Josslyn Ryan 09/25/12

Hist 1120

Reading Log #2

“We Are Well As We Are”

Until recently, Christian missionaries weren’t connected to the harmful outcomes of the contact between the Europeans and Indigenous peoples throughout Canadian history.[[1]](#footnote-1) James P. Ronda discusses what historians have uncovered through their fresh research on the missionaries and Indigenous peoples, and how their evangelistic motives brought destruction to Indigenous culture.[[2]](#footnote-2) In this article, we gain insight to how each culture viewed each other’s practices of faith, the measures that the missionaries would go to to transform the Indigenous culture, and the responses of the Indigenous peoples towards the missionaries’ goal of “saving” them.

A central theme of the missionaries’ and Indigenous peoples’ arguments were on the topic of the afterlife, and sin.[[3]](#footnote-3) Christian’s believe that there is a place in heaven for them if they are to submit to God and repent of their earthly sins, while the Indigenous peoples believed that once they die, they will reside in a place of nature where they will eat, hunt, have warfare, and be with their people.[[4]](#footnote-4) Indigenous peoples understood the Christians beliefs of sin to be an “obsession with death and punishment”, and found it useless in their way of life.[[5]](#footnote-5) On the contrary, the Christian missionaries witnessed the Indigenous peoples’ ceremonial rituals, and beliefs that there would be earthly pleasures in the afterlife, to be demonic.[[6]](#footnote-6) These conflictions among the two cultures caused strife, but also caused historians to understand that both parties had reasonable religions.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The missionaries’ goal was to transform the Indigenous peoples’ culture to the European’s way of life, and they went through extremes of achieving it.[[8]](#footnote-8) The missionaries performed baptisms among the Indigenous peoples which lead to the suspicion of it being the root of the smallpox epidemic.[[9]](#footnote-9) This is important to note because there was a need for healing among the Indigenous peoples, and the Christian missionaries condemned their healing ceremonies which were extremely significant to their culture.[[10]](#footnote-10) Through their messages of sin, the missionaries used guilt and scare tactics to convert the Indigenous peoples, which may have caused some to feel guilty or confused about their culture, possibly leading to the revitalization of religions.[[11]](#footnote-11)

“Missionaries promised heaven, but brought devastation.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Ronda’s article depicts the irony of the missionaries’ goal to “save” the Indigenous peoples. Two completely different religions that couldn’t agree, yet it is known to be a one-sided battle because the Christians imposed their beliefs so harshly.[[13]](#footnote-13) These interactions were so harmful because of the incredible ambition of the missionaries to have a culture “commit cultural suicide”.[[14]](#footnote-14)

1. James P. Ronda. “’We Are Well As We Are.’: An Indian Critique of Seventeenth-Century Christian Missions”, *The William and Mary Quarterly 34,* no. 1 (1977). 66-67. Historians changed their views on the early Christian missionaries. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 66-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 68-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 68-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 73 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 72-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 68-71, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)