



The history of the catechesis of the Catholic Church on the Crow Reservation
by Karen Watembach

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in History
Montana State University

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Abstract:

The thesis presented in this paper states that the Catholic Church through the missionary activity of the Jesuits on the Crow Reservation from 1887-1921 established a permanent mission school, St. Xavier Mission Boarding School, as the center of a European feudal model of church. This model was built upon two constructs: the stationary center and the philosophical-historical concept of world view. The Crow people were in contrast nomadic and held a cosmological concept of world view. The teachings of Jesus were woven through a series of cultural conflicts, misunderstanding of methodologies and language differences, clashes of values as well as loving concern, Crow language preservation, education of the young, and spiritual gifts which spoke to the Crow people.

Using a historical approach, the writer researched archival materials - letters, diaries, school and government records, sermons, prayers and catechisms translated into the Crow language; gathered information through oral history; and interpreted theological and philosophical constructs in Catholic Church history and in Crow tradition. Through this research it was concluded that the Catholic Church did in fact build a model of feudal church on the Crow Reservation with the boarding school as its stationary center. However, in 1907 the model began to disintegrate when the government and the Crow people desired day schools. The center of the feudal model was lost when St. Xavier Boarding School closed in 1921.

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

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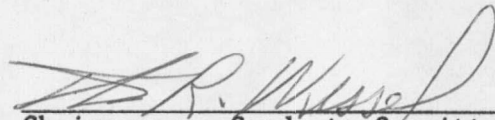
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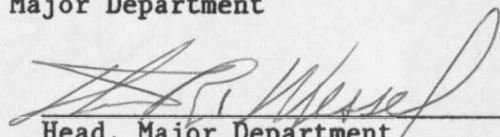
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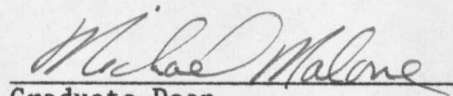
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ABSTRACT

The thesis presented in this paper states that the Catholic Church through the missionary activity of the Jesuits on the Crow Reservation from 1887-1921 established a permanent mission school, St. Xavier Mission Boarding School, as the center of a European feudal model of church. This model was built upon two constructs: the stationary center and the philosophical-historical concept of world view. The Crow people were in contrast nomadic and held a cosmological concept of world view. The teachings of Jesus were woven through a series of cultural conflicts, misunderstanding of methodologies and language differences, clashes of values as well as loving concern, Crow language preservation, education of the young, and spiritual gifts which spoke to the Crow people.

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INTRODUCTION

A friend once said, "I like to go to the mountains because they put me in perspective." Perhaps this was why the Crow, when they saw the land of south central Montana, decided to stay in the late 1700's after wandering for perhaps as much as one-hundred years. There were many mountain ranges in Crow Territory one of which was named for them - the Absarokee Range (Absáalooke). The Crow medicine men still say, "All we have comes from those mountains - the Big Horns." It was to the high places that men and women went to receive strength and sacred power for their lives. Alappwuash, or Sore-Belly, a Crow chief, said of his country, "The Crow country is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it exactly in the right place." It has good grass, good water, and plenty of buffalo. In the summer the people can go to the cool mountains and in the winter they can stay in the sheltered valleys. To the north it is too cold and the winters too long. In the south it is hot and there people get the fever. To the west people are poor and they must eat fish which is poor food. To the east a Crow's dog would not drink the muddy river water in the Missouri which the people there are forced to drink. "The Crow country is exactly in the right place. Everything good is to be found there. There is no country like the Crow country."

Although the area of the Crow Reservation covered a little over 7500 square miles in 1887 the Crow people knew each river, creek and valley intimately. The Crow people found their center in this land and in all the natural forces giving life to them and to the land.

In 1884 the United States Government moved the Agency to its present location on the Little Big Horn. The Catholic missionaries in 1887 when choosing the spot for St. Xavier Mission selected a place close to the Agency and geographically central within the boundaries of the reservation. Even after the northern and western portions of the reservation were ceded to the United States St. Xavier Mission remained centrally located. This physical centering symbolized the "mission foundation" construct. St. Xavier Mission among the Crow people would be a focal point around which the people would gather. In the minds of the mission founders, the people would no longer look to the mountains for the centering of their lives, but to St. Xavier Mission.

