations. When diverse individuals inter in mission fields, unique and complex situations resulted.¹⁷⁴ As Robert Choquette says, the wide range of theological tenets within Protestantism makes too much generalization about the feelings and reactions of clergy dangerous (although within Methodism this wide range was drastically narrowed, to be sure). It is true that relations between the two groups during the latter half of the nineteenth century were underscored by mistrust, rivalry and animosity. Not all priests and ministers felt this way however. Some clergy and lay people, in fact, "managed to overcome their prejudices and develop constructive and charitable relationships with people of the other camp."¹⁷⁵

In her study of nineteenth century missions to the Dene, Kerry Abel concluded that, although historians have long given the impression that Catholic and Protestant

¹⁷³The Missionary Bulletin (Toronto: The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church) 1,3 September 1918, p. 315.

¹⁷⁴See, for example, the meeting between Robert Rundle and Jesuit Father De Smet in the Journal of Robert Terril Rundle MSS Glenbow Foundation, Calgary, Alberta.

¹⁷⁵Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault, p. 178.

missionaries were forever at one another's throats in her region of study, there was no evidence of conflict between the two groups. Any contests for influence and power had always occurred between shamans.¹⁷⁶

In Choquette's words, "Protestant-Catholic relations could be complex, not easily reduced to simple formulae. The same people who hurled ideological and theological missiles at each other one day could end up embracing each other on the next."¹⁷⁷ Circumstances in remote areas could unite Catholic and Protestant missionaries finding themselves united in a common goal; a crisis might require everyone to pull together in Christian cooperation or simply share the common quest for survival during particularly hard times.

The winter of 1931 in Little Grand Rapids was an example of those hard times. Luther Schuetze wrote in his memoirs about the scarcity of food, the prevalence of illness and the many deaths. He had heard that Boniface Guimond, the Roman Catholic missionary-teacher, was having a particularly hard time making ends meet. One day, Guimond passed by Schuetze's home on his way home from the store. As Schuetze recalled:

his eyes looked very hungry when he said, "My, you have a lot of nice fish." [I gave him a stick of

¹⁷⁶Kerry Abel, Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993), p. 134.

¹⁷⁷Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault pp. 183.

ten white fish]...he was overcome and finally stuttered "Mr. Luther I'll pray that you will be a Saint in heaven." I replied, "Not yet, I'd like to stick around a little longer."¹⁷⁸

An excellent example of Catholics and Protestants banding together in a crisis at Berens River to accomplish a common goal occurred in the winter of 1930. Brother Leach, Rev. Niddrie and the Indian Agent united in the face of a severe food shortage to persuade Chief William Berens to take more rations for his band. When need arose, it seems to have been fairly natural for Leach and Niddrie to work in concert.¹⁷⁹

Around 1900, a spirit of optimism pervaded Canada and citizens believed they were beginning a newer and better era. Society was experiencing an economic upswing after a decade of hard times, immigrants flowed into the West and the Boer War renewed imperial enthusiasm among English Canadians.

Religious life, however, as Mark McGowan notes, was somewhat less optimistic.¹⁸⁰ Ill-will had been generated through the 1880s and 1890s through arguments over separate schools west of the Ottawa River, the 1888 Jesuits Estates Act, the founding of the Equal Rights Association and the

¹⁷⁸Luther L. Schuetze, "Personal Papers," p. 23.

¹⁷⁹1930 Journal of Frederick Leach (Oblate Archives, Manitoba Province). This will be discussed in greater detail later.

¹⁸⁰Mark G. McGowan, "Rethinking Catholic-Protestant Relations in Canada: The Episcopal Reports of 1900-1901," Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Historical Studies, 59, 1992. p. 11.

Protestants Protection Association and accusations of clerical interference in politics.

With this in mind, Pope Leo XII in 1900 ordered a survey analyzing the nature and scope of Protestant proselytism in Canada. Twenty-five out of twenty-eight dioceses responded and the results, tabulated on 1 March 1901, constitute "the most complete and comprehensive report on Protestant-Catholic relations submitted to date by Catholic bishops."¹⁸¹

McGowan, in his study of this survey, found that Catholic-Protestant relations consisted of multi-faceted, multi-dimensional levels of denominational intercourse that were closely associated with regional situations, class, language, demography and ethnicity. Interestingly, most respondents did not report the existence of much direct Protestant proselytism and most bishops perceived that Canadian officials were essentially impartial in their relations with churches, although opinions varied regarding the extent to which civil education was used to Protestant advantage. As well, the bishops had a great confidence in the ability of the Catholic laity to withstand any existing Protestant seductions, and went so far as to say that anti-Catholicism merely served to generate a growth of Catholic commitment.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 23.

Not all was serene, however. On the negative side, both French and English bishops worried about the mixing of Protestant and Catholic children in public schools and Catholic membership in secular fraternal organizations. To this end, they established separate schools or conducted after-school catechism sessions and set up the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association, the membership of which shot from 5,650 in 1890 to 17,088 by 1902. Everyday contact with Protestants in neighbourhoods was the source of greatest worry as this could increase tolerance and erode a healthy Catholic horror of Protestant heresy. "Such social intermingling could subtly disarm Catholics, create moral and devotional laxity, and finally imperil their faith itself."¹⁸³ Although the bishops had faith in the courage of their congregations' convictions, they feared that if they were not careful, parishioners could be subtly seduced.

The dioceses of the Northwest, which included the Berens River area, expressed the most negative views regarding Protestant-Catholic co-existence. Protestant missions there were well-organized by 1900 and friction between French and English-speaking settlers added to the problems. Protestants received substantial financial backing from Bible Societies, eastern Canadians, the Methodist Bureau and the Church Missionary Society while Catholics did not have this wide range of support. The

¹⁸³Ibid., p. 23.

Oblates were angry with federal and local governments for showing bias towards Protestants in competition for jobs in the Department of Indian Affairs. Protestant employees, they said, purposely worked to spread Protestantism on reserves in their capacities as Indian Agents.¹⁸⁴

For example, on 28 July 1889, Bishop Grandin complained to E. Dewdney, Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, that the Department of Indian Affairs did not treat Roman Catholics with impartiality and that, too often, Catholics met with unfair opposition. Catholics, he claimed, were systematically excluded from employment in the Department and the DIA dealt with Roman Catholic clergy as if it must guard against them.¹⁸⁵

This spurred a swift memo to the Privy Council of Canada from Dewdney. The Superintendent-General denied all, explaining that it was just a coincidence that so few Catholics were employed in the Department. "The religion of many of the officials is unknown...today," he wrote, "efficiency, not religious convictions is the standard upon which officials and employees have been selected." Dewdney also expressed his frustration over the many Protestant churchmen complaining to his department about supposed DIA partiality towards Catholics.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 22-23.

¹⁸⁵NAC, RG10, vol.3841, file 71,345.

¹⁸⁶NAC, RG10, vol.3841, file 71,345.

The situation clearly was not remedied to Catholic satisfaction. On 28 July 1889, Bishop Vital-Justin Grandin wrote a letter of complaint to the Governor General in Council.¹⁸⁷ Grandin did not back down. Dewdney was still dealing with the bishop in 1890 when he wrote on 5 September saying, "I regret very much that you are suffering persecution from our Agents and employees." Dewdney agreed with the Bishop that missionaries should have the liberty to exercise their ministry among any Indians who called for it. He assured Grandin that the agents had been instructed not to interfere with or cause Indians to attend or not attend particular schools, that the problem of uneven teacher's salaries would soon be resolved with the establishment of a fixed salary, that children in Roman Catholic schools would receive the same treatment as those in other schools, that Catholics would now be given timely notice of changes in school regulations, that DIA employees had been instructed not to interfere in religious affairs and that Roman Catholic job applicants would receive the same treatment as other applicants.¹⁸⁸

In a letter to Father Lacombe on 14 September 1890, an angry Bishop Vital wrote:

¹⁸⁷"je me contenterai d'attirer votre attention sur ce qui me paraît la cause première de ce que nous avons à souffrir tous les jours. Cette cause première c'est l'exclusivisme qui semble agres dous [sic] le Departement des Affaires des Indiens." NAC, RG10, vol.3881, file 94,189.

¹⁸⁸NAC, RG19, vol.3841, file 71,345.

the Agents...without doubt, make themselves agreeable to their superiors by ill-treating us. The fact is that M. Reed...[refused] to let us establish a Church and a school on the reserve of Thunder-child under the false pretext that the majority were Protestants, while in reality there are 99 Catholics and but 24 Protestants. [He said] he had only obeyed the directions given him M. Williams...during several months, refused to give rations to the Catholic Indians who objected to sending their children to Protestant schools....M.M. Mann and Lucas were both elevated from the position of former Instructors to that of Agents. I...believe that they obtained their advancement from having pursued us and embarrassed us in every possible way....[other proofs] abound in my memoir....M. Vankoughnet assures us that the question of which religion a man...[belongs] to has never been [considered] with [DIA] appointments. If this is so, how is it that for 14 years that Government named the Agents and it is only last March that we could get a Catholic Agent in my diocese, and if he were not married to a Protestant lady I know not if they would have accepted him....You know also how certain Catholic employees were removed from the Reserves where they found Protestants to replace them.¹⁸⁹

In Berens River, Catholic and Protestant missionaries did not get along well. Percy Berens remembers, with humour, the rocky relationship that existed between Rev. John Niddrie and Father Joseph De Grandpré at Berens River.

P.B. Father De Grandpré was the priest's name, and Niddrie was the United Church minister - and they used to fight just like a cat and a dog! [laughter] Really...I'm telling you the truth!

S.G. What would they fight about?

P.B. Their religion. Niddrie thought his religion was better than Father De Grandpré's religion. [laughter] Sure! They fought just like a cat and a dog.

S.G. Did the people [in the community] get involved in the fighting?

P.B. No, just them two, the priest and the missionary.

S.G. Yelling?

¹⁸⁹NAC, RG10, vol.3841, file 71,345.

P.B. No - they'd just send notes, they had messengers. [laughter] Father De Grandpré would send a messenger to go and give that note to Niddrie [more laughter]. Yeah, they never contacted each other to talk business, like, you know - no, they just sent notes - Niddrie would answer the note from Father De Grandpré [laughter].

P.B. [Niddrie] was too generous, I guess I have to use that word - too generous to the people, to the United Church members. But it was different with the Catholics, he didn't have nothing to do with the Catholics.

S.G. What about the Catholics? Did the Catholic [clergy] only give to the Catholics?

P.B. No.

S.G. They gave to everybody?

P.B. uh-huh [yes].¹⁹⁰

Fred Baptiste has similar memories.

S.G. You know, Percy Berens told me that Father De Grandpré and Niddrie used to get into fights.

F.B. They didn't get along so good them two! [laughter] You know, this Father De Grandpré wanted to change some of the people to be a Catholic, like.

S.G. He wanted to convert the Methodists?

F.B. Yes, yes! And so they didn't get along too good. After they both died, everyone got along fine - every one of them. There's one thing I can say about Mr. Niddrie; when somebody died from the Roman Catholic mission, they'd take the body to the church and he'd ring the bell when he seen this body going by - he was, like, saying goodbye, eh?¹⁹¹

Virginia Boulanger, an Ojibwa woman living in Berens River, also remembers that although Catholic and Protestant members of the community got along well, Niddrie and De Grandpré fought. Although she never understood the details of the battles or exactly why the two did not get along, she

¹⁹⁰Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

¹⁹¹Fred Baptiste to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

clearly remembers the two clergymen in heated competition for church members.¹⁹²

Methodist records contain some extremely agitated responses to proposed Catholic missions encroaching on their territory. On 17 August 1911, Rev. Joseph Lowes wrote to T.E. Egerton Shore, General Secretary, Foreign Department of the Methodist Mission Society about the new Catholic mission at Berens River. He was threatened and perturbed.

I am very much afraid that the Roman Catholics are going to best us here. They are going to build a new church here this fall, at least so I am told. Two priests are expected, one to stay right here [Brother Leach] and the other to visit about [Father De Grandpré] and both to proselytize as much as possible then press for a Boarding School of their own at Berens River. They use all sorts of underhand methods and means. Perhaps I do take this to heart too much but I do feel very badly about it.¹⁹³

The prospect of a new Catholic boarding school at Cross Lake prompted a similar letter to Shore from Methodist missionary S.D. Gaudin.

[should the Catholics build a boarding school] our church will have a very poor chance at Cross Lake. With things even as they are at present, with only one priest on the ground we are having a hard battle to anything like hold our own but what it will be with the added prestige which a boarding school will give them with priests, Brothers and Sisters galore. You can hardly imagine how the Catholic religion appeals to the Indian nor how

¹⁹²Virginia Boulanger to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

¹⁹³T.E. Egerton Shore Correspondence, Fonds 14, Subseries 5, box 5, file 98, (Victoria University Archives).

the Indians of that faith are seeking to win over their Protestant friends.¹⁹⁴

The Catholics were equally negative about the Protestants in their correspondence and private papers. Sometimes this was revealed fairly subtly. In March 1927, Brother Leach and Methodist lay missionary John James Everett were called to George Boucher's home to visit George's dying eleven-year-old daughter, Elizabeth. Leach was critical of his Methodist counterpart.

Saw the little girl and told them the only thing was prayer. She died within an hour....Thank God I am a Catholic. A short few lines of the Bible, a short prayer was all [from Everett]. Not a word about God to the child. No names of Jesus and Mary on her lips.¹⁹⁵

On 23 December 1928, Leach and the Methodists found themselves together again, helping a sick baby at Joe Boucher's home. Leach wrote with contempt on 24 December:

Saw Joe Boucher's baby. Someone [obviously the Methodists] gave it Aspirin. Mrs. Street [the Methodist school teacher's wife] gives some other dope, following my usual rule [I] will not give anything to be taken internal. It is going fast.¹⁹⁶

Sometimes the records are not so subtle. In January 1919, Leach wrote to his superiors in St. Boniface, saying that he may have "gained a victory over the Protestant

¹⁹⁴T.E. Egerton Shore Correspondence, Fonds 14, subseries 5, box 5, file 98, (Victoria University Archives).

¹⁹⁵1928 Journal of Brother Frederick Leach (Oblate Archives, Manitoba Province).

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

minister." Cubby Green was an Ojibwa Methodist man living at Berens River. His wife had died and he apparently relinquished control of his two Protestant daughters, Alma (who was subsequently adopted by a Catholic woman named Sarah Shaw) and Sophia (who was adopted by Margeurite McKay, also a Catholic). The girls were baptized in the Catholic Church in November 1913. In 1918, Rev. Percy E. Jones was apparently working to have the girls taken away from their adoptive Catholic parents and sent to the Protestant school at Norway House. According to Leach, when the boat was about to sail:

the minister came while I was away for a few minutes, took the children and hid them until the boat came and placed them in the Captain's charge. I nearly had a fight with the minister for he was most insulting.¹⁹⁷

The girls did go to Norway House, however, and a major battle ensued. Leach wrote to his superiors in St. Boniface that:

Mr. Jones thought he had us cornered because he made one of the guardians sign a paper releasing the children...saying that if she didn't sign he would expose her (she was with child through another man not her husband).

Leach appealed to Indian Agent Carter who, on 28 September, ordered that the girls be returned to their guardians and attend the Catholic school at Berens River. Carter also wrote to Indian Affairs Minister D.C. Scott in Ottawa

¹⁹⁷AD, L581 .M27C 14.

recommending the girls' release from Norway House. Ottawa acquiesced.¹⁹⁸

Leach's letters to his superior in St. Boniface were filled with struggles with the Protestants over children. In the summer of 1919, for example, Leach wrote angrily:

They wish to take another child from us. Name Alfred Berens, protestant Mother, Catholic father dead. Mother has given us a writing request wanting her boy to come over to our school. He has been at this school one year. He refuses to be baptized at present as all his relations threatened him with bodily injury if he became Catholic. His mother wants him to be baptised.¹⁹⁹

In July 1919:

My attendance is...very good. I am not going to say it is easy work to keep the children regular. It is very hard work indeed. The Protestant minister is trying his best to get us out of here, and he is getting very powerful support from the Methodist Society. Children will be children and a few of our find it hard to understand why the minister feeds and clothes his children and we can't.²⁰⁰

He was still writing in this vein a decade later:

The Methodists have concentrated their forces this year....They cannot get the children by ordinary means so are using rather foul means. Last fall,

¹⁹⁸AD, L581 .M27L 20. Cubby Green was Walter Green's father. Interestingly, William Berens himself got involved in this struggle, working with Green and Jones. He said that although he had received no official authority to return the children to Cubby, he was chief and had a right to rule his band. Leach wrote in exasperation, "The chief has not acted in an impartial manner as he should have done for he has admitted that he tried to influence the guardians to relinquish their rights of guardianship, especially Miss Sarah Shaw."

¹⁹⁹1919 (the letter had no specific date but was simply headed "June-July, 1919). AD, L581 .M27L 20.

²⁰⁰June-July, 1919, AD, L581 .M27L 21.

over 30 bales of used clothing were sent out. Any Indian wishing to get some must attend the Protestant Church or School. We had our school register Catholic children whose parents, practically speaking, had no religion. These parents are offered clothing by the Methodists and in consequence changed their children from our school to the other. I now here [sic] that the children are Protestant.²⁰¹

Catholics, however, were not always the losers. In 1928, Leach wrote to Father Josephat Magnan, his Provincial "The Methodists have given us very keen competition and are by no means pleased as I have taken away 4 of their best pupils. I have every right to do so as these children are Catholics."²⁰²

Both sides were clearly willing to use almost any means to outdo each other. On 22 August 1919 Leach wrote another letter to the Oblate headquarters in St. Boniface. He had asked the Provincial Government for an allowance of one hundred dollars a year for teaching non-treaty children and Deputy Minister R. Fletcher had granted the request. Wrote Leach:

By the letter you will see that he knows nothing about the Methodist school and I suppose it is not necessary for me to tell him about the other Non-Treaty children who go there. In fact unless you think necessary otherwise I am keeping it quiet from all.²⁰³

²⁰¹18 January, 1929, AD, L581 .M27L 110.

²⁰²AD, L581 .M27L 107.

²⁰³AD, L581 .M27L 23.

If Protestants worried about being bested by the Catholics, Catholics had the same fears about their Protestant competition. Wrote a somewhat wistful Leach to St Boniface on 4 January 1926:

All kinds of tricks are used [by the Methodists to attract children to their school], the chief attraction being quantities of clothing given free to parents and children...the children are bought. It is the lack of spiritual faith which does so much harm. I often wonder how the Protestant minister has such a hold over his people. There are several belonging to his church living close to us and regularly you will see them passing our gate on Sunday to go to church a distance of over three miles. Not only that but I have often seen our own Catholics coming out of the Methodist Church on a Sunday afternoon and they number not a few. Why? Is it because the service is more popular, more attractive?²⁰⁴

It is necessary here to emphasize the need to critically question the sources. Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the field, when writing letters to their superiors at home, often had an interest in bringing out the worst dynamics of a given situation. This may have been a way of soliciting moral or financial support or of trying to make sure that people at home grasped some idea of the hardships of living in a remote northern community. Overstatement and some selection of data, then, might have been in order so that these purposes could be served. Robert Choquette believes that a real difference existed between the writings of field missionaries and their actual life experiences. He goes so far as to say that the

²⁰⁴AD, L581 .M27L 84.

difference between writings and actual life make missionaries look "schizophrenic - a psychologist would have a field day." Choquette is speaking with some humour here but the point merits serious consideration.²⁰⁵

The stage has now been set to study the encounters between the Ojibwa world view and Christianity between 1875 and 1940. Ojibwa religion, Protestantism and Catholicism as well as the relationships between the two Christian religions and the dynamics that existed in the relationships between Protestants and Catholics have been delved into in some depth. The general history of Berens River during the period has also been probed. The next chapters explore how these world views and life ways melded together for the people of Berens River in a mosaic that was to embody many genuine Christian elements but that would remain essentially Ojibwa.

²⁰⁵Robert Choquette, "L'Histoire de l'Eglise de l'Ouest: hier et aujourd'hui," paper presented at the Fourth Western Oblate Studies Conference, Winnipeg, 25 August 1995. As well, whether one wrote for a public as opposed to a private audience made a difference to both style and content.

CHAPTER IV

LIFE ALONG THE BERENS RIVER FROM 1875 TO 1940

Between 1875 and 1940, the communities along the Berens River experienced a number of transformations. Social and technological changes came with treaty negotiations, fisheries and steamboats. This chapter will focus on life along the Berens River in order to provide a context for the encounters between Ojibwa people and Christianity. Changes in the economic milieu, fluctuations in the health of Saulteaux groups, incoming Euro-Canadians and their institutions as well as the effect these institutions had on the lives of community residents will be examined. All these factors were potential influences on conversions and church membership.

The Lake Winnipeg Saulteaux Indians of the Berens River area live in the East Winnipeg country. This area, with the Poplar, Berens and Bloodvein Rivers making up its major river systems, contains a topography which ranges from rolling to hilly to fairly flat. Although climate and drainage conditions create much tree growth, glacial ravages have affected the already grim condition of the Canadian Shield soil.

Agriculture is further impeded by the East Winnipeg country's cold, continental climate. Average temperatures in winter are -32 degrees C. and summers do not get much warmer than 22 degrees. Winters are long, with snow often

appearing before November and accumulating to anywhere between 38 and 254 centimetres by February, the coldest month of the year. Snow begins to melt in April and deciduous trees yield leaves in June. Summer in northern Manitoba extends from June to August. Annual temperature, wind and daylight changes in this seasonal cycle affect the arrival and departure of migrant birds, the habits of fur-bearing animals and the economic activities of aboriginal communities whose hunting and gathering work is closely regulated by the limitations of habitat in this subarctic forest.²⁰⁶

Since survival was based on individual hunting and trapping and on the cooperation of small groups, people dispersed or congregated as food supplies fluctuated; thus the formation of large, permanent groups was prevented. Hence, the social, economic and technical cultures of these groups were built around the intricacies of the environment. These adaptations, which required a high degree of independence, self-reliance and individual effort, combined with a need for self-restraint, are persistent and work well for the communities.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶A. Irving Hallowell, Contributions to Anthropology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 333.

²⁰⁷Susan Elaine Dueck, "Methodist Indian Day Schools and Indian Communities in Northern Manitoba, 1890 - 1925" (M.A. Thesis, The University of Manitoba, 1986), pp. 43-44.

By the time Egerton Ryerson Young established the first Methodist mission at Berens River in 1873, Ojibwa subgroups along the river had been interacting with one another and, to some degree, with Crees and with British, French and Algonquian fur traders. There existed, by Young's initial forays into the area, a dynamic situation which embodied a host of adaptations to community life. By the 1870s, life at Berens River was "a crossroads for Ojibwa fur traders and for missionaries, government administrators and other outsiders."²⁰⁸

By the signing of Treaty 5A in 1875, a church and school house had been erected in the community and classes had begun. Steam navigation was beginning on Lake Winnipeg and valuable minerals and timber had been found in the Lake's vicinity (causing a flurry of applications to the government to buy land). David Laird, Minister of the Interior, wrote of good land for agriculture on the west shore and added,

with pending Pacific Railway construction west of the Lake...the Lake and the Saskatchewan River are destined to become the principal thoroughfare of communication between Manitoba and the fertile prairies in the West.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸Jennifer S.H. Brown "'A Place in Your Mind For Them All': Chief William Berens" in Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Sketches of North American Frontiers ed. by James A. Clifton (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1989), p. 210.

²⁰⁹"Report of the Department of the Interior, 1875," Sessional Papers, 1876, vol. 9, no. 7. p. viii.

As a young man, Jacob Berens, in 1860, was probably among the Ojibwa at Berens River who approached Rev. George McDougall, then en route to the Rossville Methodist mission at Norway House, asking for a missionary and expressing an interest in Christianity. McDougall baptized Jacob at Rossville on 25 February 1861 and it was there that the future chief learned Cree syllabics and moved on to establish the base for a dynamic Methodist mission in the Berens River community. His conversion and baptism, and the rumoured conversions of a number of others in that area led the Methodists to found the 1873 mission (although for much of this time, Jacob was away from home working on the Hudson's Bay Company York boats on Lake Winnipeg or at White Dog, a Hudson's Bay outpost).²¹⁰

By the signing of the treaty, Jacob had been back at Pigeon Bay - living in one of the area's first log houses and trading furs with the Berens River Hudson's Bay post - for five years.²¹¹ Methodism and log houses notwithstanding, the old ways were a major part of both family and community life for Jacob whose father, Bear, held

²¹⁰Jennifer S.H. Brown "Chief Jacob Berens" (Forthcoming entry in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. 14. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.) A. Irving Hallowell dated Jacob's birth as 1832; others, translating his name to "Something That Moves Across the Sky" - a reference to Halley's comet - believe he was born in 1834. He married Mary McKay whose father, William McKay, was a Hudson's Bay Company trader at the Trout Lake post in Ontario's Severn River drainage.

²¹¹A Hudson's Bay Company post existed at Berens River since 1824, though records show occupation of the post as early as 1814 by men sent from the Jack River mouth. (HBCA, District Reports, 1805-1825).

shaking tent and Midewiwin ceremonies until his death in 1873.

With the signing of the treaty, Jacob, a leader in the negotiations, was elected chief of Berens River, Little Grand Rapids, Poplar River and Pikangikum. This moved him still further onto centre stage in a world which was in constant transition under the weight of new technology, increased missionary involvement, and ensuing Ojibwa adaptation and dynamism. After 1875, Jacob became an active regional player in the bureaucratic world of Indian Affairs.²¹²

With the early 1880s came another burst of change for the community. In 1883, the first commercial fisheries opened on Lake Winnipeg and, with this, came a boom in the fishing industry with its new steam schooners and access to American markets. Young men like William Berens moved seasonally into these new labour activities while continuing to work with their families on winter traplines in the bush. Some, like Berens, also found work as interpreters. Far from being incapable of coping under oppressive changes foisted upon them, these people moved between worlds with a skill that was valued by white traders, missionaries and government agents.

However, the new pressure brought difficulties; in 1885 Ebenezer E. McColl, Inspector of Indian Agencies, reported

²¹²Brown, "Chief Jacob Berens", p. 5-6.

that the Ojibwa were upset over fishing parties from Winnipeg encroaching on their waters, saying, "if allowed to continue the destruction of whitefish and sturgeon at the present rate [they] will exhaust the supply and deprive them of their principal source of subsistence."²¹³ The next year, Indian Agent Angus MacKay noted the Ojibwas' displeasure over the encroachment and their anger over the application of Manitoba game laws to the Indians in that part of the province.²¹⁴

Generally, however, the 1880s in Berens River, with the exception of illness from an epidemic in 1887, were a time of good hunting and plentiful fishing. MacKay, in 1883, reported excellent fishing with plenty of food over the winter and, in 1885, wrote that there was no shortage of food in the difficult winter/spring period due to the prevalence of fish, deer, rabbits and fur-bearing animals. The year 1887 again yielded a plentiful food supply and good prices paid for furs by traders, although much sickness occurred. MacKay reported that many died and many more were unable to hunt regularly. By 1888, MacKay was still reporting an abundance of moose and deer as well as good fall fishing - the slaughter was particularly good that year

²¹³"Report of E. McColl, Inspector of Indian Agencies, 1885," Sessional Papers, 1886, vol. 18, no. 3, p. 129.

²¹⁴Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1885," Sessional Papers, 1886, vol. 9, no. 4, p. 110.

as unusually deep snow made it impossible for animals to run far or fast.²¹⁵

The 1890s were a time of economic changes for the Berens River community. While hunting, trapping and fishing remained central aspects of Ojibwa life, many depended increasingly upon commercial industries such as sawmills, cordwood camps and commercial fishing companies for employment. They built permanent houses, owned cattle, grew hay and planted gardens on land that was fairly hostile to serious agricultural endeavour.

Between 1889 and 1899, the community experienced hard times. In 1889, a bush fire swept over a large portion of the reserve, burning the hunting grounds bare.²¹⁶ Fishing (especially for whitefish, pickerel and pike) and the hunting of moose and caribou were the two staples most depended upon by Indians in northern Manitoba.²¹⁷ Drastic depletion of fish and game prompted the Inspector of Indian Agencies to report in 1890 that:

now that fishing and hunting grounds are becoming depleted, Indians (who formerly only cultivated

²¹⁵Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1883," Sessional Papers, 1884, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 97; "Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1885," Sessional Papers, 1886, vol. 19, no. 4, p. 68; "Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1887," Sessional Papers, 1887, vol. 21, no. 3, p. 292; NAC, RG10, DIA, vol. 3801, file 48,638.

²¹⁶"Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1889," Sessional Papers, 1890, vol. 23, no. 10, p. 309.

²¹⁷James G.E. Smith, "Western Woods Cree." in Handbook of North American Indians Vol. 6, Subarctic, ed. June Helm, William Sturtevant, gen. ed., 20 vols. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981), p.259.

potatoes) are looking more to the Department of Indian Affairs for help.²¹⁸

Indian Agent reports for the decade reflect the struggle in Berens River. Angus MacKay noted in 1890 that winter was severe, fur-bearing animals were rapidly decreasing, and that many children and elderly people had died from influenza, which had swept the district.²¹⁹ In 1892, the community was still self-supporting but the fur hunt turned out poorly again and farming, as MacKay admitted, was very difficult owing to "wooded, rocky land and cold lingering springs." The people, however, were pleased that year that the government had finally excluded portions of the Lake and rivers from licensed fishermen.²²⁰ A severe measles epidemic in April, May and June of 1893 resulted in need for medical aid from the Methodist Missionary Society and the Hudson's Bay Company, and cattle died in droves of disease and starvation.²²¹

Perhaps the most revealing document is the report of ~~Shpenanibon of Inupiat era Ebe began in 1894: what was then~~ 1894: advantages [of] devoting themselves to agriculture...and

²¹⁸"Report of E. McColl, Inspector of Indian Agencies, 1890," Sessional Papers, 1892, vol. 24, no. 18, p. 202.

²¹⁹"Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1890," Sessional Papers, 1891, vol. 23, no. 10, p.131.

²²⁰"Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1891," Sessional Papers, 1892, vol. 25, no. 10, p. 68.

²²¹"Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1893," Sessional Papers, vol. 27, no. 10, p. 71.

less to the wild, nomadic and precarious pursuits of the chase.²²²

Significantly, government agents had almost universally expressed frustration over Indian reluctance to become seriously involved with agriculture. When Angus MacKay, in the same sentence, noted the impossible farming conditions and then remarked that, "even if conditions were excellent, Indians still would not be interested in farming,"²²³ he showed assumptions and stereotypical attitudes that were ingrained to the point of causing blindness. The fact that the Ojibwa of Berens River were facing enough economic hardship to cultivate crops in the poor lands around the community is telling. The fact that agents expected them to do this, even in good times, is also telling.

The tone of the correspondence in government records reflected an almost formulaic contempt for the debauched moral values of Cree and Ojibwa people and a lack of comprehension of native cultures and world views. In the report noted above, for example, McColl bemoaned the fact that it was extremely difficult to "eradicate this wretched condition from savages whose proverbial habit of wandering around is so...rooted in their inflexible nature." In fact, Ojibwa flexibility and adaptive responses could be found

²²²"Report of E. McColl, Superintendent Inspector, 1893," Sessional Papers, 1894, vol. 27, no. 10, p. 46.

²²³"Report of A. MacKay, 1891," Sessional Papers, 1892, vol. 25, no. 10, p. 68.

everywhere within community life; the rigidity was on the part of agents and missionaries who expected one true path to be followed: agriculture and settlement. Some of the more enlightened, like McColl, however, did hold out hope for the future of native people, writing optimistically that:

The Indians are developing intellectually, however. The baneful influence of the designing medicine man over them through his poisonous nostrums and mysterious incantations is fast disappearing and the darkest clouds of pagan ignorance and superstition...are gradually disappearing.²²⁴

The year 1894 was a particularly bad year for scarce fur-bearing animals, poor gardens and much scarlet fever and influenza. Huge storms ruined the fishermen's nets and fishing was so poor that the community finally had to receive aid from missionaries, government and the Hudson's Bay Company.²²⁵ Correspondence between Agent MacKay and the government reflected the seriousness of the times. In a visit to Berens River on 10 February 1894, the Agent noted that fish buyers could no longer be depended upon to buy fish at good prices as traders had stopped purchasing the whitefish which were getting increasingly scarce. The hunt in fur and game, he also noted, was very poor. On 31 March, he alerted McColl to the fact that the "Indians [were] very

²²⁴"Report of E. McColl, Superintendent Inspector, 1883," Sessional Papers, 1894, vol. 27, no. 10, p. 40.

²²⁵"Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1894," Sessional Papers, 1895, vol. 28, no. 9, p. 73.

bad off for fish - they [could not] catch any whitefish or other fish." MacKay wound up buying 1200 perch from Mr. Disbrowe, the Hudson's Bay post manager, to "relieve them of their suffering." When he returned on 23 April, he was alarmed, saying:

The Indians are very badly off for fish. [I] never saw them worse off for fish at this place - their nets are down everywhere possible but this yields nothing. I have given them now over 1000 whitefish of my own.²²⁶

Hunting conditions improved slightly over the last half of the decade; the Indian Agent reported that moose, caribou and rabbits were available "in fair amounts," although apparently traders were not "paying so well."²²⁷ Fishing continued to be sluggish, though, with more and more Ojibwa working in lumber camps, mills and fisheries. Health was poor and the community battled waves of scrofula and tuberculosis. By 1898, Agent J.W. Short noted that there was significantly more land cultivation due to the fish scarcity on the reserve and the hunting income was well below average.²²⁸

The 1890s also saw the arrival of the first long-term Methodist missionary, James Arthur McLachlan and his wife,

²²⁶NAC, RG10, vol. 3946, file 123,454.

²²⁷"Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1896," Sessional Papers, 1897, vol. 21, no. 14, p. 260.

²²⁸"Report of J.W. Short, Indian Agent, 1898," Sessional Papers, 1899, vol. 33, no. 12, p. 70.

Sarah.²²⁹ Before his arrival in 1893, the mission at Berens River had experienced a considerable turn-over of resident preachers. Egerton Ryerson Young had left in 1876 and his replacement, Rev. John Semmens, had stayed for only two years.²³⁰ Of his first arrival at the Berens River mission in July 1876, Semmens wrote:

A beautiful...Mission House was erected by Rev. E. R. Young in the summer of 1874. A school house was erected at the same time on the lean-to or shanty principle, but no church adorns the spot....There are 11 houses - native homes - here and there among the trees, with little garden plots attached to each....The fisheries are close and inexhaustible. The forest - varied and interminable. The Mission House filled twice a week with respectably dressed and orderly congregations. There is an average attendance of 25, a resident Church membership of 24, a total population of about 60.²³¹

After a gap of three years, William Hope arrived to live in the community from 1881 to 1883. He was replaced by Rev. Enos Langford who was transferred to Winnipeg in 1885. Rev. J.W. Butler replaced him for a brief year in 1888. It

²²⁹James A. McLachlan was born near Aylmer, Ontario on 22 October 1855. After attending the Victoria and the Wesleyan Theological Colleges, he was ordained by the Conference in 1879. After twelve years in charge of the Victoria Indian Mission, he was transferred to Berens River in 1893. He and a boat load of six children, en route to the Brandon Industrial School, were drowned on Lake Winnipeg on 12 September 1903. McLachlan was buried at Berens River. (Victoria University Archives, Biographical Files).

²³⁰Rev. John Semmens began his work in northern Manitoba as a Methodist missionary. In April 1901, he accepted the position of Indian Agent at Berens River, replacing J.W. Short, who was retiring. He went on to become Inspector of Indian Agencies for the Department of Indian Affairs. He spoke highly of the first convert at Berens River, describing Jacob Berens as "a most thoughtful man, a good reasoner and a wise administrator." Personal Papers of Rev. John Semmens (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario), p.62.

²³¹Ibid., p. 48.

was not until 1893 that "Supply Missionary" was replaced by the name of a resident missionary in the Methodist records.

Interestingly, church membership rose steadily and rapidly during McLachlan's tenure (1893-1903). The number of full members increased from 58 in 1893 to 93 by 1903. Although hard times probably stimulated this growth, causing people to look towards Christianity as a source of added power and support, it is also likely that people were responding to a missionary whom they liked and who became involved in community life over enough time to establish some trust among the people.²³² Membership jumped especially between 1896 and 1898, moving from 62 to 87 members - possibly due to a huge Methodist revival conducted by MacLachlan in the winter of 1897.²³³

To the chagrin of the Methodists, the Roman Catholics built their first chapel at Berens River in 1897. No longer could the Protestants enjoy a denominational monopoly!

The years from 1900 to 1920 were times of yet more changes. From the mid-1890s on, Indian Agents Angus MacKay and J.W. Short increasingly mentioned with pleasure the

²³²Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1893-1894, p. lviii; 1895-1896, p. xlix; 1896-1897, p. xlv; 1897-1898, p. xlvi; Proceedings of the Sixteenth Session of the Manitoba and North-West Conference of the Methodist Church, 1899, p. 332; Proceedings of the Seventeenth Session, 1900, p. 332; Proceedings of the Eighteenth Session, p. 27; Proceedings on the Nineteenth Session, p. 41, Proceedings of the Twentieth Session, p. 20. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario).

²³³"Report of J.A. McLachlan, 1897-8," Annual Report of Missionary Society, p. xlix.

marked progress towards civilization being made by the residents of Berens River. Ebenezer McColl wrote (albeit somewhat naively) in 1895:

In the Berens River Agency, the Indians are under the absolute control of the Agent, whose instructions are implicitly carried out...his influence among them is great on account of his thorough knowledge of their language and character.²³⁴

The fact that the people had just emerged from what may have been the hungriest winter/spring in a long time might have had something to do with their compliance toward the Agent who had given them fish. The Ojibwa of Berens River were indeed changing as the environment and the world changed around them; they were, to the repeated frustration of government workers and missionaries, however, selecting the nature of these changes and controlling the speed of their adaptation to them.

During this period, the community became increasingly involved in commercial industries. In 1900, a government fish hatchery was built on the reserve and two fishing stations opened at Berens River on Sheep Island and Yankee Island. Inspector John Semmens reported in 1901 that the Indians were:

²³⁴"Report of Ebenezer E. McColl, Superintendent Inspector, 1895," Sessional Papers, 1896, vol. 29, no. 10, p. 210.

in excellent condition due to the good fishing industry and extensive lumber interests of Captain Robinson of Selkirk.²³⁵

After Rev. McLachlan drowned in 1903, he was replaced by Willis Shoup until Rev. Thomas Neville and his wife arrived in 1904. Annie E. McEwen and her husband Doug arrived from Winnipeg in 1906 and spent four years in the community where Doug worked at the fish hatchery.²³⁶ Her memoirs provide some glimpses into community life in the early 1900s. The Nevilles were just leaving Berens River when the McEwens arrived, as Thomas had been transferred to a Winnipeg church. In September, Rev. Arthur Okes and his wife, Jane were stationed at Berens River.²³⁷ In 1909,

²³⁵"Report of John Semmens, Indian Agent, Berens River Agency, 1901," Sessional Papers, 1902, vol. 36, no. 11, p. 73. Noting that most Ojibwa were connected with one or another of these pursuits, he listed the Dominion Fish Company, the Northern Fish Company, Ewing and Fryer and the J.K. McKenzie Company as dominating forces in the industry.

²³⁶Annie E. McEwen was a member of a prominent Red River settlement family. A.E. McEwen, "Four Years at Berens River," A.E. McEwen Memoirs (PAM, MG8 B52, fos. 36-42).

²³⁷That summer a student, Douglas Durkin, arrived as a supply missionary for three months. Durkin (1884-1968) was born and raised in Parry Sound, Ontario. His mother, a strong Methodist, wanted him to become a missionary in China and, while he had lost interest in religious education by his early teens, her personality and influence remained with him throughout his life. As a young man, he worked with railway gangs and as a pianist for silent movies in Winnipeg theatres. After graduating with a B.A. from The University of Manitoba, Durkin lectured at a number of schools in English and history, most notably Brandon College, until 1917 when he accepted a position as a lecturer in English at The University of Manitoba where he later became assistant professor. He moved to New York City in 1921 where he devoted his life to writing his novels, the most notable of which is The Magpie (1923), and teaching at Columbia University. Durkin married and collaborated on a number of literary works with Martha Ostenso who was also well known to the North American literati. His short stories appeared in such popular magazines as Harper's Magazine, Liberty and Century. Durkin also composed a number of ballads in collaboration with Carl Sandberg and wrote a screen play, Union Depot, with Gene Fowler. His mother's Methodist ideals manifested themselves throughout Durkin's life; he was socialistic in outlook and espoused progressive reforms regardless of

after having spent "the required three years" on the Reserve, the Okes were transferred to southwestern Manitoba and Rev. Joseph Henry Lowes arrived with his wife in 1909. They would stay in the community until 1916.²³⁸ Mrs. Lowes took on an active role in teaching the day school.

Where Thomas Neville had increased church membership from 90 to 98, the mission actually lost 14 members during Okes's tenure. Lowes would take seven years to build the number of full members back up to 98.²³⁹ In the 1908 Manitoba Conference Report of the Methodist Missionary Society, one finds the brief but telling statement that, "At Berens River...some difficulties have been encountered through the opposition of some new methods introduced by a change of ministers."²⁴⁰ Annie McEwen contrasted the two missionary wives, describing Mrs. Lowes as "a bright, attractive woman," who "was quite popular with the Indians

public opinion. "His hope for man's regeneration depended upon humanity's spiritual salvation, not on political action." (See Peter E. Rider's introduction to Douglas Durkin, The Magpie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. xvi-xviii.

²³⁸Ibid., p. 2,6.

²³⁹Annual Report of Missionary Society, 1904-1905, p. xxii; 1905-1906, p. xxi; Minutes of the Manitoba, Assiniboia and Alberta Annual Conferences of the Methodist Church, 1907, p. 33; Annual Report of Missionary Society, 1908, p. 44, 1909, p. 224; 1910, p. 176-7; Minutes of the Thirteenth Session of the Manitoba Conference of the Methodist Church, 1916, p. 231.

²⁴⁰Manitoba Conference Report, 1908, p. 45. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario). It is impossible to ascertain exactly what these "new methods" involved although it is likely that they centred around a "firmer stance" taken by the missionary. This may well have been expressed in intolerance, harsh judgements of behaviour and customs and, possibly, more public displays of chastising sinners.

for, though not particularly religious, she treated everyone fairly and did not try to tell them their religious duties as Mrs. Oke had done."²⁴¹ Jane Oke, she said, was a generous woman with a nursing background and provided much medical aid. However, "none of this seemed to offset her bossiness...I think the Indians, women as well as men, prefer women to give their lectures privately."²⁴²

The Ojibwa in the community clearly chose different responses to different missionaries and their families and church membership rose and fell accordingly. The Ojibwa lifestyle, however, remained a central framework in the world view of the people. John Semmens wrote in 1903 that

Even the medicines supplied are not administered as directed, and in many ways are not given at all, and not infrequently the complications are brought on by the combined use of Indian and white medicines. The morality of the people is not sufficiently developed to merit high praise. This is the outcome of old associations and old methods of living....It is not easy to correct wrongs which are winked at by the elders of the tribe....However we hope that society is moving out of darkness into light and knowledge and that the future will bring a purer social condition.²⁴³

McEwen wrote favourably about life in Berens River, remembering the friendly rapport between her husband, Doug, and Chief Jacob Berens. Her son Norman's best friend was

²⁴¹McEwen, Memoirs, p. 6.

²⁴²Ibid., p.6.

²⁴³"Report of John Semmens, Indian Agent, Berens River Agency, 1903," Sessional Papers, 1904, vol. 38, no. 11, pp. 82-83.

John James Everett, the chief's grandson. The family received a warm farewell when they left in 1910, wrote McEwen: "What a crowd of Indians came out...to see us leave; either they liked us or they were glad to see us go."²⁴⁴

William Berens became chief of the Berens River band in 1916 on his father's death. The importance he placed on agriculture and the raising of livestock counters the stereotypes in the reports of government agents who continued to complain that "these Indians [applied] very little energy to cultivating the ground" as "their other occupations [took] them away every year when they should [have been] at home looking after their garden plots."²⁴⁵

Until 1920, the fishing industry paid good prices which helped to offset the instability and poor prices in the fur market caused by World War I. By 1919, the value of fish

²⁴⁴McEwen, Memoirs, pp. 2,3,7. John James Everett was born in Berens River in 1894 and spent his life working in several other northern Manitoba and northwestern Ontario communities. A hunter and trapper, Everett also kept cows and horses. He and his wife, Alice, raised their own as well as many adopted and orphaned children. An elder in the Berens River Church for many years, he undertook full-time ministry work about 1960. Everett served as Lay Supply at Little Grand Rapids, Pikangikum and Berens River. He died in St. Adophe on 17 May 1976. As well as ministerial duties, Everett worked on translating the New Testament Scriptures and collaborated with Charles Fiere, of Cross Lake, on translating the Gospel into Saukteaux. He lived to see the first copies of the Gospel of Mark published by the Canadian Bible Society. (Victoria University Archives, Biographical Files.)

²⁴⁵"Report of S.J. Jackson, Inspector of Indian Agencies, 1904," Sessional Papers, 1905, vol. 39, no. 11, p.118.

and fur prices had doubled from what it had been during the five years prior to the War.²⁴⁶

The state of health in the community was unremarkable until 1918, when the huge 1918-1919 influenza pandemic hit Berens River. The first burial was held on 7 November 1918 and 22 more died over the next 11 days. Death rates on the reserve clustered around 100 per 1000; the under-six age group suffering the most with the high death rate of 250 per 1000.²⁴⁷

On the mission front, Joseph Lowes left Berens River in 1916 and was replaced by Percy Earl Jones and his wife Nellie who remained there until Rev. John Niddrie arrived in 1920.²⁴⁸ Jones was good friends with William Berens, who chose the minister's name for one of his sons at baptism.

²⁴⁶"Report of Duncan C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, 1919," Sessional Papers, 1920, vol. LVI, no. 8, 1920, p. 47.

²⁴⁷D. Ann Herring, "The 1918 Flu Epidemic in Manitoba Aboriginal Communities: Implications for Depopulation Theory in the Americas," paper presented at the American Society for Ethnohistory meeting, Toronto, November, 1990. p. 5. See also: "'There were Young People and Old People and Babies Dying Every Week': the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic at Norway House," in Ethnohistory 41,1, 1993, pp. 73-99.

²⁴⁸Rev. Percy Earl Jones was born in Tunbridge Wells, England in 1888. In 1908, he began his theological studies in Winnipeg's Wesley College. Jones served ten years in Methodist work at Poplar River and Berens River. He died in Melita, Manitoba on 8 May 1940. (Victoria University Archives, Biographical Files.)

Rev. John Niddrie was born in Oban, Scotland on 22 September, 1863. After arriving in Canada in 1884, he was ordained in 1915 and was stationed at the McDougall Mission in Morley, Alberta from 1889 to 1909. In Manitoba, he worked at Oxford House from 1910 to 1915 and Island Lake from 1915 to 1920. He then ministered at Berens River until his retirement in 1938. Niddrie died and was buried at Berens River on 4 May 1940. (Victoria University Archives, Biographical Files).

Seven decades later, Percy Earl Berens, son of William and Nancy, has fond memories of the Jones family and the minister, his namesake.

He was a good man. It's not very many ministers that goes into these Indian settlements to go and visit the chief and councillors. Percy Jones used to be at the house visiting my old man, my dad. That's how I happen to know...Winnona and Leslie Jones [the Jones children]. He [Leslie] was a little boy like myself; we used to play outside while they were talking inside.²⁴⁹

In 1918, Father Joseph De Grandpré and Brother Frederick Leach opened the Roman Catholic day school under the auspices of Brother Leach.²⁵⁰ Percy Berens also remembers Leach:

P.B. I'll tell you something, I'd sooner have that Brother Leach on that Berens River Reserve instead of that nursing station. Because if Mr. Leach had to walk to visit around...the Reserve with the snow up to his knees, he did. And then on that Reserve today, they'll never walk in my house and see if I'm alive or not.

S.G. So you thought that Brother Leach cared about the people?

²⁴⁹Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, 15 November 1994.

²⁵⁰Joseph De Grandpré, was born at Isle du Pas, Québec, on 26 March 1882 and died at Saint-Adolphe, Manitoba, on 7 March 1973. He studied at Assumption College from 1896 to 1905 and entered the novitiate at Lachine on 14 August, 1905. He was ordained at Ottawa on 5 June 1909. He served in western Canada at Camperville, Manitoba, Beauval, Saskatchewan and Berens River, Bloodvein and Little Grand Rapids, Manitoba. In: Gaston Carrière, Dictionnaire Biographique des Oblats de Marie Immaculée au Canada Vol. 1. (Ottawa: Éditions de L'Université D'Ottawa, 1976), p. 261.

Frederick Leach was born in London, England on 14 July 1892. He joined the Oblates of Mary Immaculate on 9 March 1913 at Lachine, Quebec and took his Perpetual Vows on 9 March 1920 at Berens River. Leach also served at Bloodvein and Little Grand Rapids. He continued living in Berens River after his semi-retirement in 1965 until 1978 where he entered full retirement in St. Boniface. Leach died on 12 July 1982 at the residence of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, St. Boniface. See: Brother Frederick Leach, Sixty years With Indians and Settlers on Lake Winnipeg (Winnipeg: Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Manitoba Province, c.1983).

P.B. Yeah, he did - very much he cared for the people.²⁵¹

During the 1920s and 1930s, Ojibwa men of Berens River continued with hunting and fishing as their main line of work.²⁵² The people in the community had also, by now, clearly chosen to at least partially adapt to many Euro-Canadian institutions. They participated in commercial ventures, attended the day schools, erected permanent buildings and raised stock according to their needs.

Rev. John Niddrie arrived in 1920 to begin work at the Methodist mission and remained as minister until his retirement in 1938. For most of that time, his Catholic counterparts were Joseph De Grandpré and Frederick Leach.

In 1927, Annie Niddrie arrived in Berens River to help her brother, John, keep house. She wound up staying for 33 years and wrote in her memoirs of life in the community, the beauty of which affected her deeply. "The scenery up the River was beautiful. The green and gold leaves on the trees was a sight to behold....I never had one lonesome day all those years."²⁵³

²⁵¹Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, 15 November 1994.

²⁵²"Report of Duncan C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, 1919," Sessional Papers, 1920, vol. LIV, no. 9, 1920, p. 47.

²⁵³Annie Niddrie, "Annie Niddrie of Berens River" (unpublished manuscript edited by John W. Chalmers), p. 5. Annie Niddrie was born in Morley, Alberta on 18 February 1892 and died on 19 February 1982. She worked at Berens River as organist, taught Sunday School and, in her words, "sat up with the dead when there was no one else available." p. 5.

In the 1930s, she remembered, everybody rode in a boat, and fishing and trapping were the primary ways to make a living. Older people made fish oil, smoked fish and moose meat, made pemmican and dried berries for winter. Mail was brought across the Lake by dog train until the late 1950s. In the 1930s, airplanes began landing at Berens River, small outboard motors began to be used on canvas canoes or the new wooden fishing yawls and tractor trailers replaced dog teams for winter freighting.²⁵⁴

Annie also wrote of the increasingly difficult economic conditions faced by the people. The Depression hit Berens River hard and many families were extremely short of food and clothes. Babies were fed on the water in which whitefish had been boiled, or on water that had been used to boil the roots of plants found in the bush (although they thrived on this). The reserve was full of tuberculosis and other illnesses. By 1940, food shortages warranted the opening of a home for the poor by the Department of Indian Affairs and Annie Niddrie was placed in charge, taking in any people the policeman sent her way.²⁵⁵

When studying the sources used here, one must apply much critical questioning before drawing solid conclusions. Times were indeed hard at Berens River during the 1930s just

²⁵⁴Ibid.

²⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 8,12. The first policeman, Corporal Stewart, had arrived with his family in 1928.

as they were hard across the country. However, government and missionary reports of starving Indians were meant to be read by superiors from whom the writers needed attention and financial support. In addition, the stereotype of the dependent Ojibwa was a deep-running and often useful one. Communities of helpless and needy native victims conferred a feeling of power and importance on government agents and which helped to fuel an entire missionary movement. Frederick Leach recorded a situation in his journal that, at face value, seems to provide evidence for starving and dependent Indians at Berens River but which, when examined from the perspective of William Berens, calls into question the degree of community desperation and dependence.

The fishing season in the summer of 1929 had been poor and on 7 January 1930, Leach wrote, "The Indians here are almost destitute and the situation is getting serious. There is practically no fur or fish." On 8 January, Leach sent an aerogram to the Indian Agent, alerting him to the sad state on the reserve, and began giving out soup to some families. On 10 January, he recorded that most families were in a state of semi-starvation. On 18 January 1930, Leach wrote, "saw the chief today re. his starving Indians. He has some fool idea that many could live on rabbits. He forgets that rabbits are very scarce."

Emergency meetings were held on 21 January and 11 March. Missionaries Leach and Niddrie and the Indian Agent

were convinced that the Indians needed rations, the Hudson's Bay manager was concerned about the unavailability of rations and William Berens continued to say that his people did not need rations. At a third meeting on 30 March, Chief Berens submitted the idea that, instead of receiving rations, the community could perhaps get an advance on their treaty money. This was the solution finally agreed upon.²⁵⁶

Obviously, William Berens did not wish to accept rations, a move that would have placed the community in a dependent position, and he worked to find an alternative solution to a problem that was probably very serious. Leach's condescending disregard of the rabbit-hunting idea shows a superior attitude and clouded judgement - what, after all, would he have known about hunting rabbits? Berens, who had spent his life hunting, understood much more about the viability of this solution. This was an issue about independence, with William Berens wanting to affirm the community's independence and the missionaries and agent working, intentionally or not, to decrease it.

By 1940, the Ojibwa of Berens River had been "wards" of the Dominion government for 65 years and the community had, as had the wider world, undergone many changes. Throughout, they selected their responses to

²⁵⁶Journal of Frederick Leach (Oblate Archives, Manitoba Province).

those changes, took in stride those aspects of Euro-Canadian institutions which were either unavoidable (such as compulsory school attendance) and/or which were of use to them and moved on with life. Throughout, all change and growth was carried out within a framework that remained clearly Ojibwa.

METHODIST MISSIONARIES

AT BERENS RIVER	
YEAR(S)	NAME
1874	E.R. Young
1876-1877	John Semmens
1881-1884	William J. Hope
1885-1887	Enos Langford
1888-1892	supply
1893-1903	James Arthur McLachlin
1904	Willis W. Shoup
1905-1906	Thomas Neville
1907-1909	Arthur Oke
1910-1916	Joseph H. Lowes
1917-1919	Percy E. Jones
1920-1937	John W. Niddrie
1938-1940	Luther L. Schuetze

AT LITTLE GRAND RAPIDS	
YEAR(S)	NAME
1899-1901	visited by J.A. McLachlan
1905-1907	William Ivens
1908	J. Woodsworth
1909	Joseph Jones
1910	Roy Taylor
1911	J.H. Wilding
1914	Alfred G. Johnson
1917-1918	Mary Nanakwap
1923	supply
1927-1937	Luther L. Schuetze
1938	R. Schuetze
1939-1940	Colin Douglas Street

ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES AT BERENS RIVER

YEAR(S)	FATHERS
1912-1914	Siméon Perreault
1913	Célien Gauthier
1914-1917	Camille Perreault
1915	Gustave Fafard
1916	Eugène Baillargeon
1917	Siméon Perreault
1918-1921	Philippe Valès
1919	Joseph de Grandpré
1921	Edouard Planet
1921	Etienne Bonnard
1921	Claude Kerbrat
1922-1925	Joseph de Grandpré
1925-1927	Alphonse Paradis
1926-1941	Joseph de Grandpré
1927	Léandre Gauthier
1930-1936	Célien Gauthier
1937	Julien Jalbert
1938	Eugène Baillargeon
1939-1948	Gérard Pinette

YEAR(S)	BROTHERS
1917-1922; 1923-1926	Jacques Grall
1918	Théodore de Bijl
1918-1921; 1924-1926; 1927-1936	Frederick Leach
1922	Eugène Paquet
1936-1944	Arthur Limoges
1939-1949	Alcide Gagnon

ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES AT LITTLE GRAND RAPIDS

YEAR(S)	FATHERS
1925-1926	Joseph de Grandpré
1928-1929	Léandre Gauthier

YEAR(S)	BROTHERS
1926-1927	Frederick Leach

Chapter V

THE OJIBWA WORLD VIEW

In his discussion of Ojibwa ontology, world view and behaviour, anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell drew upon Robert Redfield's definition of world view as, "the picture the members of a society have of the properties and characters upon their stage of action....[it] refers to the way the world looks to that people looking out." A peoples' world view comprises "that outlook upon the universe that is characteristic of [them], as contrasted to the perspectives of outsiders looking in at them."²⁵⁷ The best way to understand the world view of the Berens River Ojibwa is to study their actions which were carried out within a framework that revolved around relationships between human persons and other than human persons, as well as individual quests for power and survival.

Missionaries, settlers and many authors, past and present, have represented aboriginal religions as being static and "traditional." Aside from that shared perspective, they have ranged from representing Ojibwa religion as a one-dimensional confusion to an evil web of immorality and iniquity, to a timeless innocent Eden that survives in stark contrast to the violent and corrupt history of turbulence and change in the real world.

²⁵⁷A. Irving Hallowell, Contributions to Anthropology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 357.

This chapter pursues a different interpretation, exploring the depth and complexity of a dynamic religious life that, like other great religions of the world, was founded on the power and passion of belief and yet which has an enormous capacity for flexibility and adaptation. It will discuss, also, the engagement of Ojibwa people in engage in critical thinking and empiricism with respect to their own religious practices and those of others

As Hallowell wrote, the psychological core of the Ojibwa religion involves other than human beings: a faith in their power, trust in their vitally needed aid to human beings and a dependence on them in order to experience a good life. The heart of this religion is "in the interpersonal relationships [Ojibwa people] seek to maintain between themselves and other than human beings." Since humans are always working to increase their own powers through the aid of ever-present other than humans, religious behaviour is not a compartmentalized aspect of life that is confined to special rites and ceremonies; rather "this religious core manifests itself in widely ramified contexts."²⁵⁸ Hallowell defines Ojibwa religious behaviour as any activity through which an individual or group strive to "promote a good life for human beings by making explicit

²⁵⁸A. Irving Hallowell, The Ojibwa of Berens River, p. 81.

recognition, direct or indirect, of man's faith in and dependence on other than human persons."²⁵⁹

The history of the Ojibwa healer and leader Fair Wind (Naamiwan) provides an example of the dynamism and flexibility that existed in the Ojibwa world view and in their ongoing creation of tradition.²⁶⁰ Hallowell was told that the ideas of Drum Dances came to the upper Berens River from an Aboriginal visitor to Little Grand Rapids around 1912. Recent research has shown that several features of these dances were very similar to the Ojibwa dream drum ceremonies which spread through Minnesota and Wisconsin in the 1870s. They were initiated by Tailfeather Woman, a Sioux, who was told in a dream how to make a large drum and of the songs to accompany it. The ensuing ceremony "became the vehicle for making peace between the Sioux and the Ojibwa."²⁶¹ Subsequently, Thunderbirds (pinésiwuk) gave Maggie Wilson her Drum Dance through dreams and it was performed at the Manitou Reserve from 1918 to 1929. Clearly, the pivotal ideas involved were moving throughout the Rainy River and the Lake of the Woods area. It is probable that Ojibwa people carried them north to Jackhead

²⁵⁹Ibid., p. 82. See also A. Irving Hallowell, Contributions to Anthropology, pp. 380-383.

²⁶⁰Jennifer S.H. Brown in collaboration with Maureen Matthews, "Fair Wind: Medicine and Consolation on the Berens River," in Journal of the Canadian Historical Association (1993), pp. 55-74.

²⁶¹Brown with Matthews, "Fair Wind," p. 64.

and the Bloodvein River via the Winnipeg River and Lake Winnipeg.²⁶²

By 1932, three or four big drums were used in a number of ceremonies by different families at Little Grand Rapids. They bore a striking resemblance to those used in Minnesota and Wisconsin, yet like Fair Wind's drum, they were each distinctive. Their histories underscore the Ojibwa ability to receive new ideas, examine them and either reject, recast or integrate them (in bits or in totality) into a dynamic life.

The power of belief has been a cornerstone of religions throughout the world. Homer's Odyssey begins with the line, "Sing to me, O Muse, of man's many wanderings." This invocation of the Muse expressed a conviction held by such writers as Homer and Virgil - it reflected their quest for aid from a higher power, a source outside themselves, which they sought before writing their classic epics.

In John 14:10 and 12, Jesus discussed miracles saying, "The Father that dwelleth in me doeth the works....He that believeth in Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do." The great composers Brahms, Beethoven and Mozart described their entries into dreamlike states that were infused with God, existences of an almost pure belief during which a higher power wrote through them. In Brahms's words,

²⁶²Brown with Matthews, "Fair Wind," p. 64.

It cannot be done merely by will power working through the conscious mind, which is an evolutionary product of the physical realm and perishes with the body. It can only be accomplished by the soul-powers within - the real ego which survives bodily death. Those powers are quiescent to the conscious mind unless illumined by Spirit. To realize that we are one with the Creator, as Beethoven did, is...awe-inspiring. Very few...have come into that realization and that is why there are so few...creative geniuses. [In the dream states] the Spirit [illuminates] the soul-powers within, and...I see clearly what is obscure in my ordinary moods; then I feel capable of drawing inspiration from above...the ideas flow upon me, directly from God, and not only do I see distinct themes ...but they are clothed in the right forms, harmonies.²⁶³

Yellow Legs, a powerful leader of the Midéwiwin and the great-grandfather of Chief William Berens, once walked on the water to an island on Lake Winnipeg in search of a special remedy. On another occasion, he sent two men to an island in search of a stone that he described carefully to them. The stone later proved to have magical qualities in the Midéwiwin Lodge.²⁶⁴ More than sixty years after William Berens described these events to Hallowell,

²⁶³Arthur M. Abell, Talks with Great Composers: Candid Conversations with Brahms, Puccini, Strauss, and Others (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1955). p.5.

²⁶⁴Jennifer S.H. Brown, " "A Place in Your Mind for Them All:" Chief William Berens" " in Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers, ed. James A. Clifton (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1989), p. 208. Yellow Legs, who married Mistamut, lived on the west side of Lake Winnipeg in the late 1700s. It is likely that his origins were from the Lake Superior area and if this is true, he would have been one of the first Ojibwa to move into the Lake Winnipeg area as the first major migrations there likely occurred between the 1780s and 1790s, a time when the Ojibwa and their Montreal-based fur trade counterparts expanded their territories westward. He died before 1830.

William's son, Percy, discussed them with me. He was clear on the importance of belief.

S.G. I've heard that your great great grandfather Yellow Legs walked on the water. Have you heard about that?

P.B. An Indian of that long time ago that was really really - that knew it was a gift given to them - given to them - that they could do them things what you and I couldn't do.

S.G. Why can't we do them any more? Why can't you walk on the water?

P.B. That's a simple word. No belief.

S.G. What did Yellow Legs believe in so strongly? You say it was because of his strong belief that he could walk on the water.

P.B. Because he had that belief...in the spirits. In the spirits, that's the belief.²⁶⁵

Percy Berens explained that he could never walk on the water, saying, "my belief is not strong enough." Walter Green is an Ojibwa man living at Berens River. His response to the story of Yellow Legs, like that of Percy Berens, reflects the centrality of belief:

I never heard about that [Yellow Legs walking on the water] but I heard a lot about medicine men. They're so wonderful - they can do anything. Someone was telling me there was a big rock in the lake. And someone said, "do you know that the medicine men in the old days could open that stone in half and put it back together?" That's how much they believed in what they were doing. They were blessed.²⁶⁶

Yet most missionaries, government agents and settlers assumed that Aboriginal peoples were not only without history of any note, but that their simple religions lacked

²⁶⁵Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

²⁶⁶Walter Green to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

the depth and integrity necessary to produce miracles or sustain deeply held or inspired belief.

In the 1930s, Ruth Landes noted that the Ojibwa saw all religion and magic as medicine or as power.²⁶⁷ Prior to the 1875 signing of the Treaty at Berens River, leadership was in the hands of medicine men - those who had gained the most power within their communities through visitations in their dreams from the pawáganak (dream visitors). These were the first chiefs and the significance here is in the power of religion within Ojibwa society.²⁶⁸

Certainly religion, and the power and protection that resulted from relationships with other than human beings, were seen by these people as critical for survival and success. The power of medicine and magic can perhaps best be seen in one Ojibwa interpretation of their history: in the nineteenth century, much animosity existed between the Sucker clan and the clans who lived adjacent territory: the Loons to the south, the Moose and Kingfisher clans on the east shores of Lake Winnipeg and along the Berens River. It was not warfare but shamanistic killings that took lives in the struggle between the River people versus the Berens River and Little Grand Rapids folk.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Ruth Landes, Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), p. 22.

²⁶⁸A. Irving Hallowell, Culture and Experience (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), p. 121.

²⁶⁹James R. Stevens ed., Legends From the Forest: Told by Chief Thomas Fiddler (Moonbeam, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1985), p. 42.

A. Irving Hallowell discussed Ojibwa religion in some depth.²⁷⁰ In the Ojibwa world, he explained, humans were extremely dependent on other than human beings who took pity on mortals and fulfilled their desires.²⁷¹ Humans needed power from these entities to the extent that they could not survive without them. As discussed above, at the core of Ojibwa religion was faith in the power of other than human beings, trust in their crucial aid to survival, and dependence on them for the experience of a rich life. Humans worked continually with other than human beings to maintain a good relationship and this led the Ojibwa of the Berens River area, especially adolescent and adult males, into a constant quest to increase their gifts of power. Hallowell, in fact, defined Ojibwa religious behaviour as any activity by which an individual or group seeks to "promote a good life for human beings by making explicit

²⁷⁰A. Irving Hallowell, The Ojibwa of Berens River Manitoba: Ethnography into History ed. with Preface and Afterword by Jennifer S.H. Brown (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992).

²⁷¹In the Ojibwa world, humans, animals and other than human persons, or manitous, possessed different physical characters but were related to each other. Humans had more power than animals and less than Manitous which personified natural forces, life events, some natural forces, and natural places, things or persons. Natural disasters could be avoided by treating Manitous with respect, although one never knew when the whimsical nature of a Manitou could cause problems. Some of the most prominent Manitous included Nanabozho, a trickster/culture hero of myth; Mikinak the Great Turtle, the messenger at shaking tent ceremonies; The Four Winds, responsible for changes in the weather and the seasons; the Underwater Monster or Sea Serpent which had powers over both water animals and land animals and which could wreck havoc through creating huge storms; and The Thunderbirds, counter forces to the former, members of the hawk family who manifested themselves through thunder and lightning. For an in-depth discussion, see Michael R. Angel, "The Ojibwa - Missionary Encounter at Rainy Lake Mission, 1839-1857" (M.A. thesis, The University of Manitoba, 1986), pp. 36-43.

recognition, direct or indirect, of man's faith in and dependence on other than human persons."²⁷² All this was not about intrinsic personal power but was given from others. Thus religion was linked closely to good conduct.

Since only medicine men had the power to directly invoke the most powerful other than human spirits, average Ojibwa sought their help; the validity of the conjurers was that they themselves had been empowered by other than human beings.²⁷³ As Ojibwa theories of causation were more personalized, impersonal causes did not exist. All phenomena and occurrences resulted from interactions between human and other than human persons or between humans and other humans.²⁷⁴ The most vital source of contact for average humans with their other than human "grandfathers" was through dreams, and the number of guardian spirits whom an individual acquired varied from person to person.²⁷⁵

Besides maintaining erroneous theories as to the depth and complexity of Ojibwa religion, missionaries believed that native peoples lacked a coherent, self-contained system of beliefs that was continually examined and measured against individuals' life experiences. In his article, "Some Empirical Aspects of Northern Saulteaux Religion,"

²⁷²Hallowell, The Ojibwa of Berens River, p. 82.

²⁷³Ibid. p. 82.

²⁷⁴Ibid. p. 71.

²⁷⁵Ibid. pp. 86, 91.

Hallowell cautioned against assuming that Ojibwa religious beliefs were mechanically passed down with only dogma and mythology to support them. Rather, their religious experiences were taken seriously enough to "make them a subject of relative thinking and discussion... [and] inevitably subject to challenge on empirical grounds."²⁷⁶

The men of Berens River were primarily hunters and it was critical for them to be intimately engaged with their environments: with the present and with what was actually occurring in their midst. While their traditional world view provided a framework for their outlooks and interpretations, their first-hand perceptions of "celestial, meteorological and biotic phenomena [were] also important."²⁷⁷ Experience and belief were harmonized in order for beliefs to be genuine and to survive. Western society in the nineteenth century was also in the throes of an empiricism which had been generated in the Enlightenment. The methodology of critical questioning was emerging in science, social science and religion.

A critical difference between the two societies, however, centred around belief. Although both believed in the power of belief, Ojibwa groups encompassed, within their world view, an enormous capacity for flexibility in

²⁷⁶A. Irving Hallowell, "Some Empirical Aspects of Northern Saulteaux Religion," American Anthropologist 36, 1934. p. 392.

²⁷⁷Ibid. p. 393.

defining reality compared with the rather rigid doctrinal structures of the missionaries they encountered. Percy Berens, a Christian, does not believe in spirits but, he explains, this does not mean that they do not exist:

- S.G. You say you don't believe in spirits at all.
 P.B. No, I don't. I've only got one belief and one spirit.
 S.G. For you, that's the answer?
 P.B. Right. I choose that.
 S.G. But Yellow Legs chose to believe in spirits - was that okay?
 P.B. That's okay too, that's good too.
 S.G. So you're not saying that spirits don't exist? You're saying that you don't choose to believe in them?
 P.B. Yes, I don't choose to believe in them spirits.
 S.G. But they can exist for other people?
 P.B. Yes, they will exist. If you believe strong enough to believe that there's spirits there then they're there. Now you know what I mean? And that's what those old time Indians had. They strongly believed in them spirits of evil and righteousness. That was their belief, see? Evil and righteous spirits.²⁷⁸

Empiricism has, for Euro-Canadians, lent credibility to their institutions and it has been a common assumption that other races lacked this tool to apply to their own belief systems.²⁷⁹ Interestingly, however, the Ojibwa world view also builds upon the idea that seeing is believing. William Berens grew up in a Methodist home. His parents, however, never allowed their Christianity to separate them from his

²⁷⁸Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994. Interestingly, Percy's dichotomising of evil versus righteous spirits suggests the influence of Christianity in his life.

²⁷⁹For an excellent discussion on this, see: Olive Patricia Dickason, The Myth of the Savage: The Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984). All Amerindian societies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led structured lives with organized societies based on coherent belief systems and cyclical patterns. It was the Europeans' ignorance of this that led to the label, "savage."

father's non-Christian family. William participated in a number of Methodist and Ojibwa ceremonies and events, the latter having a lasting impact. After attending the Midéwiwin and seeing his grandfather, Bear, curing with his medicines and conducting the shaking tent ceremony, he decided that Ojibwa rituals had a power that Christian rituals lacked:

He practised the old Indian religion. He may have died about the time the first missionary came. But if he lived longer he never changed his beliefs. This grandfather had lost all the fingers of his left hand except the thumb, yet he was a conjuror. How could he have shaken the tent himself? I used to see him go into the conjuring tent but the voices I heard coming out of it did not seem like his voice. I saw him cure sick people with his medicine and by nib kiwin. I had reason to believe that my grandfather knew what he was doing and that his beliefs were true. I used to hear my mother talk about God but I did not see anything that my mother did that proved to me that what happened was through the help of God. I saw no power comparable to what I had seen my grandfather use. For I saw my grandfather in the Midéwiwin once. It must have been the last one ever held at the mouth of the river. My grandfather was the headman. That is another thing I can never forget.²⁸⁰

Fred Baptiste, an Ojibwa resident of Berens River, is a Christian who also grounds his belief in the Thunderbirds in

²⁸⁰A. Irving Hallowell ed. "Reminiscences of Chief William Berens" (Unpublished paper, 1940), p.7. Bear (Maskwa), Yellow Legs's eldest son, was William Berens's paternal grandfather. Born about 1790, he married Amo (Bee) or Victoria. He died at Berens River circa 1873-74, without converting to Christianity, just before the mission opened there, although he did adopt the Christian surname Berens. Travelling with Amo and his younger brother Cauwanas to the east side of Lake Winnipeg, they brought his father's sacred stone and, in the 1860s and 1870s, conducted the last Midéwiwin ceremonies at Berens River. The three were pivotal in maintaining Ojibwa traditions among subgroups who mingled along the river, reflecting a variety of adaptations to life in a dynamic community.

empirical proof, in one instance furnished by an Ojibwa Methodist preacher. In his words:

When I was up at Pikangikum, Ontario, I used to know guys who came down from Pikangekum and preach here - Fiddler, Adam Fiddler, I think it was. He'd take the service here - old Niddrie let him preach in the afternoon. And then he gave me a feather - a feather that's that long [measures a two-foot span with his hands] and about that wide [measures a four-foot span]. He says, "you know what this is?" And I says, "that's from a big bird." He got that from the high rocks where there's thunder on Percy Island - that's where they [the Thunderbirds] keep their young ones. That's where he got this feather, it's just a young one's feather.²⁸¹

Another Ojibwa member of the Berens River community remembers his doubt, as a young man, in the validity of the shaking tent ritual. John Edward Everett explains:

J.E.E. I didn't believe it myself but I was told then, "okay, you're going to see him." [David Eaglestick, a medicine man at Little Grand Rapids]
 S.G. Then what happened?
 J.E.E. I gave him some tobacco first.
 S.G. And then what happened?
 J.E.E. Well I wanted to find out about it - it was bolted right to the ground, you know. The thing would shake!!
 S.G. You saw the tent shaking and that's when you believed?
 J.E.E. I wanted to find out about it....it was in that evening - there were five of us. Well, actually, I was just about scared that thing was going to take off - everything was shaking!
 S.G. What did you hear?
 J.E.E. Well, one way to find out. You don't have to open that. You talk from the outside. I want to find out how my friends in Berens River were doing.
 S.G. So, John, before you saw the shaking tent, you didn't believe in it?
 J.E.E. Well actually I didn't believe. That's the reason I wanted to find out.²⁸²

²⁸¹Fred Baptiste to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

²⁸²John Edward Everett to Susan Gray, Berens River, 2 December 1994.

Percy Berens tells of hearing the drumming and singing of what he calls the "mound builders" (Memegwesiwag) at three different times in his life. The experiences are what supported his belief in their existence.

P.B. That's another thing. Mound builders - Memegwesiwag - that's an Indian name. I heard them drumming. Maybe it's hard for you to believe. I heard them drumming. Three times in my life I heard that.

S.G. Why were they drumming?

P.B. I don't know, I guess they were going to bless me, I guess. It's just as well I heard them drums, see? It was a nice day and I was in the canoe because I was going down on a moose hunt. And then I was paddling. All of a sudden I heard drums so I just put my paddle down and I was listening like that. My cousin on the stern steering the canoe said, "What do you hear?" I said, "Listen to them drums," I said. "Listen to the Memegwesiwag singing" And he stopped paddling. The canoe was drifting along the river. "I don't hear nothing!" he says. "Oh come on!" I said, "you can just hear it plain," And he stopped again and: "No, I don't hear nothing. You're all b.s.," he says to me [laughter].²⁸³

In Percy Berens's words, "But I heard them, three times in my life I heard that same thing. And that's why I fully believe there's people, Memegwesiwag, mound builders they are....I truly believe on that because three times I heard

²⁸³Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994. Percy's brother, Gordon, a United Church minister, explained the Memegwesiwag thus: "There's people living, isolated people like, that could do a lot of things. They call them Memegwesiwag. They're the people that did a lot of magic things. And they live on rocks. They had a home on a rock. Their homes were in a rock. And that's one thing a lot of white people don't believe. They don't believe their home was in a rock and if they want to bless you, you'll hear that drum. First you'll hear that drum and then they'll show in person and give you what you want to know or what you want to do in a magical way. They come in dreams too. You could have them in dreams in a dream like. They call them Memegwasiwag, Small People." Percy was, indeed, blessed by the Memegwasiwag. Gordon tells of Percy's encounter, remembering how his brother offered tobacco to the Small People after hearing them drum. The following day, the tobacco was gone and in its place lay the rib of an animal not found in those parts. Gordon says, "Well he kept that thing, you know, and when he was trapping nobody could beat him. He was always the head trapper. Nobody could beat him. He was always the highest one." Gordon Berens to Maureen Matthews and Jennifer S. H. Brown, Fisher River Seniors Residence, 20 March 1995.

that drumming and singing."²⁸⁴ It is interesting that while, for Percy, the existence of the Memewesiwag was validated through his own experience, his cousin, who heard nothing, did not blindly believe Percy at the time.

When asked if William Berens had believed in the Thunderbirds, Percy replied:

he believed on the Thunderbirds because of what happened to him. He seen it with his own eyes....I believe what I see with my own eyes. And I believe that. Thunder. I believe that. [and earlier] Yes, you can believe in them [Thunderbirds] easily because you can hear them.²⁸⁵

Gordon Berens, a former United Church minister and Percy's older brother, discussed his father's belief in the Memegwesiwag. Again, he emphasized that seeing was believing: "He believed in them [the Memegwesiwag]. He believed on that. He was a strong believer on that because he had seen quite a few things. [That's] why he was such a strong believer."²⁸⁶

Similarly, the Ojibwa of Fond du Lac used empirical observation in drawing their conclusions that cattle possessed magic powers. Early traders had introduced these animals to the region by 1806 and, over a period of three decades, the Ojibwa made careful observations, gaining some

²⁸⁴Percy Berens to Maureen Matthews, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 12 September 1994.

²⁸⁵Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

²⁸⁶Gordon Berens to Maureen Matthews and Jennifer S.H. Brown, Fisher River Seniors Residence, 20 March 1995.

useful insights. In 1834, they explained to the missionary Edmund Franklin Ely that cattle closely resembled buffalo, a perception which was reinforced by the traders' penchant to allow the beasts to roam freely in the woods. They noticed that cattle, however, ate many plants that no buffalo or other wild animals ever ate. In her article, "Of Missionaries and Their Cattle: Ojibwa Perceptions of a Missionary as Evil Shaman," Rebecca Kugel explains that this observation led to the Ojibwa conclusion that cattle must possess spiritually-derived powers and must have great virtue. Shamans thus worked to harness this power during healing ceremonies, holding up pictures of cows in front of the ill, thus inducing the sick to dream of cattle. "In what was clear proof to the Ojibwa of the spiritual power of cattle [they observed that] after such dreams the sick [recovered]." ²⁸⁷

The validity given to personal testimony is a significant aspect of Saulteaux society. Carefully distinguished from second-hand reports, it provides corroborative evidence for Berens River Ojibwa in cases of doubt. When a young boy told of seeing a strange bird lying on the rocks after a storm, elders were sceptical. Only years later, when the testimony came from another corroborative source, did the original tale gain credibility

²⁸⁷Rebecca Kugel, "Of Missionaries and Their Cattle: Ojibwa Perceptions of a Missionary as Evil Shaman," *Ethnohistory*, 41,2, 1994, pp. 228-229.

and people believed that the boy had actually seen a Thunderbird.²⁸⁸

Multiple testimony has always been seen as even more difficult to contradict, especially in cases involving the sightings of giant animals. William Berens, together with his two sons, sighted the Great Snake, for example, and this had real validity in their community. Discussing the high ranking given to firsthand testimony as observed fact, Hallowell said, "Oral testimony among the Saulteaux...parallels the exaggerated emphasis upon the authority of the written word among us as presented, e.g. in the newspaper reports, "true story" magazines, etc."²⁸⁹ In Ojibwa history there have been very few reports of sightings of the giant animals and this, too, adds credibility to the stories of those who have seen them.

Yet, even personal testimony was seen critically. Not all sightings were considered valid. Someone who described an encounter with a strange creature outside the realm of recognised mythology and tradition would have been, in Hallowell's words, "subject to ridicule."²⁹⁰ Percy Berens's contempt for charlatan conjuring at Berens River provides an example of critical reflection.

S.G. Have you ever seen a conjuring tent?

²⁸⁸Hallowell, "Some Empirical Aspects," p. 395.

²⁸⁹Hallowell, "Some Empirical Aspects," p. 395.

²⁹⁰ A.Irving Hallowell, Ibid. p. 395.

P.B. I've seen it! But it was a mockery. They did that at Berens River. But they didn't really know what to do.

S.G. Why not?

P.B. Because it was lost! And that guy that went in that tent didn't have no power at all from the spirits.²⁹¹

The Ojibwa beliefs in a flat earth and in the daily journey of the sun across the sky was not based on blind faith but were sustained through daily observation. While it was true that the idea of the earth existing as an island was rooted in dogma, contact with white transoceanic visitors supported the idea that their world was surrounded by water and schoolroom maps reinforced the idea of "flatness."

The Thunderbirds provide an example of Ojibwa empirical measurement. In April, both the Thunderbirds and the ordinary birds arrive in Berens River from the south. In the fall the Thunderbirds and birds move south, following the "summer birds' trail" (Milky Way.) The existence of thunder is linked to the presence of birds and is supported by the Ojibwa conviction that natural phenomena are animate.²⁹²

Dreams have been an exceedingly important part of the religious culture among Ojibwa who believe that they "obtain direct personal knowledge of the spiritual entities of the cosmos, e.g., the "bosses" or "owners" of the phenomenal

²⁹¹Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

²⁹²Hallowell, "Some Empirical Aspects," p. 394-395.

world, as well as other beings, through dreams."²⁹³ Jack Fiddler, a leader of the Sucker clan from Sandy Lake, once told Edward Paupanakiss, a Cree missionary from Norway House, "I believe in my dreams. Everything we dream is right for us....Our dreams are our religions."²⁹⁴

The puberty fast, undergone by young boys, institutionalized the importance of dreaming; this was the time when the pawáganak who would bless and aid the boys throughout their lives were attained. As far as Ojibwa people were concerned, men were rendered practically powerless without these "grandfathers", especially if they aspired to lead religious ceremonies or be especially good hunters.²⁹⁵ Different people, however, attained varying degrees of power from other than humans; one man might have several guardian spirits, another might have only one, while another might not have acquired any at all. Only a few acquired exceptional powers.²⁹⁶

²⁹³Ibid. p.398.

²⁹⁴Thomas Fiddler and James R. Stevens, Killing the Shamen (Moonbeam, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1985), p.44.

²⁹⁵Hallowell, "Some Empirical Aspects," p. 398.

²⁹⁶A. Irving Hallowell, "The Ojibwa of Berens River", p.89. The pawáganak could be seen through the eyes of the soul as opposed to the body. An integral part of reality, Ojibwa people have never regarded them as supernatural beings although their powers were indeed greater than those of the human, plant or animal entities under their control. If a man wished to hunt an individual animal, it was important for him to gain favour with that animal's "boss" or "owner. Once this had been done, it was equally important for him to avoid offending that entity. (See Hallowell, "Some Empirical Aspects", p. 398.)

For Ojibwa people, dreams have been a source of empirical evidence regarding "the genii of the cosmos."²⁹⁷ Interestingly, in the case of the boy who saw the Thunderbird lying on a rock, the later source which confirmed the sighting came from a man who dreamed of Thunderbirds.²⁹⁸ Since the pawáganak (dream visitors) were normally seen only in dreams, the boy's story of seeing the Thunderbird had to be confirmed by the testimony of the man who dreamed of them, rather than the other way around.

Hallowell described the dream of a Christian Ojibwa which showed how dreams were concretely tested by the Saulteaux. The man was having a poor hunt and lay down to sleep, dreaming of a long trail running north. In his dream, he walked on this path toward a deadfall until he saw two attractive girls dressed in white. One was setting a table with food and it was she whom he approached. As she told him the food was for him, he awoke and began walking north, despite the fact that the path was dangerous since he had just set many steel traps on this line. "But when I got there [to the deadfall], I found a fisher....It was female. I knew what my dream meant then."²⁹⁹ A female creature had provided food for the man both in his dream and in reality.

²⁹⁷Hallowell "Some Empirical Aspects," p.398.

²⁹⁸Ibid. p. 398.

²⁹⁹Ibid. p. 400.

For him, the dream's validity was obvious, Christianity notwithstanding.

The Ojibwa attained empirical proof of the validity of pawáganak by observing relative hunting success. All men in a community had good hunting skills and shared a similar technology. Fur-bearing animals were distributed fairly evenly. How, then, could one explain wide variations in degrees of hunting success? Successful men had clearly been blessed with the help of animal "owners." The less successful had either not been helped or, if so, something had gone wrong: either their pawáganak were weak, or a man had failed to properly honour an "owner" - or he was simply a poor hunter!³⁰⁰

Betsey Patrick, an Ojibwa woman from Berens River, described a dream which changed the course of her life and which illustrates the kind of help given to humans by other than humans through dreams. She explains that she could have been a very good medicine woman but that she chose, in her youth, not to follow this course. Sarah Jane MacKay, from Split Lake, was an excellent medicine woman, able to cure those whom nobody else could cure. Sarah's granddaughter had died and, missing the company of a little girl, she became fond of Betsey Patrick. When Betsey was 12 years old, she went on a canoe trip with Sarah. They camped on an island. Betsey knew that Sarah wanted her to become a

³⁰⁰Ibid. p. 400.

medicine woman and to teach her in this art. Although Betsey was frightened on the first night of the trip, she said nothing to Sarah.

That night, she dreamed of a river. A log led across the water to a huge rock which sat at the top of a waterfall. Betsey crossed the log, moving towards this rock in which a door appeared and opened. "A tiny little old shrunken man was in that rock. He told me to come in. I went in and he gave me a book made of birchbark and told me to read this book, he said these were the secrets of life." Betsey remembers that the pages, she recognized, described "the joy of the human heart."

When she had finished, the man told her there was something else to see. Another door appeared in a wall of the rock. As she passed through this door, she encountered a Thunderbird and as she looked at his eyes, she saw that they were filled with lightning. They dazzled and terrified her. Betsey ran away - away from the little man, away from the rock, across the log and back to the shore.

When she awoke, Sarah was making tea and Betsey said to the older woman, "I cannot do what you want me to do." As Betsey Patrick sees her life, this was her choice and she made a decision not to take on those powers.³⁰¹

³⁰¹Betsey Patrick to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

A dream that Walter Green had as a child reflects the continuing impact of dreams on the lives of the Saulteaux, the significance of the power of belief in their religious life and the syncretism that has come from Ojibwa people creatively integrating aspects of both Saulteaux and Christian concepts.

S.G. Did you learn to play the organ from [Rev. Niddrie]?
 W.G. This is what I call a gift. You know, when I was a little boy...a couple of my uncles sent an organ to where my aunt and I were living. And they used to ask my uncle to play the organ. Boy I used to wish I could play - many times I'd stand there watching him. But one night when I was sleeping I had a dream. Somebody came to me - like an angel, you know_ a lady. So she took me and grabbed my hand and said, "Come on over this way." Her face was just beautiful and there were flowers all around her. So she took me out and we came to a great big building. It was a building like marble, you know. And she took me into that building. We walked for a long way and, while we were walking, she turned to one room and said, "This is the place." And I looked around and saw an organ - a pipe organ. So she said, "Is this what you want to play?" I said, "Yes, very much." And then she sat down and I sat down beside her and first she played Jesus Loves Me - do you know that song? Then she played it twice. Then she said, "Okay, you play." So I sat down, and I played for a long time. That's how I learned. When I was fourteen, I played the organ in the church, prayer meetings, wakes.

S.G. What did the angel look like?

W.G. Well, like what you'd see in a picture. Her dress was white and she had a glittering crown, a long white gown, a little bit of something around her waist. What she had on her head was just glittering, like silver or gold. Some kind of wings, I couldn't see very good.

S.G. Can you tell me about how dreams are important?

W.G. It all depends on who you were. If you don't believe in dreams, they're useless. You got to believe in them.³⁰²

Shamans, too, had to be blessed by certain kinds of pawáganak; their powers were not seen as having come from genetic talent, nor were they learned since no formal social

³⁰²Walter Green to Susan Gray, Berens River, 1 December 1994.

mechanism for this existed. Here too, abuse of one's powers could result in abandonment by the pawáganak. It is in the realm of the conjuring tent that we see one of the strongest modes of empirical testing in Ojibwa society. Here people could have direct contact with many pawáganak.

During the ceremony, the tent, which was shaken by the controllers of the winds, was filled with the voices of the entities. One could hear, rather than see, any of the spiritual entities. Always present were Mikinak (the Boss Snapping Turtle), one or more winds, and the spiritual "owner" of the conjuring institution, "the one who takes them out"³⁰³ This ritual was used to obtain information about people living or events occurring at a distance in time or space, to recover lost or stolen items and, at one time, to detect and combat sources of witchcraft. This last was especially important in curing illness because it was important to discover whether a person was ill due to sorcery or due to his or her own moral transgressions. With the help of a good conjuror, one could foretell events, kill another person or bring the dead to life.³⁰⁴

Conjuring was empirically tested in Ojibwa society. This was based on auditory perception as well as on direct results. Was the information obtained correct? Was the

³⁰³A. Irving Hallowell, "Some Empirical Aspects," p. 402.

³⁰⁴For an in-depth discussion, see A. Irving Hallowell, The Role of Conjuring in Saulteaux Society (New York: Octagon Books, 1971).

lost article recovered? If so, there was no room for scepticism. While many Euro-Canadians have looked at the Shaking Tent ceremony with condescension, Hallowell makes an interesting point when he remarks that white culture applies the same tests to fortune-telling.³⁰⁵

Certainly, the art of conjuring had a dark side. Discussing sorcery in his study, Culture and Experience, Hallowell noted that even Christianized Indians believed that sorcery could come from one's relatives or neighbours: "In the last analysis, almost every Saulteaux believes that it is possible for another person to harm him by covert means."³⁰⁶

William Berens's family experienced some bad times at the hands of conjurors and Percy Berens remembers this vividly. In one story, a conjuror sold his muskrat furs after the spring hunt to a trader. The man owed money to the Hudson's Bay Company, for whom William worked at that time.

P.B. He had that bill in the Hudson's Bay store where my dad was, see? And then he goes and sells his furs to this trader - his spring hunt furs.

S.G. Instead of paying off his debts to the Hudson's Bay?

P.B. Yeah....Then this old man, I guess because he was looking for trouble, this conjuror you know, he walks into the old man's store, the Hudson's Bay store. So he says, as soon as he opens the door, "Tobacco! Tobacco!" My dad told him, "You go and get your tobacco from the trader. You're not getting any tobacco in here."

³⁰⁵Hallowell, "Some Empirical Aspects", p. 402.

³⁰⁶ A. Irving Hallowell, Culture and Experience, P. 147.

S.G. So did the conjuror make life miserable for your dad after that?

P.B. He tried. After he [the conjuror] moved out to Poplar River, they [William and Nancy] moved out there too and that's the time that thunderstorm came.

S.G. And the conjuror made that happen?

P.B. Yeah, yeah. Mom was there, she used to talk about it too. It so upset her, that thunderstorm. You could see the lightning on the rocks.

S.G. Is that why William always told you boys not to get into conjuring - because you could hurt people with it?

P.B. Sure! Sure! That's why he told us that. Never have anything to do with it, that conjuring kind of business.³⁰⁷

Percy remembers a tragedy that occurred as a result of bad conjuring:

S.G. You can believe that conjurors really can do bad medicine because you see that happening to people?

P.B. One of my brothers died of that kind of thing.

S.G. Which one?

P.B. The oldest, Jacob was his name.

S.G. Jacob died from bad conjuring?

P.B. Yes, yes. Just because that man - when the Hudson's Bay Company used to have dog trains taking the fur in, dogs from Island Lake and Oxford House, that's called a fur train. And they used to get a train of dogs and a guy from Poplar River, maybe. And that's where my brother - he beat them guys from Island Lake and Oxford House and Nelson House. Because they were jealous of him, they thought that my brother was using a medicine for his dog team to be so good.³⁰⁸

Positively, however, in the history of the Ojibwa people, shamans with full powers were usually leaders in

³⁰⁷Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, 15 November 1994. William related this experience to Hallowell in the 1930s, saying "About sundown, I could see a cloud rising in the west. It was calm...Then I could hear the thunder...just as something striking my body when I heard it. Then I knew what it meant. I thought I was going to be killed by the thunder that night...you could see the lightning when it struck that rocky island...running all over like snakes...fearful. We hid our heads...On the other side of the island when they saw the lightning they never expected us to live...But I never gave up hope...then she [Nancy] saw the day sky coming...I jumped up and walked out then. I said "This old fellow did not kill us yet." (see Hallowell, "Reminiscences," p. 54.)

³⁰⁸Ibid.

their communities. This was because of their ability to heal and cure, find animals in hunting seasons and ward off attacks from other shamans.³⁰⁹ Gordon Berens, in discussing Fair Wind, revealed the complexity and ambiguous nature of both conjurors and the institution of conjuring:

G.B. He was helping people...as much as he could. Even when some person was sick, he was right there to make that person well, give them medicine, you know, out of herbs, bark of a tree. He knew what to give a person to make them right again.

M.M. Were the people at all afraid of him?

G.B. They were afraid of him because they knew they'd die if they didn't. That's right, he used his magic, like see - yeah, they were afraid of him. They had to respect him but he knew, he knew that he was respected. But if he knew that a person didn't respect him, like, try to make a fool of him, like, that's the person he was after. And he laid him underground. Six feet underground too.³¹⁰

Finally, in establishing a context for the study of syncretism and Ojibwa encounters with Christianity, a discussion of a Supreme Being is essential. This Being was the only entity who never entered the conjuring tent. It was never in any way anthropomorphized regarding sex or bodily form and there are no iconographic representations of the Creator and Ruler of all things - the Boss of Bosses.

Although scholars are divided on the question of whether this being was a pre- or post- contact phenomenon, by the mid-nineteenth century, Ojibwa people generally believed in some form of Great Spirit. Likely the concept

³⁰⁹Fiddler and Stevens, Killing the Shamen, p. 22.

³¹⁰Gordon Berens to Maureen Matthews and Jennifer S.H. Brown, Fisher River Seniors Residence, 20 March 1995.

was not missionary-induced as the idea of an intimate and personal relationship with God is a Christian one and the Ojibwa relationship with the Great Spirit was highly impersonal. Even today, this difference is a real one. Betsey Patrick, for example, discussed her confusion over the two concepts saying "I always grew up hearing about God the Father and praying to God the Father - but now I hear so much talk about God the Creator. How can people pray to God the Creator? Because this is Manitou?"³¹¹ The statement shows the personal relationship involved with one God and a more impersonal one with another God.

As well, while pre-Christian Algonquian beliefs were not centred around a dualistic notion of good versus evil, this concept did gain a firm foothold in Ojibwa religion. By the mid-nineteenth century, the existence of good and evil forces was a part of the Saulteaux world view.³¹² Percy Berens had strong words regarding both Ojibwa belief in a Supreme Being and on the incorrect assumptions made by Euro-Canadians that they had been the ones to introduce God to native communities:

Sure! We believe. We Indians believe this world was created by one person. The Great Spirit. Manitou. You know, when the missionaries first came here, they thought that our ancestors that were Indians they didn't know God. Yet everything they did, these ancestors - way back before they

³¹¹Betsey Patrick to Susan Gray, Berens River, 1 December 1994.

³¹²Michael R. Angel, "The Ojibwa-Missionary Encounter," p. 44.

ever seen a missionary - they were talking about Manitou. What is Manitou? God.³¹³

The Ojibwa communities along the Berens River possessed a world view which was complex, flexible and dynamic. Grounded in the knowledge that power came from the strength of belief, these people thoughtfully incorporated new concepts and elements into their own framework as they saw fit and did apply empirical thought to their religious life. The fact that most missionaries, settlers and traders suffered a failure of understanding on all these fronts profoundly influenced missionary/Indian encounters, sculpted interactions between the two cultures, and coloured Euro-Canadian interpretations of present and past. The newcomers' sense of possessing exclusive truth sustained both their convictions and prejudices. For the Ojibwa of Berens River, however, a very different truth existed and their landscape was wide and inclusive. It is from the vantage point of this truth that we need a new look at their religious history.

³¹³Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, 15 November 1994.

CHAPTER VI

ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN THE OJIBWA WORLD VIEW AND CHRISTIANITY
ALONG THE BERENS RIVER, 1875-1916

My religious background really did shape almost everything. It gave me the mythological framework I was brought up inside of, and I know from experience that once you're inside a mythological framework you can't break outside of it. You can alter or adapt it to yourself, but it's always there.

Northrop Frye³¹⁴

The history of encounters between the Ojibwa people and Christian missionaries between 1875 and 1916 yields a rich story of complex interactions in which Indians took a leading role in determining their religious courses of action and shaping those ideas that they chose to accept and integrate into their world view. Throughout, we can see syncretic blendings of concepts and the coexistence of Christianity with Ojibwa religious practices.

Methodist missionary Frederick G. Stevens and his wife, Frances, documented encounters which show just such native control over their religious decision-making. Frances described a trip she made with her husband in 1901 during which they encountered the Northern Ojibwa Sucker and Crane Indians. The Cranes, she said, "were anxious to hear more of the Gospel." The Suckers, however, "were more or less

³¹⁴ David Cayley, Northrop Frye in Conversation, p. 39.

indifferent and clung stubbornly onto old ideas."³¹⁵

According to Frances, both bands were practising polygamy and the Stevenses used "wisdom and diplomacy" to deal with the situation.

The Cranes felt that they should take on a new way of life and readily began to make the drastic change. The youngest wife was invariably chosen and that meant that many former wives had to be looked after. This was agreed to. The Sucker band was indifferent and clung stubbornly to their life as it was. Our efforts met with some success but enthusiasm for the new life was conspicuous by its absence.³¹⁶

F.G. Stevens continued the story. In 1907, the chief of the Sucker clan, Jack Fiddler, and his brother were charged with the murder of a woman who had become a windigo. Jack Fiddler hanged himself while on trial at Norway House and his brother died in Stony Mountain Penitentiary. According to Stevens "when this happened, the Suckers realized what paganism had done to them and decided to become Christians."³¹⁷ Adam Fiddler, already a Christian, offered to teach his people what he could, and the community sent word to Norway House and Berens River, asking for an annual visit from an ordained missionary and offering to convey him from and to Berens River free of charge. Unfortunately, no missionary took on the job.

³¹⁵Frances G. Stevens, "Personal Papers", PP35, file A (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario), p. 56.

³¹⁶Ibid.

³¹⁷F.G. Stevens, "Personal Papers", PP35, folder A (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario), p. 10.

In 1910, some of the Sandy Lakers who had come under treaty moved to Deer Lake. It was not until 1913, however, that Stevens ventured to these people and, on his arrival, found a warmly welcoming but frustrated group. "Their church was there but, tired of the long waiting, those inclined to paganism had put up the 'long tent' and...said, "If the missionary does not come soon, we will begin drumming again."³¹⁸ When Stevens left, the chief told him:

My experience has taught me that all men are liars, especially missionaries. We see you now. You say you will come again next year - we are not sure. If you come again next year, we will accept the Sacraments of the Church.³¹⁹

The story of encounters between Ojibwa people and Christian missionaries along the Berens River demonstrates the extent to which Ojibwa maintained control over their religious life, consciously adapting selected Christian ideas into their world view. In 1854, Rev. John Ryerson stopped at Berens River on his way to Norway House. At that time, although the Hudson's Bay Company factor told him that the Indians there wanted a missionary, his interaction with them was not so encouraging.³²⁰ It was Jacob Berens who, in 1861, became the first Berens River Saulteaux to convert.

³¹⁸Ibid.

³¹⁹Ibid., p.11.

³²⁰Rev. John Ryerson, Hudson's Bay (Toronto: G.R. Sanderson, 1855), p. 81.

While visiting the Methodist mission at Norway House, he learned Cree syllabics and was baptized by Rev. George McDougall. With his conversion, Berens laid down the basis for the subsequent conversion of the Ojibwa at Berens River: by 1892, every member of the Berens River community was reported as being Christian.

In speculating on the possible reasons for Berens's conversion, Jennifer S.H. Brown surmises that the experience could well have been a quest for new powers. As well, Jacob wanted to wed Mary McKay, a Christian woman. His religious status may well have been a pre-requisite as far as Mary's parents were concerned.³²¹

The baptism and ensuing conversion made the Methodists optimistic, especially when, in 1871, Rev. Egerton Ryerson Young was approached at his Norway House mission by a group of Saulteaux from up the Berens river. These Berens River men asked Young to visit and, in 1874, after some preliminary ground work was laid by Timothy Bear, Young opened a mission at the mouth of the river. From there, he also made trips to the Little Grand Rapids area. As Brown explains, Young's visits:

³²¹Jennifer S.H. Brown, "A Place in Your Mind For Them All", pp. 209-210. Mary McKay (1836-1908) was the granddaughter of Donald McKay, a Scottish fur-trader who was employed by the Hudson's Bay Company. Her father, William McKay, was the Hudson's Bay Company trader at Trout Lake in Ontario's Severn River drainage. Her parents and grandparents were of Scottish and Cree descent. Her skin was light and there did not exist among Berens River Ojibwa the intermediate racial term, métis. As well, she spoke English and possessed English cultural characteristics. This led the community to see her as white.

and those of upriver people to his mission were the first in a long chain of encounters between missionaries and the upper river Ojibwa, with results that ran the gamut from confrontation and avoidance to dialogue and conversion or creative syncretism.³²²

Jacob Berens encouraged his children to welcome technological and social change, saying to William, "Don't think you know everything. You will see lots of new things and you will find a place in your mind for them all."³²³ This flexible attitude enabled his son, William, to choose his own ideas and pathways throughout his lifetime. As a young man from a Methodist family, William chose not to seek out and take traditional Ojibwa sacred power; he did not embark on a vision quest that would have enabled him to connect with his pawáganak. However, such knowledge was a part of his world view and William always believed that he could have access to that route of power if ever he chose to seek it out. William Berens:

was not a pristine aboriginal Ojibwa from a static, unchanged Saulteaux community. He was the product of several centuries of cultural change and adaptation...despite his life-long involvement with things and ways Anglo-Canadian, he lived largely with an inner Ojibwa world view, sensitized to Ojibwa views of sacred power and well-being, committed to fundamental Ojibwa norms and styles in personal relations and interaction.³²⁴

³²²Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Fair Wind," p. 62.

³²³A. Irving Hallowell ed., "Reminiscences of Chief William Berens" p. 1. (transcribed by Jennifer S.H. Brown).

³²⁴Jennifer S.H. Brown, "A Place in Your Mind", p. 204.

On 20 September 1875, Berens River came under Treaty 5A. Jacob, a leader in the negotiations, was elected the first treaty chief over a huge territory including Little Grand Rapids, Pikangikum, Poplar River and Bloodvein. This meant that he would interact intimately with government and missionaries. Just as the chief welcomed Euro-Canadian change, however, his Methodism did not cause him to dissociate himself or his family in any way from his fellow Ojibwa who practised traditional religion. His children participated in "both Methodist observances and in Ojibwa religious events that left lasting impressions."³²⁵

An example of his ability to bridge Ojibwa and Canadian worlds occurred in November 1876. Three Berens River men killed their mother in their winter camp because they were afraid she was becoming a windigo. At the hearing conducted by Roderick Ross, the Hudson's Bay Company factor and Justice of the Peace for the Kewatin District, Jacob pleaded for the sons. He explained the boys believed that, by killing the windigo, they would actually be saving lives in the long run and that those Ojibwa did not yet understand Christian ways. In a letter to Alexander Morris, Ross wrote:

There is a good deal of excitement here among the Indians at Berens River...about the probable punishment of the parties implicated in the

³²⁵Ibid., p. 211.

murder....[They] are opposed to any further actions in the case.³²⁶

The Ojibwa at Berens River have a long history of participating actively in mission and government life in their community. Their reactions to the Methodist day school in the 1880s provide examples. In 1880, the Methodists sent William Hope to teach at Berens River; the young man had received a liberal education at St. John's College in Winnipeg but held no provincial teaching certificate. Ebenezer E. McColl, Inspector of Indian Agencies, wrote a scathing report to the Department of Indian Affairs for the year ending 31 December 1881.

The whole band complains of the inefficiency of the Mission school and ask for a Government school. The chief [Jacob Berens] stated that he valued his religion and loved his minister, but that he never knew of an instance where any of his people were educated at the Mission schools, as only the most inferior teachers were invariably employed.³²⁷

³²⁶Alexander Morris Papers, PAM, MG12, B1, LG 1443. The charges were ultimately dropped.

³²⁷"Report of E. McColl, Inspector of Indian Agencies, 1881," Sessional Papers, 1882, vol. 15, no. 5, p. 107. Unfortunately, the Sessional Papers for this year do not contain any statistical material for attendance in the school; this data was not generated until 1885. McColl (1835-1902) acted first as Inspector and then as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Manitoba and the Northwest Territories from 1877 to 1902. His agencies ranged from Cumberland House west to Lake Superior. (See Frances McColl, Ebenezer McColl: "Friend to the Indians" Winnipeg: Hignell Printing, 1989). Both Jacob and William Berens got along well with McColl; William told A. Irving Hallowell in 1940 that the Inspector was, "the best...the Indians ever had since treaty was signed - a very clever speaker." When William was a young man, McColl had hired him and a friend to work for him and at the end of the trip, had given the pair "supper at his own table...How many men can you find today to offer you that?" Not only had McColl paid the men all the money they had coming to them, he also gave each a present of a suit of clothes and William Berens never forgot the kindness. (See A. Irving Hallowell ed. "Reminiscences of Chief William Berens", pp. 39, 41).

McColl's report for the next year showed that the situation was no better and community members were taking matters into their own hands. Mr. Hope's school was not progressing well and the attendance was very poor. The Ojibwa at Berens River placed enough value on providing education for their children to become actively involved; in this case the value of a good education won out over loyalty to the Methodist missionary. The people, explained McColl, "started to build a school house of their own last winter, but were prevented by an epidemic breaking out among them...but they intend on finishing it as soon as possible."³²⁸

It seems that a major disagreement occurred in the community in 1884 over the whole day school issue; should the new building be a government or a Methodist school? Initially both a government and a Methodist school began operations in 1885. Agent Angus MacKay reported to the Department that Miss Jane Flett had been recently appointed by the government to teach in the newly appointed government Indian School; she had 44 names on her roll. MacKay wrote:

now that the band have got what they long asked for - a teacher appointed by the government, who can speak Indian as well as the English language, and the school is solely under the supervision and control of the Department...there will be a change for the better.³²⁹

³²⁸"Report of E. McColl, Inspector of Indian Agencies, 1882," Sessional Papers, 1883, vol. 16, no. 4, p. 142.

³²⁹"Report of A. MacKay, Indian Agent, 1885," Sessional Papers, 1886, vol. 19, no. 4, p. 110.

Of the Methodist school, however, he wrote:

The band disagreed and divided in opinion and a bitter feeling arose amongst them on the question of giving consent to grant a piece of land in the centre of the reserve to the Methodist Missionary Society, and one of the reasons...was on account of the school. They said they did not want it to be under the management of the mission, and they feared that an effort would be made to get control of the school if they...established themselves on the school site....they [objected to] the school being under the management of any society...other than the Department.³³⁰

Ebenezer McColl's 1884 report to the Department as Inspector of the Manitoba Superintendency shed more light on the dynamics of the meeting. He wrote:

In accordance with the instructions received from the Department, I summoned a meeting of the Indians to ascertain if the majority of them are favorable to surrendering to the Methodist Mission the ground within the Reserve whereon their present buildings are situated. Mr. Agent MacKay and the Reverends Messers. Ross and Parkinson together with the Chief and Councillors and all the resident members were present. After an exhaustive discussion...a decision...in favor of granting the request of the Mission [was made] by a two third vote.³³¹

A year later, Angus MacKay told McColl in a letter dated 25 March 1885 that the mission school, taught by Miss Gussie Parkinson, was "poorly attended because parents want a government school instead." Seven treaty children (three being the chief's children) and two non-treaty children were in attendance. William and his brother Jacob, aged about 17

³³⁰Ibid.

³³¹NAC, RG10, vol. 3703, file 17,665. Rev. A.W. Ross was stationed at Fisher River and visited Berens River occasionally.

and 15, were among the students and MacKay remarked that the two wrote and spelled very badly.³³² The government school had obviously closed with the continuation of the Methodist school and parents were still not only dissatisfied but were looking for other options. On 25 April 1885, MacKay wrote to McColl, saying:

After the closing of the Government School in Berens River, Miss Flett opened a private school at the request of the people of the Hudson's Bay Company Post, for the benefit of some White and Treaty children of men belonging to the establishment. Many of the Indians asked for permission to send their children there also but Miss Flett refused them admittance lest it might be said that she was hindering them from attending the Mission school.³³³

On the Methodist side, the annual report of Rev. Enos Langford for the year 1884-85 is interesting. He explained that there had been no missionary at Berens River for the past four years with the exception of occasional visits from Rev. Andrew W. Ross from Fisher River. The Indians, he said, had been upset over the loss of their missionary.

Last June [I] was appointed to take charge of the field. We were welcomed by the Indians, who said their prayers had been answered. They appeared ready to cooperate with us....We had great hopes

³³²NAC, RG10, vol. 3715, file 21,257.

³³³NAC, RG10, vol. 3715, file 21,257. According to MacKay in 1885, Jane Flett's school had six white children and seven Treaty children on the roll; all were making excellent progress. MacKay commented that she was not receiving a salary for her efforts and suggested that, although she did not ask for financial compensation, she should be paid some sort of salary. Miss Parkinson stayed at the Methodist school until 1888 when her brother-in-law Rev. Enos Langford was transferred to Winnipeg. Although no teacher replaced her for two years, missionary J.W. Butler took over teaching duties when he could. MacKay reported to McColl on 23 May 1888, that Butler was "much esteemed by the Indians and greatly interested in the Mission work." (NAC, RG10, vol. 3801, file 48,638).

of a successful year. But through counter-influences the poor Indians were sadly perplexed and unnecessarily disturbed. We...had fully expected the aid...of all, Indians and whites.³³⁴

Langford's phrase that the Indians had "appeared ready to cooperate" is revealing. It seems that not all the Indians had been ready to cooperate! Were community members taking a vocal, active role in a situation that meant much to them? Had the Methodists simply assumed that these people would welcome a Protestant school wholeheartedly or taken for granted that any recalcitrant parents could be easily won over?

Along the Berens River between 1875 and 1916, we see a complex dialogue between missionaries and Ojibwa. Native responses involved adaptations of new concepts, acceptances of some Christian ideas, the survival of many native ideas and customs, creative syncretic blends and interesting integrations of the Christian and Ojibwa world views. It is important not to confuse syncretism with situations where Indians carried out both Christian and non-Christian activities in their daily lives. As Antonio Gualtieri explains, syncretism is:

a...radical form of cultural encounter in which the traditions entailed are fused - either deliberately or, more usually unconsciously, over a period of time - into a novel emergent whose meanings and symbolic expressions are in some

³³⁴ "Report of Rev. E. Langford for Berens River," Sixty First Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1884-85 (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms, 1885) p. xxix.

respects different from either of the original singular traditions.³³⁵

The interplay between missionaries and Ojibwa people along the Berens River and native responses to aspects of Christianity may be traced in records of conversions and baptisms as well as in evidence of survivals of Ojibwa ideas and customs. Some interesting dynamics appear in the fluctuations in Methodist church membership at Berens River and Little Grand Rapids.

For Berens River, the first extant statistics begin in 1889 during the tenure of Rev. James Arthur McLachlan. His church membership increased steadily and rapidly from 58 in 1893 to 93 by 1903. McLachlan was respected in the community and lived at Berens River long enough to win the support and confidence of the people. His large, sizzling 1897 revival especially spiked enrolment by 25. McLachlan's untimely drowning along with six Berens River children rocked the community in 1903. Fred Baptiste remembers the trust that the Ojibwas had for the missionary:

F.B. They took a bunch of kids in a sailboat to [the Brandon Industrial] school in the south. And this minister here [James McLachlan] his body's right across here [points out the window]. He drowned with a bunch of kids. He took a bunch of money to put in the bank for them and he took kids to go to the school - but they all got drowned. And then when they found those bodies there was a parade right across here [points]. The church was way back in there and there was a lot of bush around it. They buried everything in one long grave.

³³⁵Antonio R. Gualtieri, Christianity and Native Traditions: Indiginization and Syncretism Among the Inuit and Dene of the Western Arctic (Notre Dame, Indiana: Cross Cultural Publications, 1984), p. 1.

S.G. What a tragedy!

F.B. Oh yes - terrible.

S.G. What did the people think about McLachlan? Did they blame him for the accident?

F.B. No, no. People used to give him money to take to the bank.

S.G. They trusted him with their money and their children. That seems to show that they trusted the man.

F.B. Well he was a minister - they trusted him with everything.³³⁶

In 1909, the records reflect a substantial drop in membership, from 98 to 86.³³⁷ This was during the tenure of Rev. Arthur E. Okes (1907-1909) who, along with his wife Jane, did not seem overly popular in Berens River.³³⁸

Membership rose steadily during the ministries of Rev. Joseph Henry Lowes (1909-1916) and Rev. Percy Earl Jones (1916-1921). Jones's tenure saw a particularly abrupt jump of 13 members in 1918.³³⁹ This was the year of the influenza epidemic that killed many people in the community; it is possible that the crisis spurred some people towards conversion and baptism.³⁴⁰

³³⁶Fred Baptiste to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

³³⁷Eighty-Sixth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1909, (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms, 1910), p.176.

³³⁸This is discussed in Chapter Four.

³³⁹Minutes of the Fifteenth Session of the Manitoba Conference of the Methodist Church, 1918, p. 300. For more discussion on Revs. Lowes and Jones, see Chapter Four.

³⁴⁰The influenza pandemic swept the country between 1918 and 1919. In Manitoba aboriginal communities the death rate varied greatly with the highest toll at Norway House (at 188 deaths per thousand) and the lowest at Fort Alexander (35 per 1000). Berens River and Fisher River both experienced death rates of around 100 per 1000. The first burial at Berens River occurred on 7 November 1918; by 18 November 22 had died and the last burial fell on 13 December. See D. Ann Herring, "The 1918 Flu Epidemic in Manitoba Aboriginal Communities: Implications for

Membership continued to gradually increase between 1921 and 1928, moving from 85 to 117 members under Rev. John Niddrie's ministry (1921-1938). A particularly large increase occurred in 1923 with a leap of 25 converts.³⁴¹ The same year, the number of Methodist families in Berens River increased from 51 to 57. It is possible that new people moved into the community and were converted by Niddrie, or that existing Roman Catholic families changed denominations, but the records reveal no explanation of the rise. Between 1928 and 1934, Niddrie, it seems, did not preserve detailed records. His submission for 1936, however, shows that the membership in his mission had risen from 117 to 158.³⁴² Membership would only increase by two by 1940.

Although Methodist statistics for Little Grand Rapids do not begin until 1909, we know that from the community was visited by Rev. McLachlan who travelled from Berens River until William Ivens arrived in 1904. Evidence suggests that the Ojibwa here were receptive to Ivens and interested in education.³⁴³ In 1904, S.J. Jackson, Inspector of Indian

Depopulation Theory in the Americas" Paper presented at the American Society for Ethnohistory Meeting (Toronto, November, 1990), p. 5.

³⁴¹Minutes of the Twentieth Session of the Manitoba Conference of the Methodist Church, 1923, p. 322.

³⁴²The United Church of Canada Year Book (Toronto: United Church of Canada General Offices, 1936), p. 399.

³⁴³William Ivens would go on to be active in the Social Gospel movement and found the Canadian Labour Churches. Ivens was among those integral to the Social Gospel movement and ultimately left the Methodist Church for areas of activity which he believed held more scope and hope for societal change. Although the church, in 1918, had formally advocated social reconstruction by a shifting of emphasis from

Agencies, reported that the Methodists had sent Ivens to teach at Little Grand Rapids, saying, "The acting councillor and the band are very much pleased at the school opening and would like...to have a school house built."³⁴⁴

Joseph F. Woodsworth replaced him in 1908; the Joseph Jones took over in 1909 and was replaced by Rev. Roy Taylor who stayed for 1910. Statistics for 1909 submitted by Jones reflect a sudden drop in church membership which fell from 54 to 0.³⁴⁵ Some major event must have caused 54 Ojibwa to leave the Methodist church and possibly made Jones

competition to cooperation, the emerging radical group (men like Ivens, J.S. Woodsworth and Salem Bland) differed in the extreme from Methodist leadership regarding the action required for this "reconstruction." While the outspoken Bland was dismissed, Woodsworth and Ivens chose to leave the church when they realized it would be impossible for them to carry out their work (concerning the plight of the "common man" and problems caused by the industrial revolution) within the structures that surrounded them. Both Ivens and Woodsworth were arrested for their participation in Winnipeg's 1919 General Strike. The Canadian Labour Churches were a variation of the "Labour Churches" founded in England in 1890 and were set up to appeal to those with whom the church had lost touch. By 1920, there were at least ten Labour Churches in Manitoba, each with its own flavour. See Richard Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-28 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 66-85.

³⁴⁴"Report of S.J. Jackson, Inspector of Indian Agencies, 1904," Sessional Papers, 1905, vol. 39, no. 1, p. 123.

³⁴⁵Minutes of the Manitoba Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, 1909 p. 43. Rev. Joseph Jones (1881-1970), originally trained as a carpenter, was born in Lancashire, England and arrived in Canada in 1902. He served as a carpenter and physical instructor at Brandon Industrial School between 1904 and 1907 and worked at Little Grand Rapids from 1907 to 1911 when he left to attend theological studies at Wesley College from whence he graduated in 1911. Between 1911 and 1914, the year of his ordination, Jones served as assistant principal at the Brandon School, designing a new school for Norway House where he served from 1914 to 1916. After overseas service in World War I, Jones served the rest of his career in Indian communities in northern Manitoba, building mission houses at Norway House, Cross Lake, Island Lake and God's Lake and serving as Principal of Portage la Prairie's Indian Residential School from 1934 to 1942. Jones married Florence Consterdine (1882-1988) who served as Field Matron at Cross Lake from 1926 to 1929 and Matron at the Portage la Prairie school. (Victoria University Archives, Biographical Files.)

leave that community almost immediately thereafter. Jones's biographies make no mention of his tenure at Little Grand Rapids and Methodist records are mute. In 1905, Rev. Thomas Neville had reported that William Ivens was working:

among a really pagan people. In fact, if all of Canada were...examined, I don't think a worse condition could be met. Space will not permit me to tell of the beliefs, practices, customs and modes of life of these people.³⁴⁶

While Ojibwa resistance clearly prevailed here, the people seem to have also been open to Christian ideas since there was a significant enrolment in the church prior to the Jones year. We know that McLachlan's 1897 winter revival had affected Little Grand Rapids. In his Annual Report that year, the missionary wrote:

Last winter this mission [Berens River] enjoyed a gracious revival, during which most of our young people professed conversion and united with the Church. As a consequence our work has been largely along the line of education and consolidation....I visited the [Little Grand Rapids] Indians. A volunteer band from Berens River accompanied me and did splendid work....[now there is] a class of 20 members where none existed before.³⁴⁷

One possible explanation lies in the memoirs of Luther Schuetze. Discussing his own growing understanding and tolerance of the drum dancing at Little Grand Rapids, Schuetze mentioned that initially he, like a missionary

³⁴⁶"Report of Thomas Neville for Berens River, 1904-05," Annual Report of the Methodist Missionary Society (Toronto: Methodist Book Rooms, 1905), p. xxiv.

³⁴⁷"The Indian Work: J.A. McLachlan's Report on Berens River," Seventy Fourth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1897-98 (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms, 1898), p. xlix.

before him (possibly Jones), had originally been very uncomfortable with the practice. This former missionary "saw in the Drum Dances something pagan, that had to be done away with, he took forcible action and kicked the drum in and said it was of the devil." It is very possible that this kind of "forcible action" offended the entire community and resulted in the Ojibwa rejecting the mission. These people clearly were not weak sheep blindly following a missionary from darkness into light!

In 1911, J.H. Wilding was in charge of the mission and Alfred G. Johnson replaced him in 1914. For the years between 1917 and 1923, Methodist records simply stated "Native Assistance" in their reports for Little Grand Rapids; however, in 1919, Mrs. Mary J. Nanakwap was teaching at the community's day school. It is possible that she was the Native assistant referred to by the Methodists. No statistics are listed from 1909 to 1916 when we learn that apparently eight infant baptisms occurred and five marriages were solemnized that year.³⁴⁸ It is not until 1919 that we see an increase from zero to twelve, bringing the total church membership to twelve.³⁴⁹ Was Mary Nanakwap, an Ojibwa woman, responsible for the sudden 1919 success?³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸Minutes of the Thirteenth Session of the Manitoba Conference of the Methodist Church, 1916, p. 231.

³⁴⁹Minutes of the Sixteenth Session of the Manitoba Conference of the Methodist Church, 1919, p. 327.

³⁵⁰"Report of D.C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 1919," Sessional Papers, 1920, vol. LVI, no. 8, p. 47.

Did the threat of the 1918 influenza epidemic spur some Christian conversions in this community?

After the arrival of Luther Schuetze, there was a significant rise in Methodist church membership at Little Grand Rapids. Between 1931 and 1934, enrolment soared from 12 to 135.³⁵¹ By 1937, 148 Ojibwa belonged to the church, and 41 children were enrolled in the Sunday School.³⁵² Schuetze was a dedicated and sincere man who spent many years among the Ojibwa in this community. Yet it is interesting that even he made no increase in church membership for five years; it likely took him this amount of time to establish trust and acceptance.

The theme that native people accepted missionaries and aspects of Christianity on their own terms and at their own speed reverberates through the history of these encounters. At Berens River and Little Grand Rapids, we see a growing involvement in Christianity among the people in the communities. On the surface, missionaries' reports seem confusing; in one paragraph they lament the persistence of pagan practices among native peoples and in another, often within the same document, they rejoice in the triumph of Christianity over heathenism.

³⁵¹The United Church of Canada Year Book (Toronto: United Church of Canada General Offices, 1934), p. 458.

³⁵²The United Church of Canada Year Book (Toronto: United Church of Canada General Offices, 1937), p. 380.

The essential point here is that the Ojibwa had different responses at different times to different missionaries. Reasons for their acceptance of Christian ideas were many and often depended on local circumstances or environmental factors. It was possible for a group or community to reject a missionary at one point and accept parts of her or his message on another occasion depending on local changes or events or the extent of the rapport with an individual missionary.

Northern Manitoba missionary documents show that, between 1875 and 1916, there were many positive responses to missionaries despite some angst in the reports generated in 1877-78 over the fear among the Berens River Indians of poisonings by medicine men. On 9 November 1877, Alexander Morris, Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, sent a dispatch to the Deputy Minister of Justice about the alleged poisonings, or fear of poisonings at Berens River, perpetrated by a Mrs. Bains. This sparked a major investigation and nothing could be proven despite her reputation for "dealing extensively in what the Indians call 'bad medicine.'" In March 1878, Roderick Ross asked F. Graham, Acting Indian Superintendent for Manitoba, to initiate legislation "for the speedy suppression of a custom that is constantly being presented to the attention of traders and missionaries who live among Indians." Ross wrote that the whole "bad medicine" issue could be divided into two areas; the:

higher branch...professes to give...them...the power of taking human life...or incapacitating an enemy from killing game, catching fish, or running or walking....This superstition [is] firmly believed in by all Indians...and causes a state of terrorism...that generally impedes the advancement of natives in... civilized habits of life.³⁵³

The second branch involved a bona fide poisoning through the use of a powder that "only the Indians of southern Saulteaux tribes know how to make....they sell it for a lot of money to the northern Indians."³⁵⁴

In 1893, Ebenezer McColl reported that the Indians were "developing intellectually."

The baneful influence of the designing medicine man over them through his poisonous nostrums and mysterious incantations is fast disappearing, and the darkest clouds of pagan ignorance and superstition...are gradually vanishing.³⁵⁵

F.G. Stevens wrote of an 1898 encounter with the Sandy Lake Indians who "asked me to come the next year...to teach them the Gospel." These people expressed genuine interest, telling him:

Once we men listened to the missionary [Edward Paupanikiss] at Island Lake and we allowed ourselves to be baptized and returning home we found we could not stand against the old people. So now we do not want to hear the Gospel unless all...hear it with us.³⁵⁶

³⁵³NAC, RG10, vol. 3655, file 8977.

³⁵⁴Ibid.

³⁵⁵"Report of E. McColl, Superintendent Inspector, 1893" Sessional Papers, 1894, vol. 27, no. 10, p. 45.

³⁵⁶F.G. Stevens, "The Sandy Lake Story," Personal Papers of F.G. Stevens, PP35, folder A (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario), p. 1.

Sometimes, native people had other reasons for being receptive to missionaries, however. Stevens wrote of an 1899 encounter with a group of Indians at Kiche Mut-ta-kwum (Big Teepee) who were starving. "They were heathen but longing to hear more of religion."³⁵⁷ Rev. and Mrs. Stevens fed the people, talked with them and went on their way. Shortly, however, the missionaries were the ones to get into trouble; a shortage of food caused them to return to Big Teepee where they were grateful to get a bit of dried deer blood. "Next morning," wrote Stevens, "we tried to give them some religious instruction but it seemed almost hopeless."³⁵⁸ When the Stevenses next met these Indians in 1900 they swarmed around them, hungry and asking for food and tobacco. Once again, they were interested in communication and trade.

The conversion of Sucker clansman Robert Fiddler in the early 1900s presents yet another reason for acceptance of the Christian message. The Island Lake Indians had been experiencing poverty from the late 1880s onward and by 1891 were asking the government for a treaty, writing to Angus MacKay at Berens River. By 1909, the opportunity for negotiations was nigh and Robert Fiddler, leader of the Pelican, Sucker and Crane clans at Island Lake, was thinking seriously about terms of a possible treaty.

³⁵⁷Ibid., p. 2.

³⁵⁸Ibid., p. 3.

Fiddler had a near brush with conversion while attending a prayer meeting led by Methodist missionary, A.H. Cunningham. His descendant Thomas Fiddler says that Robert had been very upset over Bible verses discussing punishment for sinners. "Robert amongst others," he explained, "were greatly shaken up, came near a crash but got away."³⁵⁹ After what Thomas Fiddler described as "more Bible onslaught," Robert finally converted. His conversion led to the subsequent conversion of his "warriors" and Cunningham reported that "everything went from there in a flood time, they flocked in and around until I could not get away at night."³⁶⁰

It is interesting that, while Thomas described Robert as "[breaking]...under this onslaught against boreal belief," and sobbing, he also made it clear that the Suckers adopted Christianity in order to help them "gain sympathy with westerners in their [the Suckers'] quest for survival."³⁶¹ At least part of the reasons for conversion may have stemmed from these people's wish for a treaty. This is not to say that Robert Fiddler was insincere in his taking on of Methodism. It suggests, however, that reasons for conversion among northern Manitoba Indians could be multi-dimensional and complex.

³⁵⁹Thomas Fiddler and James R. Stevens, Killing the Shamen, p. 122.

³⁶⁰Ibid.

³⁶¹Ibid., p. 125.

Another story beautifully illustrates different responses made by different groups of Indians. In 1901, Stevens and his wife were en route to Island Lake from Oxford House when they met the Little Crane Clan who were in bad shape; four had recently starved to death and in a seeming response to trauma "they all became Christians."³⁶² Also present were men from the Sucker Clan who, Stevens said, deceived them, saying to the missionaries, "We are sorry we did not know you would be here or we would have brought our women and children just like the Cranes." After the Stevenses left, they found that the Suckers had hidden their women and children across the portage; in his words, "They did not become Christians."³⁶³

Epidemics could also spur a leaning toward Christianity by groups who believed during a time of crisis that they needed all the power they could get. In his 1874-75 Annual Report for Berens River, E.R. Young wrote:

An epidemic that raged during the winter months has been made a blessing to some of the people. The Missionary, while acting the part of a doctor, was able to recommend the Great Physician...at a time when hearts, even of the obstinate...were susceptible to religious truth. Some, alas,...with returning health went back to their old ways, but others have remained true to their vows.³⁶⁴

³⁶²Ibid., p. 8.

³⁶³Ibid.

³⁶⁴"Annual Report of E. R. Young for Berens River, 1874-75," Annual Reports of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 1873-76 (Toronto: Wesleyan Conference Printing Office, 1876), p. xxix.

And in 1894, James McLachlan wrote:

Our people have passed through fiery trials this year in connection with the measles epidemic; but God has brought them out with a deepened Christian experience, that will be helpful in our future work. It has not all been sunshine, however: There have been many difficulties....Evil influences from without [medicine men?] have been hard to meet and have greatly hindered the work.³⁶⁵

Conversion stories of individuals also show that some genuinely seemed to have been affected by the Christian message. Sandy Hartie, son of Nelson House chief John Hartie, was converted by Egerton Ryerson Young in 1871. According to Young and to John Semmens who later encountered Hartie, the young man was truly excited by the Gospel. In this case also, however, he had a need to take on the new religion. Accidentally shot in the leg while hunting, Hartie was carried to his father's camp where, "his homecoming was...an unwelcome one."³⁶⁶ His illness was, "a keenly felt burden to his family until Rev. E.R. Young visited John Hartie's camp." Young took the boy to Norway House where he received nursing, schooling and Christian

³⁶⁵"Report of J.A. McLachlan for Berens River" Seventieth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1888-89 (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms, 1894), p. x.

³⁶⁶John Semmens, "Notes on Personal History," Personal Papers of John Semmens, PP34 (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario), p. 27.

education. Hartie was converted at an evangelical meeting and became an enthusiastic Methodist.³⁶⁷

At this time, Semmens passed through on his way to Nelson House to begin the first mission there; he remembered Sandy Hartie's invaluable help in teaching him Cree and Cree syllabics. The two went together to Nelson House where Hartie worked hard to round up the summer hunters, telling them that, "a teacher had arrived who would preach to them the truthfulness of the Great Spirit."³⁶⁸ Many responded by bringing their canoes and going to hear Semmens preach thanks, in large part, to the efforts of Sandy.

Another conversion served to change Semmens' view of the people among whom he worked. In July 1876, the missionary was ordered to go to Berens River to relieve E.R. Young; he was sorry to leave Norway House and none too eager to move to Berens River. Semmens, in fact, confessed that before arriving at this community, he "believed the prevalent struggle about the hardness of the Saulteaux and the viciousness of their heathen practices."³⁶⁹ It was the conversion and baptism of the medicine man Sowanas (South Wind) that, he said, turned him around. Sowanas' words

³⁶⁷There is a discrepancy in the sources here. While Semmens said that Hartie was taken to Norway House by Young, Young himself wrote that the Nelson House Cree (to his surprise) brought the boy to him at the Rossville Mission. See Egerton Ryerson Young, On the Indian Trail: Stories of Missionary Work Among the Cree and Saulteaux Indians, (New York: Young People's Missionary Movement, 1897), pp. 96-99.

³⁶⁸Semmens, "Notes on Personal History," p. 28.

³⁶⁹Ibid., p. 54.

reveal a quest for knowledge and an idea that the Gospel could provide an extra safeguard for the afterlife:

I have lived many years in sin. I have served the Devil....In witchcraft I was chief of all the people here. In medicine work I have long led the van. My pagan countrymen look up to me as the priest of my tribe....Now I wish to put all evil from me and learn wisdom before I die. My children and my wife are baptized. They have gone their way and I have gone mine, but my heart tells me...I...am wrong. I have listened to scriptural teaching and...I feel most anxious to be saved after the Gospel fashion. It seems to be my only hope....Perhaps the Indians will follow me in right paths after they have gone in wrong directions. At any rate, I will try by divine help to set them a good example....I am [hoping]...I may at least attain to everlasting life.³⁷⁰

A number of questions come to mind here. We, of course, do not know how much of this speech was added to or embellished by Semmens either for dramatic appeal or because memories can change over time. It is likely that Sowanas wanted to be baptized but it is difficult to know how many things were phrased in a way that would be acceptable to Semmens; after all, if the missionary were not convinced of the Ojibwa's motivation, he could refuse baptism. Sowanas had been observing "conversion-style" rhetoric for many years and would have known the right things to say. The old man could well have been concerned about the afterlife and believed that Christianity would indeed provide an additional safeguard in eternity. We also do not know if he was under

³⁷⁰Ibid.

some pressure to convert because his family had become Christians.

We do know, however, that this medicine man was an influential and respected leader in his community, living at a time when Christianity was becoming a force to be reckoned with at Berens River. It is entirely possible that his union with this religion would keep Sowanas ahead of the van. We also know, if Semmens can be believed, that after 4 February 1877, Sowanas buried his medicine in the swamp. According to the missionary, "his deportment wholly changed...his heathen practices were abolished forever."³⁷¹

Did this casting off of his medicines, however, show that he no longer believed in Ojibwa medicine? Not likely. Jacob Berens had also, on his conversion, cast away his medicines sometime during his mid-twenties. Years later, however, when his son, William, had a severely injured knee that could not be healed by medical doctors in Winnipeg, Jacob lost no time in taking him to a medicine man - in this case his brother Albert. Although Jacob would not perform the cure himself, he gave Albert tobacco for his services, saying, "I know you are pretty good...but I'll tell you what medicine to use."³⁷²

³⁷¹Ibid.

³⁷²A. Irving Hallowell ed., "Reminiscences of Chief William Berens," p. 46.

William's Winnipeg doctor had extracted two grains of shot and two pieces of metal out of the site. The mystery was that the young man had never been shot in his life. Jacob, however, was able to clearly explain the cause to his minister, telling James McLachlan "You white people don't believe it. But I've told you about such things. This is through an Indian's magic power."³⁷³

Percy Berens talks about Jacob's conversion and subsequent casting off of his conjuring practises:

S.G. Do you know people who weren't Christians and then decided to become Christians?

P.B. Yeah. My grandfather, Jacob, he wasn't a religious fellow.

S.G. He wasn't?

P.B. He was not. He was a man who believed on nature. Conjuring is the right word - conjuring. He was a conjuring man, my grandfather. When the religion came to Berens River, the missionaries, you know, want him to quit. So he packed up parcels of tobacco and he got two men to take this to Jackhead. He sent it out to the Jackhead conjuror, you know? It was given out. He was letting all this thing go, conjuring. He sent it to Bloodvein, Jackhead, Little Grand Rapids, even Deer Lake - that's 300 miles from Berens River to go to Deer Lake. He sent guys there to take that tobacco, he's finished with it.

S.G. So he converted?

P.B. So he was converted.

S.G. What did that mean for him?

P.B. It changed his life altogether. He didn't believe none of that stuff that he had believed.

S.G. He didn't believe?

P.B. No more. He's getting over with that.

S.G. Why did he want to convert?

P.B. Because I guess the missionary was preaching the gospel and he believed what he heard so he thought he had to let it go, his conjuring. That's why he quit.³⁷⁴

³⁷³Ibid., p. 44.

³⁷⁴Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

Clearly, Jacob let his conjuring go out of a conscious choice that he was required to make upon his baptism; however, he and his children never lost their faith in the reality and validity of this magic and its power. At no time did they cast off their beliefs and decide that they constituted shallow superstitions. The rejection of conjuring was likely done out of a respect for Christianity and perhaps some fear of the repercussions of the "dark side" of this kind of magic.

In the same vein, William Berens, out of respect to his Christian faith, chose not to go on a vision quest; this did not mean, however, that he did not believe that it would be entirely possible for him at any time to do this and acquire a pawágan. Percy discusses the family dynamics that centred around this issue.

S.G. I know that William told Hallowell that he could have gone on a vision quest but, because he was a Methodist, he chose not to. But he always felt that any time he wanted, he could have met up with his pawáganak. Did he really believe that?

P.B. Oh yeah - oh yeah! He talked to us family about it. He could have been like that because his dad used to ask him to believe the same as this conjuring business. He wanted to hand it over to him, but dad said that "I wouldn't want it."

S.G. Jacob asked William to take that on?

P.B. Yeah.

S.G. Because he was in line for it?

P.B. Sure - it was Jacob's son. But my dad said "no."

S.G. Did that upset Jacob?

P.B. No. It's okay. He never used to say his dad got mad at him because he turned that down. He [Jacob] said "that's yours, that's your choice - so do what you like."³⁷⁵

³⁷⁵Ibid.

Discussing his own decision to follow Christianity, William was clear, telling Hallowell:

When the missionary Egerton Young came and preached to us about the love of God and His Son, I wanted to understand what this man was talking about. Finally I got enough sense to believe in Christianity. A lot of others had the same experience.³⁷⁶

Methodism would play an important role throughout his lifetime and he would raise his children within the church. At no time, however, did he cease to believe in Ojibwa spirits or lose respect for or deny the power of Ojibwa religion.

Government and missionary records are full of stories showing that Christianity and Ojibwa beliefs existed along the Berens River. The Ojibwa ability to integrate these seemingly disparate concepts can cause some confusion in interpreting this kind of history. Selective adaptation may have suited their flexible world view, but it confused, angered and upset many a missionary who expected a shedding of the old and a wholehearted acceptance of the new.

As well, varying degrees of acceptance between communities and even among different individuals within those communities can produce a fairly unclear picture for observers who wish to make generalizations about Christian conversions from the historical records. For example, one report may complain of members of a community pursuing a

³⁷⁶A. Irving Hallowell, "Reminiscences of Chief William Berens," p. 7.

nomadic lifestyle or engaging in "pagan practices", but a contemporary document may also detail these same Indians congregating at the mission on special days, attending church or baptizing their children with consistency.

Ebenezer McColl's 1893 report expressed pleasure over the supposed decline of the power of medicine men. Yet, two paragraphs earlier he bitterly discussed the continuance of polygamy, saying:

the law is impotent to inflict punishment upon...transgressors for...unfaithfulness; consequently this loathsome and infectious moral leprosy is contaminating Indian communities, destroying the chastity of the virtuous.³⁷⁷

In 1876, E.R. Young revealed that, while Christianity was positively received by the Berens River community, it was not replacing the Ojibwa world view. In 1875, he had written happily that at Berens River "every conjuring drum has ceased to beat and every outward pagan rite has been given up."³⁷⁸ His report for the next year, however, showed that Ojibwa identity was alive and well; these people were hardly becoming lost in their Christianity. Said Young:

Not only has the outward appearance of degrading paganism disappeared, but there is now an almost universal belief in our holy religion and, on the part of many, an earnest desire to...understand

³⁷⁷"Report of E. McColl, Superintendent Inspector, 1893," Sessional Papers, 1894, vol. 27, no. 10, p. 45.

³⁷⁸"Annual Report of E.R. Young for Berens River, 1874-75," Annual Reports of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 1873-76 (Toronto: Wesleyan Conference Printing Office, 1876), p. xxx.

the plan of salvation....While rejoicing, we have to mourn over the absence of that thorough heart-work, the genuine conversion of the inner man by the transforming power of the Holy Ghost.³⁷⁹

Two years later, John Semmens reported in the same vein:

From many a wigwam where, but a few short months ago, idols were worshipped and demons invoked, ascend with...regularity, the songs and petitions of awakened men. Childish lips have learned to lisp, "Our Father which art in Heaven"....The change has not been so deep as I could wish...but...ground has been broken. The soil of their hearts is now ready for the good seed.³⁸⁰

Generally, the Berens River community seems to have responded positively to mission efforts with the people partaking in church life to varying degrees. Especially by 1899, numerous favourable reports indicated that the Ojibwa there were pleased with James McLachlan. J.W. Short, Indian Agent, wrote in 1898 that Methodist services were well attended.³⁸¹ The next year, Ebenezer McColl commented that McLachlan "having contended so violently against immorality [has] raised the standard of virtue on the reserve."³⁸²

³⁷⁹"Annual Report of Egerton R. Young for Berens River, 1875-76," Ibid., p. xxii.

³⁸⁰"Report on Indian Missions, 1877-78: J. Semmens: Berens River," Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada, 1877-78 (Toronto: Methodist Conference Office, 1878), p. xviii.

³⁸¹"Report of J.W. Short, Indian Agent, Berens River Agency, 1898," Sessional Papers, 1899, vol. 33, no. 12, p. 71.

³⁸²"Report of E. McColl, Inspector of Indian Agencies, Lake Winnipeg Inspectorate, 1899," Sessional Papers, 1900, vol. 34, no. 11, p. 102.

John Semmens's 1901 report indicated an interest in Christianity but shows that it did not amount to the exclusion of all else:

I found in every place much regard for the knowledge and worship of God. In two or three places vestiges of an hereditary paganism were found, places where bigamy was tolerated and idol-worship was practised. Yet even there might be discovered a hunger for better things.³⁸³

Following the McLachlan tragedy, we have evidence that the Christianity of many people at Berens River was genuine and integrated into their lives. S.J. Jackson, Inspector of Indian Agencies noted:

The Indians of this band...show the effects of their early religious training and put to shame many of our so-called Christian people. Every night before going to their beds they hold a short service of prayer...They felt very bad over the loss [of Rev. McLachlan and the children].³⁸⁴

By 1908, Semmens could report that "The natives are more or less favourably disposed toward Christianity, and not a few are devout members of...the missionary enterprise."³⁸⁵

Certainly, however, a strong Ojibwa world view prevailed between 1875 and 1916. In her reminiscences of Berens River, Julia Asher (née Short) wrote of living with her Indian Agent father in the community between 1898 and 1900. Julia remembered the Methodist church being full on

³⁸³"Report of John Semmens, Indian Agent, Berens River Agency, 1901," Sessional Papers, 1902, vol. 36, no. 11, p. 73.

³⁸⁴"Report of S.J. Jackson, Inspector of Indian Agencies, 1904," Sessional Papers, 1905, vol. 39, no. 11, p. 119.

³⁸⁵"Report of John Semmens, 1908," Sessional Papers, 1909, vol. XLIII, no. 15, p. 113.

Sundays and the friendly relations between her family and the Berenses. One evening, Jacob told her the legend of the windigo, adding that most of the older Indians believed in windigos despite the church's teaching against their existence. "Christianized as they were," she wrote, "this belief...lingered on, even in our time....We had two indications of it on our Reserve while I was there."³⁸⁶

At Little Grand Rapids, the Ojibwa world view still prevailed widely. Writing about both Berens River and Little Grand in 1880, Rev. A.W. Ross lamented that "We...cannot speak encouragingly of these polygamous bands and yet there is a longing to hear the Word."³⁸⁷

W. M. Chapman, the Hudson's Bay Company trader at Little Grand Rapids, made a number of references to continuing Ojibwa practices within the community. In October 1912, for example, he wrote "Many Indians are attending a Dog-Feast," and the next month mentioned "The

³⁸⁶ Julia Anna Asher, "Reminiscences," 1950, p. 89. (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario). The incidents involved a man named Musquomoat and his family. They had killed their mother who, they believed, was turning into a windigo. Musquomoat later converted and this, according to Asher, invoked in him an increasing sense of guilt throughout his life regarding his mother's death. The second case occurred over a "crazy woman" named Sarah Ross who was on the trapline when people in her midst perceived that she was becoming a windigo. She died before Short and McLachlan could get to her. While there was insufficient evidence to prosecute Thomas Bear and his wife who had been alone with her when she had died, the understanding was that she had been "killed as a wetigo."

³⁸⁷ "Report of A.W. Ross: Berens River and Little Grand Rapids," Annual Report of the Auxiliary Missionary Society of the Toronto Conference, 1880-81 (Toronto: The Methodist Mission Rooms, 1881), p. xxiii.

people are very noisy at L.G. Rapids. They beat their drum all night."³⁸⁸ On 2 August 1913, Chapman wrote:

John Duck conjuring during the night and early hours of the morning....He had some very vigorous wrestling inside the tent and the birch bark "temple" nearly pulled down on several occasions.³⁸⁹

Again in 1915: "the dog-feast takes place tonight, incessant drumming until early Sunday morning."³⁹⁰

Integrations of Christianity with the Ojibwa religion are among the most interesting outcomes of the encounters between these world views. William Berens related an experience to A. Irving Hallowell that represents one of the most fascinating examples of this blending. The event was seen and interpreted within a distinctly Ojibwa context while the solution to the crisis was found in Christianity.

William and Nancy Berens were fishing at the mouth of Poplar River when one evening, around six p.m., William said he felt as if he was going crazy.

I could hardly see the lamp. When it got later, I was worse and worse. Finally I had to tell my [hired] man to tie me up and throw me in the cellar--to nail it up and take my wife to the mission house....Both of them were scared. They did not know what to do, did not wish to do as I said....All of a sudden I thought of something--we had the Bible in the house. I took it and opened it and tried to read it. I could make out

³⁸⁸"Journal of W.M. Chapman," PAM, MG1, C5, October 1912 - November 1915.

³⁸⁹Ibid. (1913).

³⁹⁰Ibid. (1915).

nothing. The first word I made out was God; as soon as I did, things got brighter it seemed.³⁹¹

A year prior to this, William had a run-in with an old man who had sold a bearskin to a missionary. William had been angry and, when the old man wished to buy a pipe and some tobacco from the Hudson's Bay store, had told him to go buy from the missionary instead. He told Hallowell:

Everybody was scared of that old man. This happened in the store. Everybody was quiet when I talked back. One old fellow told me I had made a mistake. "I'm sorry for you," he said. But I did not give a damn. I did not think he could hurt me -- he did not get me at once.³⁹²

Even in everyday life, we have evidence of integrations between the Ojibwa and Christian world views. Typical was the 1903 report of John Semmens who wrote:

not infrequently [medical complications] are brought on by the combined use of Indian and white medicines....The morality of these people is not sufficiently developed to merit high praise. This is the outcome of old associations and old methods of living....It is not easy to correct wrongs which are winked at by the elders of the tribe.³⁹³

Along with integrations, syncretic blends also occurred along the Berens River yielding creative and novel

³⁹¹A. Irving Hallowell ed., "Reminiscences of Chief William Berens," p. 54.

³⁹²Ibid., p. 55.

³⁹³"Report of J. Semmens, Indian Agent, Berens River Agency, 1903," Sessional Papers 1904, vol. 38, no. 11, pp. 82-83.

results.³⁹⁴ Fair Wind was a medicine man from Pauingassi who, after 1914, became a noted religious innovator among the Ojibwa people who lived along the Berens River.³⁹⁵ His close connections with other-than-humans and a deep kinship with the Thunderbirds made him an exceptional hunter. Interestingly, as his religious influence grew, Fair Wind drew increasingly on a broad range of concepts that were "both Ojibwa and non-Ojibwa, Christian and non-Christian, whose roots lay a long way from Berens River."³⁹⁶ Fair Wind's drum dance, the inspiration of which came to him in a dream, represented this kind of merging of ideas. The ceremony appalled missionary F.G. Stevens who saw it as threatening and pagan; typical of the Methodist outlook which saw religion in black and white or oppositional terms: one was either with the devil or with Christ. However, when Hallowell observed this dance of consolation in the 1930s, he recorded Fair Wind's words:

When a person has lost a brother, child, or some other relative, we call upon them to look down upon us. They have been on this earth once, and before that they were sent from above to come on

³⁹⁴For an excellent example of syncretism among northern Manitoba Indians in the 1840s, see: Jennifer S.H. Brown, "The Track to Heaven: The Hudson Bay Cree Religious Movement of 1842-1843," Papers of the Thirteenth Algonquian Conference, William Cowan ed. (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1982).

³⁹⁵Jennifer S.H. Brown with Maureen Matthews, "Fair Wind," p. 62. (See also Chapter Four).

³⁹⁶Ibid.

this earth. Jesus, too, came from above to be the boss of the earth.³⁹⁷

Hallowell saw that, at the conclusion of the dancing, the group sang a Christian hymn, Fair Wind lifted his hand in Christian benediction style and mentioned Jesus once again. The anthropologist was curious about which spirit had given Fair Wind his dance and asked if it had come to him from the djibaiyak (spirits of the dead) or from a pawágan (dream helper). Neither, replied the medicine man, it had come to him from God. In Hallowell's words:

this dance...illustrates extremely well how diverse strands of belief and practice can be wielded together under the influence of a strong personality, and yet still be kept within the framework of the Saulteaux interpretation of the universe.³⁹⁸

Another striking example of syncretism can be found in the life of Adam Fiddler. In 1901, as a young man, Christ appeared to him in a dream while he was on a trip with F.G. Stevens and from then on, according to Thomas Fiddler, "Christ became an other-than-human guide."³⁹⁹ Thomas describes Adam as:

cautious in his acceptance of Christianity. He did not discard what he found good and necessary in his forest beliefs and he is not described as being a Holy Man among the clansmen rather than a Methodist Christian. Adam Fiddler was a Sucker clansman who could confront windigo, utilize the shaking tent, issue prophecies, and sing over the

³⁹⁷Ibid., p. 67.

³⁹⁸Ibid.

³⁹⁹Thomas Fiddler and James R. Stevens, Killing the Shamen, p. 173.

drum. Adam Fiddler was more than a Christian. Adam's adoption of some Christian beliefs, though, did start a process of change away from some of the ancient ways.⁴⁰⁰

That the people along Berens River maintained an Ojibwa world view does not lessen the sincerity of their Christian beliefs. William Berens provides an excellent example; throughout his life he felt a profound respect for the power of Ojibwa religion while, at the same time, maintaining a true respect for Methodism and ministers. Even as a young man, this was present. Before he became chief, William visited a missionary he knew at Emerson, Manitoba, Rev. McHaffie, who had been at Fisher River and travelled with him in North Dakota. William told Hallowell that he went into the Pembina Hotel "for dinner and some drinks besides....I was very careful not to overload myself because I was travelling with a minister and was staying with him."⁴⁰¹ Noteworthy here is that, years later, in reminiscing with the anthropologist, Berens remembered the sensitivity he had felt towards a man of the cloth.

Another brief clue is found later in William's "Reminiscences" to Hallowell. He had just returned to Berens River after a trip. "When we got to Mr. Short's place...I asked him if the celebration was over at the Church, so he told me, 'I just came from there - it's just

⁴⁰⁰Ibid.

⁴⁰¹A. Irving Hallowell ed., "Reminiscences of Chief William Berens," p. 47.

over.' I was disappointed that I was not there."⁴⁰² This is one small statement in a substantial manuscript, yet its very inclusion and simple sincerity have real impact.

There is no doubt that the Ojibwa along the Berens River experienced changes and adaptations in their religious life. That they controlled the nature of this dynamism and the speed at which it occurred between 1875 and 1916 is clear. Also clear is that, as a parallel to what Northrop Frye said of his Methodism, the world view at their core remained essentially Ojibwa.

⁴⁰²Ibid., p. 50.

CHAPTER VII

ENCOUNTERS, 1917-1940: ACCEPTANCES AND REJECTIONS

We smoke our pipes west - all the directions - north, east - because we see a big cloud and where's it coming up from? This moving cloud! What's going to happen? All of a sudden it's like a bomb, eh? If you smoke, the thunder cloud will go past. The Thunderbirds. Many moons. Love your neighbour as you love yourself. Listening to the white people today, you hear Thunderbirds come when there's cold air with hot air. No way. Young Thunderbirds in the fall, they're just like - oh! they make a really loud noise!⁴⁰³

In 1917, William Berens succeeded his father, Jacob, as chief of Berens River. The community had been under treaty for forty-two years, the Methodists had been established among the people for forty-three years and the Catholic mission would open in two years. Contrary to the assumptions of A. Irving Hallowell who believed these river mouth folk to be heavily acculturated due to prolonged and sustained contact with Euro-Canadian culture the history of the Ojibwa there was not one of "one-way progression involving cultural loss and replacement," but rather the story of "a far more complex complementarity or fusion."⁴⁰⁴ This chapter will focus on the nature of the interactions and the relationships that developed and evolved between

⁴⁰³John Edward Everett to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 2 December 1994.

⁴⁰⁴Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Afterword," in A. Irving Hallowell, The Ojibwa of Berens River Manitoba: Ethnography Into History, ed. by Jennifer S. H. Brown, (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt, Bruce and Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), p. 113.

Berens River Ojibwa and Christian missionaries between 1917 and 1940.

By 1917, the Methodist day school had become a fixture on the Berens River Reserve. As already discussed, the people in this community had taken an active role in this institution from the beginning. Near the end of Jacob Berens's tenure as chief, the records show native people were still taking interest in educational matters. Percy Jones had left the community and Jacob, through Inspector Bunn, requested that the Department of Indian Affairs hire a competent, preferably older teacher to replace the missionary. Although this may have been done in an effort to aid the Methodists in their selection of a teacher, the partnership itself is of significance.⁴⁰⁵

It is, of course, important not to generalize too much about the feelings and opinions of the entire community based on the actions of the Berens family. Jacob had always been in the vanguard when it came to matters of conversion, education and the integration of aspects of Ojibwa and Euro-Canadian lifestyles. Even amidst the ado over the Methodist versus Government school issue in the 1880s, Jacob, although displeased with the situation, continued to send his sons to school. His boys made up two of only seven students. This attitude had an impact on William; he and his wife, Nancy,

⁴⁰⁵Susan Elaine Gray, "Methodist Indian Day Schools and Indian Communities in Northern Manitoba, 1890-1925," *Manitoba History*, no. 30, Autumn, 1995, p. 5.

valued education encouraging their children to attend school and learn as much as they could. Education, they realized, was the way of the future and learning was a thing to be valued.

Percy Berens remembers this clearly. William and Nancy sent him on to the Brandon Industrial School after his years at the Berens River Methodist day school had come to an end. Decades later, his enthusiasm for this learning experience is still obvious.

S.G. What was the Brandon Industrial School like?

P.B. Oh, they taught us everything!

S.G. Did you enjoy it?

P.B. I really enjoyed it. I learned a lot of things. You know why Indian Affairs shut that place down? Because the Indians were getting too smart.

S.G. Why did your parents send you to the Industrial school?

P.B. So that I could have an education.⁴⁰⁶

Although attendance was irregular at the Methodist and Catholic schools, it is important not to misinterpret Ojibwa attitudes based on statistics and the laments of teachers and Agents.⁴⁰⁷ Jacob and William Berens valued education, for example, yet their children did not attend school on a regular basis throughout the year. William, and later, his children were present at school when their lifestyle made this possible and convenient; for outsiders to decide that these people did not value education because they attended school irregularly is shortsighted. Rather, this is another

⁴⁰⁶Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

⁴⁰⁷Susan Elaine Gray, "Methodist Indian Day Schools," p. 5.

example of the Ojibwa at Berens River selecting aspects of Euro-Canadian life that they found necessary and important and then adapting those aspects to their own lives within their own frameworks. Interestingly, statistics show that average attendance remained fairly stable and consistent. This indicates that families followed a pattern involving both time spent in the bush and time spent in the community. When they were on the reserve, children, for the most part, attended school quite regularly (with average attendance remaining fairly consistent). The following tables, created from data in the reports for Indian Affairs in the Canada Sessional Papers, reveal a fairly steady pattern of attendance.

Berens River Methodist Day School

Year	Teacher	Total Enrolment	Average Attendance
1885	Gussie Parkinson	35	16
1886	G. Parkinson	38	18
1887	G. Parkinson	39	17
1888	J.W. Butler	32	14
1889	E.H. West	25	9
1890	E.H. West	36	7
1891	Charles French	39	11
1892	S.E. Batty	59	30

1893	S.E. Batty	22	7
1894	S.E. Batty	33	16
1896	Minnie Wilson	40	10
1897	B. Alexander	48	9
1900	Miss Lawford		
1904	Eliza Postill		
1905	E. Postill		
1906	Louie A. Showler	28	8
1907	L.A. Showler		
1908	L.A. Showler	38	11
1910	Bessie Hayter	24	10
1914	Mrs. Lowes	33	10
1915	Mrs. Lowes	33	10
1919	A.A. Smith	36	17
1920	Ida Fairservice	36	17
1921	Zella Richardson	37	23
1922	A. Wilkie Lonsley	28	16
1923	Colin Douglas Street	29	15
1925	C.D. Street	37	22
1926	C.D. Street	38	23
1927	C.D. Street	41	28
1928	C.D. Street	38	27
1929	C.D. Street	38	23

Berens River Roman Catholic Day School

Year	Teacher	Total Enrolment	Average Attendance
1919	Frederick Leach	25	17
1920	F. Leach	29	20
1921	Josephine St. Denis	29	15
1922	A. Langlais	23	12
1923	Patricia Fuller	25	13
1925	P. Fuller	22	11
1926	F. Leach	22	16
1927	Boniface Guimond	23	15
1928	F. Leach	25	15
1929	F. Leach	25	18

Little Grand Rapids Methodist Day School

Year	Teacher	Total Enrolment	Average Attendance
1906	William Ivens	46	19
1907	W. Ivens	38	14
1908	Joseph F. Woodsworth	43	20
1910	Roy L. Taylor	50	15
1914	Alfred G. Johnson	45	18
1925	Mina Moar	17	8
1926	John James Everett	19	10
1927	J.J. Everett	23	8
1928	Luther L. Schuetze	25	11
1929	L.L.Schuetze	30	12

Little Grand Rapids Roman Catholic Day School

Year	Teacher	Total Enrolment	Average Attendance
1928	Boniface Guimond	27	15
1929	B. Guimond		
1930	B. Guimond	15	11

Interestingly, while the Berens River Catholic school was in a minority position compared to the Methodist school in the community, the Catholic school at Little Grand Rapids seems to have run neck and neck with its Protestant competition. This might have been because, at Berens River, the Protestants had gained a firm foothold and ensconced themselves long before the Catholics made overtures. As well, Jacob and William Berens were staunch supporters of the Methodist church and this may have affected Catholic acceptance at Berens River to some degree. Perhaps also, William, as chief, had some problems with a religion that was in rivalry with his own denomination of Christianity and which could undermine his own authority. Whatever the reasons, there was always a coolness, still evident today, towards Catholicism on the part of the Berens family.

An example of this attitude can be seen in a dream that William Berens related to A. Irving Hallowell when the latter was on a summer fieldwork visit to Berens River in the 1930s. The dream (c. 1917) predicted the coming of the

Roman Catholics to Berens River just before their arrival. It is of great significance that William, whose Methodist loyalties certainly showed themselves here, was operating within an entirely Ojibwa context in his faith in dreams as accurate vehicles of foreshadowing and prediction. Finally, William's interpretive comments to Hallowell revealed an attitude that seemed to be typical among the Indians along the Berens River - a sense of thinking about and listening to different religious messages, selecting those elements that were sensible, necessary or desirable and disregarding the rest.

I had this dream before the Catholics started their mission here. I had 4 or 5 children at the time. I dreamed that I was close to the place where the wood pile of the Hudson's Bay Co. now stands. Two Catholic priests were holding me, one on each side. Another Indian was there too (named). One of the priests took his head off. There he stood without any head. I was fighting them but they dragged me off towards where the Catholic mission now stands. We came to a big furnace and these priests tried to push me into it. At the same time there was an old man who stuck his head out of the flames and tried to pull me in. But they were not able to get me in. I kept on fighting them and they dragged me to another place where there was another furnace. There the same thing happened. An old man stuck his head out and tried to pull me in while the priests tried to push me in. This old man had a spear. I got pretty close to the flames that time: then I woke up.⁴⁰⁸

Hallowell noted that:

The dreamer commented that he now knew the meaning of the dream. It gave him foreknowledge of the struggle with the Catholics in which he is

⁴⁰⁸A. Irving Hallowell Papers, MS Coll. 26, APS, Philadelphia.

engaged. The first incident shows that the priests can do what they want with Indians who do not think for themselves. They can put any ideas in your head they want to.⁴⁰⁹

From the beginning of their work at Berens River, the Catholic missionaries felt the effects of being "on the outs," religiously speaking, with the chief's family. In 1919, the Oblates wished to establish a school at Bloodvein. On 9 April, Frederick Leach wrote from Berens River to his Provincial:

The people [at Bloodvein] are greatly in favor of a Catholic school and said they would wait until this summer to give us a chance to build one....The danger is that if we don't build one this summer the Methodists certainly will for the chief of this Reserve [William Berens] has a position with the Hudson's Bay Company and he reports all our doings to the Methodist minister....Father [De Grandpré] has just interrupted me to tell me to report again that this church must be built this summer...and he adds "the Indian population there have a better disposition than those here."⁴¹⁰

The last sentence probably says a good deal about the place of the Catholics in the Berens River community at that time and the letter suggests the extent of teamwork between chief and Methodist missionary.

Ida Green, William and Nancy's niece, grew up with the Berens family after they adopted her in 1918 (her mother, Sarah Everett, Nancy's sister, died in the 1918 influenza

⁴⁰⁹Ibid.

⁴¹⁰AD, L581, .M27L, 16.

epidemic). She sheds some revealing light on William and Nancy's attitude to the Oblate mission at Berens River.

I.G. I was baptized when I was a baby - Catholic. I didn't know that 'till my Auntie Margaret told me that. She said "You should go to church over there." That's where I belongs to. I said "No, I don't like that." Because I don't like that, to go to church there.

S.G. Why not?

I.G. Well, I don't know - I don't like it. One reason that I don't like it - you know when you take the Sacrament? You have to tell everything to that minister. That's why I don't like it.

S.G. Confession?

I.G. Yeah. Because God sees me what I'm doing - God - don't let anybody else know.

S.G. What would William and Nancy have done if you had decided to go to the Catholic church?

I.G. They wouldn't have let me go over there. They didn't like that church.

S.G. Why? How do you know they didn't like it?

I.G. Because they didn't let me go to church [there] - just in here - the United Church.

S.G. Did you ever ask them if you could go to the Catholic church?

I.G. No, because they didn't like that kind of a church. If they would like it, they would have let me go to church over there.

S.G. They would have suggested that you go?

I.G. Yeah.

S.G. Did your father ever have Brother Leach or Father De Grandpré visit him in his home?

I.G. Well, Father De Grandpré came and saw me here - after I was married. And so he said "Why don't you come to church?" I said - I made an excuse, you know - I said I got nothing to take me over there and it's a long walk because, you know, I couldn't leave my kids alone, because Gordon [Ida's husband] was playing the organ in the United Church every Sunday so I was alone in here.⁴¹¹

Percy Berens also subtly expresses some disdain for the Catholic mission in his community. This is interesting because he has also been clearly affected by his father's and grandfather's flexible attitudes towards learning and

⁴¹¹Ida Green to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

incorporating new technology and ideas. Although Percy Berens has positive memories of Frederick Leach, he also retains a good deal of his family's mixed feelings towards the Oblates. He discusses why Catholic Ojibwa people in the community ventured to Rev. Niddrie's afternoon services at the United Church.

P.B. the service in the afternoon was altogether different from the kind of service they had. The United Church preached from the Bible and they knew that, see?

S.G. So they wanted to hear the Bible?

P.B. Sure!

S.G. Would you say they wanted both churches?

P.B. No. They wanted to learn what really comes out of the Bible, see? That's what they wanted to know. And they wanted to hear Niddrie preaching - what kind of a sermon he preaches about.⁴¹²

Berens River adults who were children in the 1920s and 1930s emphasize that the community valued its schools and missionaries. Just as William and Nancy Berens were good friends with Percy Jones, older residents of the community remember Rev. John Niddrie, teacher Colin Street and Brother Frederick Leach with warmth. Percy Berens says that Colin Street:

was the best teacher that ever taught school in Berens River. He was the longest teacher that ever been in that schoolhouse. Because some teachers just came in for a year and said "oh, to heck with the Indians." Not like Street.⁴¹³

Some of the stories take on a humorous vein. Fred Baptiste remembers being a pupil of Colin Street.

⁴¹²Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

⁴¹³Ibid.

S.G. Did you know Colin Street?

F.B. Yeah, I knew him! He was the teacher right here - he was a good teacher! He strapped me once. [laughter] He caught me smoking! [laughter] He strapped me right on my hand I guess and - well, he didn't like tobacco. But, later on, I was working on this old boat - this old Keenora - and then I seen him [Street] in Winnipeg and Walter Green said "Freddie, come here!" We were loading freight - we were right in the Redwood dock. He seen somebody coming down the hill there, coming to see us - and he was smoking a pipe! "Boy, Mr Street," I said, "you strapped me once at school for smoking tobacco and now here you are out of school and you're smoking tobacco!" Well, what happened to him, he told me, the doctor told him to use that tobacco for his own good.⁴¹⁴

Walter Green also has poignant and revealing memories about the place of the church and school in the lives of himself and his family.

S.G. What do you remember about school?

W.G. Well, the school was very good - I liked it. C.D. Street was such a good teacher. He was kind. He really didn't push the kids to learn, he helped them. Because it doesn't help to push. I've been in the United Church all my life.

S.G. What do you remember about church and the ministers?

W.G. Well, the church - I must have been about five or six years old - I went to church with my aunt. The church was one special day for the people. Everybody would go to church. Saturday, they would cut all the wood, take it inside and get ready everything so they wouldn't have anything to do on Sunday. They would put their axes away, they would put their guns away, they would put their hunting knives away. All they thought about on Sunday was going to church.

S.G. Why was church so important?

W.G. Well that's what they believed, you know - that's one day they have to respect and honour because it's Sunday - rest day. The minister that baptized me was Jones. I remember Niddrie really well. He was the best minister we ever had. He used to invite me or some of the boys to supper or to work for him, like cutting wood, hauling wood and all that in the winter. And in the summer I would go there and hoe his garden and get all the weeds out.

⁴¹⁴Fred Baptiste to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

S.G. When he invited you for supper, what were those evenings like?

W.G. Oh, we used to sit and talk. That's how I learned a little bit of English.⁴¹⁵

The church was also an important part of life for Percy Berens as he was growing up. Like Walter, Percy speaks with respect for the church and Christianity.

S.G. Percy, your Dad and Mom were in church most times?

P.B. Oh yeah!

S.G. And did you like that? Did you like going to church?

P.B. Oh yeah! I'll explain this. At funerals and weddings, the church was full because people respected that, they respected that. Not like today, no respect at all for anything.

S.G. Why did they respect things like that back then?

P.B. Because they go to church - and the missionary would explain what a married life means, the promises you're making when you're taking the vows on the wedding, see? They wanted to explain.⁴¹⁶

Responding to the idea that many Ojibwa people believe in both the Thunderbirds and the Bible, he speaks with respect for Christianity and places a high value on understanding the Bible.

Yeah, but the Bible is best. If you really explain it to an Indian what that Bible really means and what's in the Bible, the Scriptures, like - then they'll be able to believe it, see? That's the trouble, nobody ever comes along to explain it properly.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵Walter Green to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994. Annie Niddrie, speaking of Berens River in the 1920s, also mentioned the respect held by the people for the Sabbath. "The older Indians were so honest and truthful and the very soul of honor...no drinking and no working on Sundays. It was a hallowed day." See Annie Niddrie, "Annie Niddrie of Berens River."

⁴¹⁶Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

⁴¹⁷Ibid.

A strong and prevalent theme that arises in many discussions with Ojibwa people occurs in the reminiscences of William Berens. This is the great emphasis placed on understanding; without proper understanding there can be no real belief. When asked why William spent so much time reading his Bible, Percy explained that "He wanted to learn! I know many a time I read it for him when he was getting short sighted."⁴¹⁸

Fred Baptiste's family always went to church because, as he puts it simply "They believed in God."⁴¹⁹

S.G. I have the impression that when you were young a lot of people went to church. Why did they do this?

F.B. Well, they all wanted to listen to the preaching - the stories about Jesus, all that stuff that's in the Bible. That's why we used to have a Sunday School, the teacher's going to tell those kids about the Bible. In church on Sundays up at the front in the first two rows there was the school kids, they sat up there listening on Sundays. When somebody died, Mr. Street would let us come to the church if it was a school day.

S.G. Street would close the school if there was a burial?

F.B. Yes. We would all go to the church and sit at the front.⁴²⁰

To Fred's mind, people he knew who had made decisions to become Christians and join the church did so because "They wanted to bring up their children proper like, you know?"⁴²¹ By the 1920s and 1930s, Christianity seems to

⁴¹⁸Ibid.

⁴¹⁹Fred Baptiste to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

⁴²⁰Ibid.

⁴²¹Ibid.

have been integrated into the community enough for it to serve as a standard for what was proper, acceptable and right. In the case of Berens River, this grew from the strong relationships forged between missionaries and a good many of the people as well as the degree to which committed missionaries were able to work consistently and over a long period with the Ojibwa. Betsey Patrick discusses this integration and team work between missionary and community.

S.G. What did the people think of Niddrie?

B.P. They all liked that old missionary.

S.G. Why do you think that was?

B.P. I couldn't tell you exactly why they liked him so much. He used to keep boys there - he used to keep boys in that house, you know. And those boys, they were all good organ players, they all played at church. One was my cousin and another was a Green boy and there was an Everett boy. So they used to take turns in church, you know?

S.G. Who taught them to play the organ?

B.P. Well, that was him, that old man. And of course that Annie, that niece of his was really good...What I really think...the kids in those days really weren't that bad, they weren't bad when they were with the religious institutions. Like this Mr. Street, you know, we went to school for awhile when we were here. And in the morning when he used to go into the class, he used to say the prayers and we'd read one chapter [of the Bible], you know, St. John or - not a lot, just a little one, you know, each child. And then, after that, we used to sing Oh Canada and then we'd start to work. Nowadays they don't teach them no prayers at all - they get into mischief, this sniffing business and everything, they steal, break in. And before, we used to pray. The nuns used to teach them what's not good, what's bad and what's good. What they should do at the school, they should get the missionaries to go at least on Fridays and teach the kids.

S.G. So it was the ministers themselves who gave the stability? Or do you think it was the prayer that gave the stability?

B.P. Well, I think it was just that they gave them good discipline. They'd take all the kids and talk to them good and all that and tell them good. Of course some nowadays say they're so bad, but for me I couldn't say nothing [bad]. They taught me good, they taught me everything - how to knit, how to sew and everything. And if you listen to your

supervisors and listen to them carefully, they'll teach you, and do that. Teach you not to be ignorant.⁴²²

Betsey's parents sent their children to church regularly because "They told us that's good for you to go and listen to the preaching."⁴²³ She also, however, suggests another reason for a high degree of church attendance at Berens River. Her mother grew up with Jacob Berens, her grand uncle, and in his household everyone went to church regularly.

B.P. In the olden days, the old people used to go to church all the time. [Looks at a Berens family picture] You know, I used to visit these old people long ago. You know they used to have church in the morning, church in the afternoon - so those old people used to go twice a day to church.

S.G. Why did they do that?

B.P. I don't know! They had nothing to do on Sundays - might as well go to church. Even on New Year's Eve, you know, they used to get up at eleven o'clock and go to church and they'd have night watch, you know?⁴²⁴

Catholic Ojibwa people living in the Berens River community also experienced their church as a substantial part of their lives as they grew up. Virginia Boulanger remembers that there were always many people in church on Sundays. Her father, James MacKay (Indian Agent Angus

⁴²²Betsey Patrick to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994. Gordon Green (Ida's husband) and Harry Everett were likely the boys who lived with Rev. Niddrie. Niddrie sent Harry, Betsey's cousin, to college to be trained as a minister. Betsey does not know what happened to him after he left Berens River.

⁴²³Ibid.

⁴²⁴Ibid. Jacob Berens had four brothers, Joseph, James, John and Samuel. Betsey's mother, Victoria Keeper, was John's daughter. Victoria's parents died when she was a young girl and was raised by Jacob.

MacKay's son) and mother, Catherine Goosehead (an Ojibwa woman) owned a store where, Virginia says, they worked very hard. She explains that it was especially important to Catherine, who had attended the Brandon Industrial School, that her children went to school "Because they had to learn."⁴²⁵ Like Betsey, Virginia is adamant about the positive contribution of the missionaries to the community.

V.B. One thing I want to tell you. When I was young, a young girl, I never see kids hang themselves like they do today. That's something I always tell white people.

S.G. Why is it different now?

V.B. Because back then they used to tell them everything - they would tell kids "Don't do that."

S.G. Who told the kids what to do and taught them everything?

V.B. Their families. They taught their kids, and I teach me grandkids, to go to church and listen to what they say and learn things to do and not to do.

S.G. When you were growing up, do you think both parents and church helped with this?

V.B. Yes! Yes! Yes!

S.G. Do you think they acted as a team?

V.B. Oh yes, yes. They all had the kids listen.⁴²⁶

Percy, Betsey, and Virginia all refer with conviction and consistency to the idea of doing right and being good. This idea, so strong in Christianity, also has Ojibwa roots and is, possibly, one reason people felt so passionately about the idea of being taught and helped in this regard. For Ojibwas, bad behaviour offends a conjuror or other than human being can result in severe consequences and bitter

⁴²⁵Virginia Boulanger to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

⁴²⁶Ibid.

regret. As A. Irving Hallowell explained, in Ojibwa culture it is wise to avoid offending others; therefore, putting on a friendly front, suppressing one's own opinions and being helpful are beneficial. The foundation here is one of caution and anxiety.⁴²⁷

As Ida Green puts it when asked why she always tried to listen to what she was told by her parents and minister "I have to listen because if I don't behave myself, God doesn't like me if I don't behave myself."⁴²⁸

John Edward Everett remembers Patricia Fuller, his teacher in the Catholic day school.

J.E.E. All those days - one open classroom - I can remember her name, Miss Fuller. We had school - Catholics - we had to go to the Catholic school.

S.G. So what about Miss Fuller? What was she like?

J.E.E. Miss Fuller. She was a kind teacher. Made sure I say at home "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost."

S.G. She taught you that?

J.E.E. Yes.⁴²⁹

John also expresses the place of Christianity in his life when he was growing up.

Well, when I was a small kid even I couldn't even go to sleep. My aunt used to come and say "Are you going to sleep? Do this." [He folds his hands in prayer] Thank the Lord. Next morning she asked "Did you say your Lord's Prayer?" Well, in a person's life you just have to continue on - it's a habit. You cannot even eat at the table without prayer. I was brought up like this and

⁴²⁷A. Irving Hallowell, Culture and Experience, p. 147.

⁴²⁸Ida Green to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

⁴²⁹John Edward Everett to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 2 December 1994.

what am I going to do? Who am I going to listen to? Auntie. My uncle.⁴³⁰

By 1935, like their Methodist counterpart, the Catholic mission seems to have gained a solid place in the community at Berens River. Leach wrote with satisfaction to his Provincial on 24 November:

The work at the school is most encouraging this year. There are 27 on the register. All agree together as one happy family. Their conduct is excellent and their attendance at mass, in spite of handicaps, is very good....As you are aware the opposition we have here is most fanatical. For a very long time now I have had a daily souvenir in my prayers for the conversion of both Catholics and Protestants. It seems that God, in His mercy is beginning to hear our petitions. Today, for instance, practically every Catholic who was able to attend Mass did so.⁴³¹

By the 1920s, Christianity had also gained a place within the Little Grand Rapids community. As discussed in the last chapter, 1919 was the year Mary Nanakwap taught in the Methodist day school and in that year church membership for this denomination rose from zero to twelve members on probation.⁴³² The next year, those probationary members became full members and although statistics show no increases until 1934, neither do they show any decreases.

By this year, Luther Schuetze had been working at Little Grand Rapids for seven years with membership clinging

⁴³⁰Ibid.

⁴³¹AD, L581, .M27L, 130.

⁴³²Minutes of the Sixteenth Session of the Manitoba Conference of the Methodist Church, 1919, p. 327.

tenaciously, if not stubbornly, to twelve. No statistics are available for 1932 and 1933; however, in 1934, membership shot up to 135.⁴³³ By 1936, the Methodist mission had 140 full members and by 1940 there were 149.⁴³⁴ Schuetze wrote "Spiritually we found our natives much more receptive than our white Brethren to the Christian Gospel."⁴³⁵

One of Schuetze's most interesting stories involved the conversion of "the Head Medicine Man, Machkajence (John Duck)" whom he described as "a striking figure with coal black eyes that seemed to spew fire."⁴³⁶ The missionary saw this transformation as a miracle. According to Schuetze, Duck and his wife appeared, carrying a drum, at the Methodist mission one morning. The Indian said "I have come to give you this Drum." He had sold one like it the previous year to a Poplar Hill drummer for \$500 and A. Irving Hallowell had tried without success to buy this particular drum. (It was John Duck who conjured for the anthropologist so that the latter could find out how his

⁴³³The United Church of Canada Year Book (Toronto: United Church of Canada General Offices, 1934), p. 458.

⁴³⁴The United Church of Canada Year Book (Toronto: United Church of Canada General Offices, 1936), p. 400. The United Church of Canada Year Book, p. 424.

⁴³⁵Luther L. Schuetze, "Personal Papers," p. 24.

⁴³⁶Ibid., p. 37.

father was faring.)⁴³⁷ Schuetze was adamant that he wanted nothing to do with it because, to him, it was evil. For years, John Duck had been the Methodist's great foe and the source of much frustration. In the missionary's words:

I saw in John Duck my greatest opponent in our Work, he used to drum and chant in the evening and everyone heard him, and when a man had done something to displease John Duck he would make medicine against him, for instance he would [ask] that that...person would not catch any furs that winter, and it happened often that it was so. If it was a deadly insult he would sing for their death, and often that person laid down and died. Now here stood this man, no cringing and stuttering, but straight and erect, he had come to a decision to accept Christ as his Savior and Master.⁴³⁸

In the end, Schuetze told the Ojibwa that he would take the drum and write on it "This drum has been given to me this date for the Glory of God by John Duck."⁴³⁹ John Duck and his wife were both subsequently baptized.

The Roman Catholics made their initial foray into Little Grand Rapids in 1924. On their first visit to the community in the autumn of that year, De Grandpré and Leach baptised twenty-three children. On 4 February 1925, Father De Grandpré wrote to St. Boniface requesting that a day school be erected. Thirteen of the newly baptized children

⁴³⁷A. Irving Hallowell, The Role of Conjuring, pp. 53-55.

⁴³⁸Luther L. Schuetze, "Personal Papers," p. 38.

⁴³⁹Ibid., p. 39. This drum has disappeared. When Schuetze moved from Little Grand Rapids, he gave it to a Mr. Davidson who was the credit manager of Ashdown's Whole Sale and the Sunday School Superintendent in a Winnipeg church.

were of school age, twelve more had recently been baptized and this group would be of school age in one to two years. All should have had instruction in Catholicism, he maintained; hence parents and councillors were asking for a school to be established.⁴⁴⁰ The community support seems to have been real because parents like John Duck, Charles Dunsford (senior), John Leveque, Hugh Albert Owen and Charles Dunsford (junior) would be mentioned over the decades by Brother Leach as being supportive to the mission work.

Leach enjoyed his time in this community, writing that life there was good; there was no alcohol on the reserve, the children were pleasant and made fair progress at school.⁴⁴¹ The Oblate arrived in the community to begin his work in the new school at precisely 1:00 p.m. on Monday, 25 October 1926. The Catholic Indians had been persuaded to "build a few shacks and leave their wives and kiddies" (while they went into the bush). Leach was genuinely shocked to see so many children at school as he expected all

⁴⁴⁰"Dans une premiere visite faites au Petit Grand Rapide l'automne 1924, vingt-trois enfants ont té baptisté catholiques, dont treize de l'ge a l' cole....Douze autre enfants plus jeunes ont aussi t baptis et plusieurs d'entre eux auront dans un an ou deux l'age de ecole. Tous devront avoir une instruction en rapport avec leur religion et leur foi. C'est pourquoi les conseilluers et les parents demandent avec instance une ecole catholique sur la Reserve du Petit Grand Rapide." AD, L1001, .M27L, 2.

⁴⁴¹Brother Frederick Leach, O.M.I., Fifty-Five Years with Indians and Settlers on Lake Winnipeg (Winnipeg: The Order of Mary Immaculate, Manitoba Province, 1973), p. 32.

the Ojibwa to be away. On his first day of teaching, eleven children appeared and he wrote in his journal that night "Hope they continue. Seem to be a bright bunch. Their names are certainly hopeless. Kakijep, Mijiok etc."⁴⁴²

The people in the community certainly seemed interested and curious. Leach wrote that their house was "full of visitors all day we are on inspection." That house, he commented, was in "awful condition," but, "Still we're happy. This is the missionary life and may God help us to persevere and give us courage and health to carry on."⁴⁴³ His entries often mentioned that his parishioners attended mass, listened attentively to the sermons, showed interest and filled the Oblates' house on Sunday afternoons. Children continued to attend school regularly and in November of 1926, Leach wrote "All the kiddies and even babies came to school today. Sent a few home."⁴⁴⁴

Another way the Catholics secured a foothold at Little Grand Rapids was through their medical aid. The turning point seems to have come in 1926. The wife of a man called Omimi developed an abscess on her knee. Leach wrote:

At first she had an Indian doctor and would not accept my help, but after a number of days when the Indian remedies proved to be of no avail, she called for me....After...successful treatment sick

⁴⁴²"Journal of Brother Frederick Leach."

⁴⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴Ibid.

calls [to others in the community] were more frequent.⁴⁴⁵

Knowledge in education and the Scriptures as well as medical help seem to have been actively sought by the Indians at Little Grand Rapids. It is unlikely that Leach was misrepresenting these situations in his journal and memoirs, especially when he clearly expressed dissatisfaction and demoralization over work situations in other communities.

The story of Charley Dunsford (junior) is interesting. Charley and his father were among the first Catholic parishioners on the reserve and supported the mission from its beginning. During the first mass, Charley Dunsford (senior) "a fine old man," was so moved to extend glad welcome that, in the midst of Father De Grandpré's sermon, he had jumped from his seat and approached the priest, shaking his hand and repeating, "Bonjour, bonjour!"⁴⁴⁶

On 26 April 1927, Leach was called out to see Charley (junior) who had been ill for two months. Writing with the usual sarcasm reserved for these matters, the Oblate recorded that "Doctors (?) Baptiste and Duck present with Drums."⁴⁴⁷ Six days later, Leach noted that Charley, more

⁴⁴⁵Brother Frederick Leach, O.M.I., Sixty years with Indians and Settlers on Lake Winnipeg (Winnipeg: The Order of Mary Immaculate, Manitoba Province, 1983), p. 31.

⁴⁴⁶Leach, Sixty Years, p. 25.

⁴⁴⁷"Journal of Brother Frederick Leach."

ill by the day, had consented to be baptized. Still, however, he "[got] Dr. (?) Duck to doctor him. Dr. (?) Duck plays his drums in Charley's tent during the night." On Good Friday, 15 April, Charley "received Extreme Unction and sent his pagan doctors away. Quite a few came [to Mass]. Charley's conversion had done good to all."⁴⁴⁸

Significantly, until the end of his life, Charley incorporated both Christian and Ojibwa aid. It is difficult to know whether his final decision to send the medicine men away was because Charley knew that Leach would not baptize him otherwise or whether he simply made a choice of one over the other in his dying moments. Ojibwa medicine did not require exclusivity of devotion whereas Catholicism certainly does. Possibly, in order to truly acquire the power from the latter, the Indian had to send away the drummers although their absence from his sick bed need not have meant that they were absent from his heart. On 24 April, Charley died and Leach noted in his journal:

May God grant that I die as resigned to His Holy Will as Charley. Since he renounced paganism he has done his utmost to influence all to accept God's Word. His last words to his old Father were, "Help these White people all you can and take their Belief." His little son, "Little Dogskin" was baptised and given the name Joseph Tache.⁴⁴⁹

In his book, Sixty Years With Indians and Settlers on Lake Winnipeg, Leach mentioned that near the end, Charley was

⁴⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹Ibid.

totally alone in his house. "His relatives and friends were following an old old custom....They were leaving him to die in peace."⁴⁵⁰ After Charley's death, Charley (senior) exchanged pipes with Leach, telling the Oblate that since he had taken care of his son, Charley would now take care of Leach.⁴⁵¹

In 1938, the Oblates continued to report to St. Boniface with pleasure and optimism about their work at Little Grand Rapids. On 17 January of that year, Father De Grandpré wrote to the Rev. Father P.G. Lamontagne, saying that church attendance was thriving thanks to the work of Boniface Guimond. As in the case of Luther Schuetze, Guimond had, by this time, been working in the community for a number of years (since 1927) and had earned some respect and trust.⁴⁵²

Methodist missionaries Roscoe Tranner Chapin and F.G. Stevens wrote some similar reports from farther north about the vigour with which their native clientele took on Christianity. Chapin began work at the Island Lake Mission in 1922. Discussing the warmth, sincerity and good will of the Island Lake Cree, he wrote:

⁴⁵⁰Leach, Sixty Years, p. 31.

⁴⁵¹Ibid.

⁴⁵²"Beaucoup de monde est venu à l'église le dimanche. C'est dire que Boniface [Guimond] fait bon travail par la et...je souhaite qu'il y reste encore." AD, L581, .M27L, 161.

During the summer and fall, before they left for their winter camps, Sunday was a gala day. From the more distant points on the lake many would start the night before, camp on the way, and be at the Mission point for breakfast and a visit before the morning service. I have...counted about 50 canoes heading for morning worship together. Thrilling? It did something to you.⁴⁵³

The Sandy Lake Ojibwa embody another good example of native acceptance of Christianity. This community was visited annually between 1920 and 1930 by Rev. Niddrie until he got too old to make the trips. F.G. Stevens explained that, by this time, the popularity of Indian mission work had so declined and the Board of Home Mission had become so incompetent in its planning and training policy that Sandy Lake was neglected and finally dropped from the Methodist field. Only Adam Fiddler remained at work among these people. The group, however, never gave up in their quest for a missionary and sent petition after petition to the Home Mission Board asking for aid. In 1937, the Catholics started a mission at Deer Lake but most remained loyal to Methodism.⁴⁵⁴

In the Berens River community today, the lives of Percy Berens, Walter Green, Fred Baptiste, John Edward Everett, Virginia Boulanger, Ida Green and Betsey Patrick are affected by their Christian faith. The shedding of Christ's

⁴⁵³Roscoe Tranner Chapin, "Memoirs of a Happy Journey Through Life," p. 44.

⁴⁵⁴F.G. Stevens, "The Sandy Lake Story," (Personal Papers of F.G. Stevens) p. 12.

blood for the sins of humankind seems to have had particular impact. This might be reflective of the reason many Ojibwa chose to convert to Christianity. As has been discussed, in Ojibwa religion, angry conjurors and injured other-than-human beings can wreak enormous havoc in one's life. It follows, then, that the concept of Jesus Christ shedding blood so that a person's sins can be forgiven and so that people can enter heaven is powerful for many Ojibwas.

A few years ago, Walter Green had a serious operation in a Winnipeg hospital.

W.G. A minister came in to pray for me because that morning I was to go on the operating table. And I asked that minister which church does he belong to....He was a rabbi. He wanted to pray for me but I said to him "I belong to the United Church. I don't think I want you." Because he was going to do this thing - they sprinkle something on your forehead and it means you belong to their church. So I didn't want anybody else to come and pray for me, just a minister from the United Church.

S.G. I notice, though, that the time you had [a] vision when you were sick at home with a cold, you talked about that vision to a Pentecostal minister. But you're not a Pentecostal. Was it that the rabbi was more threatening - that you felt he would take you?

W.G. That's what I felt, you know. He, might want me to sign the paper and belong to his church. This Pentecostal minister, he's a good friend of mine. There's some kind of relationship between me and him. So I just wanted to know how he felt about my dream....I want to stick to the United Church where I was baptized.⁴⁵⁵

Fred Baptiste's house is full of pictures depicting Christian themes such as Jesus, the Last Supper and the crucifixion. A particularly large coloured painting dominates one wall.

⁴⁵⁵Walter Green to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

F.B. You know this picture of Jesus. Can you make anything out of that?

S.G. Well, I see Jesus knocking at a door, and it's closed and it's night. What's your take on that?

F.B. He's standing at the door, knocking at the door....He's knocking at your heart - and would you let him in or not? I want you to answer that!

S.G. You want me to answer that?

F.B. Yes, yes. If Jesus knocks at your door - that's your heart's door, eh? - would you let Him in?

S.G. I think I would.

F.B. Sure! Sure! Nobody'd ever turn Him down.

[Then in reference to the Crucifixion:]

F.B. I like both those pictures. Jesus carried that cross - for our sins - and when He got there to the end, He was stripped and He was crucified. His hands here [points to his palms] - He got five bleeding wounds: His hands, His feet, His side - that's where the blood came out, through here. Your sins should be washed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

S.G. Does that have a lot of meaning for you?

F.B. Oh yes! Oh yes!⁴⁵⁶

John Edward Everett speaks with similar passion and loyalty:

Today I'm a Catholic - cross, water - God, there is only one God. The Holy Water is good. My religion is one religion. When I was born, they baptised me as a Catholic. I'll stay that way 'til I die.⁴⁵⁷

About Christ, John says:

There's only one. He died for us on the cross. What happened? There was two more on the cross - sinners. What did one say to Jesus? "Release us from this trouble." The other one said "Remember me when you enter paradise." Many times I take the Sacraments at Bloodvein. Remember. I remember. That He died for you - that's why that

⁴⁵⁶Fred Baptiste to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

⁴⁵⁷John Edward Everett to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 2 December 1994.

blood was shed - for me. My sins He will forgive.⁴⁵⁸

Virginia Boulanger also has many religious pictures and Bible verse plaques on her walls. For her, the Virgin Mary has special meaning and significance. She has many pictures, paintings, drawings and tapestries of Mary and when asked why she is important to Virginia, the Ojibwa woman responds:

[because] she had to suffer when her son was crucified. Only a mother could feel that, you know. And you have to remember - when you pray, you have to sign with the cross and remember that He was dying for you - for our sins. God is helping us every day.⁴⁵⁹

Christianity, however, certainly did not thrive and grow at all times in all places. The 1918 influenza epidemic, combined with Methodist neglect of the field, caused trouble for F.G. Stevens at Sandy Lake. He wrote:

Now, in August, 1918, under a great fear, they had made a relapse into pagan practices. Adam [Fiddler] had become discouraged and had given his work. Vexed and disappointed, he had practically backslidden....Then they turned against me. Threats had been made on my life if I came. There was no welcome for me...but I stood firmly.⁴⁶⁰

Stevens found, that same year, that the Indians at Deer Lake also possessed a mind of their own and clearly rejected the mission school there. Upon visiting these people, he found that the Little Crane children were not attending the

⁴⁵⁸Ibid.

day school that had been opened in 1917. Upon asking the parents about the situation, the missionary was firmly told that the teacher had taken the names of their children away and that that was not acceptable. Also "[he] told our children not to kill little birds. We do not want our children taught that."⁴⁶¹

As well, not all Ojibwa people sought baptism for themselves or their families. For example, on 20 April 1927, George Boucher, a Little Grand Rapids man, asked Frederick Leach to come and see his daughter, sixteen year old Mary, who was dying of consumption. Five days later, the Oblate wrote in his journal that she was "very weak. I wish I could get her baptised Catholic."⁴⁶² On 30 April there was no improvement and Leach asked the father to allow Mary to be instructed in Catholicism. George "deferred his answer." Although (or perhaps, because) the Ojibwa had lost two children that year to consumption, he was certainly in no hurry to join the church or allow Mary to be converted. On 8 May, a frustrated Leach noted that "George is as obstinate as a mule and will not let her be baptised." On 11 May "Mary Boucher had a very bad spell towards evening.

⁴⁵⁹Virginia Boulanger to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

⁴⁶⁰Personal Papers of F.G. Stevens.

⁴⁶¹Ibid., p. 12.

Poor little kid it made my heart ache to see her....Geo.
Boucher refuses religious consolation to Mary."⁴⁶³

That Christian Ojibwa people have freely selected aspects of Christianity that appeal to them and have rejected aspects that are meaningless to them is made clear in John Edward Everett's theological discussions.

S.G. I want to ask you about the Virgin Mary.

J.E.E. I can say this: in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, amen. Why? Because she's a statue, eh? Virgin Mary - she's a statue. I don't want to kneel down there and ask Virgin Mary to forgive my sins. Well, I used to do it, you know - just because I was taught to be that way. But now who am I asking today?

S.G. Who are you asking today?

J.E.E. Lord, I say, forgive me my sins.

S.G. So you go straight to God?

J.E.E. Yeah.

S.G. You don't go through the Virgin Mary?

J.E.E. No! No! I got a cross - beads - rosary beads for saying that prayer. But not now. There's many many moons, yes.

S.G. So you don't feel like you have to go through Mary any more?

J.E.E. No. There's only one. He died for us. Okay, He died for us on the cross.⁴⁶⁴

As noted earlier, the Berens family had some problems with Catholicism coming to the Berens River and Catholic day school statistics indicate that this mission occupied a definite minority position on the Reserve. Catholic mission records also indicate a fairly lukewarm community response to their overtures (although this mission's adherents seem

⁴⁶³Ibid. We do not learn exactly when Mary died but can assume it was fairly soon after 27 May when Leach noted that he was spending most nights at her bedside; she was never baptized.

⁴⁶⁴John Edward Everett to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 2 December 1994.

to have been as loyal as the Methodist parishioners). The priests' journals and letters are full of references to boredom and loneliness, a problem that does not seem to have been shared by Methodist counterparts at Berens River.

Wrote Father De Grandpré to St. Boniface on 5 January 1920:

A little too quiet. We would be bored if we didn't have manual work to occupy us. The work of the clergy is very little - it would not be sufficient to occupy a Father and we are two. Since four months that have been here, I haven't heard fifteen confessions except at Christmas or when there is a big gathering. In that case, there are seven confessions.⁴⁶⁵

"In our poor mission, the days pass by monotonously and tranquilly," wrote E. Planet to his Provincial, Rev. Father Jean Baptiste Beys on 22 November 1921.⁴⁶⁶ Perhaps one of the most revealing documents is a letter from Father Leandre Gauthier to the Rev. Father Josephat Magnan on 4 October 1927. The passage, besides revealing much about Gauthier's personal biases, reflects a coolness towards the mission on the part of many Ojibwa at Berens River.

I don't believe the acquisition of language will be the biggest difficulty that I will encounter in mission work - this will be, I believe, to succeed in liking Indians because I find them to be very full of pride, concealment and hypocrisy, not to mention untidy. I haven't a lot of sympathy for them. I believe that the proximity of the

⁴⁶⁵"un peu trop tranquille, l'en serait ennuyeux s'il n'y avait pas les travaux manuels pour nous occuper. Le travail du ministère est bien peu de chose il ne souffrirait pas pur [sic] occuper un père et nous sommes deux. Depuis quatre mois que je suis [ici] je n'ai entendu en tout qu'une quinzaine de confessions. Excepté à Noël ou il y a un grand concours. Celors [sic] j'ai en sept confessions." AD, L581, .M27L, 29.

⁴⁶⁶"dans notre pauvre mission, les jours s'écoulaient monotones et tranquilles." AD, L581, .M27L, 50.

Methodists puts them back worse than elsewhere. But I hope that, with time, I will succeed in finding several qualities in them to be, after all of the world. I finish...with the hope that in my next letter I will be able to write to you in total truth: I like my Indians and am beginning to speak with them in their language.⁴⁶⁷

The most tangible evidence of native rejection of Christian mission work at Berens River is in the story of the Roman Catholic boarding school. In 1936, a residential school was built in the community and the Oblate Sisters agreed to assume administrative responsibilities. However:

In spite of efforts and pains taken by the good teachers, the residential school was not a success due to the lack of co-operation from the parents of the children.⁴⁶⁸

When the Oblates decided to use the new building as a nursing station instead, the idea was welcomed by the Ojibwa. Since the Oblate Sisters did not do this kind of work, the Grey Nuns accepted the job of running the facility and provided day school teaching as well.

In 1936, these Indians were standing as firmly as they had in 1875 in terms of control over their religious lives. Like the Little Cranes at Deer Lake who had withdrawn their

⁴⁶⁷"je ne crois pas que l'acquisition de la langue soit la plus grande difficulté que je rencontrerai dans le travail des missions. Ce sera plutôt, je crois, de parvenir à aimer les sauvages, car je les trouve bien indépendants [orgueilleux] (?), dissimulés et hypocrites, sans parler de leur malpropreté. Cela fait que je n'ai pas beaucoup de sympathie pour eux. Je crois que le [voisinage ?] des méthodistes les rendus pires qu'ailleurs. Mais j'espère qu'avec le temps, je parviendrai à trouver quelque qualité dans ces êtres qui sont pourtant du monde. Je termine...avec l'espoire que sur ma prochaine lettre, je pourrai nous écrire en toute vérité: j'aime mes sauvages, et je commence à parler avec eux dans leur langue." AD, L1001, .M27L, 2.

⁴⁶⁸Brother Frederick Leach, Sixty Years with Indians, p. 49.

children from school because they did not like the messages that were being imparted, the Ojibwa at Berens River had no intention of supporting that which was forced on them against their will. That the Oblates would construct an entire building and secure staff before really exploring the wishes of parents says much about their attitude towards that which they decided was good, proper and beneficial for "their" Indians. Between 1917 and 1940, the Ojibwa along the Berens River not only actively decided whether to let themselves be led to water, but they clearly decided where, when and how much they would drink.

CHAPTER VIII
 ENCOUNTERS, 1917-1940: SURVIVALS AND
 INTEGRATIONS

Is it possible that beneath the Christianity of the native peoples of the Arctic and sub-Arctic there still flourishes in the psychic life of emotional orientation and fundamental attitudes, the pre-Christian aboriginal religion?⁴⁶⁹

So writes anthropologist Antonio R. Gualtieri in his book, Christianity and Native Traditions: Indigenization and Syncretism Among the Inuit and Dene of the Western Arctic. He found examples of religious persistence, not only among northern peoples, but among peoples around the world. In New Guinea, for example, among tribes of Markham Valley, vital native animism and medicinal ritual were, in 1941, co-existing with the German Lutheranism brought by missionaries. Another example occurs in a rather bitter letter written on 27 November 1883 from Oblate missionary Bishop Paul Durieu to Father Jean Marie LeJacq in the Cariboo country of British Columbia. The Bishop was upset about native religious ideas existing beneath the overlay of Roman Catholicism among the Chilcotin Indians:

It is a truism that the Indian quickly brings his religion in accord with actions that flatter his self-interest and passion....The Indians, although baptised, saying their prayers and even confessing very often, retain within their hearts pagan ideas

⁴⁶⁹Antonio R. Gualtieri, Christianity and Native Traditions: Indigenization and Syncretism Among the Inuit and Dene of the Western Arctic (Notre Dame, Indiana: Christian Cultural Publications, 1984), p. 71.

and maxims which will often be the norm of their daily actions.⁴⁷⁰

In his book, The Role of Conjuring in Saulteaux Society, A.Irving Hallowell noted that the shaking tent ceremony reinforced Saulteaux values and beliefs by tangibly validating ideas relating to the dynamic entities of the cosmos (thereby humanizing spirits and increasing intimacy between humans and other-than-humans), supporting the Ojibwa social structure by exposing the dangers of violating social mores, generating confidence in dealing with life's pitfalls and providing entertainment for participating audiences. Thus, he explained, it was understandable that conjuring had:

persisted up until the present day even in communities where Indians have been Christianized...the occurrence of conjuring in such cases is an index of the validity of native beliefs, attitudes and values despite the veneer of acculturation.⁴⁷¹

Even near the end of his career, Brother Frederick Leach was protesting the ongoing power and influence held by medicine men in northern Manitoba. In 1952, for example, an upset Ojibwa friend warned him that he had offended a medicine man who was consequently preparing to do him harm. Although Leach said he felt like smiling over a harmless threat, he gave his friend credit for showing enough courage

⁴⁷⁰Ibid., p. 71.

⁴⁷¹A.Irving Hallowell, The Role of Conjuring, p. 7.

to actually deliver a warning.⁴⁷² That Leach felt compelled to publish an article about the problems of Indian people relying on medicine men shows their firm place in Ojibwa society.⁴⁷³

Speaking to Hallowell in the 1930s, William Berens recalled an incident where he believed, as a young man, he had actually been charmed. A number of instances when William had used Christianity to overcome potential harm from conjurors have been noted, reflecting his strongly Ojibwa approach to the new religion. In this case, however, he was actually taken over by a spell and fell in love with a young woman. William had been working on a surveying job up the Berens River. He was very smitten with this beautiful young woman who had "light skin and flashing black eyes." Too shy to pursue her, William left the next morning; however, as he passed her, she reached out and touched him. That night, in another camp with six men, William dreamed of this woman who was walking on the water, straight towards him. "Come across to me," she said.

The next thing William knew, he was out of the tent and calling for a boat. How he got out over the other men he never knew. They shook him and asked him if he were crazy. The next day after they had started, William asked the boss whether he could pay him off and let him go. Request

⁴⁷²Brother F. Leach, "Indian Medicine Men and Their Remedies," Moccasin Telegraph, Winter, 1966, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁷³Specifically, Leach was concerned about misdiagnosis and improper doses of medicines administered to sick people by medicine men - although he did acknowledge the usefulness of Indian medical roots and herbs and retained a lifelong interest in these things.

refused. Still later he noticed that his vest was gone. Where it got to he never knew. Was sure he had it on when he started. Whole thing was the result of a love charm as he could not stop thinking of the girl for several days. Put into effect when she touched him. Must have had medicine in her hand.⁴⁷⁴

William's sons Percy and Gordon Berens, and Fred Baptiste all expressed a real respect for the power of conjurers. Similarly, while Virginia Boulanger says that she does not believe in, nor does she trust, the power of medicine, she concedes that for awhile, the medicine men did have real powers.⁴⁷⁵ For his part, Walter Green expresses real admiration for medicine men, saying, "They're so wonderful - they can do anything....They were blessed!"⁴⁷⁶

Percy Berens provides an explanation for the missionaries' ongoing battles against Ojibwa healers:

S.G. It seems to me that many missionaries, like Brother Leach and Rev. Niddrie and even Percy Jones, were pretty down on medicine men.

P.B. Oh yeah! One reason why. They didn't want this new generation to live that kind of life.

S.G. What was wrong with that kind of life?

P.B. Because they didn't believe in it, that was what was wrong. That's the trouble. They didn't really have it explained to them what it means for an Indian to be a medicine man.

S.G. What does it mean for an Indian to be a medicine man? What should the missionaries have understood?

⁴⁷⁴A. Irving Hallowell Papers, MS Coll. 26, APS, Philadelphia.

⁴⁷⁵Virginia Boulanger to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

⁴⁷⁶Walter Green to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

P.B. They should have known better. That man there, that medicine man, he's going to save lives! For other people! It's a good thing! I very appreciate your bringing this whole thing up, this medicine thing. The old people lived long in my time - no babies died that much as what they do now because the Indians knew the medicine...the medicine men had the knowledge and the medicine.⁴⁷⁷

The prevailing belief in Thunderbirds among people in the Berens River community evokes similar themes. Fred Baptiste, cited elsewhere in this study for his passionate expressions of Christian faith, is also passionate about the Thunderbird feather he once owned. Percy Berens has this to say about the huge birds:

S.G. Percy, do you believe in the Thunderbirds?

P.B. Thunderbirds? Oh, yeah. I believe that. I fully believe.

S.G. What do you think about them? What do you believe about them?

P.B. It's a bird! It's a bird. You should go to Poplar River [to see their nest of boulders]. White people don't believe it's a bird, a Thunderbird, they don't believe on that. But we Indians absolutely believe that's a bird.⁴⁷⁸

Percy explains that the lake up at Poplar River is all clear of Thunderbirds now. He speaks of this to Jennifer Brown and Maureen Matthews.

J.B. So the Thunderbirds moved away?

P.B. They moved, I guess. Too much travelling on that lake....If you're on the north end of that lake, I was, and you look through on a clear day, look towards the west end there, it's just like that place above all the rest. The main shore is here, like - and that thunder where the Thunderbirds used to nest is way up higher than that.

J.B. Did they go away partly because of airplanes and things like that?

⁴⁷⁷Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

⁴⁷⁸Ibid. At Poplar River, explains Percy, there is a high place where one can see the Thunderbirds' nests.

P.B. I guess so. And the bush fires used to be on that lake all the time and forest planes would be there all the time. Maybe that's why they're gone.

When asked if he fears Thunderbirds, Percy responds:

No. No, I don't. I know lots of people do. Even they just put blinds on their windows when there's a thunderstorm. Old timers used to be really really afraid of - My Mom, myself, my Mom used to cover up all the windows and all the mirrors in the house, used to cover them all up when there's a thunderstorm.⁴⁷⁹

Gordon Berens, Percy's brother, became a United Church minister late in life. He had a very special tie with Thunderbirds and had a unique relationship with his grandfather, Jacob Berens.

G.B. I was a baby for him, my grandfather. That old fellow saw a lot of me. I know a lot of white people don't believe the old Indian ways. The old - my grandpa - blessed me with Thunders, Thunderbirds. Yeah, he blessed me with a Thunderbird and there was one time, I was out at a sand bar picking strawberries - so that time, there was a big thunderstorm. Rain poured down. I was out picking strawberries. While I stood out, like, we had a talk - while I stood out - and I hold up my hand like that. "That's enough! That's enough! Let it stop," I said, "let it stop because," I said, "you're going to wet everybody except me." That rain just stopped like that. And none of my hair was wet....The Thunderbirds blessed me.

And:

G.B. [When my Mom went into labour] Thunder! Thunderstorm came so heavy and my Dad put down two tents on top of the other. And when I was born, the water poured down them two tents just like as if they was no cover at all, except the place where my Mom was lying, not a drop. Not a drop of rain. But the rest of it was just pouring down between them two tents by pailfuls you see, but where my Mom was lying, no rain at all. Oh yes, my Mom often used to tell me about it. My Dad did too, so I guess that's why I'm still alive today.

⁴⁷⁹Percy Berens to Jennifer S.H. Brown and Maureen Matthews, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 12 September 1994.

M.M. When there was thunder, could you hear the Thunderbirds talking?

G.B. Well, of course I do....You know, a lot of people don't believe me. When a thunderstorm comes, I know what it is, but try to tell them, they won't believe it. So I just keep it to myself. I tried it once and they wouldn't believe me. I said "That's all. You're finished. I won't interpret no more. I won't interpret no more if you don't believe what I interpret this time, " I says....But I understand them. I can talk to them in my own language and they understand me. If I say [to] a big thunderstorm "That's enough! You scare the kids. You scare the children. That's enough!" [softly] Thunder just talk like that, yeah.

J.B. Did you learn a lot from your grandfather, from Jacob?
G.B. Oh, I did - I did. Oh, I wasn't too old, but I learned a lot. He used to tell me "That's going to happen." He predict things ahead of time. And that always came true. He says "Remember, that's going to happen. What I'm telling you, I'm predicting now," he says "you'll remember as soon as you, as soon as you hear the thunder," he says "you'll understand." Yeah, that happened. Still happens to me like that. Still happens.⁴⁸⁰

Another interesting example of a survival of Ojibwa belief is found in Percy and Gordon Berens's discussions about the Memegwesiwag. One of Percy's encounters with these "Mound-builders", as he called them, was discussed earlier. Gordon remembers another of Percy's experiences this way:

my brother Percy heard them beating the drum. Where we have our cabin on the lake, when we were trapping, there's a high rock and there's a river on the east side of the lake and there's a high rock there. And my brother was out, I was out, I was out with him but I turned back. I turned back where I only had my sets, I only had my sets, pull them up but he had to go further. So I was coming back after I pulled up my sets and I came right back to our camp. It was kind of late in the evening. Seen him coming. I had tea all ready, supper all ready, supper waiting for him. So he

⁴⁸⁰Gordon Berens to Jennifer S.H. Brown and Maureen Matthews, Fisher River Seniors Residence, 20 March 1995.

come in. I look at him and, oh, did he ever look pale. "Oh," I said "what happened? Oh!" I says, "you look so darn pale! Are you sick?" "No," he says "I'm not sick." "What happened?" "Well, boy," he says "I'll just tell you. Boy, I hear them, what you call Memegwesiwag. I heard the Memegwesiwag singing," he says. "On the last high rock on the lake there," he says, "and I went to the little island there," he says "I went to the little island there. I went to this place where there was open water. I bent down to have a drink and, boy, I could hear that drum," he says "in the water, like an echo. So I had a drink and, boy, I could hear that drum," he says "in the water like an echo. So I had a drink and I kind of sat, and boy," he says "I sat. Well they start to sing. Beat the drum," he says "and start to sing. Oh I stay there," he says "I sat there and listened." Well, you know the next thing he had to do. He had to put tobacco where he heard them singing, like, you know. That's a present, like, you know - so he had to go there. He says "Boy, I put that tobacco on the ledge of a rock. Walk away." Next time he went, he went and check if that tobacco was gone. The tobacco was gone and there was a rib, a blade, like, you know - a blade of an animal. So he took that. It was right on top, where he had the tobacco, so he pick it up and he brought it to our camp and he said to my Dad....My Dad look at that rib, at that blade....He couldn't figure out what kind of animal it was. So he told Percy "I don't...this animal," he says "is not from this place. Different place, this animal is from a different place." Well, he kept that thing, you know, when he was trapping nobody could beat him. He was always the head trapper. Nobody could beat him. 'Cause he used to carry this with him all the time. He used to carry this blade all the time and nobody could beat him. He was always the highest one. Yeah, he was the highest one. So, a lot of them asked him why he was killing so much fur. My, he wouldn't tell them, he wouldn't give away himself, wouldn't give away himself why he was killing so much. He just didn't want to tell them.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸¹Ibid.

When Maureen Matthews asked Gordon if he believed that the Memegwesiwag people had given powers to Percy, he replied "I believe it. I believe it. Sure there's people living and the only way a person sees them people is when they dream."⁴⁸²

After fifty years of missionary encounters, Ojibwa beliefs remained strong at Little Grand Rapids in the 1930s. Just as Luther Schuetze and Frederick Leach recalled drumming going on at the bedsides of sick Ojibwa, so John Niddrie remembered the community as "a stronghold of paganism, and at eventide, the sound of the conjurors' drums could be heard in all directions."⁴⁸³ Leach remembered much illness there during the 1920s and 1930s and commented "on occasions there was little cooperation from the parents or patient; added to this, many preferred Indian remedies to the white man's."⁴⁸⁴ And:

When we were stationed at Little Grand Rapids we heard the beating of the drums quite often. At times, it would be the "medicine-man" drumming after he had been called out to give herbs to a patient. This...was supposed to increase the efficacy of his medicine.⁴⁸⁵

Luther Schuetze wrote of an interesting event concerning windigos that occurred in church among his own

⁴⁸²Ibid.

⁴⁸³Rev. John W. Niddrie, "North of the Northwest," p. 109.

⁴⁸⁴Brother Frederick Leach, Sixty Years With Indians, p. 30.

⁴⁸⁵Ibid., p. 31.

flock of Christianized Indians. In 1929, the missionary put up the first Christmas tree ever seen in the community. He wanted to convey the concept of Santa Claus and got a stronger response than he bargained for after explaining that Santa is a stranger who arrives with presents.

Everyone panicked as they were deathly afraid of strangers and had the most weird stories about strangers often being windigoe...who often killed and ate up some of the native peoples, it seemed a yearly occurrence with them that someone saw a stranger somewhere and it most likely would be a windigoe, they would all pack up and move.⁴⁸⁶

Schuetze, at this point, had no idea how terrified the Ojibwa were; he went on to say that Santa would arrive at the church and would be accompanied by the sound of bells. On Christmas Eve, he dressed up the Ranger from Eagle Lake.

I have never seen anything like what happened when those bells jingled and the door opened. The whole Congregation all sitting on those log benches disappeared under them, how they did it, I don't know...there were some real stout women.⁴⁸⁷

Schutze also included the following story in his memoirs. It was meant to gently scoff at the phenomenon of windigos and show that the Indians at Little Grand Rapids were "Gradually...emerging from the yoke of superstition and fear."⁴⁸⁸ It seems to suggest more, however, about the prevalence of the Ojibwa world view among the Indians of

⁴⁸⁶Personal Papers of Luther Schuetze, p. 11.

⁴⁸⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸Ibid., p. 24.

this community. The incident occurred on Upon Gashing [Pauingassi] Lake and was related to Schuetze by the chief. He and his brother were paddling a canoe when the latter thought he saw a Windigo. The brother said that they should leave immediately and go home to warn others.

the Chief was following suit, and then said he remembered what I had said in one of my sermons, that they should always make certain of anything before they spread a false rumour, so under his brother's protest, he steered the canoe closer, and found it was a tree stump.⁴⁸⁹

Of great interest, when studying encounters between Christianity and native world views in northern Manitoba are the examples of the ways in which both Cree and Ojibwa integrated these two belief systems. A 1928 article entitled, "Wetigoes - Or What?," written by Methodist missionary J.A.C. Kell while he was stationed at Oxford House, provides an excellent example.⁴⁹⁰ A group of Indians came to call on Kell.

"Donald Wood has been brought in from his camp to the Chief's house. He is afraid that he is going crazy and wants you to give him the Sacrament." That...sounded simple...but was it? It was more than half a century since Oxford House Indians finally renounced their pagan beliefs and practices of their ancestors and, as a community, accepted Christianity. For awhile their enthusiasm and the novelty of this new way of living [uplifted them]. But it is not reasonable to expect that a primitive people can in two generations cast off the instincts, superstitions

⁴⁸⁹Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰Rev. J.A.C. Kell, "Wetigoes - Or What?" (1928). Personal Papers of Rev. J.A.C. Kell (United Church Archives, Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario).

and prejudices inherited from many generations of pagan ancestors. At present...some...are leading good Christian lives, but many are semi-pagan and semi-Christian. They realise the power of God but cannot lose their fear of evil spirits and medicine men.⁴⁹¹

Kell explained that Donald Wood was an excellent bushman, adding that this was an inherited trait as was his inherent vulnerability to superstition. Wood and his son had experienced problems with their health.

Consequently, being naturally of a superstitious nature...[Wood] firmly believes that his misfortunes are due to evil spirits. He has now got it into his head that the only remedy is the Sacrament, which he regards as superior medicine, able to counteract evil influences.⁴⁹²

Apart from revealing the writer's ethnocentrism, this passage tells of a comfortable and meaningful integration of Cree and Christian religious ideas on the part of Donald Wood.

In another piece entitled "The Social Organization of the Northern Cree," Kell wrote:

The effect of Christianity on these people is difficult to gauge...as only very few have understood the meaning of Christianity...unfortunately [except for a few cases] the great majority of Indians are only half Christian and half pagan. They still believe in bad medicine and wetigoes but have their children baptized, attend church and pray, presumably to the Christian God. Along with their fears of their own old superstitions they add fears of the devil and of hell. They...alternate between periods of great carelessness

⁴⁹¹Ibid.

⁴⁹²Ibid.

and moral recklessness and periods of penitence and self-nourished sanctity.⁴⁹³

Writing in the same vein from Fisher River,

F.G. Stevens complained to Kell in a 1927 letter that:

Nowhere do I find much stability. The Hart-Muskego people were pagans in the bush and Christians at the mission. The others, on the other side, were not much for pagan customs but I always find that when the situation becomes desperate that most find down deep in their heart some paganism. This I found out at Oxford House as I do here and everywhere.⁴⁹⁴

An example of just such a desperate situation occurred among the Indians at Deer Lake in 1918. F.G. Stevens had just left that community to return to Oxford House when a man became very ill and could not be cured. Stevens wrote in his memoirs:

All the time, some of the older men were just over the border between paganism and Christianity. Other means failing them, they brought out their drums. The man died. Then they were very much afraid of what they'd done. That was the year of the "flu" and although...none of them took it, they were excited all winter. More or less conjuring went on all the next spring. Not all of them turned back to paganism. Adam Fiddler remained faithful.⁴⁹⁵

The Deer Lake Indians were in a frightening situation. Aware that people in many communities were dying of the epidemic, they were probably using all possible means

⁴⁹³J.A.C. Kell, "The Social organization of the Northern Cree," Oxford House, 1928 (Personal Papers of Rev. J.A.C. Kell) p. 8.

⁴⁹⁴Personal Papers of Rev. J.A.C. Kell.

⁴⁹⁵F.G. Stevens, "The Sandy Lake Story," (Personal Papers of F.G. Stevens), p. 12.

available to see themselves through a crisis, rather than simply abandoning Christianity. Although the people were angry over having been without a missionary during this time (Stevens wrote that he had been warned that if he returned to Deer Lake he would be shot), they all appeared at church in the summer of 1919 - presumably with Adam Fiddler presiding. When Stevens arrived, he found a mixture of responses that ranged from furious ("I had a desperate time with these") to "Steadfast and faithful." Stevens reported, however, that he "mastered them all"; he left Deer Lake and did not return for twenty-one years.

At Berens River, we find a rich history involving the integrations of two world views. Gordon Berens is clear that just as Percy acquired his special hunting powers from the Memegwesiwag, or Small People, so too did Fair Wind derive his amazing gifts from the Thunderbirds. His discussion of how he and his father combined Christian with Ojibwa concepts is enlightening.

G.B. Well, it combines together. That's the real way to say. The real true word to use, combine together. Church and the other belief combines together like one. So the church believes the people and the people believes the church, both ways, like. So there's no problem. There's a connection, like, that couldn't break off between the old Indian ways and the present belief. The two beliefs are connected together, just like one.

M.M. Did it take awhile to work out the connection?

G.B. Sure they do. The church believes a lot of these old Indian ways was true. And that's why they are combined together so strongly that you couldn't, you can't break off the connection, like. Both are true. Both ways are true. The Indian ways are true and the white man belief is true, so it's hard to break the two links.

J.B. Sometimes some of the white men tried to say the Indian way was false.

G.B. Yeah.

J.B. And they tried to throw it away.

G.B. Yeah, they tried to throw it away, they tried to destroy the Indian way. A lot of them don't realize it's just like one belief. A lot of white people don't believe an Indian belief and a white man belief are just like one. But a lot of them don't believe it. They can't break the Indian way from the white man, the white people's way.⁴⁹⁶

Gordon summed up his own theology thus:

"You'll never be a white man," I says [to his nephew] "although you think you're a white man when you're doing white man's things, " I says "his ways. But," I said "you're still a full blooded Indian. That's what you are yet....I respect the white man's way, " I said "but I still hold on [to] my Indian ways," I said. "Just like one, my way and the white man's way," I say "is just like one to me." I believe his ways and I believe my ways. "A lot of white people believe my ways the same as I do, " I says "but a lot of them don't,"....And I says "There's a link that'll never be broken apart. The white man's way and an Indian way....I've had my dreams all these years and I've been with the white people more than I do with my own people and that's what I say. Both ways are linked together."⁴⁹⁷

Dreams and visions as vehicles of prediction and bringers of clarity are such important parts of the Ojibwa world view that they carry over strongly into Ojibwa Christianity. As noted earlier, Walter Green had a dream in which a Christian angel appeared to him and actually taught him how to play the organ. Like Gordon, Walter has definite

⁴⁹⁶Gordon Berens to Jennifer S.H. Brown and Maureen Matthews, Fisher River Seniors Residence, 20 March 1995.

⁴⁹⁷Ibid.

thoughts on the acceptability and naturalness of linking Christian and Ojibwa beliefs.

S.G. [Many] Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, expected people who were converted to believe and behave in a certain way, and they didn't like them doing things Ojibwa. [Walter laughs] Why are you laughing?

W.G. I think they had the wrong feeling. The ministers should have gone first and seen if whether there was anything bad there. This is just what the people believe - that's their belief - either they're going out or somebody's leaving - so they'll come back to the same way they lived.

S.G. Is it true that you can believe in Christ and be a member of a Christian church like the United Church and still believe in doing the drum dances and doing the Shaking Tent?

W.G. Oh yes! And when Sunday comes, it's a special day.⁴⁹⁸

Walter tells of another vision he had the previous summer:

I was alone here in June and then I got a very bad cold. I couldn't sleep at nights, I couldn't lay down...I'd get up and drink cold water and rub Vicks on my chest and neck. And then I had a dream - it wasn't a dream, it was a vision. There was somebody sitting by the doorway - on a chair by the doorway - looking at me; and I was turning over and over, trying to sleep. And that was the first night. Then, when the morning came, before sunrise, it was gone. Then the next night I was feeling a little better, I could sleep for awhile, then get up and go back to bed for a little while. And the same person came back - and they were sitting closer to my bed than on the first night. Then before sunrise he was gone. It was a man. That night, I was a lot better, I wasn't coughing at night time, I could sleep good. And that third night he came back - he was sitting at the end of my bed. And before sunrise he was gone. So I told this to a Pentecostal minister. Do you know what he told me? He said, "Somebody's taking care of you - from God." I was telling him that I know now there's somebody with me here, I'm not alone. I must have got blessed. And now I'm never frightened. Now I never have any trouble of fear that anything will happen when I'm sleeping. I don't think about it, I go to bed and sleep. I want to

⁴⁹⁸Walter Green to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

stay here - I want to live here - I want to stay where I was born in Berens River. I want to stay here 'til the end of my life.⁴⁹⁹

In the 1930s, William Berens described a vision to A. Irving Hallowell that presents another striking example of Christianity wedded to Saulteaux belief. The apparition in this mystical foreshadowing seems to have been an angel, a clearly Christian symbol.

my wife and I went to bed about the same time as usual one night but I did not fall asleep at once. My head was turned towards the door leading to the kitchen and all of a sudden I saw a woman standing there. She was slender, dressed in white and had golden hair that fell to her shoulders. I caught a glimpse of wings springing from her back. I trembled all over, I was so scared. But I managed to nudge my wife with my elbow. She had gone to sleep but turned over at this. When I looked again I could not see the angel, for that is what the figure seemed to be. All I could see was something misty like a cloud. My wife saw nothing but I told her what I had seen. I wondered what was going to happen. The next day, which was Sunday, my boss drove up with his dog team. He said that he was on his way to Berens River and asked me to go along with him. I told him that I was not prepared to go and that I had no grub. But he insisted. So I got ready and went with him. When we arrived at Berens River I met my brother-in-law. He told me my sister was very ill. She had been continually asking for me. They were even thinking of sending a dog train for me but they could not get one. I stayed at Berens River for ten days. My sister grew worse and worse. Then she died. I was getting worried but my boss, who had returned from a trip up the river by this time, set my mind at rest. He told me that he was glad he had brought me along so that I was able to be with my sister the last days of her life. It was very strange that he asked me because he did not seem to have any good reason, except that he wanted company. Yet I got there in

499Ibid.

time although I did not even know my sister was sick when I started.⁵⁰⁰

A few days before I met him, Fred Baptiste had attended the funeral of an old friend. What he did there is an example of syncretism, a fusion of cultural traditions:

F.B. Like the other day I was looking at that picture on the wall there [points to a large colour print of the Last Supper]. I went to the last services for Alec McKay. And they say they represent this [the Last Supper]. I took a piece of cake in a piece of kleenex and I got up. They were talking about Jesus with this last supper he had with the Disciples before He goes to Heaven. "There's a piece of cake in this kleenex," I says "you're always talking about Jesus having the Last Supper. Now I'm going to put this cake where Alec can - inside his coffin. We're having the Last Supper with Alec - his body is going down into the grave." I know some didn't like it.

S.G. You put that cake in his coffin because, in the Last Supper, Christ ate for a last time?

F.B. Yes....I was having the last supper with Alec before he goes down into the grave - he said when he goes home he's going to tell other people that I did that.

S.G. Where did you get the idea to do that?

F.B. Through that [points to the picture] and from reading the Bible. I was just thinking about this, you know. I did that before, this was the second time I did that.

S.G. Fred, why were some people angry about that?

F.B. I don't know. A lot of people said I shouldn't put that in his casket. They just say "amen," you know, and others just say "thank God."⁵⁰¹

The Christian idea of the Last Supper converged in his mind with the Ojibwa custom of placing articles such as food and tobacco on graves. As A. Irving Hallowell speculated in Culture and Experience "Indians who adhere to the native concepts of life after death...must feel much less remote from the spirits of the dead than do most who

⁵⁰⁰A Irving Hallowell Papers, MS Coll. 26, APS, Philadelphia.

⁵⁰¹Fred Baptiste to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

have...capitulated to Christian notions."⁵⁰² While Christianity does not (except in the case of Catholics praying to saints) allow for communication with the dead, the Ojibwa view holds that food and tobacco should be placed and replaced on graves subsequent to burial; this was to aid the journey of the djibai or spirit of the dead person.⁵⁰³

By 1926, Christianity at Berens River had grown strong roots. Yet Leach could write to his Father Provincial in St. Boniface "We say that the Indians are far more civilized than in years gone by. It is true, but how they do cling to some of their old customs."⁵⁰⁴

The many instances where Indians called both medicine men and Christian missionaries to the bedsides of the sick and dying are on record. Fred Baptiste's interpretation of medicine men is typical and reveals a highly integrative way of thinking. He discussed this after I asked him about his view of Yellow Legs walking on the water:

F.B. Unless he believed, unless he fully believed in Jesus Christ - maybe He helped him walk on the water. Jesus walked on the water.

S.G. But Yellow Legs won't have known about Jesus.

F.B. Well, I've seen a lot of people who believed all the other stuff from before. They used to heal people who were sick. [Tells the story of a Berens River man who was told by his doctor that he had six months to live but who was cured by a medicine woman] How come he got better? You know, God plans everything in this world. The medicine woman used

⁵⁰²A. Irving Hallowell, Culture and Experience, p. 157.

⁵⁰³Ibid., pp. 157-158.

⁵⁰⁴1926 AD, L581, .M27L, 86.

that plant that God planted in this world - roots, like, you know - because it's medicine.

S.G. So the power of that medicine came from God?

F.B. Yes. Everything you see here. The older people used to use that medicine.

S.G. You said that Christ walked on the water. And Christ says in the Bible that if you believe enough, you can walk on the water. But when Yellow Legs walked on the water he had never heard about Christ because that was long before the missionaries came. So where would he have gotten the power to walk on the water?

F.B. Well, they had their own power, I guess.

S.G. Where would they have gotten their power from if they didn't know about Christ? Is it possible that Yellow Legs got his power from spirits?

F.B. They had their own spirits.

S.G. Well what happened to those spirits?

F.B. I don't know, they're gone, I guess - when they [the old people] died. Them older people died and now the spirits are gone. Now there's nothing left.⁵⁰⁵

For Percy Berens, too, medicine men are not separate from Christianity.

S.G. What do you think about medicine men?

P.B. Well, I'll tell you one thing that's my belief. It's a gift. And the person knows that - that's a gift.

S.G. A gift from whom?

P.B. Manitou. As I told you, the Indians - before they ever seen a white man - they already talked about Manitou.

S.G. The Christian God and Manitou - are they the same?

P.B. They're the same. That's the same God.⁵⁰⁶

The same theme arises when Percy discusses Thunderbirds.

S.G. Percy, what else is different about what Indians believe from what white people believe? For instance, Indians believe in Thunderbirds and white people don't. What else is different?

P.B. What is different? Well the white people don't believe in nothing at all! I might just say that. They don't believe in nothing at all. Not like we Indians - because our ancestors believed on all these things. And

⁵⁰⁵Fred Baptiste to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

⁵⁰⁶Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

then we're starting to see it's true - and then we believe it. Like these Thunderbirds now, the Indians believe from a long time that it's a bird.

S.G. So they have the Thunderbirds and the Bible.

P.B. Yeah! But the Bible is best. If you really explain it to an Indian, what the Bible really means and what's in the Bible, the Scriptures, like, then they'll be able to believe it, see?

S.G. But it's okay to believe in the Bible and the Thunderbirds?

P.B. Yeah! Sure!

S.G. Why?

P.B. Why not? If we didn't have Thunderbirds, maybe we would never have had no rain! And the whole earth would be just dried up. And then where are we going to be? Don't you know, you white people, don't you know enough that everything God created meant something to the people and to the beasts of the earth?

S.G. Some white people say you should believe in the Bible but that you shouldn't believe in the ability to conjure or in Thunderbirds. But you say you can believe in the Bible and you can believe in the Thunderbirds. So how come the Indians are different from the white people that way?

P.B. That's very easy to answer that question. Because the Indians are smart, clever - but the white man is stupid, ignorant. [laughs] Isn't that correct enough? Sure! We believe.⁵⁰⁷

No discussion of Ojibwa flexibility can be complete without reference to the willingness to partake of events in both Catholic and Protestant churches. Once the two missions had been established and running within the community long enough to win some confidence and acceptance among the people, these Saulteaux seem to have moved fairly freely between the two, although they did maintain a loyalty to the church in which they had been baptized. For example, in discussing Rev. Niddrie, the Catholic John Edward Everett remembers "he was a big minister, a kind minister....There's been many times since that I've said 'God, I wish we had a

⁵⁰⁷Ibid.

minister like Mr. Niddrie.' A kind natured person."⁵⁰⁸

When asked whether he attended Niddrie's church services, he replied "Yes! Don't you know there's one God? It doesn't matter. I'm a Catholic. God so love us - we have to go!"⁵⁰⁹

Fred Baptiste also remembers people from the community attending both churches - on special occasions, like funerals, and on ordinary Sundays. As he put it "People went to both. It depended on whatever's closer - people living way down on the point, here, they come to the Catholic church."⁵¹⁰

Although Percy Berens is clearly partial to the United Church, he shows typical Ojibwa flexibility in explaining why the Berens River people attended the services of both denominations.

Because the Indians know enough to know why Christ was born - so it didn't make no difference which church they go....They wanted to celebrate the birth of Christ. See, it didn't matter where they go. Same with the Catholics - they could go to the United Church on Christmas service because that's what that minister did - not only on Christmas - also on ordinary Sundays.⁵¹¹

Virginia McKay, a Catholic, married Tom Boulanger, a Protestant Cree man from Oxford House on 25 September 1925.

⁵⁰⁸John Edward Everett to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 2 December 1994.

⁵⁰⁹Ibid.

⁵¹⁰Fred Baptiste to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

⁵¹¹Percy Berens to Susan Gray, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 15 November 1994.

Father De Grandpré officiated at the service which was held at the Berens River Roman Catholic Church.

S.G. Although you were a Catholic, did you ever attend services in the Methodist church?

V.B. Oh yes - to hear the Bible, you know?

S.G. Why was it important to listen to the Bible?

V.B. Because they wanted kids, like, to know about everything.

S.G. Did you like attending services at the Methodist church?

V.B. Oh yes - because my husband was Protestant.

S.G. So you married a Protestant?

V.B. He went to the Protestant church and got baptized there. He was not a Catholic but we got married at the Catholic church.

S.G. How did your parents feel about you marrying a Protestant?

V.B. They didn't want to let me, I guess. They wanted the children to go to the Catholic church.

S.G. Did they care that Tom, himself, wasn't a Catholic?

V.B. No, they didn't care - there's only one God. There's only one door, too, in Heaven, they say.

S.S. When you met Tom and then found out that he wasn't a Catholic, how did you feel about that?

V.B. Nothing, I didn't feel nothing.

S.G. So after you got married which church did you go to - did you go to both?

V.B. Yeah, sometimes he would go with me to the Catholic church, sometimes the other.⁵¹²

In sum, Christian and Ojibwa beliefs were held, to varying degrees, concomitantly by many individuals along the Berens River. The sincerity of their Christianity and the reality of their Ojibwa world view were both in evidence and the presence of one did not detract from the meaning or value of the other.

⁵¹²Virginia Boulanger to Susan Gray, Berens River, Manitoba, 1 December 1994.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Conversions and the taking on of Christianity had multi-dimensional meanings and were interpreted in myriad ways by Ojibwa people living along the Berens River, between 1875 and 1940. Christian rituals and practices were incorporated into the fabric of the Saulteaux world view in ways that were controlled by and meaningful to the participants. Today, both Christian and Ojibwa ideas are integrated within the lives of those Ojibwa who were alive during this time and both are held with power and sincerity. While these people's lives have been strongly affected by a Christianity that sustains them in their day-to-day life, these same individuals retain a belief in such Ojibwa beliefs as the Thunderbirds and the power of medicine men and conjurers, as well as the use of dreams as vehicles of prediction, guidance and foreshadowing.

As well, a number of beliefs and ideas shared between these two religions have served to facilitate Ojibwa integrations of Christianity with their traditional concepts. The striving for honesty, being helpful, not hurting others/doing unto others what an individual would have done unto them, the power of belief and the forgiveness of sins in the face of confession and repentance are a few of these tenets which abound in the teachings of Christ and the Ojibwa belief structure.

The shaking tent, for example, has curative and clairvoyant functions, as Hallowell learned, observing its use in the 1930s. In the case of healing, it has often been used to discover the hidden causes of illness as well as for producing a cure. For example, did the illness come about as a result of sorcery? Did it arise because of the moral transgressions of the ill person? If the latter is true, until the transgression is known and a confession is made to the shaman, no medicine can be of use.⁵¹³

As well, the concept of personal relationships between individuals and the divine have provided a bridge between Ojibwa and Christian world views. Christianity embodies the principle of a personal relationship between God and the individual. Certainly, one of the primary social functions of the shaking tent is to personalize spirits and increase intimacy between them and the audience. In these ways, both religions contain a mechanism that generate a sense of safety and confidence in facing life's dangers.⁵¹⁴

Conjuring also has served to emphasize the concept of a high god (through its conspicuous absence in the shaking tent - this being is the only other than human entity that is never present during these rituals), and life after death (through communication with the spirits of the dead). The shaking tent indirectly supports the Ojibwa social structure

⁵¹³A. Irving Hallowell, The Role of Conjuring, p. 54.

⁵¹⁴Ibid., p. 85-86.

by exposing the dangers that befall people who violate societal mores.⁵¹⁵ These aspects make it possible to forge a link with Christianity which, of course, is centred around the idea of one God, is founded on the idea of an afterlife and which serves, through its laws, to encourage individuals to conform to the mores of their Judeo-Christian society.

This integration of ideas in a dynamic and flexible way is an identifiable theme in studying encounters with Christianity among many groups of native peoples throughout the world. Looking at the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Inuit of Pangnirtung and Qikiqtarjuaq, for example, Diane Payment found that persistence and change are in clear co-existence.

The traditional belief system and rules of life provide stability and persistence in the face of the rapid economic and social changes of the last century. The old traditions have changed or incorporated elements of Western civilization....The elders' testimonies suggest that they have kept and adapted the old beliefs that are needed or valid today and deliberately forgotten the others.⁵¹⁶

Although these people accepted Jesus Christ as a vital entity, they have not forgotten Sanna (the Goddess of the Sea who was central to Inuit life) whose rules are followed and respected. Although it is difficult to be certain

⁵¹⁵Ibid., p. 86.

⁵¹⁶Diane P. Payment, "Persistence and Change in the Spiritual Traditions of the Inuit of Pangnirtung and Qikiqtarjuaq (Broughton Island) Since the 1890s," paper presented at the Fourth Western Oblate Studies Conference, Winnipeg, 25 August 1995, p.11.

whether shamanism was abandoned by the people or driven underground by missionaries, it seems that during the mid-1920s, shamanism "began to be transformed into occult practices marked by Christian syncretism."⁵¹⁷

Ojibwa people living along the Berens River experienced a deep, complex and dynamic religion that was based on the power of belief and yet which was adaptive and flexible. New ideas flowed into their midst and were incorporated in rituals such as the Drum Dances. As well, contrary to the assumptions of generations of Westerners, the Saulteaux engaged in empiricism and critical thinking at deep levels. The ability to incorporate outside ideas into an existing world view does not imply an inability to think empirically nor does it suggest a superficial belief system; it is in this realm that missionaries misjudged Ojibwa thought and made serious errors in communicating with their clientele.

As late as the 1930s, the Ojibwa saw all religion as medicine and power and the fact that the first chiefs after the signing of the 1875 treaty at Berens River were medicine men shows the significance of religion in their society. Religion and the protection that resulted with close alliances with other-than-human spirits were critical for survival and success. This view persists today, whether Indians are discussing the concept of Christ dying for our

⁵¹⁷Ibid., p. 12.

sins or special hunting powers granted to an individual by the Memegwesiwag, or the Thunderbirds.

Berens River Ojibwa belief in Thunderbirds, the power of medicine men and the use of dreams, far from being rooted in confused superstition, is underpinned in their frame of reference by empirical proof; indeed, for people living in a tough physical environment and relying on hunting and trapping skills for survival, experience and belief must be harmonized in order for the latter to have credibility. Ojibwa people believed because they saw, heard and experienced. Personal testimony, an instrument of validation in Saulteaux society, has served for generations to provide corroborative evidence, especially in the case of multiple testimonies. However, even personal testimony has been critically weighed. Those people describing experiences or sightings of things that existed outside the realm of recognised tradition and mythology or claiming powers that were not demonstrated, were given no credence.

Part of the Christian context in Berens River communities was provided by Methodists caught up in an optimistic postmillennialist fervour and striving to create the Kingdom of God on earth. Missionaries throughout the world believed that their message could transcend time, place and circumstance. They believed their converts, upon conversion, would take the moral high road and elevate themselves to a new life.

The advent of social theory in the 1890s and early 1900s posed the real challenge to Protestantism in Canada. The Baconian view held that God's plan in history would transcend the physical realm of class, poverty and circumstances to change the lives of all Christians for the better. Social theory, on the other hand, caused people to consider that the world's problems may have been more due to social economic conditions than to lack of morality. With this came the beginning of the decline of Baconianism, with its time-specific and culture-specific values.

It is clear, however, that at least until the 1920s, Protestantism was a vital and formative element in English Canadian culture and Methodists did integrate new concepts of the day into their mission to regenerate the world and this did not bring about the downfall of religion through modernization of its tenets. It is also clear that the missionaries working in northern Manitoba did not abandon their sphere to secularism; their greatest problems lay in their expectations that their clientele would experience immediate and complete change upon conversion. This, coupled with a lack of understanding and appreciation of their Cree/Ojibwa fields made for mis-communication and misjudgments.

Around the world, Roman Catholics were as caught up in mission zeal as Protestants. With the advent of ultramontaniam in the nineteenth century, church life

experienced a tremendous surge of life and renewal with clerical expansion, an increased impact of the church on the lives of Catholics, a revitalization of its clergy and an explosion of mission effort. Catholicism's vitality was part of the mosaic that made up the great influence of religion in nineteenth and early twentieth century Canadian life and culture.

Like Protestant groups, Catholics believed that they had been chosen by God to fulfil an important mission in North America. In Quebec, the clergy was sufficiently isolated from Europe to allow them to escape the impact of the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. They were, on the other hand, were very much influenced by ultramontane currents that invigorated their theology and mission effort. It was this awakening that was manifest in the arrival of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, an order devoted to mission work and which insisted on Roman supremacy and the opening of mission fields across Canada.

Catholicism was saved for awhile from secularization by ultramontanist ideals which promoted centralized leadership and unity, its link with French Canadian cultural survival and the strength of its lay devotion. Where Protestantism, with the Bible as its sole source of religious credence, was vulnerable to the rise of modern science and biblical criticism, Catholicism was less affected by these currents through internal buffers such as the authority of the Church

Fathers, the emphasis on the Eucharist over the printed word, veneration of saints, Marian devotion and the maintenance of traditional Latin liturgy.

Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries worked between 1875 and 1940 in consciousness of being individual parts of a great whole that strove to inculcate European civilization. Where Protestants sought to evangelize and create the Kingdom of God on earth, Catholics were driven by their desire for the unity and universality of the Catholic religion. Both worked to bring salvation through a connection between Christ and humankind, operating within a society that was tremendously shaped and influenced by religion.

In encounters with Christianity, a number of factors influenced positive responses among native people along the Berens River. These included a wish for literacy and Western education to survive in a world that was being continually affected and changed by Euro-Canadian institutions, a wish to understand the Bible as a source of potentially helpful and beneficial messages, added divine protection from illness or other crises, safety from bad medicine and harmful conjurors, access to Western medicine and added dimensions and powers to existing ones derived from traditional Ojibwa venues such as rituals.

Where mission efforts were successful in these communities, we usually see the sustained presence of a

devoted missionary who lived long enough in a community to achieve respect and earn trust among the people. By the late nineteenth century, many Ojibwa young people were already second generation Christians, thus a tradition and loyalty had been established among individual families; native people wished to remain in the church where they and their parents before them had been baptized. Missionaries provided medical and spiritual aid that bolstered and often ran in tandem with that received from traditional sources such as medicine men. Social interaction between missionaries and parishioners as well as entertainment such as Christmas services or get-togethers at the ministers' homes for young people gave a vitality and presence of the church in the community.

Christianity, however, was not always accepted out of hand. Lack of support by missionaries (such as the Deer Lake Indians being left to fend for themselves at the time of the 1918 influenza epidemic), lack of agreement with the lessons taught to children in schools or lack of need to take on aspects of a new religion and lack of respect by a missionary for sacred Ojibwa rituals (such as the episode of a Methodist missionary kicking in a sacred drum at Little Grand Rapids) could all yield cold responses. It is clear that the Berens River Ojibwa maintained considerable control over making choices - it was they who decided when and how they would or would not accept Christianity, when and if

they would send their children to a new school and whether or not they would allow baptism for themselves or their sick and dying relatives. Their relatively isolated setting, their distance from the Prairie conflicts of 1885 and the absence of specific legislation forbidding their rituals assisted them in maintaining their world view.

Upon accepting Christianity, most Ojibwa people integrated it smoothly into their existing world view, striving to learn the Bible, attending church regularly at those times when they were at the mission and deriving as much power and strength through this medium as possible. Christianity did not replace traditional ideas as much as it served to enhance possibilities and increase dimensions of the understanding and experiencing of life in this world. In listening to Ojibwa people talking today, the theme of wanting to know and understand "everything" is as strong as it was when Jacob Berens told his son, William that he must find a place in his mind for all that he would meet. This pivotal aspect of the Ojibwa world view contributes importantly to our understanding of mission efforts in North America from a native perspective.

Much have I seen and known - cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments
Myself not least, but honored of them all -
And drunk delight of battle by my peers,
Far on the planes of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met.

Ulysses, Alfred, Lord Tennyson

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