

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School*, by Elizabeth Furniss. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995. 141 pp. Illus., map. \$12.95 paper.

*The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest*, by Robert Choquette. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995. 258 pp. Illus., maps. \$26.00 paper.

These two works provide a glimpse into the debates on the role of missionaries in western Canada. While neither author fully embraces either pole of much of the contemporary scholarship on missionary activity — hagiography versus virulent condemnation — they stakes out very different positions.

Robert Choquette follows the expansion of the missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate — a largely French, Roman Catholic congregation — into western and northern Canada in the nineteenth century. He sees Oblate contact with, and proselytization of, Canada's Native peoples as a "conquest"; Native people were "conquered religiously and . . . largely assimilated" (p. 21). Choquette's primary interest lies in the relations between the Oblates and the Anglo-Protestant missionaries, and he employs military terminology to highlight the "real" battle between Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries. The first two-thirds of the book follows Oblate-Protestant confrontations in Red River, Athabasca-Mackenzie, Alberta, and, to some extent, British Columbia. The last third offers an analysis of Oblate missionary strategies, Roman Catholic/Protestant relations, and Anglo-Franco relations, the latter described largely through the prism of the Manitoba and North-West Territories school questions.

Choquette's most interesting section is his analysis of the material consequences of Catholic theology. He explains baptismal practices and the role the sacraments were to play in Native "conversion." Oblates baptized potential converts sooner than did Protestants, believing that baptism washed away sin and that the convert's faith could be nurtured and brought to maturity through sacramental teaching and practice. Protestants were slow to baptize, believing that baptism was "the symbolic recognition of a [sudden and complete] conversion that has already taken place in the person's heart" (pp. 192-93).

Choquette claims that, overall, Catholics were more successful than were Protestants in converting Native peoples. Oblate success, he believes, hinged on the clergy's practice of celibacy, mission practices which were consonant with Roman Catholic theology, the Oblate emphasis on Native languages, and the high quality of Oblate Christian witness. In the final analysis, he grants the Oblates the dubious distinction of having "served to liberate the Indian people of Canada, but . . . within a context of ethnocultural subjugation . . . driven by the Euro-Canadian conquest of Canada's North and West" (p. 236).

Focusing on the first thirty years of St Joseph's residential school near Williams Lake, British Columbia, Elizabeth Furniss provides a very different account of Oblate activity in western Canada. Her objective is to examine the "long-term structural relations between First Nations and the Canadian government" (p. 15), in which she considers the Oblates to be profoundly implicated. She wants to pry apart the types of control — legal, administrative, and ideological — that the Oblates and the provincial and federal governments were able to exercise over Native peoples. To do so she concentrates on the events surrounding the death of Duncan Sticks, a young Shuswap boy attending St Joseph's in 1902, and, to a lesser extent, on the suicide of Augustine Allan in 1910.

Furniss claims that the Oblates and the government collaborated to manipulate the meaning and interpretation of these tragedies, not only to effect damage control, but also to legitimate the residential school system itself. She argues that material circumstances surrounding the deaths — poor-quality food and harsh discipline which may have led to a spate of runaways — were reinterpreted by the Oblates and, above all, by the government. Explanations of the runaway problem and the deaths were shifted away from food and discipline and refocused on Native people, who were no longer seen as the victims but as the causes of these problems. Native methods of

resistance (e.g., running away) were reinterpreted by school and government officials as the inability of Native people to recognize their own best interests; food shortages were seen as children's lack of common sense simply to ask for more. Thus, through a manipulation of the meanings and circumstances of the boys' deaths, the Oblates and the government legitimized their continued interference in Native lives. Furniss considers such interference, in the name of benevolent paternalism, as fundamental to contemporary Native-government relations.

Reading these two books together, I am struck by their contradictory yet complementary analyses. While Furniss offers a sensitive, if brief, ethnography of the Shuswap, she largely ignores the Oblates; Choquette does a fine job of pointing out some of the theological differences between Protestants and Catholics and of locating the Oblates in nineteenth-century Catholicism, but he largely ignores the Native presence. With these points in mind, I would like to suggest some of the difficulties these books present.

Choquette paints a rosy picture of the Oblate "conquest" of Canada's Northwest, both in terms of its local success and general outcome. This partly reflects the primary focus of his research, which is to illuminate the relations between Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century. But it also reflects his tendency to gloss over many details of the Oblate project (e.g., Oblate attitudes towards marriage) and his suspicion of Anglo-Protestantism in general.

While Choquette does explain different Protestant doctrines, he sees all Protestants as "culturally arrogant" (p. 232), "bigoted and intolerant" (p. 216), and the clergy, in particular, as having a poor and "warped" education (p. 171). This attitude towards Anglo-Protestants explains his inclusion of a chapter devoted to the Manitoba and Northwest Territories school questions, a chapter which sheds no light on the Oblate "assault" and a great deal on Choquette's religious and political inclinations. It is not an attitude that bodes well for a balanced assessment of Catholic and Protestant missionary activity.

In the final chapter, Choquette proclaims the Oblate triumph over their Protestant foes in the Canadian Northwest. He then goes on to posit a special "affinity" between Native peoples and the Oblate priests based, according to Choquette, on the similar positions vis-à-vis Anglo-Protestantism. "French and Canadian Catholics were used to being in a minority position linguistically, culturally, and religiously . . . Their best hope was to survive with as few losses as possible. In

this fundamental respect, they were very close to the Indian people" (p. 232). I find this argument about the affinity between Native people and the Oblates astonishing. To compare the ethnocultural survival of French and Canadian Catholics to that of Native peoples in the nineteenth century is to telescope the politics of the present into accounts of the past. The disruptive forces at work on Native cultures — disease, loss of game, the reserve system, and the activities of both Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries — were so acute that many White observers predicted the extinction not only of Native cultures but of Native peoples themselves. To posit a relationship, unconscious or otherwise, between Natives and Catholics of any nationality, based on the mutually experienced threat of Anglo-Protestant domination, is to conflate colonial subjugation and cultural prejudice.

Furniss, on the other hand, runs into problems because she has not considered the specific circumstances and religious character of the Oblates. The Oblates were overwhelmingly French: they spoke and wrote in French, and many did not acquire English until years after their arrival in BC. As Roman Catholics, they were targets of a great deal of anti-Papal sentiment in a country that was governed, by and large, by Anglo-Protestants. In this light, I have a great deal of difficulty accepting Furniss's argument concerning the collusion of Oblates and the government. While extremely active in petitioning the government to lay out and enlarge Native reserves, the Oblates had no preferential access to government or law. Nor did they participate in government administration, being themselves governed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Indeed, Oblates, unlike Protestant missionaries (e.g., William Duncan), were not seen as appropriate government officials: they were neither Indian agents nor justices of the peace as was, for example, William Duncan.

Catholic education has been an Oblate objective in British Columbia since the time of their arrival. The Oblates opened their first school on the BC mainland in 1863 at St Mary's mission — without government support. I suspect that much of the Oblate rhetoric Furniss cites had less to do with collaboration than with the need to keep Catholic schools from being overwhelmed by a secular or Protestant school system. The Oblates were driven by goals and motivations that often bore little resemblance to those of the government; perhaps it is appropriate to say that the Oblates were less interested in "civilizing" Natives than they were in "Catholicizing" them. And schools were seen as the means par excellence of achieving such an end.

But I agree with Furniss that, in some cases, Oblate rhetoric and government rhetoric, although differently motivated, did overlap and reinforce each other. To deny that Christianity, particularly in combination with the residential school environment, has had a profound impact on Native peoples is unthinkable, and the 1991 Oblate Apology to Native Peoples is a testament that some Oblates have come to recognize that the effects of their missions on Native peoples and cultures were not always positive.

I think it is important to point out the ways in which government rhetoric can be reinforced by other forms of rhetoric, for we need to be able to pick our way through these coalitions — whether intentional or not — to get at their (often) racist and (always) self-serving cores and to understand the impact that these rhetorics continue to have on Native people today. While I don't agree with many of the details of Furniss's argument, I do applaud how she shows us the connections between twentieth-century problems and nineteenth-century "solutions."

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*Hail, Columbia: Robert Gray, John Kendrick, and the Pacific Fur Trade*, by John Scofield. Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1993. xx, 378 pp. Maps, illus. US\$19.95.

Following the Oregon Historical Society's edition of Frederic Howay's *Voyages of the Columbia to the Northwest Coast, 1787-1790 & 1790-1793* (1990), John Scofield's study of the enigmatic leaders of America's first Pacific fur-trading expeditions is a welcome addition. Howay left many unanswered questions about the activities and motivations of the two commanders, John Kendrick and Robert Gray. If Scofield offers readers a little too much in the way of "rattling anchor chains," "greasy swells," and speculative recreations, he also presents new views explaining the idiosyncrasies exhibited by the major figures. When Captain Kendrick took command of *Columbia Redivivua*, owned by Joseph Barrell and partners, he had a distinguished war record (against the British during the American Revolution) and long experience at sea. Less is known about Captain Gray, who commanded the small consort, *Lady Washington*.

From the beginning, Kendrick appeared to lack the Yankee efficiency that drove New England traders to compete for markets