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Harvey Markowitz

Washington and Lee University

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CONVERTING THE ROSEBUD

SICANGU LAKOTA CATHOLICISM IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

HARVEY MARKOWITZ

Following the Civil War, the United States government undertook a massive reform of its Indian policy, replacing the antebellum goal of permanently segregating Indian and white populations with that of “civilizing and Christianizing” (i.e., assimilating) Native peoples. To aid in this reform, the federal Indian

Bureau successfully petitioned leaders of main-line denominations, including members of America’s Catholic Church hierarchy, to enlist personnel to educate Indians in the manners and customs of “Christian citizenship.”

In 1886 priests and brothers belonging to the Jesuit’s Buffalo Mission and Franciscan sisters of Penance and Christian Charity from Stella-Niagara, New York, arrived on the Rosebud Reservation in present-day South Dakota to pursue the work of converting and “Americanizing” members of the Sicangu tribe of the Lakota.¹ Centered at Saint Francis Mission and School, these religious² adhered to the major presuppositions and practices of the Catholic missiological paradigm of their day. At the core of this paradigm lay the goal of establishing sacramental communities, or churches, whose members loyally subscribed to the tenets and rituals of the church universal.

This article discusses a number of the dominant features of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indian Catholicism on the Rosebud Reservation, focusing primarily on the Sicangu’s responses to the significant differences between their traditional religious customs and the beliefs, rituals, and requirements

Key Words: assimilation, Franciscans, Jesuits, missions, syncretism

Harvey Markowitz is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Washington and Lee University. He served as Community Liaison/Fieldworker for the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian, working closely with the Florida Seminoles, Eastern Cherokees, Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, the Blackfeet Indian Tribe, the Chiricahua Apaches, and the Tohono O’odham Nation. He lived twelve years on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, where he was on the faculty of Sinte Gleska University. He has a PhD in American Church History from the Divinity School, the University of Chicago.

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of Catholicism. It first examines several of the basic assumptions that informed the Sicangu's reception, interpretation, and practice of the "prayer" of the *Sina Sapa*, or Blackrobes (Jesuits), drawing upon their statements regarding the sacraments and other church practices to illustrate these processes. It then describes selected strategies, including various modes of resistance and adaptation, that the Sicangu employed to cope with the Catholic requirement of ecclesial exclusivity—a policy that, as will be shown, stood in direct opposition to the fundamental Lakota tenet of the plentitude of sacred power. Finally, this essay considers ways in which Sicangu and other Sioux Catholics refashioned selected aspects of their annual religious congress to reflect elements of traditional Lakota religious beliefs and practices.

THE SICANGU RECEPTION,
INTERPRETATION, AND PRACTICE OF
CATHOLICISM

Wakan, Sicun, Ton, and Sicangu Catholicism

In common with other Lakota, the Sicangu conceived, organized, and celebrated their traditional spirituality according to a set of categories that were at once logically coherent and fluid. The existential core of this system was their wonderment at a profoundly mysterious universe. Any object, being, or process capable of generating this experience the Lakota referred to as *wakan*, reserving the term *Wakan Tanka*, "Great Wonder" or "Great Mystery," for the most unfathomable and awesome of these marvels.

Lakota cosmology traced the *wakan* character and powers of various phenomena to the potency (*ton*) of their spiritual essences (*sicun*).³ While they believed that all realities, be they physical, conceptual, or spiritual, possessed sacred power, they considered certain classes of phenomena and their representatives to be endowed with *sicun* of extraordinary force and mystery. Thus, for example, they attributed the talents of exceptional hunters, warriors,

and artists to the remarkable strengths of their respective spirits. Surpassing all other humans in spiritual prowess, however, were the *wicasa wakan* (holy men, medicine men, or shamans) to whom the good deities and spirits had entrusted the tribe's sacred language and *wicoh'an wakan*, or sacred traditions. Among the greatest of these customs were socially beneficial ceremonies, including rites for treating illnesses, prophesying, locating buffalo herds, and finding lost objects, which had been revealed to shamans in *wo'ihanble*, dreams or visions. Such visions generally included prayers and songs that gave shamans the power to *yuwakan*, or consecrate, ceremonial objects or plants, either by activating their *ton* or by infusing them with *ton* from the shamans' own *sicun*. Extolling his abilities to *yuwakan*, Oglala shaman Feather on Head thus stated, "I am a great medicine man. I have mysterious powers. . . . I can give magic power to things. I can make mysterious things."⁴

Like all great holy men, Feather on Head had received his ability to "make mysterious things" from the *Wakanpi*, spirit beings whom Lakota considered to be the source of all *ton*. The majority of Lakota referred to the most powerful and nurturing of these beings as *Taku Wakan* (spirit relatives) or simply *Wakan Tanka*. Lakota holy men, however, addressed them as *Tobto' kin*—the "Four times Four"—owing to their belief that they were sixteen in number, comprising four hierarchical divisions of four gods each. The "Four times Four," they held, constituted a *tiyospaye* (extended family) that was structured and operated according to the same social and moral principles as the Lakota's own *tiyospaye*. Excluded from this family were the many malevolent deities (*wakan sicapi*) who reveled in tormenting humankind either through their own evil deeds or through the spells (*hmuga*) of their human agents, sorcerers, and witches that caused misfortune, sickness, and death.⁵

Notwithstanding the tenacious efforts of Catholic missionaries to inculcate Sicangu converts with the orthodox church dogma of their day, reports by Jesuit superior Fr. Florentine



FIG. 1. St. Francis Mission, c.1886–87. In view are the well and windmill, the church, and part of the school building of the original mission grounds that was destroyed by fire in 1916. Courtesy of the author.

Digmann and other Saint Francis missionaries suggest that many Rosebud Sicangu of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to interpret Catholic doctrines and practices in terms of the basic categories of traditional Lakota thought and ritual.⁶ Not being Catholic theologians, Sicangu were most likely oblivious to or unconcerned with the very real differences between Catholic and Lakota spiritualities. For example, it would have been exceedingly difficult for Sicangu, whose ontology did not distinguish between natural and supernatural realms and phenomena, to grasp Catholicism's metaphysical separation between creator and creatures as well as the myriad of theological and anthropological assumptions (including original sin and salvation) associated with this distinction.

It is, however, just as likely that the missionaries' need to communicate in Lakota, either through interpreters or language acquisition, also encouraged the Sicangu's proclivity to make sense of the beliefs and practices of the Blackrobes' religion by resorting to

their traditional tenets. Instead of replacing the central ideas of Lakota spirituality with those of Catholic doctrines and dogmas, the missionaries' use of Lakota theological vocabulary for their instructions and homilies ironically reinforced the presuppositions of traditional Lakota religious thought. Of particular importance was their appropriation of the term *wakan* to convey Catholic beliefs and categories related to the supernatural—for example, their renderings of God and the devil/demons as *Wakan Tanka* and *Wakan Sica*, respectively. Not only did both expressions contain the term *wakan*, but they also referred to important pre-Christian, Lakota deities. As such, they served as conduits for Lakota precepts regarding sacred power, practices, and beings to enter into Sicangu Catholicism. In the case of *Wakan Sica*, the missionaries further unintentionally abetted this transmission by explicitly identifying the Lakota's traditional gods as devils and demons, akin to those found in Jewish scriptures and the New Testament.

In addition to their use of Lakota loan words, the missionaries both created neologisms as well as employed terms that had been invented by earlier Catholic and Protestant missionaries, including the noted Benedictine priest of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, Jerome Hunt, and the equally famous Congregationalist missionaries from the eastern Dakotas, Samuel and Gideon Pond, Stephen Return Riggs, and John Williamson.⁷ Among the most important of these innovations and borrowings were *wanikiye wakan* (sacred giver of life) for savior, *Anpetu Wakan* (sacred day) for Sunday, *ogligle wakan* (sacred messenger) for angel, and *wakan waste* (sacred good) for saint.⁸

The preceding examples of manufactured spiritual vocabulary found throughout the priests' homilies, religious instructions, and church rituals may be multiplied many times. However, what is important here is not the number of such terms but their collective consequences, which were to reinforce Sicangu traditional conceptions of the nature and attributes of sacred power and to shape their understanding of the new religion. Nowhere are these two results more evident than in the Sicangu's theory and practice of *wo'econ wakan* (sacred doings), the seven Catholic sacraments.

CATHOLIC SACRAMENTS AND WAKAN

The missionaries' translation of the sacraments as simply *wo'econ wakan*, "sacred doings," suggests the primacy of these rites in Catholic theology, ecclesiology, and missiology. In contrast to Protestant emphasis on "the Word," Catholic missionaries focused their efforts on educating their converts on the importance of the sacraments both for the sake of the individual salvation of the Sicangu and as a condition for developing a viable church among them. The missionaries undoubtedly borrowed the term *wakan* to express the holy character of these "doings," most importantly their capacity to convey God's supernatural gifts—grace in its various forms—to the souls of their recipients.⁹ For the same reason, it is not surprising that the term also appears in the missionaries'

translations for six of the seven sacraments: *Yutapi wakan* (sacred meal) for the Eucharist, *woglakapi wakan* (sacred testimony) for penance, *wicayustanpi wakan* (sacred completion) for confirmation, *wiyunpi wakan* (sacred application) for extreme unction, *wicasa wakan kagapi* (sacred men making) for priesthood, *wakankiciyuzapi* (sacred union) for matrimony, and *onweyawakan* (sacred provisions) for viaticum (which is technically not a sacrament but an element of extreme unction). The missionaries' translation for baptism, *mni'akastanpi* (to pour water upon), is unique in not including the term *wakan*. Nevertheless, even here, they employed the term in their Lakota rendering of the water used in the sacrament.

And yet, if the missionaries' appropriation of *wakan* succeeded in impressing the sacred character of the sacraments upon the Sicangu, it did so at a tremendous price of which the religious were apparently unaware. For this term also transmitted the ontological assumptions underlying the ideas and experiences of sacred power as they existed in traditional Lakota individual and collective life. This transmission is most readily observed in the Sicangu's understanding of the sacraments of baptism, extreme unction, confession, and the Eucharist.

As the priests went about their work in Rosebud's camps, they were soon struck by the Sicangu's terror of baptism. It did not take them long to trace this fear to their practice of baptizing gravely and terminally ill individuals whose souls they considered in most immediate need of cleansing from original sin. Although the missionaries were open to the possibility that God, in his mercy, might spare the lives of some of these "deathbed" converts, their overriding concern was focused on the latter's spiritual rather than corporeal regeneration.¹⁰

For the Sicangu, whose spiritual anthropology was devoid of anything akin to original sin, the necessity of ceremonially cleansing souls in order to insure their happy afterlives would have made little sense. As with other Lakota, their preeminent ritual for assuring a tranquil transit from this world to the next centered on

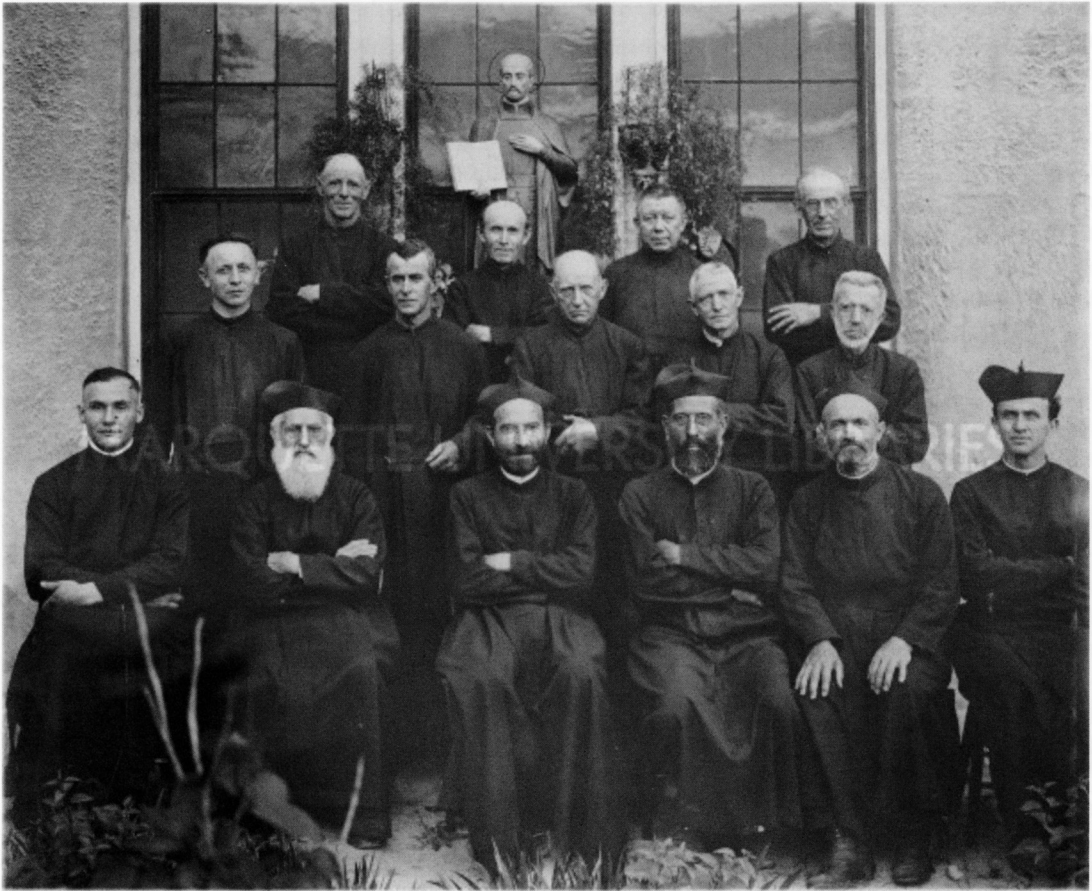


FIG. 2. The Jesuit priests and brothers of Saint Francis Mission, c. 1916. Father Florentine Digmann, who served as the mission's superior from 1888 to 1916, is seated in bottom row, second from the left. Courtesy of Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University Libraries.

the ceremonial application of a tattoo (*akito*) that served as a sign for the old woman who guarded the road to the next world to allow its bearer to pass by unmolested.¹¹ Ceremonies for sick individuals were performed exclusively for the purpose of their physical recoveries.

The use of holy water in baptism may have further added to Sicangu suspicions and fear regarding the rite. Lakota held that during their sweat baths (*inikagapi*), the *ton* of the heated rocks and water mingled together in steam that both purified participants' bodies and reinvigorated their own spiritual principle. Here water was a key element in a ritual that was performed for the physical and spiritual welfare of band members. However, accord-

ing to traditional Lakota spirituality, sorcerers could ceremonially pervert the *ton* of material objects such as water so that they caused sickness or death. When a high percentage of individuals died shortly after being baptized, many Sicangu attributed their passing to the evil power of the baptismal water. Thus, it was thoroughly in keeping with basic tenets of Lakota spirituality that the Sicangu should fear the uninvited "sick calls" by priests, who the Sicangu understood as akin to their own sorcerers. The horror that the Sicangu generally displayed toward priests and their rite makes even more sense when one considers that the missionaries' Lakota rendering of baptismal ("holy") water was *mniyuwakanpi*, water that

had been made *wakan*, spiritually powerful. Because the Sicangu interpreted this translation according to spiritual presuppositions and processes familiar to them, it would have made sense for them to assume that the priests had empowered the water with *ton* that sickened and killed those receiving the rite.

With the passage of time and generations, however, the Sicangu discerned that there existed no marked difference in fatality rates of sick individuals who were baptized and those who underwent curing ceremonies, and their fear of the sacrament gradually abated. Increasing numbers of Rosebud Sioux therefore agreed, for one or a combination of social, economic, and spiritual motives, to allow the priests to “pour water” on them and their family members. Using his interrogation of the relatives of a recently deceased “pagan” Indian to illustrate this change, Digmann wrote: “‘Did baptism kill him?’ we [Digmann and a fellow priest] asked the Indians. ‘No, because he did not want it and so could not be baptized.’ ‘Did your medicine men kill him? You will not admit that so it was the sickness that caused his death, as we all have to die.’ A few similar cases set them rethinking that after all it was not baptism but the sickness that carried them off, especially as others who were hopelessly sick recovered after having received baptism” (14). By 1904 the priest confidently asserted that “the fact that our Indians are now anxious to have their babes baptized soon after their birth shows that their old fear ‘The pouring on of water would kill them,’ has disappeared.”¹²

Not only did the Sicangu abandon the notion that baptism killed its recipients but they also, ironically, gradually credited the ceremony with healing powers, a belief encouraged by the occasional recovery of individuals whose souls had been “washed clean” on their deathbeds. In one such case, Digmann administered the sacrament to an ailing woman who “had wished long ago to be baptized” but had not been able to attend the required catechetical meetings. The woman not only survived her illness but went on to live another twenty years. Describing a similar case, the priest wrote

that the great headman Two Strike “having reached eighty years . . . often got swoons. I said to him: ‘If you die unbaptized, I would feel sorry for you my life long.’ He yielded and after we instructed him [he] received the sacrament. After this the swoons did not return anymore and he lived thirteen years longer ascribing it to baptism and often repeating, ‘Baptism was good medicine’” (14). On yet another occasion, Digmann reported that after being baptized an old woman exclaimed that the “medicine I had put in her mouth (salt) at baptism was very good. It made her feel so good” (47). Another somewhat different case involved a young man who suffered from “fiery apparitions.” He informed Digmann that after being “instructed in the Faith and baptized, these apparitions did not return anymore” (15).

Sicangu attitudes regarding the sacrament of extreme unction underwent a transvaluation similar to those associated with baptism. In January 1901 an ailing Sicangu notified Digmann of his desire to receive this rite. The priest wrote that this individual “was the first one who asked for it. The effect,” he continued, “was salutary for body and soul and did to overcome the prejudice as if it meant ‘sealing for death’” (116). A report concerning another Indian’s request for the sacrament further reveals the Sicangu’s diminishing fear of extreme unction. Digmann wrote that when he and Fr. Henry Westropp arrived at this individual’s house, they “heard already outside the powwows [Lakota curing songs] and the ‘voice of the medicine men but they opened the door; the noise stopped at once; his [the ailing man’s] father (pagan yet) himself, helped at the Extreme Unction, pulling off his shoes and stockings, turning him around etc.” Although the recipient died, Digmann found in the event “some change for the better, comparing with their former fear and apathy” (140).

The statements of other converts also reflect the conviction that extreme unction not only posed no danger but was even responsible for their recoveries. After receiving the sacrament one grateful Sicangu informed Digmann, “You have doctored me, I am much better.”

She went on to describe how she had “seen Jesus appearing to her and pointed to the place where He had stood” (149). A woman who asked Digmann to perform the rite on her daughter suggests an association of the sacrament’s “doctoring” powers with the *ton* contained in its oils. When the priest asked the mother (“who was pagan yet”) to help remove her child’s moccasins, she responded, “‘You don’t need to anoint her feet, she is very fast yet.’” (107).

Although the Sicangu most commonly attributed healing properties to those sacraments performed for critically ill individuals, they also ascribed medicinal qualities to other *wo’econ wakan* as well. They therefore believed that the consecrated communion wafer that they received during Eucharist possessed revitalizing powers akin to ceremonially prepared Lakota medicines. Thus, one Sicangu Catholic confided to Digmann, “‘When I did not receive Holy Communion for a long time, I don’t feel good. After I received it, I feel fresh again’” (197). The experience of being empowered or cured also appears in Sicangu statements regarding confession. One Sicangu Catholic thus told the priest that when he recently contracted a severe cold, he rejected the offers of a medicine man to perform a doctoring ceremony and requested instead that the Little Father [Father Westropp] come to his house so he could “‘go to confession.’” Digmann reported that he did so and was well again the next day, [ascribing] his bodily recovery to the Sacraments” (68). On another occasion, a Sicangu who had suffered a stroke told Digmann that “after going to Confession, he felt better, could again talk and walk” (140).

OTHER CATHOLIC PRACTICES AND WAKAN

In addition to attributing recuperative and energizing qualities to selected sacraments, Sicangu Catholics accorded sacred powers to other church practices in a manner consistent with traditional Lakota spirituality. Once again, the Saint Francis religious, whose borrowings of Lakota spiritual terms

served to obfuscate the fundamentally different principles underlying Catholic and Lakota understandings of the sacred, encouraged this mode of interpretation. The missionaries’ appropriation of the term *hanbleceya*, or vision quest, for Catholic retreats reveals an intriguing example of such obfuscation. When performing a Lakota *hanbleceya*, individuals fasted and prayed for four days in the wilderness in hopes of receiving guidance and powers from their spirit relations. Digmann stated that when he used the term for this rite to inform Sicangu Catholics that he was on retreat, they “seemed to have a holy awe and did not dare address him” (40). Such respectful avoidance was in keeping with the Sicangu’s appreciation of the sacred nature of the vision quest as well as traditional proscriptions that forbid interaction with vision seekers until they have been ceremonially reintegrated into the community.

In November 1906 the famous Oglala Lakota medicine-man-turned-Catholic-catechist, Nicholas Black Elk, traveled from Pine Ridge Reservation to Rosebud in order to make a retreat under Digmann’s direction.¹³ Although one of the most able of the Lakota catechists, Black Elk was apparently sufficiently uninformed about the theology and methods of Catholic retreats to ask, “‘How is it about eating during the Retreat. The Indians do not eat during their recesses’” (168).

In spite of the missionaries’ use of *hanbleceya* to designate Catholic retreats, Sicangu converts seemed to have appreciated that this appropriation did not signal any softening of their stern opposition to the Lakota vision quest. Consider in this context the following exchange between Digmann and a Sicangu Catholic who wished to borrow one of the missionaries’ fur coats. “‘What for?’ [the priest asked]. He first did not want to come out. Finally he said bashfully: ‘hamblemicinyinke’ [I am going to undertake a vision quest]. . . . He had taken a vow. ‘First go to your Easter-duty’ was my reply and leave those old customs” (143).

For the Sicangu, *hanbleciye* was part of a wider system of Lakota beliefs and practices that were rooted in a number of fundamental



FIG. 3. A gathering of Lakota catechists from the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations. Nicholas Black Elk is standing sixth from the left. Note the Catholic sodality medals that most of the men are wearing. Courtesy of Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University Libraries.

assumptions regarding the nature and significance of dreams or visions (*wo'ihanble*). Two of the most important of these assumptions were, first, that *wo'ihanble* constituted the primary means through which spirits communicated information and knowledge to human beings, and second, that it was the role of holy men to interpret their meanings.

The spiritual significance that the Lakota traditionally accorded visions and dreams occasionally served as a conduit leading the Sicangu to Catholicism. In 1894 one of the mission school's non-Catholic students informed Digmann that Jesus had prevented a ghost from carrying him off and then, before leaving his bedside, advised him that he "would be all right again" once he was baptized. After satisfying himself that the vision had not resulted from natural causes, the priest reported that he "examined [the boy] about the necessary truths of faith, prayed with him and baptised him. . . . The next day I asked him again: 'Was any ghost

with you?' 'Not today but last night.' Be it as it may, God can call also by dreams" (143).¹⁴

In yet another *wo'ihanble*-inspired cure and conversion, a Sicangu informed Digmann that he had dreamt that the bishop of South Dakota had appeared by his bedside, prayed over him, and said he would get better. According to the priest, "This came true. He never had seen a Bishop. He recognized Bishop Lawler as the one two days later."¹⁵

Once baptized, Sicangu sometimes enlisted the aid of the Jesuit priests to discern the meaning of their visions and dreams, much as they had solicited this service from their holy men. One convert thus informed Digmann that while lying awake in bed, "a white robed man coming through the window had grasped him by the shoulder and said: 'Hurry up.' He asked me: 'What should that mean?'" After examining him, Digmann inquired, 'Did you make your Easter duty?' 'No' [he answered.] 'So hurry up, go to Confession . . . and then: Come

what may.' He went and did it; and others had noticed that he prayed with great earnest" (88).

In addition to seeking the aid of medicine men to cure illnesses and to interpret visions and dreams, the Lakota frequently petitioned these religious specialists to draw upon the power of their spiritual helpers and ceremonial paraphernalia to help them recover misplaced or stolen property. The Sicangu quickly identified this Lakota application of sacred power with the missionaries' custom of offering rosaries and invoking the aid of saints to find lost objects (90). Thus, Fr. Emil Perrig reported that chief Iron Shell asked him for a set of rosary beads. When the priest asked him what he needed them for, the headman responded that it was "to say it [the rosary] for himself when hunting for his horses on the prairie" (131).

Iron Shell's request for rosary beads is reminiscent of the conundrum the noted Jesuit missionary Fr. Pierre-Jean De Smet faced during his initial visits to bands of Sioux in the mid-nineteenth century. While De Smet valued the place of material objects in the ceremonial life of the church, he worried that Indians would distort their meanings and uses to accord with their traditional "idolatrastic" practices.¹⁶ Echoing these misgivings, Digmann wrote in 1900 of having to warn Sicangu Catholics about "put[ting] their faith in outward things" (109). In spite of this concern, missionaries continued to distribute blessed objects, such as crucifixes, medals, and scapulars, to Sicangu Catholics, apparently hoping that their recipients would realize that their power belonged to God and not to the thing itself. Arriving at the home of a seriously ill Catholic elder just as a shaman was about to begin a curing ceremony, Digmann wrote: "The medicine man made his powwow [and] did not open the door for a long time. . . . [I] could do nothing with the sick man. He only asked for a crucifix, had lost his. I gave him one, also a scapular he had been enrolled already [sic] and a medal of the Blessed Virgin saying: 'Call me if you want me again'" (77).

Two final examples of the powers that the Sicangu attributed to blessed objects concern

their "medicinal" use of Saint Ignatius water, or water that has been blessed using an image of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.¹⁷ In one case, Digmann provided a woman ailing from gallstones with a flask of this water to drink and apply over the infected area of her body. The woman's husband later told the priest that "after she had done so, she had vomited yellow stuff and felt much relieved. They ascribed it [to] the St. Ignatius water" (197). On another occasion, the priest gave the parents of a sick boy some Saint Ignatius water to bathe in and to drink. Digmann wrote that the boy's mother informed him that following the treatment, "he broke out in a heavy sweat and ascribed it to the water" (197).

THE PLENTITUDE OF POWER AND SICANGU RESPONSES TO CATHOLICISM

Prior to their conversion to Roman Catholicism, Sicangu Catholics' participation in Lakota spirituality had thoroughly familiarized them with the wondrous capacity of sacred power to benefit human beings. Encouraged by the missionaries' use of traditional Lakota spiritual terms in their translations of key Catholic beliefs and ceremonies, the Sicangu drew upon this experience to make sense of the new religion. In so doing, however, they replaced orthodox Catholic tenets concerning the supernatural character of sacred power and wonder-working with those founded on the significantly different metaphysical presuppositions informing the nature and operation of *wakan*.

In accord with the ontological wall that Jewish and Christian traditions erect between the natural and supernatural realms, the Catholic Church maintains that God alone possesses the power to work miracles. While according to this tenet, the Lord in his mercy may select elements of the created order as media for his supernatural acts, the latter remain without any inherent efficacy or power in relationship to these wonders. To attribute miracle-working capabilities to things themselves—including those persons, places, and

things that have been blessed or consecrated for special church functions—is to commit the sin of idolatry. Even the saints to whom believers petition for divine help do not directly answer these requests but present them to God who alone may or may not fulfill them.

The Judeo-Christian distinctions between natural and supernatural and between creature and God were entirely foreign to Lakota theology. The Lakota instead posited a cosmos in which all existence—from the *Wakan Tanka* to the humblest of organisms—shared a common spiritual principle or essence. While the power (*ton*) associated with this essence might vary among individuals and classes of beings, these differences were thought to be a matter of degree, not kind. This belief in the plentitude of sacred power was a fundamental presupposition of Lakota spirituality.

While remaining tacit, the differences in the understanding of the nature and locus of sacred power lay at the roots of the majority of conflicts that arose between the Sicangu and their Catholic missionaries. Among the most significant of these clashes centered on the missionaries' demand that their converts eschew participation in Lakota and Protestant religious observances. For the Saint Francis religious, who believed that the Catholic Church was the sole repository and dispenser of sacred wisdom and power, the Sicangu had to choose between being faithful members of the one true communion or being schismatics or heathens. This requirement, however, probably struck most Sicangu as both bewildering and absurd. Not only did their belief in the plentitude of sacred power run contrary to the assumption that any one tradition held a monopoly on *ton*, but it also encouraged them to adopt and adapt the religious traditions of other peoples. Lecturing one convert who wished to continue his participation in Lakota ceremonies, Digmann thus insisted, "If the Lord is Good . . . Hold to Prayer; if Lakota customs are from the Great Spirit, stick to them, but you cannot serve two masters. Do not limp from one to the other" (75). With regard to the various denominations of Christianity, he

stated, "If I were Protestant and believed what they say, I never would set foot into a Catholic Church" (80).

Drawing upon traditional Lakota assumptions concerning sacred power, the Sicangu responded in various ways to the missionaries' insistence that Catholics refrain from participating in all other forms of religion. Adhering to a doctrine of religious pluralism strikingly similar to that espoused by some contemporary ecumenists, some Sicangu chose to confront the missionaries directly on this point. Thus, Digmann reported that one Sicangu insisted that "God made three Prayers" [Lakota "prayer," Protestantism, and Catholicism]. Unwilling to allow such blasphemy to go unchallenged, the priest mockingly retorted, "Why not one hundred and forty? . . . The kings in Europe have established Churches for their respective countries, but God did not make them" (85). After another Sicangu expressed the opinion that "Both Prayers, the Blackrobe and the White Robes come from the heart of the Great Spirit," the priest reported that he struggled "to make him understand that the Great Spirit had not 'two tongues.'" However, once he had depleted his arsenal of "rational" arguments, Digmann resorted to accusing his Sicangu critic of "wholly sitting in darkness" and "not knowing anything." "That made an impression," Digmann wrote. "All around laughed at him, he was ashamed, and laughed himself and was silenced" (81).

Some Sicangu chose to put their pluralism into practice by participating in the religious gatherings of all of Rosebud's denominations while refusing to affiliate themselves officially with any one. Thus, when Digmann asked one elderly Sicangu if he belonged to a church, the latter responded: "When the Short Coats [Congregationalists] have a meeting, I go there and pray: 'Great Spirit have mercy on me,' and sit down and eat with them. If the Blackrobes have a meeting, I also go there and pray and eat with them. And if the White Gowns [Episcopalians] have a meeting, I also go there and eat with them. They all believe in the same Great Spirit" (122).

In order to gain access to the sacraments, other Sicangu converted to Catholicism while clandestinely attending Lakota and/or Protestant ceremonies. The religious were apparently loath to believe that members of their flock could be guilty of such infidelity. When one of Rosebud's non-Indian residents—a “divorced woman”—informed Digmann that a Sicangu had told her that he was Episcopalian and Congregationalist as well as Catholic, the priest dismissed the report. “What you say seems to be impossible,” he retorted, preferring to blame the incompetence of her interpreter rather than grant any credence to this shocking report (167).

On those occasions when the religious chose to investigate such reports, Sicangu Catholics could defend themselves by recourse to a strategy of plausible deniability. Aware of the fierce competition for converts that existed among Rosebud's Catholic, Episcopal, and Congregationalist denominations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a suspected “pluralist” could blame crafty Protestant ministers and their helpers for leading them astray. When Digmann asked one longtime Catholic whether she had defected to the Protestants, she responded that when an Episcopalian or Congregationalist minister had asked her if he “could take her name down,” she had agreed, and had no idea that she had joined his church (167).

From the sparse information available, it seems clear that some Sicangu honored the missionaries' demand to disassociate themselves from all other religions as a precondition for their conversion. In one such case, Digmann reported that when he exhorted one showman and traditionalist to join the church, the latter informed him: “I think it would be a mockery offered to the Great Spirit if I let you baptize me and still would keep the old Indian customs” (97).

For some Sicangu, the decision to renounce Lakota religious practices could be made with little or no hesitation. Describing the day he had spent instructing several members of one camp, Digmann noted that when a medicine

man asked him about several points of “superstition,” he “cleared him up about what was allowed and what not. Finally he said: ‘I’ll give it up’” (149). Other Sicangu, however, apparently struggled with if and when to abandon the “old” ways. Some of these individuals adopted a tactic of delaying their conversion until their impending death, from either disease or old age, prompted them to take action. When the daughter of an elderly medicine man asked Digmann to baptize her ailing father, the medicine man told him: “I want to be baptized and will call you in time . . . I have yet a medicine, I want to give my sons; after that I will be baptized.” The priest went on to write that the following summer, while “he [the medicine man] was on his wagon to go to the Agency for his ‘per capita money’ he was very weak and sick. After finding it necessary, we finished the necessary instruction and acts, I baptized him on his wagon. The following day he died” (154).

In another case of “deathbed” conversion, an Episcopal woman in the last stages of consumption called for Father Digmann after the Episcopal priest had sent a helper to “pray over her” in his place. According to the priest, “She wanted to die a Catholic.” Digmann wrote that he cautioned the woman, “If you want to become Catholic for spite against the Episcopal [sic], I cannot receive you.” But she was in full earnest; all her family had joined before, and she was the only one left outside the fold” (146).

We earlier saw how many Sicangu who wished to gain access to the *wakan* ceremonies and properties of the Catholic church were able, within limits, to determine the timing and character of their baptisms. However, other Sicangu, who likewise acknowledged the power of the Blackrobes' “prayer,” steadfastly refused to convert to Catholicism under any circumstances. Their rejection was in some cases based on an aversion to one or more Catholic ceremonies, for example, their fear of baptism. There is some evidence that Catholic burial practices also discouraged conversion. The Lakota, who traditionally disposed of their

dead by placing them in the crotch of trees or on “burial” scaffolds, may have been repulsed by the idea of entombing their deceased underground (31).

Still other Sicangu refused to convert to Catholicism based on their belief that *Wakan Tanka* had provided whites and Indians with “prayers” appropriate to their respective lifeways. “The Great Spirit has raised us another way,” one such individual observed. “We also pray to Him, but we grew up on the Buffalo hunt and you with the plow” (51). This line of reasoning was apparently especially common among the older Sicangu. When Fr. Emil Perrig asked a group of elders, including chief Swift Bear, to consider receiving instruction in the Catholic faith, Swift Bear politely informed the priest that Christianity “was all right for the children at school, but that they were too old for it.”¹⁸ Digmann eventually claimed to have uncovered the underlying motive of this response: “The same excuse I have heard often. They have the idea, that to be baptized means to change their manners and live like whites” (47).¹⁹

Given the ideological nexus between “civilization” and Christianity that lay at the heart of both federal Indian policy and the predominant Catholic missionary paradigm, one can’t help but wonder what Digmann was thinking when he wrote these lines. In fact, almost everything the missionaries said and did reinforced the Sicangu’s assumptions concerning the necessary linkage between religion and culture, and that to be “baptized” meant to “live like whites.” Nowhere, however, were these assumptions more clearly articulated than in the goals and activities of the Saint Joseph and Saint Mary’s Societies. Describing the “disposition” of Rosebud Catholics who organized these guilds, Digmann observed that they “intended [them] to replace their old Indian league with its war dances and other childish entertainments”:

In their meetings they encourage one another to do away with their old habits and follow the white man’s way. . . . The members oblige themselves to dress like white

men, take good care of their families, not to admit the medicine men to the sick, and to help one another. The non-progressive Indians are now faced and opposed by a party in their own midst, which I hope will steadily grow, attract the sound element, and by making public opinion draw the rest.²⁰

The missionaries theologized their unmasked antipathy toward all Lakota customs by classifying them as sins, which they translated into Lakota as *wicoh’an sica*, literally “bad deeds” or, more commonly, *wowah’tani*. This second translation is exceedingly interesting from both semantic and pragmatic perspective. Semantically, it is comprised of three elements: first, the root *wahte*, signifying “good” or “worthy”; second, the prefix *wo*, which transforms this and all such roots into collective nouns; and third, *ni*, a marker that negates or denotes the antithesis of the character or essence of the term it modifies. By designating Lakota customs as *wo’wahtani*—things totally lacking in value, goodness, and virtue—the missionaries sought to devalue them in Sicangu hearts and minds so that converts would gladly forsake them for the practices of Christian civilization. The confusion of one recent convert suggests that at least some Sicangu either accepted or selectively employed this negative characterization of Lakota traditions in their discourse with the missionaries. When asked whether he remembered any sin after his baptism, the penitent responded, “No, I only cried very much when a grandchild of mine had died. I have no other Indian habits” (94).

SICANGU INDIGENIZATION OF THE CATHOLIC SIOUX CONGRESS

While some Sicangu may have accepted the missionaries’ assessment of Lakota habits as “sins,” evidence abounds that this was not always the case. The preceding section has already demonstrated the strategies certain Rosebud Sioux employed to maximize their access to the spiritual resources of *both* forms



FIG. 4. *Father Digmann and members of the Sicangu St. Joseph's Men's Society.* Courtesy of Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University Libraries.

of “prayer.” In addition, some converts began the process of consciously or unconsciously recasting elements of Catholic belief and ritual so they reflected qualities and attributes of traditional Lakota spirituality. Their genius for transforming Catholic beliefs and rituals into conduits of cultural and religious continuity reached its heights with the Catholic Sioux Congress. Inaugurated in 1890 by South Dakota bishop Martin Marty, OSB, the congress served as an annual opportunity for Lakota Catholics from throughout Marty’s diocese to assemble and encourage one another in their commitment to their church and to leading “civilized” lives. The bishop scheduled the first Catholic Sioux Congress for July 2–5 of that year. Several factors determined his selection of these dates. First, he believed that overlapping the convention with the Fourth of July would provide Lakota Catholics with a wholesome alternative to Independence Day celebrations at which agents turned a blind eye to traditional dancing, giveaways, and other practices that the missionaries thought revitalized Sioux “savagery.”²¹ Secondly, Marty

was aware that the Lakota had traditionally assembled for their Sun Dance in late June and early July. He thus hoped that a congress held at that time would serve to “baptize” the period and provide Lakota Catholics with a powerful symbol of Christ’s victory over devil-dominated paganism. Finally, the bishop believed that a midsummer congress would act as a pressure valve, releasing the pent-up wanderlust of the recently immobilized Sioux in socially and spiritually constructive directions.

As a loyal son of his order, Marty chose the Benedictine mission of Saint Michael’s in North Dakota as the location for the inaugural congress. Thereafter, however, delegates to the congress appropriated the right to select host missions, shaping the process in ways probably unimagined by the good bishop. A Jesuit priest who attended the 1919 convention provided a detailed account of the “picturesque and striking ceremony” comprising this undertaking:

It was the evening of the fourth day and the bower was in darkness except for the light of the moon and a feeble lamp. When all who

were interested had gathered in the bower, three spokesmen in turn took their place in the midst of the assembly and in glowing terms described the advantages of the locality at which their people desired the next Congress to convene. A vote was called for by the president. Thereupon those in favor of a particular place came to the center to be plainly visible, and were counted by the secretary. When the vote for Holy Rosary Mission was demanded a peculiar yell resembling the old time war-hoop was raised and an overwhelming majority rushed to the center of the bower. So next year's Congress will be on the Pine Ridge Reservation.²²

Sponsoring a congress carried with it a formidable array of obligations for a mission's chapter of the Saint Joseph's and Saint Mary's Societies. Not only were the members of these groups required to construct the meeting places used for congress sessions, but they also were obliged to prepare a campground and meals for all who attended. The staggering amount of capital needed to accomplish these duties can only be appreciated when one realizes that the number of visitors to the congress could run into the thousands. In explaining the social and economic conditions that made such an undertaking possible, Fr. Louis Goll of Saint Francis Mission wrote that the "guests one year will be hosts some other year. And if a locality cannot afford to be host—well the Congress cannot be held there." This principle of reciprocity, traditional among Sioux *tiyospayes* and bands, was merged with Lakota canons of hospitality. As Goll went on to state, "It would require a complete change of the law of hospitality among Sioux, if visitors had to provide board for themselves. The man who would have the courage to advocate such a plan has not yet appeared among the Sioux."²³

In addition to a massive outlay of foodstuffs and other material resources, sponsoring a successful congress entailed many hours of planning. A report by Fr. Placidus Sialm of Holy Rosary Mission, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, suggests that sodality members shaped this

requirement in ways not necessarily congenial to their missionary mentors.²⁴ Sialm stated,

We are preparing for the next Indian Sioux Congress to be held at Holy Rosary Mission. The Indians wish to have meetings and more meetings where the talkers enjoy good days of plenty to eat, plenty of talk and plenty to smoke,—with the final resolution to meet again. And so the vicious circle has become congenial to their nature. It develops talkers and voters not seldom paupers.

Despite his critique, Sialm concluded his report on a positive note, suggesting that these things are merely "incidentals." That, in fact, the "solemnity of the meetings passes anything you see among meetings of white people."²⁵

Until midcentury, when cars and pickup trucks became common on Sioux reservations, most Lakota traveled to the congress on horseback or by team and wagon. As a number of the participants lived several hundred miles from the convention, they needed to begin their trek as many as two weeks before opening day. In a fashion nearly identical with the prerreservation era, members of one or more *tiyospayes* would journey together in long caravans. Certain individuals were assigned the role of *akicita*, or camp marshals, deciding where the party would stop and insuring that decorum was maintained en route. After arriving at a campsite, women took charge of setting up the tent and preparing an evening meal, and men tended to the horses and gathered firewood, according to the traditional Lakota sexual division of labor. At sunset an *eyapaha*, or herald, would announce news of interest as members of the party entertained themselves with conversations, games, and storytelling. With dawn, he would again make his rounds, standing before each tent and shouting, "*Kikta po*," or "Get up." Then, at the *akicita's* pacing, the travelers prepared and consumed their morning meal, struck camp, and recommenced their journey. If a priest and catechist(s) were part of the group, as was often the case, evening rosaries and morning Mass were incorporated into the



FIG. 5. *The main structure of the Catholic Sioux Indian Congress whose circular bower replicates that in which Sicangu and other Lakota tribes continue to practice their traditional Sun Dance.* Courtesy of Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University Libraries.

various camp activities. This offering of prayer while journeying to a congress ran parallel with the indigenous Sun Dance practice of praying to the Four Winds for good weather and to the Sky and for his care while a band was journeying to the ceremonial grounds.²⁶

Upon approaching the site of the congress, the party was made welcome by customary expressions of Lakota etiquette. Officers from the host sodalities would ride out on horseback to greet their guests and escort them to a camp circle that contained, at times, up to 600 tents. Although remarkable to the missionaries, camps of this size and larger were routine when the Lakota gathered for their Sun Dances. Ethnologist Alice Fletcher reported that at the last Sun Dance celebrated before the government banned the ceremony in 1882, "over 9,000 [Lakota] were so camped, the diameter of the circle being over three-quarters of a mile wide."²⁷ The welcoming committee would next assign the newcomers their proper place in the

tribal circle, calculated on the basis of *tiyospaye* and district. They were then brought food, or invited to the tents of relatives or friends from other bands where they feasted and shared news.

Positioned a short distance from the camp circle was an arbor that served as the congress headquarters. A report on the 1931 congress held on the Pine Ridge Reservation described this structure as follows:

The Indians enclose a large circle by a sort of bower, some fifteen feet in width and covered above and behind by pine branches thick enough to form a wall on the outside and a heavy top covering to keep off the heat of the sun. The inner side is open, facing the center of the circle in which the American Flag flies from a tall flagpole. The whole inner portion of the circle is open to the skies. At one side of the circle an entrance is left, and at the other end a stage

is erected where the officers of the Congress take their places. Behind this is a large tent open on the side facing the circle.²⁸

One cannot help but be struck by the similarity between the congress bower and the enclosures Lakota typically erected for their Sun Dance and *hunka* (adoption) ceremonies. There is nothing in Catholic theology or ritual or in the structure of congress ceremonies that dictated the bower's circular form. Rather, like all Sioux ceremonial lodges, it was based on the Lakota paradigms of *cangleska wakan* (the sacred hoop or circle) and the *tatuye topa* (the four cardinal directions). Likewise, the divisions within congress bowers reflected Lakota presuppositions concerning sacred form and space. In common with Sun Dance lodges, congress enclosures were divided into two parts: a central area exposed to the sun and a protected perimeter covered with pine branches on its top and back. The shaded area, again, like Sioux Sun Dance lodges, was partitioned into "reserved" and common sections. In the reserved part, or *catku*, located opposite the bower entrance, stood the stage and tent reserved for congress officers and other key personnel. All of the arbor's remaining space was considered "common" and open to all.

The officers' platform and tent also served as the setting for the daily open-air masses celebrated at a congress. On such occasions a temporary altar was erected at the back (west) of the shelter. As Mass began, a procession of clerics would march into the bower and slowly wend its way to the altar. Again, this association of *catku* and altar had its precedents in the Sun Dance and *hunka*.

At the center of the congress bower stood a pole on which congress officials would hoist and lower an American flag at the opening and conclusion of each day of the convocation. The prominent place accorded "Old Glory" was consistent with the important role that Catholic missionaries on Rosebud and Pine Ridge granted the process of civilization in their work. Thus, while never forgetting that their primary obligation was to save Lakota

souls, the missionaries nonetheless interpreted this obligation in line with the Thomistic maxim that "grace builds upon nature."²⁹ In accord with this tenet, the religious viewed training the Lakota in western social and cultural institutions as a necessary secular bed for planting the seeds of faith among them.

Many Sicangu and other Lakota Catholics imbued the congress flagpole with spiritual and political meanings quite distinct from the Christian civilization that it symbolized for the missionaries. Like the Sun Dance pole and the *hunka* fireplace, the flagpole marked the center of the sacred hoop at which the six sacred directions or "grandfathers" converged. It was, as such, an important manifestation of the sacred flowering tree of Nicholas Black Elk's famous vision that was "the center of the life of the nation."³⁰ As a church-sponsored celebration, the liturgical and ceremonial observances of the congress were necessarily consistent with Catholic belief and practice. However, Lakota Catholics succeeded in molding many of these rites so that they resembled rituals that belonged to the traditional Lakota Sun Dance. Among the most striking of these adaptations was the procession in which members of the Saint Joseph's and Saint Mary's Societies marched in two separate lines from the congress bower to the church. In his monograph on the Sun Dance, James R. Walker described a so-called procession of sex for which participants similarly segregated themselves into gender-based groups. The pattern of other congress ceremonies, such as the reception of the Eucharist and the Eucharistic procession in which participants circumambulated the congress grounds in a clockwise direction while singing hymns, again appears to have been modeled after Sun Dance practices. Thus, Walker reported that in the buffalo procession the participants moved clockwise around the inside of the camp circle as they chanted in praise of God and shouted out sentiments appropriate to the occasion.³¹

At other times, Lakota traditions that the missionaries looked upon as savage or wasteful were granted a new Christian respectability



FIG. 6. Sicangu members of the St. Mary's Women's Society parading to the congress bower. Parades such as these were similar to ones that preceded the Lakota's traditional Sun Dance. Courtesy of Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University Libraries.



FIG. 7. Participants entering the congress bower. The location of the flagpole at the bower's center replicates the place held by the sacred tree in the traditional Lakota Sun Dance. Courtesy of Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University Libraries.

by being incorporated into the congress. Such was the case with the *wihpeyapi*, or “giveaway,” in which sizeable amounts of property were redistributed among members of one or more *tiyospaye*. When practiced outside the congress, the missionaries considered this custom an impediment to the Lakota’s assimilation into a western market economy. However, as a “baptized” element of the congress, it became for them a pious expression of Christian charity. An article on the 1910 Congress published in the Catholic fundraising magazine *The Indian Sentinel* noted,

The centre of the council bower was filled with trunks and boxes. The Indian women have sewing circles, and their work of the year was in these trunks and boxes, to be distributed to the poor and to their friends—all kinds of well-made clothing for the poor, all kinds of beautiful bead work for special friends. At the close of the meeting the distribution took place. . . . The Apostolic Delegate received a pair of beautiful moccasins and a pipe with a handsomely worked bag in which to carry it. As His Excellency is not a smoker this Indian gift will be an attractive ornament in his Washington home. Father Ketcham received a pair of moccasins and beautifully ornamented saddlebags, “to be used in his trips among the Indians.”³²

Perhaps the Lakota’s most intriguing subversion of the assimilationist goals of the congress was how they used the celebration to continue the yearly reunions with friends and relations that the Sun Dance allowed in prereservation times. As earlier suggested, because of the great distances separating the reservations, Lakota Catholics wishing to attend a convocation often had to begin their journey two weeks prior to its opening. An equal amount of time was required for their return home. Since the congress was held during the summer, this long absence inevitably took a toll on the crops, which by government mandate the Lakota were required to plant. Government agents

charged with the responsibility of transforming the formerly nomadic Sicangu and Oglala into farmers often bitterly complained about the disastrous consequences of the congress’s timing. For their part, Catholic missionaries found themselves caught on the horns of an exceedingly uncomfortable dilemma. On the one hand, they were staunch supporters of federal agricultural policy. On the other hand, they were not about to forsake any initiative that fostered the growth of a Catholic church.

In 1897 Bishop Marty attempted to resolve this dilemma by floating a proposal past the members of the Saint Joseph’s and Saint Mary’s Societies advocating that the congress be divided into two territorially distinct sessions. Leaving the matter totally in the hands of the societies, the proposal met a resounding defeat (81).

CONCLUSION

During one of his interviews with John Neihardt, author of *Black Elk Speaks*, Nicholas Black Elk remarked:

You will notice that everything the Indian does is in a circle. Everything that they do is the power from the sacred hoop, but you see today that his house is not in a circle. It is square. It is not the way we should live. . . . Everything is now too square. The sacred hoop is vanishing among the people. . . . Everything tries to be round—the world is round. We Indians have been put here [to be] like the wilds and cooperate with them. Their eggs of generations are in the sacred hoop to hatch out. Now the white man has taken away our nest and put us in a box and here they ask us to hatch our children, but we cannot do it. We are vanishing in this box.³³

Black Elk’s dire prognosis notwithstanding, neither the Lakota nor their spirituality has disappeared within the “box” of white culture and religion. This article illustrates how the survival of Lakota spirituality among the

Sicangu may be attributed, in large measure, to the conscious and unconscious processes of resistance and adaptation manifested in their responses to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Catholic missionization. Some Sicangu rejected the missionaries' call for their conversion. Others, by contrast, welcomed the opportunity to gain access to the sacred powers flowing from Catholic observances and paraphernalia. However, they did so in ways that mitigated the missionaries' demand that they renounce all other forms of worship, especially Lakota spirituality and ceremonies. Some converts continued to take part in non-Catholic rituals in secret, while other Sicangu delayed their conversions until threatened by death or until that time when they could adhere to the requirement that they eschew all other religions with a clear conscience. Still others attended the gatherings of all the religions, refusing to commit themselves exclusively to any one of them.

Informing all these strategies was a distinctly Sicangu understanding of Catholicism centered on the traditional Lakota concept of sacred power. The Catholic missionaries unintentionally facilitated this indigenized interpretation of church doctrine and ritual by incorporating the Lakota term for the experience of such power, *wakan*, and its lexical derivatives, into their Lakota catechetical materials and homilies. Church rituals and gatherings thus became sources of *ton* consistent with traditional Lakota concepts of sacred power, and consequently, sources of strength for a people in the midst of traumatic change.

NOTES

1. The Lakota comprised the westernmost division of the loose confederation known as the *Oceti Sakowin*, or Seven Council Fires. Four of these fires—the *Mdewakanton*, *Wahpekute*, *Wahpetuwan*, and *Sissituwan*—belonged to a division alternatively referred to as the Dakota, Santee, or Eastern Sioux. Two other fires—the *Ihantuwana* (Yankton) and *Ihanktuwanna* (Yanktonai)—belonged to the Nakota, Wiciyela, or Middle Sioux, and the remaining fire to the Lakota, Teton, or Western Sioux. The Teton Sioux were divided into seven tribes:

Oglala, *Sicangu*, *Hunkpapa*, *Mnikowoju*, *Sihasapa*, *O'ohenumpa*, and *Itazipco*. The words Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota are dialectical variants of a term meaning "friend" or "ally." The word "Sioux" is a French transliteration and abbreviation of the term *Nadouweso*, an Ojibwa (Chippewa) word meaning "snake" or "enemy."

The initial attempt to convert and "civilize" Rosebud's primarily Sicangu residents occurred three years prior to the arrival of the Jesuits and Franciscans from New York. In 1883 Bishop Martin Marty of Dakota Territory sent three of his diocesan priests—Frs. Francis Craft, Casper A. Hosphenthal, and Joseph Bushman—to begin this work. However, by 1885 animosity between Rosebud's federal agent, James George Wright, and Father Craft led to the latter's expulsion. Soon thereafter the mission was closed. For more information on these events see Thomas Foley, *Father Francis Craft, Missionary to the Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 17–24, and Harvey Markowitz, "Fr. Craft and the Rosebud Sioux," vol. 2 of "Converting the Rosebud: A Culture History of Catholic Mission and the Sicangu Lakotas, 1886–1916" (PhD diss., Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Dissertation Services, 2008), 6–21.

2. The term "religious" is often employed in this essay as a noun to refer to those persons who belong to a Catholic religious order such as the Jesuits and Franciscans.

3. For an excellent discussion of Lakota spiritual anthropology, see Arthur Amiotte, "Our Other Selves," *Parabola* 7, no. 2 (1982): 26–32.

4. Feather on Head with James R. Walker, "Preparing the Hunka Implements," in James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner, 215 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980). For an excellent semantic analysis of the term *wakan* and a description of *wakan* beings, see Raymond J. DeMallie and Robert H. Lavenda, "Wakan: Plains Siouan Concepts of Power," in *The Anthropology of Power: Studies from Asia, Oceania, and the New World*, ed. Richard Adams and Raymond D. Fogelson, 154–66 (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

5. For further discussion of the relations between evil medicine people (sorcerers and witches) and malevolent spirits and gods, see James R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner, 94 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), and Nicholas Black Elk with John G. Neihardt, *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie, 241 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

6. Florentine Digmann served as the Jesuit superior of Saint Francis from 1888 to 1916. His

diary, entitled "The History of St. Francis Mission, 1886–1924," constitutes a major source (arguably the major source) of information concerning the first four decades of Catholic missionization on Rosebud and Sicangu responses to these efforts. Original and transcribed copies of this unpublished manuscript are housed in the archives of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Marquette University Library, and the archives of Washington University. All further citations to "The History of St. Francis Mission" appear in parentheses in the text.

7. Established in 1889, the Standing Rock Reservation is home to the Hunkpapa Lakota as well as the Yankton and Yanktonai divisions of the *Oceti Sakowin*. The reservation is split by the state line separating the two Dakotas, though most of its lands lie in North Dakota.

8. The Lakota script for the "Two Roads," a pictorial catechism that the priests used to instruct potential converts on church history and dogma, offered the following translation and gloss for the first commandment: "*Wakantanka* isnala ohounlapi kta; wowicala on, woope on, wowastelake on na wocekiye on. *Ogligle wakan* na *wakan wastepi* kin hena unyuonihanpi kte na wastewica; unlakkapi." [We must honor *God* by Faith, by Hope, by Loving Him and by Prayer. We must respect the *angels* and *Saints* and we should love them.] "Two Roads," 4 (emphasis mine), Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Archives, Marquette University Library.

9. Concerning the sacraments, the "Two Roads" stated: "*Wanikiya taku wakan (wicoh'an wakan)* sakowin unk'upi, na hena un *wakan unkagapi* na [*wakan*] *ounkiyapi*, hecel *Wakantanka* woope tanyan unopapi kta na hecel mah'piya ekta wiconi kin he unkiqlamnapi unkokihipi kte." [The Saviours [*sic*] gift of the (*holy sacraments*) were seven in number, and *with these it helps us to become holy*, thus it will give us the *divine strength* to observe the commandments of God and thereby gain the heavenly reward and that we must gain by our own merits.] "Two Roads," 5 (emphasis mine). A more literal translation of the Lakota is "The savior gave us seven sacred things (the sacraments) and by means of these we become sacred and they help us in order that we be able to participate in God's laws and in order that we will be rewarded with eternal life in heaven."

10. The Sicangu were far from unique in their conclusions concerning the dangers of baptism. In the seventeenth century, Jesuits noted a similar response among many of the northeastern tribes. For an example, see James Ronda, "'We Are Well as We Are': An Indian Critique of Seventeenth-Century Christian Missions," *William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (1977): 72–73.

11. See Eugene Buechel's gloss for this custom in *Lakota-English Dictionary* (Pine Ridge, SD: Holy Rosary Mission, 1983), 75.

12. Digmann, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1904*, 337. Digmann reported that even some medicine men would come to him for the rite. He wrote that one "pejuta wicasa [medicine man], had the courage to have his little sick baby baptized, and it got well." The priest continued, "Now I have the laugh: that I am going about killing their children by pouring the water over them, and he laughs with me." In a letter Digmann wrote for the German missionary newspaper *Katholischen Missionen* (hereafter KM) nearly ten years earlier, the priest narrated two separate incidents that by their contrast demonstrate the Sicangu's yet ambivalent attitude toward baptism. Describing the sudden change of heart of a sick elder, whom he had carefully instructed and who had agreed to undergo the rite, Digmann observed:

I was stunned by this sudden change; you thought it possible to touch the evil with one's hands and to see its reflection in the distorted features of the old man. "Go home and leave me alone," he repeated several times. I stayed, and when he calmed down, I discovered the reason why he didn't want to hear anything more about baptism anymore. The night before, a young Indian woman had died who had received a protestant baptism a few years ago. He heard about it this morning and so the old superstition had reappeared in him. "In this camp," he said, "the children are baptized, and they are all dying, one after another; and a white (!) had told the Indian chief they would die from being baptized; the devil had invented baptism to kill all the Dakotas." He remained adamant and could not be talked out of it. "With the good great spirit I want to be friends, but not with he who made baptism to spoil us." (Digmann, "Nordamerika," KM 23 [1895], 163)

In stark contrast, on another occasion an unbaptized Sicangu appealed to Digmann to baptize his two children. Recounting this incident, the priest wrote:

[A]nother Indian came, who has children here in school, and told me his youngest had died. I told him I was sorry about the fact that it had not been baptized. It had only been a few weeks old, and usually they say when we want to baptize their children: "It is still too young." Two days later the Indian came to the mission again, with a boy of 3 and 5 on each hand, respectively,

and said: "These you should baptize; I fear that all my children will die . . ." This was the first case in nine years when a full-blooded and heathen Indian himself brought his children to me to be baptized for fear that they would die otherwise. (KM, 164)

13. The Pine Ridge Reservation, located to the west of the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, was established in 1878 as the homeland for the Oglala Lakota.

14. In another case of "God calling in dreams," Digmann reported that a group of Protestant Sicangu requested him to hear their confessions. When the priest informed them that they must first be instructed, one member of the company stated, "Last night I was dreaming. Blackbeard [Digmann] stood in the water and I on the bank, and I wanted to go with him to be baptized but he said, 'You cannot as yet.' My dream came true" (102).

15. *Diary of Eugene Buechel*, July 1919, Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Archives, Marquette University Library.

16. Pierre Jean De Smet, SJ, *Life, Letters, and Travels of Father De Smet, S.J., among the North American Indians*, ed. Hiram Chittenden and Alfred Richardson, 634–35 (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969).

17. Following the assumptions of their traditional, spiritual cosmology, Lakota Catholics could be expected to have attributed the cause of these cures directly to the power (*ton*) inherent in the blessed water itself. The missionaries, adhering to the dictates of Jewish and Christian theology, would have considered this interpretation idolatrous and insisted that God alone was the true source of miracles, with the blessed water only serving as a medium through which he was transmitting the cure.

18. *Diary of Emil Perrig*, 1894, Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Archives, Marquette University Library. Arriving in spring 1886, Father Perrig was one of the first Jesuit priests to serve at Saint Francis, assigned briefly as the mission's superior from his arrival until 1888.

19. In a letter to *Katholischen Missionen*, Digmann similarly stated:

You often get this answer from old Indians, men and women: "I am too old to get baptized." This, I later convinced myself, means for many

of them: "I am too old to resign myself to the way of life of the whites"; because this, they think, is a necessary aspect of baptism. For others, of course, it is just an excuse. They just don't want to break with their heathen customs and all that is connected to it. As last summer a certain Big Rib, who was begging for food, told me when I asked: "Is then heaven only for the young and not for you old ones as well?" As he answered "yes" I responded: "Well, then go and have breakfast there as well." (Digmann, "Nordamerika," KM 23 [1895]: 163)

20. Digmann, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (1892): 468–69.

21. Known as *wihpayapi*, the "giveaway" is a ritualized expression of Lakota generosity. During this ceremony, an extended family (*tiyospaye*) presents guests with gifts to honor one of its members.

22. C. M. Weisenhorn, "Great Catholic Sioux Congress," c. 1919, typed manuscript, Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Archives, Marquette University Library.

23. Louis Goll, *Jesuit Missions among the Sioux* (Saint Francis, SD: Saint Francis Mission, 1940), 43.

24. Established in 1878 in southwestern South Dakota, the Pine Ridge Reservation is the homeland for the Oglala tribe of the Lakota.

25. Placidus Sialm, "American Indians," *Jesuit Missions* 4, no. 5 (May 1930): 117.

26. James R. Walker, "Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota," in *Anthropological Papers, American Museum of Natural History* 16: 95.

27. Alice C. Fletcher, "The Sun Dance of the Oglallala Sioux," in *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science* 31 (1882): 580.

28. Joseph Gschwend, "Catholic Sioux Indian Congress," *Jesuit Missions* 5, no. 8 (September 1931): 184.

29. *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 1, A. 8, ad. 2.

30. Black Elk with Neihardt, *The Sixth Grandfather*, 130.

31. Walker, "Sun Dance," 104.

32. "The Great Catholic Congress of 1910," *Indian Sentinel*, Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (1911): 7.

33. Black Elk with Neihardt, *The Sixth Grandfather*, 290–91.