

INTRODUCTION

The words of the title, "Catholics and the Missions of the Pacific Northwest--1826-1853" have been carefully chosen. The word "Catholics" is used to refer not only to the Catholic missionaries, but also to the Catholic laity, who laid the groundwork for the Catholic missions of the Pacific Northwest. The term "Missions" is used here to designate not only the missions of the Roman Catholic Church, but also the principal Protestant missions of the Pacific Northwest. The dates "1826-1853" have been selected so that the rise, development and demise of these missions can be examined in detail.

Extant accounts of regional Catholic history have largely overlooked two vital elements of the Catholic past: (1) the germinal period of Catholic lay activity that preceded the arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries in the Pacific Northwest (1826-1838), and (2) the interval of intense Catholic-Protestant interaction that followed the arrival of Catholic missionaries (1838-1847). The purpose of this study is to explore those periods in detail, examining the factors that influenced the rise and development of the Catholic Missions in the Pacific Northwest, 1826-1853.

Another important aim of the monograph is to examine the role of education in the Catholic and Protestant missions of the Pacific Northwest which were variously founded to transmit their teachings to the natives and settlers of the region.

The student of Pacific Northwest history, when asked to address questions surrounding the rise and development of the Oregon missions, is singularly well-equipped to speak about the Protestant mission enterprise.¹ Names like the Reverend Samuel Parker, and Reverends Jason and Daniel Lee, or Henry and Eliza Spalding, and Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, dominate the pages of Northwest mission history, secular and sectarian alike. The ground-breaking efforts of the Methodist-Episcopal Church, the journals of the first white women over the Rockies, the Protestants' collective attempt to evangelize the Indians, the arrival of the Great Reinforcements of the '40s, the mission communities' role in the settlement of the Territory, the violent end of the mission at Waiilatpu, strike familiar chords and themes in the minds of regional historians. Similarly, the centers of Protestant mission activity--Willamette, Waiilatpu, Lapwai and Tshimakain, where missionaries attempted to civilize and Christianize Northwest natives, have been the objects of intense research. In short, the pages of mission history in the Pacific Northwest, from 1834-1848, are preponderant with accounts of Protestant mission activity.

The Roman Catholic mission experience in the Pacific Northwest is, by contrast, largely unexplored. The student

who seeks to understand the rise and development of the Catholic missions in old Oregon searches in vain for a well developed body of literature. In a monograph commissioned by the Oregon Historical Society, Carl Landerholm observed that while the names of Protestant missionaries like Jason Lee, Daniel Lee, Gustavus Hines, Marcus Whitman and H. H. Spalding are almost "household words,"² prominent Catholic missionaries like "Blanchet, Bolduc, Demers and Langlois, and other Catholic clergymen, appear as shadow figures flitting on and off the pioneer stage into forgetfulness."³ Landerholm's observations regarding the Catholic clergy can be applied to any number of issues and themes involving the rise and development of the Catholic missions.

The momentous labors of the Catholic laity, who played dual roles in the settlement of the territory and in the foundation of the Catholic Church in old Oregon, have been seriously neglected in the pages of historical research. The role of Catholic education in the missions of the Pacific Northwest has received only paltry attention. Neither have the Archdiocese of Oregon City, or the Sees of Walla Walla, Vancouver Island, and Nisqually been identified as significant centers of early mission activity in the Pacific Northwest. Nor has the interaction between Catholic and Protestant clergy, who simultaneously vied for the religious allegiance of the declining native population, been adequately explored, except for the narrow perspective of sectarian history.

Extant research is seriously deficient both in quality and quantity. Archbishop F. N. Blanchet's own Historical Sketches,⁴ published in 1878 as a series of newspaper articles, continues to stand out as the mainstay of Catholic history in the Pacific Northwest. However, like Reverend William Metz's "History of the Catholic Church in the State of Washington"⁵ (1919), which is largely based on Blanchet's Historical Sketches, the monograph is highly sectarian, and unduly clerical. While both authors acknowledge the indispensable activities of the early Catholic laity, they focus almost exclusively on the "high and ennobling mission of the clergy."⁶ At the same time, while portraying the activity of the Catholic clergy as "deeds of heroism...which make all worldly actions pale into utter insignificance,"⁷ Blanchet reduces the early Protestant missionaries to those "who traded in horse flesh and town lots and who had 'cattle on a thousand hills'...."⁸ While both authors provide the readers with a spate of useful facts about the Catholic missions of old Oregon, their works are acerbic studies in apology and heroic literature.

Two other works, Reverend Edward O'Hara's Catholic History of Oregon⁹ (1911), and Sister Letitia Lyons' Francis Norbert Blanchet and the Founding of the Oregon Missions¹⁰ (1940), also investigate the history of the Catholic missions in the Pacific Northwest. Less given to anti-Protestant bias, O'Hara writes to inspire the reader, and to exalt the names "of pioneer missionaries and empire builders of the

Western hemisphere."¹¹ While providing a popular chronicle of Catholic events, from the arrival of John McLoughlin to the death of Archbishop F. N. Blanchet, O'Hara portrays Catholic figures of the period in hyperbolic terms. "No effort has been made in these pages to pronounce a eulogy upon them; their best eulogy is a simple narrative of their lives and deeds,"¹² writes O'Hara.

Sister Letitia Lyons' Francis Norbert Blanchet and the Founding of the Oregon Missions (1940) represents the most carefully researched and cogently written history of the Catholic mission period produced to date. In her preface, Lyons recognizes that aside from F. N. Blanchet's Historical Sketches, and the handful of articles derived from his work, "little else has been written and the complete story of the formative years has not been told,"¹³

Unfortunately, Lyons' historical account is seriously deficient, due to circumstances well beyond her control. Until the 1940s, the Hudson's Bay Company prohibited historians from examining their extensive archival holdings. Unable to gain access to these records, Lyons was forced to confine her examination of mission history to the years 1838-1848, and, like her predecessors, focused upon the activities of the Catholic clergy. In the final pages of her study, Lyons conceded that the final story of the period could not be written until the documents and records of the Hudson's Bay Company were released to historians. As a result, Lyons' goal to produce a more complete account of Catholic

mission history was frustrated, leaving the formative period of Catholic lay activity (1826-1838) unexamined.

Fortunately, beginning in the mid-1940s, the Hudson's Bay Company began to release its vast collection of archival materials, many of which provide the basis for this study. Now, in light of these materials, I am in a position to critically examine the traditional assumption that "the area's Catholic history began with the arrival at Fort Vancouver on November 24, 1838, of two missionary priests, Francis Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers...."¹⁴

One of the principle aims of this study is to document the activities of the Catholic laity from 1826-1838, who laid the foundation for the Catholic missions prior to the arrival of Catholic clergy (1838). This study will focus upon the role of Chief Factor John McLoughlin, whose anomalous policies and practices created an atmosphere that favored the propagation of the Catholic religion. It will explore the dual issues of settlement and controlled occupation, and the impact they had upon the Catholic and Protestant settlers. This study will also concentrate upon the uses of education and religion and their influences upon the residents of the Pacific Northwest. The monograph will explore the activities of the Catholic traders of the region, who practiced their Catholic religion in modified form, settled in the region, and laid the groundwork for the Catholic Church in old Oregon. In short, this study is designed to widen the parameters of earlier studies, and examine the role

that the Catholic laity played in the establishment and development of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest.

A second crucial issue in this study pertains to Catholic-Protestant relations during the missionary years (1838-1847). Earlier Catholic historians have presented the mission endeavors of their own Church in hallowed terms, while viewing the Protestant mission enterprise from a narrow and partisan perspective. For example, F. N. Blanchet dismissed the importance of the Protestant mission campaign by labeling its proponents as "propagandists of Protestant error..." [whose] "object in going west was not so much for the purpose of spreading Christianity among the Indians as it was for the gratification of seeing a new country and participating in strange adventures."¹⁵

This study is designed not only to surmount the parochialism that frequently characterizes earlier studies, but to document the assertion that mission history cannot be understood apart from a serious assessment of this Catholic-Protestant interaction. Therefore, this monograph will look at Protestant and Catholic leaders, lay and clerical, and examine the influence that each had on the development of the Oregon missions. It will explore the theological and educational aims of the Northwest missionaries and examine their influence upon the natives and settlers. This paper will also study Protestant and Catholic missions in relationship to the agencies that often financed and directed their activities from afar. The journals, records, diaries,

correspondence, ledgers, and annual reports of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries will be used to examine the factors that influenced the development of the Catholic missions of the Pacific Northwest.

Finally, Catholic and Protestant missionaries alike shared the common understanding that they had come West in response to the gospel mandate, "Go, therefore, and teach all nations...." This monograph will pay particular attention to the aims of the Catholic and Protestant mission education, and the methods the missionaries devised to propagate the Christian faith among the settlers and Indians of Oregon country, 1826-1853.

The final pages of the study are devoted to the missions in transition, 1847-1853. The prominent leaders, lay and clerical, Protestant and Catholic, white and native, and the parts they played in the missions of the interior are examined. Their theological and educational aims are explored. The events that led to the closure of the Presbyterian missions and to the suppression of the Walla Walla Diocese are discussed in this closing section.

The last pages provide the reader with a glimpse into the Diocese of Nisqually (1850), the beginning of the institutional phase of the Catholic history in the Pacific Northwest.

ENDNOTES

¹Commissioned by the Oregon Historical Society to prepare a "critical bibliographical survey of published and unpublished material in this field," historian Clifford M. Drury concluded, "the number of titles bearing upon the Protestant missionary movement in Oregon in book or pamphlet form, or which have appeared as magazine articles, runs into the hundreds." quoted in Clifford M. Drury, "Protestant Missionaries in Oregon: A Bibliographic Survey," Oregon Historical Quarterly (September, 1949), p. 209.

²Carl Landerholm, ed., Notices and Voyages of the Famed Quebec Mission to the Pacific Northwest, (Champoeg: 1956), p. iii.

³Ibid.

⁴F. N. Blanchet, Historical Sketches of the Catholic Church in Oregon, originally published as a series of articles for the Catholic newspaper, The Oregon Sentinel, (Portland: 1978).

⁵William Metz, "History of the Catholic Church in the State of Washington," originally published as a series of articles for the Catholic newspaper, The Inland Empire Catholic Messenger, 1919-1920.

⁶F. N. Blanchet, Historical Sketches, p. 6.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 13.

⁹Edward Vincent O'Hara, Catholic History of Oregon, (Portland, 1911).

¹⁰Sister Letitia Lyons, Francis Norbert Blanchet and the Founding of the Oregon Missions (Washington, D.C., 1940).

¹¹Edward V. O'Hara, Catholic History of Oregon, p. v.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Letitia Lyons, F. N. Blanchet, p. vi.

¹⁴New Catholic Encyclopedia (1976), s.v. "Archdiocese of Seattle."

¹⁵F. N. Blanchet, Historical Sketches, p. 11