

Christianity and Empire: A Case Study of American Protestant Colonialism and Native Americans

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INTRODUCTION

Historically the association of Christianity and empire has most often been a phenomenon that relates to either a Christendom model of church and state relationships or what might be best characterized as the "colonial" experience of European Christians in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. For example, Luis Rivera Pagán's work *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* develops the idea that the conquest of the Americas is the beginning not only of "European world hegemony," which spreads across the face of the globe, but the interrelationship between European expansion and Christianity as an "imperial ideology."¹ Furthermore, while Catholic Christianity, in the case of Spain, is perhaps an "obvious" instance of imperial ideology, with direct links between church and state, Nonconformist British evangelical Christianity in South Africa, without the trappings of official Christendom, readily served the interest of empire building. John and Jean Comaroff have argued that "Nonconformist mis-

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sionaries were the vanguard of the British presence in...the South African interior; they were also the most ambitious ideological and cultural agents of Empire, bearing with them the explicit aim of reconstructing the Native world in the name of God and Great Britain."² The contradiction at the heart of the South African example of British Nonconformist missionaries is that they seriously believed they were only converting the "other" to Christianity, whereas the evangelical enterprise in practice was a story "of the reconstruction of a living culture by the infusion of alien signs and commodities into every domain of Tswana life."³

What is most often missing from such discussions is the applicability of notions of Christianity and empire, in their varying forms, to the American experience. While it might be debated that notions of American empire or American imperialism are not new, they most often refer to American foreign policy and military intervention abroad, extending from American intervention in the Third World to U.S. colonialism in Latin America and the Philippines. On the other hand, it can be maintained that the creation of the United States as a nation-state was part of a process of colonial expansion by means of an internal consolidation of conquests over land and people, not fundamentally different from other European ventures in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

It is therefore not surprising that we have often failed to apply either the language or tools of analysis of imperialism and colonialism to ourselves and the development of the history of the United States, let alone Christianity. There are perhaps several reasons for this, one of which is Charles Long's observation that Euro-Americans partake of a cultural language—be it theological, political, or socioeconomic—which prevents Euro-Americans from "seeing themselves as they really are."⁴ Long is describing a cultural phenomenon that Clifford Geertz has identified as a process whereby the dominant peoples' "frames of meaning"—how they perceive themselves—are subject to "systematic distortion." Geertz believes that we use various labels to explain this phenomenon, which vary from "orientalism, cultural hegemony, [to] symbolic domination"—all based on the "exercise of power and the ability to depict and construct through language" a distorted "understanding of social reality."⁵ At the same time, cultural domination or hegemony is a process of deception, deception in the ways in which our very language masks or distorts social, political, economic,

and religious practice. This extends from Euro-American language about democracy and freedom to Christian religious language and imagery about community, faith, and justice in the light of the history of Native American people in this country.⁶

One of the great ironies of the Euro-American experience is the historical propensity, be one on the political left or right, to sanctify democracy and the democratic aspirations of the dominant people, frequently at the expense of others—in this analysis, Native Americans. A case in point are the ways in which historians have portrayed populism as a vivid and vital expression of a people's democratic yearnings. As a movement populism created a political culture that criticized industrial capitalism and demanded a more equitable distribution of wealth; it accused capitalism of degrading and impoverishing the individual.⁷ Furthermore, according to Laurence Goodwyn, populism was an agrarian revolt which demonstrated "how people of a society containing a number of democratic forms could labor to generate their own democratic culture in order to challenge the received hierarchical culture."⁸ Finally, populism was "an assertion of how people can act in the name of the idea of freedom. At root, American Populism was a demonstration of what authentic political life can be in a functioning democracy."⁹ The only problem with populists' glorification of freedom and democracy is that so much of the land basis for this agrarian revolt and people's supposed aspirations for freedom and democracy was the dispossessed land of Native Americans.

A recent study of missionaries and Native Americans by Native American scholar George Tinker appropriately bears the title *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*. Tinker's study maintains that in their work with Native Americans, Christian missionaries, irrespective of their denominational background and in spite of their best intentions, "were partners in genocide [and] guilty of complicity in the destruction of Indian cultures and tribal social structures."¹⁰ Much of Tinker's analysis centers on broadening our understanding of "genocide" to include "cultural genocide," which he defines as "the effective destruction of a people by systematically (intentionally or unintentionally in order to achieve other goals) destroying, eroding, or undermining the integrity of the culture and systems of values that define a people and gives them life."¹¹ For Tinker, cultural genocide is part of the process of colonialization by the dominant culture and is organically linked to the economic, political, social, and reli-

gious agenda of Euro-Americans.¹² In the final analysis, Tinker concludes that "the meeting of cultures is...harmful to Indian people and their tribal traditions."¹³

Tinker's insights into the dynamics of cultural genocide and the complicity of Christian missionaries is an important corrective to more traditional studies of Christian missions and missionaries among Native American people. Yet there is the danger of construing Tinker's analysis as treating Native Americans only as victims, namely, depicting more what was done to Native Americans than the responses of Native Americans to Christian missionaries and Christianity. Domination, cultural or otherwise, is rarely total, in spite of the intentions of the powerful. That is why John and Jean Comaroff caution us not to view colonialism as "a one-sided affair." In the case of South Africa, for instance, not only was there an interaction between the colonizers and the colonized but "cultural colonialism... was also a reflective process whereby 'others' abroad, the objects of the civilizing mission, were put to the purposes of reconstructing the 'other' back home. The two sites, the two impulses, went hand in hand."¹⁴ In a similar vein Euro-American Protestant missionaries' attempts at "civilizing" Native Americans can be perceived as differing little from their religious and secular counterparts consigning workers, women, and people of color to what they believed to be their appropriate place in the scheme of things.

Given both the historical and contemporary importance of assessing Christianity and Empire, what follows is an examination of the encounter and interaction between Protestant missionaries and the Dakota people. A more in-depth, case-study approach allows a way of coming to terms with the Christian colonial project, and more importantly provides an opportunity to listen to the voices of Native American peoples. This of course means, at least for non-Indians, refraining from attempting to speak for Native Americans, an idea expressed by some anthropologists who stress the extent to which historically "being white and Western conferred in itself a certain privilege...[and] has raised the questions of the right of the politically dominant to articulate the beliefs and desires of those they dominate."¹⁵ Perhaps that is why Vine Deloria, Jr. has remarked, in wrestling with Euro-Americans teaching Native American religions, that they do it with the "knowledge that they are intruding on the emotional commitments and experience of a specific group of people who may not appreciate

their efforts, and are willing to take the consequences."¹⁶ Even though the distinction between listening to rather than speaking for Native Americans might seem to be a matter of semantics, at least there is a realization that one engages in analysis of the experiences of Native Americans with care, cognizant of the limitations of one's own interpretation. Moreover, one of the benefits of a case-study approach is that it does not lead to generalizations about the experience of Native American peoples or speculations about the totality of tribal cultural and religious traditions.

What follows is an analysis of various aspects of Protestant colonialism as exemplified in the interaction between Protestant missionaries and the Dakota people. Even though political and economic ramifications exist with the presence of Protestant missionaries among the Dakotas, the most important dimension of Protestant missionaries' commitment to empire building was their role as agents of cultural imperialism in their attempts to transform the very fabric of Dakota society and culture. It can be argued that missionary efforts to restructure the Dakota community and people's daily lives were an attack on the spirit of a people, beyond whatever good they believed they were doing as Christian missionaries and representatives of western "civilization." Beginning with an examination of the encounter, interaction, and relationship of Dakota people to Christianity and Christian missionaries within the context of Euro-American colonial expansion, this study then turns to differing responses of the Dakotas to Christianity. This article concludes with some challenges that an analysis of Protestant Christians and the Dakota people poses for the current relationship between Christianity and Native Americans.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: FROM OCETI ŠAKOWIN TO SIOUX

The people we know today as the Sioux were, according to William Powers, a Native American population that prior to European contact called itself *Oceti Šakowin*, which means "Seven Council Fires." Moreover, *oceti* is best translated as the "fireplace" that exists at the center of one's living space, and it has a metaphorical reference among many Native Americans to "various levels of social and political organization."¹⁷ The term *Oceti Šakowin*, therefore, covers diverse groups of Native

Americans who have certain political, linguistic, and geographical commonalities.

Historically, the *Oceti Šakowin* established themselves on the headwaters of the Mississippi in an area of marshes and lakes during the sixteenth century.¹⁸ But by the middle part of the nineteenth century, given both conflicts with other Native Americans and encounters with Europeans, the *Oceti Šakowin* comprised three geographical groups and political units who spoke different dialects of the same Sioux or *Oceti Šakowin* language. The first group, which made up the first council fire, was that of the Tetons, a Lakota-speaking people who came to occupy the prairies and plains of what are now known as North and South Dakota in an area west of the Missouri River. The Tetons were composed of a number of bands such as the Hunkpapa and Oglala, the largest subdivision of the Tetons. The second group, made up of the second and third council fires, were the Yankton and Yanktonais, who were grouped collectively as the Yanktons and thought of themselves as Dakotas, just as the *Oceti Šakowin* living to the east of them did. Raymond DeMallie notes that the Yanktons spoke a dialect that is often referred to as "Nakota," though DeMallie is of the opinion that "it is incorrect to call the speakers 'Natoka'."¹⁹ They occupied a geographical region that encompassed the prairies of Minnesota and the eastern region of North and South Dakota. Finally, the third group, the Dakotas, made up the four council fires of the Mdewakanton, Wahpeton, Sisseton, and Wahpekute, and as Dakota-speaking people lived in the wooded region of the upper Mississippi and Minnesota rivers and west to the prairies of North and South Dakota.²⁰ Other scholars use *Dakota* as an inclusive terminology that subdivides the *Oceti Šakowin* into the Eastern Dakotas (Mdewakanton, Wahpeton, Sisseton, and Wahpekute), Middle Dakota (Yankton and Yanktonais), and Western Dakotas (Tetons).²¹ In the context of this article *Dakota* designates the third group of the *Oceti Šakowin*, the council fires of the Mdewakanton, Wahpeton, Sisseton, and Wahpekute.

The origin of the designation *Sioux* as applied to the *Oceti Šakowin* has been explained in a number of ways. Some argue that the word *Sioux* (a shortened version of the French word *Naduoessioux*) is a French corruption of the Algonquian *nadowe-siih*, which means "little adders," "snakes," and "enemies" and is a contemptuous label that was given by the Chippewas (Ojibwas/Asinhnabeg) to their historic enemies, the *Oceti*

Šakowin.²² The *Oceti Šakowin* first encountered by French explorers preferred the identification of *Dakota*, which means “allies,” “friends,” or “league.”²³

PROTESTANT MISSIONS AND THE DAKOTA PEOPLE

The Dakota people have had a long history of contact with Europeans, beginning with their first contact with French explorers and fur traders in the 1650s.²⁴ During the following decades, the Dakotas established trade relations with both the French and the British within a framework of Indian-European relations that, from the Dakota point of view, was a kinship network entailing bonds of mutuality in the sharing of resources.²⁵ In contrast, contact with Euro-Americans took place within the context of “American” conflicts with European powers in North America and U.S. colonial expansion. By the early nineteenth century the Dakotas, not unlike other indigenous people, had, according to Francis Prucha, “lost their powerful European allies in the New World—with whose assistance they might have hoped to hold off the onslaught of white American advance—it was clear to both Indians and whites that the United States dealt with Indians from a position of dominance.”²⁶ Dominance, notes Prucha, meant the enactment of governmental policies that rested on forms of “paternalism” which dealt with Native Americans on a basis of what was best for Euro-Americans, especially on terms that led Indians “along the path to white civilization and Christianity.”²⁷

The attitude of the United States toward indigenous nations was aptly characterized by the British government as a belief “that all territory which these Indian nations occupy is at the disposal of the United States; that the United States have a right to dispossess them of it; to exercise that right whenever their policy or interests may seem to them to require it; and to confine them to such spots as may be selected, not by the Indian nations, but by the American Government.”²⁸ In fact, the conclusion the British drew from their experience with the United States was that the Americans had adopted an Indian policy which threatened “the final extinction of those nations.”²⁹ Consequently, when Euro-Americans made unilateral decisions over land occupied by Dakota people, they were not out of character as they set boundary lines separating the newly formed United States from Canada and incorporated Dakota

territory east of the Mississippi into what was perceived by Euro-Americans as an integral part of their newly created republic. Moreover, Euro-American purchase of French land claims in North America ceded to the United States Dakota territory to the west of the Mississippi.³⁰

It was not until the 1830s that the Dakota people first encountered the Protestant missionaries Samuel and Gideon Pond and Dr. Thomas S. Williamson.³¹ The Pond brothers were both converted during the second Great Awakening, and after Samuel Pond visited the west he became convinced that the Sioux nation, as "the most savage and warlike of all the north-western Indians,"³² represented a missionary challenge, stating "If they can be tamed, the race is one well worth preserving."³³ First as independent missionaries and later as missionaries to the Dakota people under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the Pond brothers would live among the Dakotas for a period of twenty years.³⁴ Dr. Williamson, an ordained Presbyterian minister and medical doctor, with a missionary appointment by the American Board, established a mission to the Dakotas and believed, like many early missionaries, that the Dakotas were "in the lowest stages of heathenism" without any desire for the "fruits of civilization."³⁵

Missionaries serving with the ABCFM came to predominate in the period prior to the Civil War among the Dakota people, having up to seven different mission stations.³⁶ The ABCFM was a missionary agency born of a Presbyterian and Congregational alliance that saw no fundamental difference between Christian missions to "pagans" at home and abroad.³⁷ One scholar is of the opinion that "the Indian missions of the Board had the best possibility to test the implications of the superiority of Western Christian Civilization. For there, if anywhere, could be seen the onward rolling tide of white Protestant conquest."³⁸ Furthermore, U.S. military stationed in Dakota territory believed that "the instruction of the Sioux and other Indians in the tenets of the Christian religion, in agriculture and the other arts of civilization...[was] in accord with the policy of the American government."³⁹

Protestant missionaries believed that one of the major obstacles to Christian missions was the religious belief system of the Dakota people.⁴⁰ Stephen Riggs summed up the attitudes of his fellow missionaries when he stated that not only did missionary work among the Dakotas mean having to struggle against "the

common hindrances of grossness, sensuality, and selfishness, dulling the ear, deadening the mind, and fortifying, the heart" but also contending with a "powerful enemy in their false religion."⁴¹ At the same time, Protestant missionaries were well aware of the extent to which the religion of the Dakota people "permeates and enwraps...[their] whole life."⁴² Irrespective, however, of the observable centrality which religion played in the life of the Dakota people, missionaries still claimed that as long as the Dakotas remained "pagan" they would be "savages."⁴³ Dakota religion, it was assumed, was nothing more than a set of superstitions that were tied to a hunting and gathering society and that when the Dakota people were forced to "live by agriculture rather than the chase, they may be expected more readily to abandon the superstitions of their fathers and embrace the religion of civilized men."⁴⁴

The traditional Dakota religion was not the only barrier to the preaching of the "religion of civilized men." Just as much an obstacle in the path to civilization was the structure of Dakota society, which ran counter to the importance that Euro-Americans placed on private property and an atomistic understanding of the individual. T. Hartley Crawford, Commissioner for Indian Affairs, wrote in 1838 that "common property and civilization cannot co-exist." It followed, so Crawford asserted, that "at the foundation of the whole social system lies individuality of property. It is perhaps...the stimulus that manhood first feels; it has produced the energy, industry, and enterprise that distinguish the civilized world, and contributes more largely to the good morals of men than those are willing to acknowledge...[and] with it come all the delights that the word *home* expresses."⁴⁵ Early Protestant missionaries were astounded that among the Dakotas "the incentive to industry, the desire for property, never stirred their hearts, or led them to look up to civilization."⁴⁶ The Dakotas, Protestant missionaries reasoned, seemed to value a social order based on a "common property system" and a kinship network that held the needs of the community in higher regard than the wants of the individual. Consequently the Dakotas had created a distorted social system that not only impeded the privatization of land, but failed to recognize the quintessential primacy of the individual.⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, what missionaries found most objectionable about Dakota society was a communal kinship system that gave structure and order to the Dakota way of life. The Dakota kinship system, Ella Cara Deloria has argued, shaped all

aspects of a people's social life and in the world of the Dakotas "everyone shared affinal relatives, that is, relatives-through-marriage, with his own relatives through-blood."⁴⁸ This meant that kinship obligations and rules were of supreme importance, more important than the wishes or desires of the individual.⁴⁹

Given, therefore, what Protestant missionaries perceived as the "paralyzing influence" of Dakota culture, the only concrete alternative was a total transformation of the Dakota way of life.⁵⁰ To missionaries this entailed a conscious separation of Christian converts from the contaminating influence of Dakota culture by persuading them to "build houses, fence and plant fields and try and live like white men."⁵¹ In the ensuing years, when establishing Protestant missions among the Dakota people, specific emphasis was placed on a change in both the "character" and "heart," for this was believed to be the necessary prerequisite for the eventual improvement and appreciation of the "fruits of civilization."⁵² Mission schools were established, work was done on learning the Dakota language, and missionaries such as Riggs were extolled as having given "the language a name and a civilized form" through the creation of a grammar and dictionary so that an unwritten language of "ignorant and degraded" Dakota people could be brought into the "Christian household."⁵³

Protestant missionary efforts were at first uneven, and what little success they did have was owed largely to the very Dakota kinship system they so readily condemned.⁵⁴ Pivotal to the survival of Protestant missions was the support of Joseph Renville, a mixed-blood Dakota trader of the American Fur Company and a descendent of a French voyager and a Dakota woman by the name of Minyuhe, member of the Little Crow family. Moreover, Renville's wife Mary Napešniduta was a niece of Big Thunder and thus by marriage he was part of an important kinship network of the Mdewakanton people.⁵⁵ Renville and his wife and children became members of the church established by Thomas Williamson and later they were joined by others, who had kinship ties with Renville. Various members of Renville's extended family subsequently became pastors and missionaries to the Dakota people.⁵⁶

The Protestant missionary enterprise took place amidst the continual interaction between the Dakota people and the United States government which centered on issues of sovereignty over land and the future of the Dakota people. From the turn of the nineteenth century to the 1850s, the Dakotas signed a number

of treaties with the United States government ranging from minor acquiescence of land holdings and the temporary resolving of intertribal disputes to major land concessions.⁵⁷ The relation of the Dakota people and other indigenous communities to the United States government came under the heading of "Indian affairs" and was the responsibility of the War Department and its "Indian department." Relations with various Native American nations were established through special agents and superintendents working with the War Department's territorial governors. Only in 1834 was the War Department's Office of Indian Affairs formalized, headed by a Commissioner of Indian Affairs. By 1849 the Office of Indian Affairs was consigned to the Department of the Interior and became the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as it has been known ever since.⁵⁸

The interaction between the Dakotas and the United States government, particularly as embodied in treaty negotiations, took place within a context of declining food supplies, indebtedness to traders, pressures from an influx of white settlers, and missionary aspirations for the Dakota people. Changes in the Dakota ecosystems in terms of traditional food gathering patterns resulted from the commercial fur trade, depletion of game resources, and growing reliance on food and commodities supplied by traders and later the United States government.⁵⁹ Compounding the problems facing the Dakota people were the disruptive impact of the liquor trade and an accumulating debt to traders. All of these factors threatened the survival of Dakota society, principally a people whom Gary Anderson has characterized as "tied more securely to the movements of game than to the land."⁶⁰ In response to these crises, some of the Dakotas came to rely on farming, while others sought solutions to drastically altered living conditions in the exchange of land for government annuities.⁶¹

Land concessions led to an increasing intrusion of white settlers on traditional Dakota domain, but what significantly altered the relations between the Dakotas and the white settlers was the congressional creation of the Minnesota Territory in 1849 and the 1851 treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota. The newly appointed Minnesota Territorial governor, Alexander Ramsey, under the authority granted by the commissioner of Indian affairs, was authorized to end "Sioux ownership of lands within the bounds of the new territory."⁶² Supportive of Ramsey's efforts to remove the Dakota people from their traditional homeland were Protestant missionaries.

The Dakota mission of the ABCFM adopted an "Outline of a Plan for Civilizing the Dakotas" in 1850. The plan emphasized the need to "break up entirely" the "community system among the Sioux" by reducing the "common property systems" of Dakota people to individuated property holding patterns based on "individual rights" secured by United States governmental "arrangements" on land set aside for the Dakota people.⁶³ It was argued that the movement from savagery to civilization was contingent upon the restricting and confining of the Dakotas to land that was to be used for subsistence farming so as to encourage them "to be thrifty farmers rather than poor villagers."⁶⁴ Only a private property system, it was contended, laid the basis for a Dakota form of government that would encourage "industry" and the establishment of laws that would secure "life and property."⁶⁵

The 1851 treaty of Traverse des Sioux was negotiated with the Sisseton and Wahpetons, with Stephen Riggs serving as the translator during the treaty negotiations.⁶⁶ The Dakotas relinquished lands that extended from central Minnesota to northern Iowa, with the western boundary running from the Red River south to the Sioux River, and on the east land bordering the Madewakanton Islands. In place of land traditionally controlled by the Dakotas a reservation was created that spanned ten miles on each side of the Minnesota River from the Yellow Medicine Creek to Lake Traverse.⁶⁷ One of the early historians of the Dakotas has remarked that no other treaty "conveyed so vast and noble an estate."⁶⁸ The United States government agreed to pay the sum of \$1,665,000, to be deposited in the Treasury, which was to draw interest of \$68,000 for fifty years. In actuality the government never deposited the money in the Treasury and Congress had to appropriate each year the allotted interest payments; \$28,000 of the money earned as interest payments was earmarked by the government to be spent on food, education, and farming and the remainder was to be distributed in cash. An additional sum of \$275,000, to be paid to the Dakotas, was used to pay for the removal of the Dakotas from their own land, cover their trade debts, and finance development of the reservation.⁶⁹ Two contrasting responses to the signing of the treaty best sum up the reactions of Dakotas and whites alike. A member of the Sisseton delegation contended that "you think it a great deal of money to give for this land, but you must well understand that the money will go back to the whites again, and the country will also remain theirs."⁷⁰ The

editor of the newly founded *Minnesota Pioneer* declared that the end result of the treaty would be that "red savage, with his tepees, their horses, and their famished dogs, fading, vanishing, dissolving away."⁷¹

A second treaty was negotiated at Mendota between the United States government and the Mdewakantons and Wahpekutes in which they ceded the same land boundaries negotiated at the treaty of Traverse des Sioux. They were also allotted a reservation that was twenty-five miles wide along the Minnesota River from Little Rock to Yellow Medicine River. The monetary compensation totaled \$1,410,000, to be paid at the annual interest rate of \$58,000 with part of the money taking the form of annuities and reservation development. A further sum of \$220,000 was allocated, but like a similar sum paid to the Sissetons and Waheptons it was used to pay debts to traders and for their own removal.⁷² Some have labeled the treaty negotiations between the Dakota people and the United States government a "monstrous conspiracy," especially in terms of the vast amounts of money paid to traders and the fact that the Dakotas were compensated overall about seven cents an acre for their traditional homeland.⁷³ The real monstrosity was, in the words of Gary Anderson, that "what had once been a Dakota world was on the verge of collapse" and that what was negotiated was a "policy of confinement" as "white pioneers poured onto the land that had once been the Dakota domain."

Protestant missionaries praised the treaties for confining the Dakota people on two small reservations, although they did acknowledge that the "Dakotas have been compelled to leave regions abounding in forest, the home of deer, bear, and game, for a reservation so diluted of woods that it affords no game larger than raccoons and they have fears that they will not be able to obtain timber enough for fuel and fencing."⁷⁴ The federal government, they claimed, should be eternally grateful to the work of missionaries among the Dakota people, for whatever lack of resistance there was to removal on the part of the Dakotas was largely due to the "benefit of institutions from missionaries."⁷⁵ More importantly, the missionaries believed that by inducing the Dakotas to move they had saved the government money that could easily be used for the civilizing work of the Protestant missions.⁷⁶ Besides, asserted Stephen Riggs, the sale of the Dakota people's lands to the United States government had made them "less unreasonable" and it represented the "last battle" between whites and the Dakotas over

land issues. To Riggs the signing of treaties between the Dakotas and the federal government was a clear indication that a shift in the balance of power between the Dakotas and whites had occurred and "we are not sorry that...power had passed into other hands."⁷⁷

While missionaries such as Riggs celebrated the treaties as evidence of the triumph of white supremacy, the treaties came to have a different meaning for the Dakota people. Sisseton chief Red Iron protested that the treaties were signed under false pretenses, not only as to the content of the treaties, but in the manner in which the treaty process violated Dakota custom and tradition. Red Iron maintained that the Dakotas were unaware that the large sums of money offered by the federal government were to line the pockets of traders for "when we signed the treaty the traders threw a blanket over our faces and darkened our eyes, and made us sign papers which we did not understand, and which were not explained or read to us."⁷⁸ Moreover, the Dakotas, like other *Oceti Šakowin* people, had a different decision-making process than that of Euro-Americans. Decisions for the Dakotas were reached by a consensus of people meeting in council during which various points of views were heard and weighed until there was an agreement, often a long and slow procedure. Those appointed to speak for the council were spokespersons who articulated the wishes of the council rather than their own personal points of view.⁷⁹ Red Iron insisted that in the signing of the treaties the government officials did not wait for the convening of a council "so that we might be in council together and know what was done, and so that we might all understand the papers, and know what we were signing."⁸⁰ Instead only "two or three chiefs" met together, and they were influenced in the negotiating process by traders rather than by their council peers.⁸¹ Thus Red Iron concluded that the treaties were signed in bad faith and that was why "we are poor; you have plenty. Your fires are warm. Your tepees keep out the cold. We have nothing to eat.... We have sold our hunting-grounds and the graves of our fathers. We have sold our own graves. We have no place to bury our dead, and you will not pay us the money for our lands."⁸²

Unresolved grievances, engendered by the 1851 treaties, reached their peak in 1862 with the outbreak of the Great Sioux War. In the period preceding the Great Sioux War, the establishment of the reservations created internal divisions among the Dakotas and subjected the Dakotas to "the humiliation and

demoralization" often associated with the experience of being deemed nothing more than "reservation Indians."⁸³ The visible divisions among the Dakotas were the product of both missionary activity and governmental policy.

In many ways the 1850s were the culmination of decades of Protestant missionary presence among the Dakotas. An early Euro-American historian of the Dakota people, Doane Robinson, describes the work of the "devoted missionary families" as an exemplary story of "undaunted courage in adversity and persistence" as they established "a boarding school for boys and girls...[and] most of the Christian Indians removed to the vicinity and engaged in farming. There was by this time a respectable community who wore citizens' clothing, had short hair, and lived in good houses."⁸⁴ Robinson's rendition of the missionary "story" captures one of the major concerns of Protestant missionaries: the transformation of the Dakota people from hunters and gatherers to farmers—as people who worked the land in settled and ordered communities as self-sufficient individuals who, according to Stephen Riggs, regarded "labor as manly."⁸⁵ What is also apparent is that Protestant missionaries were well aware of the disruptive influence they were having on traditional Dakota society and acknowledged that the Dakota people believed that "if we endeavored to persuade them to cultivate the earth," that "they replied that it was well for the white man, to do so, but that they were made differently and must live differently, for if they should work the land as white men do, they would die."⁸⁶ Euro-American farming methods not only challenged traditional ways of life, but also assumed an alteration in Dakota gender roles. Missionaries took for granted that the only proper and "manly" role for Dakota men was to work the land. However, Dakota agricultural practices, as well as kinship roles, were tied to gender and "woman had her own place and man his; they were not the same and neither inferior nor superior."⁸⁷ Dakota women made valuable contributions to the political economy of their people in assuming the primary role of making use of the products of the land for the survival of the community, just as the Dakota division of labor set men apart as hunters.⁸⁸ It is, therefore, not surprising that Euro-American attitudes towards women and traditional values were codified in treaties and that they overlooked "the matrilinear structure of Dakota society...[and did] not acknowledge...female dominance of agriculture."⁸⁹

The appropriation of Euro-American agricultural techniques, and the underlying cultural values that they implied, were viewed by traditional Dakota religious leaders as an accommodation on the part of the Dakota people to ways of experiencing the world that violated fundamental Dakota values.⁹⁰ It followed that Christianity in particular was perceived as a fundamental threat to the institutional viability of Dakota society.⁹¹ Mdewakanton chief Big Eagle believed that the major objection to Euro-Americans was that "whites were trying to make the Indians give up their life and live like white men—go farming, work hard and do as they did—and the Indians did not know how to do that, and did not want to anyway....The Indians wanted to live as they did before the treaty of Traverse des Sioux—go where they pleased and when they pleased; hunt game wherever they could find it, sell their furs to the traders and live as they could."⁹²

In the judgment of George Tinker the missionary colonial project was nothing less than cultural genocide which would eventually lead indigenous people down the road "from the independence of a healthy interdependent community to a dysfunctional co-independent relationship between an alienated remnant of a conquered people and their conquerors."⁹³ Nevertheless, from the perspective of the missionaries themselves, so it has been argued, they were not so much engaging in the derogatory process of cultural genocide as much as saving the Dakota people from physical extinction. They accepted the inevitability of the westward movement of Euro-American colonizers, which, coupled with a humanitarian and Christian impulse of concern for others, meant that only the adoption of Christianity and Euro-American civilization would preserve the existence of the Dakotas as a people.⁹⁴ In contrast to this rather benign interpretation of the missionary enterprise, the historical record tends to be more in keeping with the conclusions drawn by Tinker.

Protestant missionaries were not the only people sowing seeds of discord among the Dakota people. Stephen Riggs aptly described the role of the federal government "as an ally to lead on to victory" when he praised the role of federal authorities as agents of acculturation.⁹⁵ This was particularly the case with Superintendent William J. Cullen and "Sioux agent" Joseph R. Brown. Both Cullen and Brown believed in the necessity of the cultural adaptation of the Dakota people to an agrarian way of life. This was most clearly evident, they

assumed, in the Dakotas' acceptance of the privatization of land and the adoption of Euro-American cultural values.⁹⁶ Cullen, in particular, believed that "allotting land and locating the Indians on farms would end their roaming."⁹⁷ Furthermore, neither Cullen nor Brown were adverse to the use of government annuities and funds to aid the process of "civilization," knowing that farming made a break with custom and tradition and was a denial of "kinship obligations."⁹⁸ By the beginning of the 1860s both Brown and Cullen realized that there were growing divisions among the Dakota people and resistance to their attempts to transform the Dakota way of life. "There is no doubt," Cullen wrote, "that at the present time a great struggle for ascendancy is taking place among the Sioux between the civilized or improvement Indians who have adopted our habits and customs and those who still retain the savage mode of life."⁹⁹

The divisions among the Dakota people acknowledged by Cullen were exemplified by the Great Sioux War of 1862, which was, argues Gary Anderson, a story of "two engagements—one between Indians and whites, the second the futile struggle of militant Dakota leaders to reestablish cultural cohesiveness."¹⁰⁰ The outbreak of the war was a manifestation of a long-standing litany of broken promises between the federal government and the Dakota people, the increasing encroachment of white settlers upon Dakota hunting grounds, and intertribal differences. It had also become apparent to many traditional Dakotas that both governmental policies and missionary evangelization led to the cultural deterioration of the Dakota as a people, graphically illustrated by various Dakotas who had abandoned customary political, economic, and religious practices.¹⁰¹ Just as infuriating was their encounter with whites who, in the words of Big Eagle, "seemed to say by their manner when they saw an Indian, 'I am better than you.'"¹⁰²

A clash between a small group of Dakota hunters and a white settler family in the community of Acton culminated in the killing of five whites, the spark that ignited the Sioux War. The killing of white settlers was interpreted by those most alienated from whites and at odds with Dakotas who had converted to Christianity as the beginning of a war that would rid the land of whites and lead to a reestablishment of the Dakota way of life.¹⁰³ At the same time many of the leading Dakota chiefs, such as Wabasha, Wacouta, Traveling Hail, Red Iron, and Standing Buffalo, were opposed to war with whites, as were many of the Sissetons and Wahpetons.¹⁰⁴ Even Little

Crow, who took on a reluctant leadership role in the Sioux War, was opposed to the war, contending that "the white men are like the locusts when they fly so thick that the whole sky is a snowstorm...[and] if you strike at them they will turn on you and devour you and your women and little children just as the locusts in their time fall on the trees and devour all the leaves in one day."¹⁰⁵ But those who argued for peace were ignored.

The Great Sioux War, as it has come to be called, was of a very short duration. There was an initial brief period in which the Dakotas committed to the war predominated, but all too quickly they found themselves on the defensive.¹⁰⁶ When it became clear that the war was lost, a small band of Dakotas numbering several hundred, under the leadership of Little Crow, fled to the northern plains.¹⁰⁷ Those who had argued for peace and had opposed the war from the beginning sued for peace.¹⁰⁸

Governor Alexander Ramsey commissioned Henry Hastings Sibley, who had a background as a fur trader and politician, to head the campaign of the Minnesota militia against the Dakotas.¹⁰⁹ Sibley, promising that only those Dakotas who had killed white civilians would be punished, convinced some Dakotas to surrender, while others were captured by members of the Minnesota militia.¹¹⁰ Those who were finally incarcerated, about four hundred, were brought in front of a quickly assembled military tribunal and tried, often in groups of up to forty prisoners, with little regard for due process. Three hundred and three Dakotas were condemned to death and moved to Mankato for their execution. The death sentences were later reviewed by Washington authorities, by order of President Lincoln, and it became clear that much of the evidence used against the condemned Dakotas was questionable at best. Eventually, Abraham Lincoln signed the death warrant for forty prisoners for whom he believed there was sufficient evidence of guilt.

On the day after Christmas, in the year 1862, thirty-eight Dakotas were hanged, with one prisoner's sentence commuted and another prisoner's name removed from the list of those scheduled to die just before the death sentences were carried out.¹¹¹ One of the Dakotas condemned to be hanged, Rada-in-yan-ka, dictated a letter that conveyed his feelings about the American system of justice: "You have deceived me. You told me that if we followed the advice of General Sibley, and give ourselves up to the whites, all would be well—no innocent man would be injured. I have not killed...[or] wounded...any

white persons. I have not participated in the plunder of their property; and yet to-day, I am set apart for execution, and must die in a few days, while men who are guilty will remain in prison."¹¹²

At the same time there were hundreds, and at one point more than sixteen hundred, Dakotas who remained in government hands at Fort Snelling, most of whom were Mdewakantons and Wahpekutes. Some of the Dakotas were families of the prisoners, both of those who had been hanged and those who were sentenced but not executed, while others were Dakotas captured by government forces. Three hundred and twenty-six of those imprisoned were sent to a prison in Davenport, Iowa where after three years of imprisonment more than one-third died. The remaining Mdewakantons and Wahpekutes were either removed to Crow Creek on the Upper Missouri, where many died of starvation, or to a new reservation site near Santee, Nebraska, in 1866.¹¹³

While the Dakotas were subjected to varying forms of incarceration by federal authorities, the United States Congress passed two acts of legislation in the early part of 1863 that banished the Dakotas from their traditional homeland. The first piece of legislation "abrogated all treaties entered into by the government with the four bands of Santee Sioux [Mdewakanton, Wahpeton, Sisseton, and Wahpekute] and denied them all rights to further benefits under the terms of the treaties, including all rights to occupancy of lands in the state of Minnesota."¹¹⁴ The subsequent piece of legislation authorized the sale of the reservation lands and the removal of the Dakotas to land that eventually became the Santee Reservation in Nebraska.¹¹⁵

The Sisseton and Wahpeton bands that had largely opposed the war fled from Sibley's Minnesota militia to the Dakota Territory. Eventually treaties were negotiated which provided for two reservations: one created a reservation on a pie-shaped piece of land that cuts across the present states of North and South Dakota, and the other formed a reservation at Devils Lake in North Dakota.¹¹⁶

"A barbarian cyclone" was the phrase that Protestant missionaries used to describe the Great Sioux War.¹¹⁷ It was a war, they believed, that killed "innocent whites" and was a product of Indian "heathenism" that in the end was a tragedy for both whites and Dakotas alike.¹¹⁸ One of the root causes of the uprising, claimed Stephen Riggs, was that the Dakota people were

treated as if they constituted a sovereign nation when in point of fact they lacked "all the elements of sovereignty" with no governmental system or the ability to make and enforce "laws for the protection of person and property."¹¹⁹ Another issue was a failure of will and "duty" as a "Christian nation to act towards them the part of guardian, making them amenable to law and bringing them under the controlling influences of Christian civilization."¹²⁰ Other factors which led to the outbreak of the Sioux War, Riggs argued, were attempts on the part of the Dakotas to make use of the "Southern rebellion" as a "time to strike" back at whites and the "antagonism of heathenism to Christianity and civilization."¹²¹

As a war between Christianity and heathenism, it appeared to Protestant missionaries that "the power of the white man had prevailed...[and] the white man's God, was to be supreme."¹²² The Dakota prisoners at Mankato converted to Christianity by the hundreds as they, according to John P. Williamson, "renounced their faith in idols and sought the way they had persecuted."¹²³ Much of the "success" of Protestant missionaries was due to evangelistic efforts of Thomas Williamson and Gideon Pond preaching and teaching among prisoners who were often chained together at the ankles.¹²⁴ In addition, missionary work among imprisoned family members at Fort Snelling was also successful, they believed, as people witnessed the brokenness of the power of traditional Dakota religious leaders and individuals experienced a "religious awakening."¹²⁵ A different reading of what Protestants considered to be the "seeds of Christian truth...suddenly manifest[ing] their vitality" is that of Roy Meyer, a historian of the Dakota people. Meyer maintains that whatever success the Protestant missionaries had at Mankato and elsewhere is less attributable to their missionary zeal, or the innate appeal of Christianity, than to the fact that "it wasn't until the morale of the Sioux was shattered by the aftermath of the Uprising in 1862 that wholesale conversions were made."¹²⁶

In 1863 the Dakotas confined at Fort Snelling, numbering at this point up to thirteen hundred, were transported by steamboat to Crow Creek where they would live until they were again moved to Santee, Nebraska, along with those imprisoned at Davenport, Iowa. The Dakotas at Crow Creek were considered "prisoners of war," and treated accordingly.¹²⁷ John Williamson wrote that "the Sioux we have here [Crow Creek] are so humbled that they make no complaints in regard to their

location...and I may state that the Sioux who are here show very clearly that as a tribe they are changed from heathenism to Christianity."¹²⁸

What Williamson was describing is a process of cultural change that would continue throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. Protestant missions among the Dakotas focused on reservations where the energies of missionaries were devoted to founding churches, establishing schools, and transforming every dimension of the traditional Dakota way of life.¹²⁹ In triumphalistic language, Stephen Riggs boasted that by the year 1873:

the dusky forms of the Dakotas flitted in the gloaming, bent on deeds of blood; now the same race is here largely represented by pastors of native churches and teachers of the white man's civilization and the religion of Christ. And the marvelous change that has passed over this country, converting it from the wild abode of savages into the beautiful land of Christian habitation, is only surpassed by the still more marvelous changes that have been wrought upon these savage heathens.¹³⁰

The year 1873 was in point of fact only the beginning of further changes that both Protestant missionaries and the federal government had in mind for the Dakotas and all other indigenous peoples. It is perhaps bitterly ironic that to a large extent Riggs' reaction to the Great Sioux War represents the same reasoning that propelled the federal government to act as "guardians" in relation to Native people, without regard for tribal sovereignty, rights, or traditions. Beginning in 1871, the federal government enacted legislation that banned tribes from making contracts without the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, established an "Indian police force" on the reservations, and subjected indigenous people to a set of rules and regulations, formulated and enforced by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, that governed "family, religious and economic affairs."¹³¹ The Supreme Court, furthermore, ruled that indigenous people were subject to "the plenary power of Congress in their domestic affairs, without the protection of the Bill of Rights."¹³² Adding insult to injury was the overturning of tribal laws by which indigenous people had control over tribal territory. Finally, it was not until 1934 that Indians ceased to be regarded as wards of the state.¹³³

The intervention of the federal government in the daily lives of the Dakotas was for missionaries only an extension of their own missionary goals. Alfred Riggs, son of Stephen Riggs, contended that "the present policy of the Government even the U.S. agencies are in a sense missionary enterprises" just as Protestant missions "among the Indians have been recognized as official agencies for the civilization of the wild peoples the Government holds as its wards."¹³⁴ Thus it is not surprising that missionaries worked to destroy the integrity of tribal self-government, supported the allotment of "homesteads" to individual persons as a means of undermining tribal land-holding patterns, and sought the destruction of any vestiges of traditional customs or traditions that stood in the way of the adoption of Euro-American material culture and conformity to Euro-American values and standards.¹³⁵ "Tribal organization in itself has always opposed civilization," wrote Thomas L. Riggs.¹³⁶ He went on to declare that "without any qualification it may be here remarked that where any form of this organization exists...you have a chilling shadow in the way of civilization and progress." The "overthrow" of tribal organizations, Riggs continued, went hand in hand not only with a change of "habitat" and "occupation," but the teaching of values, especially Euro-American values that celebrated "the value of time as well as property, thrift, and stick-to-itiveness."¹³⁷ In the end, though, it was "religion" that led to any "outward" changes in the way indigenous people perceived the world, for it is "a change of heart which calls for and ensures outward changes."¹³⁸

Writing in 1914, Francis E. Leupp, former Commissioner of Indian Affairs, summed up what he believed to be the accomplishments of the history of Protestant missions among Native Americans by stating that Christian missions "were assuredly transforming character and life."¹³⁹ He characterized the religious traditions that missionaries encountered as "the religion of darkened minds and darkened hearts, swarming with myths and mysteries, and the rankest superstitions, the fruitage of which could be nothing [more] than the gross heathenism which missionaries have found in all tribes and which still exists among tribes uninfluenced by Christianity."¹⁴⁰ By contrast, Leupp maintained, Christianity brought about a "renewal in the spirit" in the minds of indigenous people so that they can "be redeemed from heathenism and fitted for life, with stan-

dards and character that will meet the tests of life here and hereafter."¹⁴¹

DAKOTAS AND CHRISTIANITY: THE OTHER SIDE

This section turns from an examination of the history of the Dakota people and Protestant missions and missionaries to a series of divergent Dakota responses to Christianity. An important starting point for assessing the interaction between the Dakota people and Christianity are the perspectives offered by William Powers and James Treat. Powers is of the opinion that, rhetoric aside, those who argue that the conversion to Christianity, let alone the adopting of Euro-American material culture, was a process of "acculturation" which could be characterized as a "one-way street...[in which] the subordinated society" received "cultural goods" that overwhelmed them, just as they were overwhelmed by Christianity, is a problematic model for understanding cultural interaction.¹⁴² Despite what missionaries, governmental officials, and bureaucrats intended, the adoption of the trappings of Euro-American material culture and Christianity can be perceived as one of a series of social, political, economic, and religious "stratagems" for "cultural persistence," not only of preexisting kinship networks and political structures, but identity as a people and the continuation of traditional values in "non-Indian society."¹⁴³ In terms of "religious stratagems," what Powers concludes is that the adoption of Christianity was "a means of survival and adaptation to the inalterability of the white man's dominance. Christianity has been used in such a way that the old cultural institutions and their associated values may persist under new labels."¹⁴⁴ Rather than labeling this process syncretistic, Powers prefers the term "dual religious participation" which acknowledges the "coexistence of two disparate religious systems."¹⁴⁵

James Treat, by contrast, is of the opinion that Native peoples' appropriation of the Christian tradition has led to the forging of their own religious identities that are not reducible to anthropological paradigms.¹⁴⁶ Anthropologists, for Treat, have long dismissed "native religious adaptability as tragic acculturation, and...[attempt] to reduce human experience to ethnographic data."¹⁴⁷ At the same time, Treat takes issue with those within the Native American community who have outright rejected Christianity as a demonic manifestation of the domi-

nant culture. The dilemma hence for Treat is that Native American Christians "have been called heretical, inauthentic, assimilated, and uncommitted; they have long endured intrusive definitions of personal identity and have quietly pursued their own religious visions, often under the very noses of unsuspecting missionaries, anthropologists, agents, and activists."¹⁴⁸

In light of the above-mentioned observations, what follows is a series of differing Dakota assessments of Euro-American Christianity and culture. One of the most prolific Dakota writers of the early twentieth century was Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa). Eastman was born in 1858 in Redwood Falls, Minnesota. His mother, Mary Nancy Eastman, was a mixed blood, daughter of Captain Seth Eastman and Wakan inajin win (Stands Sacred) and granddaughter of chief Cloud Man, one of the first chiefs to be receptive to Protestant missionaries.¹⁴⁹ His father, a member of the Whapeton band, was Wakanhdi Ota (Many Lightings) and like his wife was descended from leaders of the Dakota people.¹⁵⁰ With the end of the Great Sioux War Eastman, at the age of four, fled with members of his father's family, his mother having died in childbirth, to Canada where he was raised by his uncle in traditional Dakota fashion. Thinking that his father had been killed by whites, he did not encounter his father until the age of fifteen.¹⁵¹ His father had been captured by government authorities and, during his imprisonment in Davenport, Iowa, had converted to Christianity. Eastman's father changed his name from Many Lighting to Jacob and took the name Eastman, having been converted by Thomas Williamson and Stephen Riggs.¹⁵² Eventually, Eastman's father settled on land in Flandreau in the Dakota Territory and at his father's insistence was enrolled in white schools. In 1887, he received a B.S. degree from Dartmouth College, and in 1890, he obtained his medical degree from Boston University.¹⁵³

In the years that followed Eastman served as a government-appointed physician at Pine Ridge and Crow Creek reservations, as well as in other government positions. He also became active in Indian affairs and was recognized, according to his biographer, as the "foremost educated Indian in the United States."¹⁵⁴ Eastman's constant interaction with Euro-Americans, coupled with his own personal religious experience and study of Christianity, led him to conclude that there was "no such thing as Christian civilization," especially in light

of what he perceived to be the obvious contradiction between Christian theory and practice.¹⁵⁵ He was appalled by the hypocrisy of self-professed Christians who “spoke much of spiritual things, while seeking only the material. They bought and sold everything: time, labor, personal independence, the love of woman, and even the ministrations of their holy faith.”¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, there seemed a gulf between the “meek and lowly Jesus” and the “lust for money, power, and conquest so characteristic” of the dominant people.¹⁵⁷ Given what Eastman viewed as Christianity’s “open contempt of all religions but its own” he was not astonished by the negative response to his efforts to convince a chief of the Sac and Fox of the wisdom of accepting civilization and Christianity.¹⁵⁸ The chief responded that:

he was...glad that I was apparently satisfied with the white man’s religion and his civilization. As for them, he said, neither of these had seemed good to them. The white man had showed neither respect for nature, nor reverence toward God, but, he thought, tried to buy God with the by-products of nature. He tried to buy his way into heaven, but he did not even know where heaven was.¹⁵⁹

Eastman ends his autobiography with the affirmation that “I am an Indian; and while I have learned much from civilization, for which I am grateful, I have never lost my Indian sense of right and justice.”¹⁶⁰ At the same time, there was a constant desire on Eastman’s part to affirm that “I am an American,” illustrating how thin was the line that separated participation in the dominant culture and affirmation of one’s identity as an “Indian.”¹⁶¹ Even though Eastman could agonize over the tensions between traditional Dakota life and the dictates of modernity, he was involved in federal government programs that sought the transformation of Dakota culture. The Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, which led to the privatization of tribal land, required indigenous people to adopt Euro-American surnames and family structure.¹⁶² Eastman records his encounter with “Old White Bull” who was informed that not only did he have to change his name, but “each man must choose one wife who should bear his name.”¹⁶³ Old White Bull exclaimed, “What...these two women have been my wives for over half a century. I know the way of the white man; he takes women unknown to each other and to his law. These two have been

faithful to me and I have been faithful to them. Their children are my children and their grandchildren are mine. We are now living together as brother and sisters. All the people know that we have been happy together, and nothing but death can separate us."¹⁶⁴ The heartrending response of Old White Bull is in many ways paradigmatic of the tensions between the preservation of Dakota traditional values and the dictates of the dominant culture.

Other Dakotas, while acknowledging that they were Christians, viewed the world more in terms of the threat that modernity posed for traditional ways of life. Jonas Keeble, a member of the Sisseton band, reflected on the irony of the term "civilization," noting that "the Indian was already civilized; they knew what they were doing."¹⁶⁵ A tribal ordering of life, Keeble stressed, was as relevant today as in the past, for "Indians worked together...and they understood each other and they honored each other."¹⁶⁶ The community was structured in ways that gave meaning to one's existence, not only in terms of human relationships but a moral sensitivity to one another and the surrounding world. Born in 1886, Keeble realized that his long life had led him to conclude that one thing was true: "The Government never fulfilled its promises."¹⁶⁷

A final window on the Dakota encounter with Christianity is best illustrated by the story of the Deloria family. Most Euro-Americans are familiar with the writings of Vine Deloria, Jr., but are often unaware of his family's long affiliation with Christianity. The Delorias are members of the Yankton council fires of the *Oceti Šakowin*, a people whose self-identification is that of Dakota.¹⁶⁸ The story of the Deloria family's encounter with Christianity begins with Vine Deloria, Jr.'s great-grandfather François des Lauriers (1816-1876), whose father had married a Dakota woman, and who was named Saswe (1816-1876), a chief of the White Swan Yankton and a *wapiya wica a*.¹⁶⁹ According to his grandson, Vine Deloria, Sr., he was receptive to the coming of Protestant missionaries to the Yankton reservation. Not long before his death in 1876, he converted to Christianity.¹⁷⁰ At the time of his baptism he changed his name to Francis Deloria and married one of his three wives, Siha Sapewin. Siha Sapewin was a Lakota, daughter of a chief of the Sihasapa (Blackfoot) band of the Tetons. Their son was named Tipi Sapa (Black Lodge), which became Philip Joseph Deloria (1854-1931).¹⁷¹ Francis Deloria's conversion to Christianity was preceded by that of his son Philip, whom Francis Deloria had

insisted attend a newly founded missionary school established by Episcopalian missionaries.¹⁷² Philip's conversion was inspired by the missionary efforts of an Episcopalian missionary by the name of Joseph Cook who convinced Philip that becoming a Christian entailed the acceptance of Euro-American customs and traditions. Philip was particularly aware of the cost of adopting Euro-American manners when he reflected on the fact that not only did he have to dress like a white person but he had to cut his hair.¹⁷³ He had been taught by his family that "a scalp-lock of beautiful long hair is a most desirable thing for a warrior to possess. Take care of your hair. Be brave, and if an enemy gets your scalp-lock, die like a man. He who dies uttering a cry is not a man, and is a disgrace to his people."¹⁷⁴ At the same time, he believed he was faced with the alternative of "the heathen life and the Christian life" and thus he chose to attend a number of missionary schools. In 1874, he returned to the Yankton Reservation, first as a lay-reader and later was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1892.¹⁷⁵ While Philip Deloria and his wife Mary Sully Bordeaux, herself one-quarter Dakota, had great respect for the traditions of the Dakota people and raised their children to know and appreciate tribal traditions and the Dakota language, Philip Deloria still characterized the belief system of the Dakotas as reflecting the "plane of their development."¹⁷⁶ Dakota customs and traditions "were adequate in the past" but were "insufficient" for the future and thus Philip Deloria concluded "The Church, and only the Church, is able to solve the future of the Indian."¹⁷⁷

Philip Deloria's son, Vine Deloria, Sr. (1901-1990), was born at Standing Rock reservation and was the only boy in a family of five girls. Like his father, he became an ordained Episcopal priest, graduating from Bard College and the Episcopalian seminary in New York, General Theological Seminary. He spent thirty-five years of his ministry at Standing Rock and later served as assistant secretary for the division of home missions of the Episcopal Church.¹⁷⁸

Vine Deloria, Sr. insists that "the work of missionaries was admirable," in terms of "their dedication to the Indian people," even though their denominationalism was divisive as "each denominational group believed that their particular faith was really the true one."¹⁷⁹ More troubling to Deloria was that the Bible did not foster a respect for traditional Dakota values, especially an acknowledgment of the Earth as sacred, or what it could mean for a people who "adapted themselves to nature,

not nature to themselves."¹⁸⁰ The end result was a failure to appreciate one's kinship with Mother Earth and thus there would be an impending ecological disaster: if "the world of today fails to leave enough of the ways of Mother Earth in her natural state, mankind will annihilate itself."¹⁸¹ Euro-American attitudes toward nature and the people who inhabited the land were, for Deloria, most destructively embodied in the Dawes Allotment Act and its impact on Dakotas living on the Standing Rock Reservation. The Dakotas had resisted privatization of land for decades, knowing full well that the Dawes Act was only "another measure to aid in the white man's efforts to make the Indian over into the image of the white man...[and] further dispossessing the Red Man of his land by declaring unallotted reservation lands as surplus land to be opened up to white settlers."¹⁸² Dakota resistance was finally overcome by 1906 and the repercussions were devastating—undermining the Dakota economy and "the well-being of our people."¹⁸³ Just as devastating was the cultural imperialism of Euro-Americans who felt "insulted that we did not respond to their white American ways," wrote Deloria, and "I remember how our language and simple innocent customs were not only frowned upon but the Churches and Government...barred the use of our own tongue and condemned our customs, or tried to shame us away from them by mimicking and mocking us."¹⁸⁴

In 1982, Vine Deloria, Sr. gave an address on "The Establishment of Christianity Among the Sioux" at a symposium on "American Indian Religion in the Dakotas: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives."¹⁸⁵ In that address he reflected that he had never questioned the Christian religion, serving as a priest among his own people. However, with his retirement he had come to certain conclusions that raised issues about the ongoing relationship of the Dakota people to Christianity. While he was enamored as ever with Jesus, he doubted the relevance of Pauline Christianity and was critical of the preoccupation of church officials with concerns unrelated to the way Jesus dealt with "what is the meaning of life, and how to live it."¹⁸⁶ In addition, the resurgence of traditional Dakota religion was viewed by Deloria as a sign of the failure of Christianity to understand and honor the long history of the deeply ingrained nature of Dakota spirituality.¹⁸⁷ Deloria concluded that Euro-American Christianity was part of a historical process by which Euro-Americans had come "to see the Indian way of life wrong and primitive. They believed the whole Indian way of life was

the work of the devil and the powers of the evil, wickedness and ignorance. That's what the missionaries told us, and we believed them and gave it up—gave the whole thing up. And what did Christianity do? Turn around and replace our superstitions with a set of their own."¹⁸⁸ Besides, it seemed ironic to Deloria that "the church calls its practices sacraments, while the Indians' ones are only symbols."¹⁸⁹

A fitting conclusion to the Deloria story are the insights offered by Vine Deloria, Jr. in his recent work, *Red Earth, White Lies*, dedicated to his father. Deloria questions the attempted accommodation of Christian denominations to traditional Indian religions and practices because he believes that "Christianity was not designed to explain anything about this planet or the meaning of human life."¹⁹⁰ His argument is based on the contention that Christianity is concerned less with how to live in this world, but the next, and thus there is a built-in devaluing of both the earth and human society. He argues that "Christianity has been the curse of all cultures into which it has intruded. It has offered eternal life somewhere else and produced social and individual disintegration."¹⁹¹ As for Protestant missions and missionaries—to Deloria, Christianity was nothing more than an agent of Euro-American colonialism as it "was made the official religion of the Indian reservations, and traditional tribal religions were banned."¹⁹² Coupled with the destructive role of Christianity was the materialism of Euro-American culture which undermined Indian spirituality.¹⁹³ Finally, Deloria believes that the five-hundred-year-old cultural conflict between Europeans and indigenous people in the Americas is at heart about differing definitions of "what civilized society should be." If indigenous people are to draw strength from their own traditions and history then, according to Deloria, "much of Western science must go, all of Western religion must go, and if we are in any way successful in ridding ourselves of these burdens, we will find that we can fundamentally change government so that it will function more sensibly and enable us to solve our problems."¹⁹⁴

CONCLUSION

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail," written in 1963, asked the white church and its clergy where Christians had been when black people

were being lynched, brutalized, and forced to endure the chains of poverty and discrimination.¹⁹⁵ The same could be asked of Euro-Americans as Native American communities were destroyed, people forced into American-designated concentration camps, or what we euphemistically refer to as "reservations," and indigenous people were systematically robbed of their language, culture, and traditions—all in the name of progress, civilization, and Christianity. What is perhaps as troubling is that Protestant missionaries in particular believed that what they were doing was on behalf of and for the benefit of indigenous people. What we are left with is a legacy of Christianity and empire that to date has not been dealt with in terms of its impact on the shaping of Euro-American discourse, people's historical self-understanding, and the relationship of Euro-Americans to Indian people in the present. Issues facing the religious community range from the need to examine the ways that the Christian tradition has been articulated within the context of a Christian colonial paradigm to the relevancy of the history of Native Americans for the contemporary Christian community. While it might be argued that Euro-Americans are trying to wrestle with Native American experience as evident in their concern for environmental issues or appreciation of Native American spirituality, there is still an avoidance of deeper structural and religious issues. Vine Deloria, Jr. wonders, for example, if the interest in the perspectives of Native Americans on the environment or spirituality is due to the bankruptcy of Euro-Americans' own values or a new form of exploitation which in the end will only be beneficial to Euro-Americans.¹⁹⁶ Another way of framing the question is offered by Vincent Harding when he asks what it means for Native Americans to express themselves in "languages and structures of belief that others have created for you."¹⁹⁷

In light of Harding's observation, it might be asked what there is about a European mediation of Christianity that leads not only Native Americans, but other people of color to raise fundamental questions about the Euro-American tradition. Perhaps Charles Long stated it best when he defined the cultural language of the dominant people in this country as "a cultural language rooted not simply in the physical conquest of space, but equally a language which is the expression of a hermeneutics of conquest and suppression. It is a cultural language that conceals the inner depths, the archaic dimensions of the dominant peoples in the country, while at the same time it

renders invisible all those who fail to partake of this language and its underlying cultural experiences."¹⁹⁸ Long's analysis of the role which a cultural language of domination has played in American life raises three important questions:

(1) While obviously historians and social scientists have methodologically made use of a "hermeneutics of conquest and suppression," for an understanding of the diverse histories and experiences of oppressed people in this country, it is not always clear to what extent this same paradigm, as it relates to indigenous communities, has been applied to an understanding of either Euro-American experience or Christian and religious discourse. For example, in the struggle for a more equitable and just social order, political and religious activists, among others, have made use of the language of communitarianism and democratic socialism as they have attempted to provide alternatives to the language of a marketplace economy and reductionistic individualism. Still, there is rarely any indication that the language about community or people's aspirations for a truly democratic society might entail an acknowledgment of how the historic experience of Native Americans qualifies or calls into question the legitimacy of the nation-state. In addition, there is the related issue of the extent to which variously conceived progress on sociopolitical projects, extending from environmental concerns to new ways of understanding political accountability, are often based on subtle, and not so subtle, denial of indigenous treaty rights and land claims or the refusal to take the struggles of indigenous people seriously to preserve religious and cultural traditions. In other words, there seems to be a tendency to engage in debates about both the contradictory nature of a capitalistic political economy and the creation of more responsive democratic institutions as if we live in a country devoid of a colonial past.

(2) At issue is the inseparability of Euro-American history and Christianity, so that one identifies American "religion" with Christianity to the degree that only Christianity expresses the American experience. Additionally, religious, ethical, and moral discourse assumes a Christian framework that is simply part and parcel of the very fabric of American society. The most frightening expression of the problematic relationship between religion and culture is the political and theological rigidity of the "Christian coalition" and the language and analysis offered by the religious right in general. But even liberals, be they Protestant or Catholic, often make a facile identification

between Christianity and culture, whether it is a form of civil religiosity or not. What needs to be questioned is not simply the relationship of Christianity and culture as much as the destructive consequences that have resulted from the historical experiences of Euro-American Christians as the governing paradigm by which we have come to understand ourselves as "Americans." While the debates over multiculturalism have called into question many of our assumptions about national identity, one might argue that part of our deliberations have obscured, if not rendered invisible, the history of indigenous people who literally seek to create other ways of conceiving the future of their own societies unrelated to issues of "American" national identity. Perhaps the depth of our inability to understand the Native American experience is reflected in our almost total unwillingness to understand the issues at stake north of the forty-ninth parallel, those of the First Nations, Canada, and Quebec.

(3) Finally, the history of the encounter and interaction between Christians and the religious traditions of Native Americans poses the need for a paradigm shift in how we come to terms with the relationship between Christianity and other religious traditions. Some scholars have advocated a "pluralist model" in wrestling with the relationship of Christianity and other religious traditions that assumes a de-absolutizing of truth, both as a way of understanding the past and present and acknowledging the validity and relevance of other religious traditions.¹⁹⁹ Jay McDaniel has expressed these sentiments best when he states that what is involved is "more than tolerance and understanding" of other religious traditions, but "hearing the truth in other religions and being transformed in the process."²⁰⁰

What all of this means for the contemporary religious community is perhaps above all else a willingness to engage in ethical analysis and religious discourse that assumes a posture of humility and openness. In the context of the history of this country, Euro-American Christians, whether they're on the left or right, have often assumed modes of behavior and styles of interaction with others that take on the character of a blatant or muted self-righteousness as to the relevancy of the Christian tradition for addressing, and often solving, the crises and contradictions of American life at both a collective and personal level. Perhaps what the history of the enduring conflict between Europeans and indigenous people on this continent

can teach us is: (1) the obvious pitfalls of the Christian legitimization of the dominant culture, with its intending exercise of power and privilege, and the identification of Christianity with the aspirations of the nation-state, be that for good or evil; (2) the more difficult lesson might be the assumption of a marginal status and role for Euro-American Christians for the perceivable future, what might be envisioned as the disestablishment of Christianity, in all of its forms. Marginality means not only a countercultural role, with respect to Christian faith and practice, but a form of exilic thinking and living—exiled from privilege, status, and influence in the world.

NOTES

1. This article is based on initial research done as part of an NEH Summer Seminar on American Indian Ethnohistory at the University of Oklahoma (summer, 1995). Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 21-22.

2. John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 236. See also John and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

3. *Ibid.*, 36.

4. Charles H. Long, "Civil Rights – Civil Religion: Visible People and Invisible Religion," *American Civil Religion*, ed. Russell F. Richey and Donald G. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 214.

5. Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 129-130.

6. David Edmunds, in a recent analysis of historical scholarship on Native American history, has stressed the degree to which Samuel Eliot Morrison's view of the history of the United States—the "history of the American People is the history in America of immigrants from other countries"—is finally being reexamined, though it can be argued that "popular" perceptions of what constitutes the history of this country have not significantly been altered. R. David Edmunds, "Native Americans, New Voices: American Indian History, 1895-1995," *American Historical Review*, 100/3 (June, 1995): 726.

7. Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1962), 11-12.

8. Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 295.

9. *Ibid.*, 296.

10. George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 4.

11. Ibid., 6.
12. Ibid., 6-8.
13. Ibid., 123.
14. Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, 293.
15. Geertz, *After the Fact*, 129.
16. Response of Vine Deloria, Jr. to Ronald L. Grimes on "Teaching Native American Religion." Updated May 1, 1995, "Lakota Home Pages," Internet. Historians of Native American history have also engaged in this type of discussion which David Edmunds characterizes as conflict over "voices and audiences." Edmunds, "Native Americans, New Voices," *American Historical Review*: 737-739.
17. William K. Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975, 1982), 3.
18. George Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937, 1975), 3.
19. Raymond J. DeMallie, "Preface" to *Indians of the Plains* by Robert H. Lowie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954, 1982), xi.
20. *Sioux Indian Religion*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 6-7. Powers, *Oglala Religion*, 11-18. Marla N. Powers, *Oglala Women: Myth, Ritual and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 23-25.
21. Ethel Nurge, *The Modern Sioux: Social Systems and Reservation Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), xii-xiii.
22. Powers, *Oglala Women*, 23. Doane Robinson, *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1904, 1956), 21. Stephen R. Riggs, *TAH-KOO-WAH-KAN or The Gospel Among the Dakotas* (New York, Arno Press, 1869, 1972), 1-2. Bruce David Forbes, "Evangelization and Acculturation Among the Santee Dakota Indians," (Ph.D., diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1977), 6.
23. Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), ix. Powers, *ibid.* Robinson, *ibid.*
24. Anderson, *ibid.*, Robinson, *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, 31.
25. Anderson, *ibid.*, x-xii. Robinson, *ibid.*, 58-76.
26. Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, Abridged Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), x. For a more in-depth analysis of indigenous people and the colonial policy of the "British Empire" in North America see Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
27. Ibid.
28. Three American Papers, Foreign Relations (Washington, D.C.: 1832), 722, *The Road: Indian Tribes and Political Liberty* by Russel Lawrence Barsh and James Youngblood Henderson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 41.

29. American Papers, Foreign Relations, 712, *The Road*, 41.
30. *Ibid.*, 77.
31. John P. Williamson, "Early Missions to the Dakota Indians in Minnesota," *The Dakota Mission: Past and Present, A.D. 1886* (pamphlet) (Minneapolis: Tribune Job Printing Co., Printers, 1886), 3.
32. Letter from Samuel W. Pond to Gideon Pond, December 3, 1833, *Two Volunteer Missionaries Among the Dakotas or the Story of the Labors of Samuel W. Pond and Gideon H. Pond* by S.W. Pond, Jr. (Boston: Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society, 1893), 19.
33. Samuel W. Pond, *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1986), 185.
34. Gary Clayton Anderson, "Introduction," *The Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834*, by Samuel Pond, xiv-xv. Pond, *Two Volunteer Missionaries Among the Dakotas*, 108.
35. "Biographical Sketch," *The Thomas Smith Williamson and Family Papers*, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota. Williamson, microfilm. "Early Missions to the Dakota Indians in Minnesota," 3-4.
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37. Clifton Jackson Philips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860* (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1969), 298.
38. *Ibid.*, 64.
39. Letter from Major V. Bliss to J. D. Stevens, June 22, 1835, U.S. Fort Snelling, *The Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, 18.3.7. Vol. 1, Dakota Mission, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. See also Letters from T.S. Williamson to David Green, June 12, 1834, Prairie du Chien, *ABCFM Papers*, 18.3.7, Vol. 1. and Lt. E.A. Odgen, U.S. Army, to David Green, Fort Snelling, April 20, 1837, *ABCFM Papers*, Vol. 1.
40. Pond, *The Dakota or Sioux*, 85-113. Rev. S. Hall to David Green, November 11, 7, 1833, La Pointe, Lake Superior, *ABCFM Papers*, 18.3.7, Vol. 1. S. Hall to the Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, May 11, 1833, *ABCFM Papers*, 18.3.7, Vol. 1. S.R. Riggs to David Green, October, 1833, Mission Station, Lac qui Parle, *ABCFM Papers*, 18.3.7., Vol. 2. S.W. Pond to Rev. S.B. Treat, September 12, 1849, Report, Traverse des Sioux, *ABCFM Papers*, 18.3.7., Vol. 3. Riggs, *TAH-KOO WAH-KAN*, 197-206.
41. Riggs, *ibid.*, 54-55.
42. Riggs, *ibid.*, 103. Some missionaries, such as S. Hall, believed that "whether these Indians have anything which deserves to be called a system of religion, worship, can hardly be ascertained." S. Hall to the Prudential Committee, *ABCFM Papers*, 18.3.7.
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50. *Ibid.*

51. Samuel W. Pond to Rev. S.B. Treat, "Report, Traverse des Sioux, September 12, 1849," *ABCFM Papers*, 18.3.7, Vol. 3.

52. Williamson, "Early Missions to the Dakota Indians," *The Dakota Mission*, 4.

53. *Ibid.*, 5. Riggs, *TAH-KOO WAH-KAN*, 13-14.

54. Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 52-53. Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 168.

55. Anderson, *ibid.* Gary Clayton Anderson, *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1986), 41. Robinson, *History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, 199-201. An interesting assessment of Joseph Renville can be found in Riggs' *TAH-KOO WAH-KAN*, 153-171.

56. For a brief discussion of the lives of Isaac Renville, John B. Renville, and Victor Renville see *The Encyclopedia of Native American Religions*, ed. Arlene Hirschfelder and Paulette Molin (New York: Facts on File, 1992), 238.

57. Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 39-40, 50-51, 56-58, 72, 78-81. Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 122-123, 153-155, 184-187.

58. "Introduction," *The American Indian and the United States: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, ed. Wilcomb E. Washburn (New York: Random House, 1973), 3.

59. Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 106-111, 128, 132-133, 153-155.

60. *Ibid.*, 15.

61. *Ibid.*, xiii, 143-149.

62. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 53.

63. Riggs, "Outline for a Plan for Civilizing the Dakotas," *ABCFM Papers*.

64. *Ibid.*, Anderson, *Little Crow*, 55.

65. Riggs, "Outline for a Plan for Civilizing the Dakotas," *ABCFM Papers*.

66. Robinson, *History of the Sioux Indians*, 213.

67. Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 186.

68. Robinson, *History of the Sioux Indians*, 213.

69. Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 186-187. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 60-61.

70. Meyers, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 80.

71. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 61.
72. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 64–65. Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 189.
73. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 87. Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind*, 199.
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81. *Ibid.*
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83. Anderson, *Little Crow*, 89. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 88.
84. Robinson, *History of the Sioux Indians*, 231.
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91. John P. Williamson, "The Pioneer Among the Sioux, Rev. Thomas S. Williamson, M.D., 1800–1879," *Home Mission Heroes: A Series of Sketches* (New York: Literature Department, Presbyterian Home Missions, 1904), 97. Forbes, "Evangelization and Acculturation," 261.
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93. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest*, 8.
94. Forbes, "Evangelization and Acculturation," 232-233.
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116. Ibid., 198-199.
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121. Ibid., 329-332.
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123. Williamson, "Early Missions to the Dakota Indians," *The Dakota Mission*, 6.
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