

Reading Log #2
Ashley Stevens

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Dr. Tracy Penny Light
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In the journal article, “‘We Are Well As We Are’: An Indian Critique of Seventeenth-Century Christian Missions” by James P. Ronda, the author discusses how the European missionaries were a threat to the survival of the Native American society. (67) Although the Christian missionaries, better known as Jesuits, had good intentions they left permanent damage within many of groups within North America. Two groups in particular that suffered from their mission was the Huron and the Montagnais Indians. (68) These two groups were forced to understand the biblical view of sin and hell, had their healing ceremony rights taken away, and lived under great fear of the Christian cross.

The main teaching that the Jesuits pushed on the native Americans was the concept of sin and guilt. This theme is derived straight from the Bible but is deemed useless to the native Americans. According to the text, “many native American religions did not contain the idea of sin as either a primordial fault or a moral transgression against the will of God. These religions recognized personal wrongdoing but did not assign it any cosmic significance.” (68) Due to this fact, this teaching was both confusing and frustrating to the aboriginal groups. Not only did the Jesuits teach on sin, but they also discussed the traditional view of both Heaven and Hell. These teachings were received poorly as the aboriginal groups believed in an afterlife of a neutral surrounding, not one of reward or punishment. (70)

Having large gatherings was, and still is an important part of Native American culture. According to the article, the Hurons held an annual medical and religious ceremony called ononharia. (73) The Jesuits condemned these ceremonies and eventually banned the practice of healing, claiming that it was sinful and it was an “art founded upon falsehood.” (73) The author argues that this ban forced the Huron people to leave their traditional medicines and practices,

which allowed for their ill family members to die. (73) Not only were many of the native americans dying as a result of this ban, but they began to suffer many curses upon the land. According to the article, “when a severe drought brought widespread crop damage in the summer of 1635, Huron religious leaders charged that the presence of Jesuit crosses had driven away from the rain.” (74) A shaman within the group ordered for every cross to be removed to allow the rain to fall again.

Even though the drought came to an end, the native americans continued to live under the fear of the Christian cross. The Huron saw the cross as a foreign source of disease and destruction upon the land. According to the text, “by 1640 all mission property, whether or not religious, had become suspect.” (75) The Huron looked upon the sacred mission objects of the Jesuits with great concern. Furthermore, the presence of the Jesuits raised a serious concern for the Indian political leaders. Every person with the villages became aware of the attacks of the missionaries and built up a resistance to their ways. Over the years, the Aboriginal people became more conscious of the philosophical differences that separate their religions from Christianity. (80)

Although it is important to stand strong in your beliefs, it is appropriate to say that the Christian missionaries caused a long-lasting negative impact on the aboriginal communities during that time. Not only did they cause psychological damage, but their actions also caused many to perish and leave their families behind.

This article left me with many questions, and they are as follows:

Assuming that the drought would have fallen upon the land regardless of their religious stance, why was it automatically blamed on the cross?

How did the missionaries find the Huron?

Was there a language barrier for the time when they were together?

Was there ever a sense of restoration between the missionaries and the aboriginal groups?

