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Winter 1999

Review of *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Metis: The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Western Canada, 1845-1945* By Raymond J. A. Huel

Gerhard J. Ens
University of Alberta

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Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis: The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Western Canada, 1845-1945. By Raymond J. A. Huel. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996. Photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. xxvii + 387 pp. \$29.95 paper.

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate were the dominant Catholic clergy in western Canada and as such played an important role in the colonization of the Great Plains. *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis*, the third volume in the Western Oblate History Project, has as its focus the Oblates' missionary work in Canada's prairie provinces from 1845 to 1945.

Raymond Huel begins his study by delineating the ideological values and goals that motivated the Oblate mission in Canada, and then provides a useful analysis of the order's various mission initiatives. During their early years in western Canada the Oblates accommodated themselves to Indian and Métis ways of life, leaving their societies largely intact. The best example of this early work was the *mission ambulante* wherein priests would live with and instruct the Métis in their summer and winter camps across the Northern Plains. Some, like Albert Lacombe, adapted this form of mission to evangelizing the Cree and Blackfoot. By the 1870s, however, the Oblates became convinced that more extensive and frequent contact was necessary and that the Métis and Indians had to abandon their traditional ways, cultivate land, and become civilized in accordance with acceptable Euro-Christian values. This "civilization" could best be accomplished through the education of young children removed from their nomadic backgrounds and traditions and placed in industrial and residential schools where missionaries and nuns would become surrogate parents. The need to fund these educational initiatives forced the Oblates into a partnership with the Canadian government that fundamentally changed Oblate relations with the Native Peoples.

Huel's analysis of these events and trends is a critical one. Oblate goals were not realized because vision and methods were defective. Although the Oblates tried to understand Native customs and cultures through their extensive use of Native languages, the attempt at directed cultural change led to Native resistance and the experiment's defeat. After a hundred years on the prairies the Oblates had failed to create an indigenous church that reflected the needs and aspirations of the people they served.

Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis touches on a number of other important topics, but these are framed by administrative issues rather than interpretive questions. The Métis, having few direct ties to government programs, receive comparatively little space in the volume. Furthermore, Huel does not analyze the ways in which the Oblate missions to Indians and Métis differed. Apart from these reservations, the book is a good introduction to the Oblate missions in the prairie west.

GERHARD J. ENS
Department of History and Classics
University of Alberta