“Why Don’t They Leave?”
Saving Faith and Other Issues of Catholic Missionization

Kathleen J. Martin

Oh, yes, we were the best Catholics.
We walked from Ajo to Gila Bend to Yuma and places in between
We walked to Quivira there at Organ Pipe and on down to Rocky Point
And all the while we carried an extra suitcase just for the saints
This is what she said with some indignation.

Oftelha Zepeda

In 1994, during a visit to family in South Dakota after many years of absence, I was struck by images in the reservation Catholic Church. The images were unfamiliar to me as someone who grew up in a Catholic Irish and German family in Minnesota. I was accustomed to “traditional” Catholic iconography, not images of birds, signs and symbols with texts in other languages, and depictions of unknown saints. Further, some of these same images were published on holy cards and posters, indicating they were not just representations specific to one community. I was attracted to the presentations, yet mystified as to what they meant, where they came from or how they were Catholic images. I wondered if it really mattered that Catholic symbols and signs were open to interpretation and change?

Symbols and signs are often ambiguous and can acquire meanings that are overlapping and not specific to the original intent of the symbol, leading to new interpretations. In fact, Fornberg (1998) poses that Christian images are open to change since they “do not reflect a change in the concept of God, but are a re-interpretation of the same concept not specifically tied to the environment, cultural beliefs or communities, and

1 This project has benefited from support by the American Academy of Religion through an Individual Research Assistance Grant in 1998, and support from the National Endowment for the Humanities through a Summer Stipend in 2000.

2 I wish to thank all the participants of this project who willingly shared and provided their insights during an interview that some described as “difficult.” Without their candid responses, knowledge and expertise, this project would have been a review of photographs without the depth of thought needed to examine these complex phenomena. I also am grateful to the churches and individuals who allowed me into their communities and were willing to engage in discussions of the issues, regardless of differences.

therefore open to individual abstraction” (p. 116). Yet, this notion of interpretation is often antithetical to cultures and traditions whose beliefs and traditions are tied specifically to features of the land, environment and community (Basso, 1996; Deloria, 1994; McNeley, 1981; Nelson, 1983; Treat, 1996; Weaver, 1998). I wondered if it was possible for two diametrically opposed systems to be integrated, and who was responsible for deciding upon the integration and presentation?

As the number of Catholic churches I visited grew, so did my questions, interest and confusion about the images I saw. Catholicism, it would appear, was re-defining its historical relationship with Native Peoples in the United States, and was taking actions to try and correct past negative characterizations and contempt for Native traditions. Through the incorporation of Native traditions into reservation Catholic churches, there appeared to be a blending of traditions unlike other Catholic parishes in the country. Some Catholics and scholars of religion say the specific purposes for these adaptations are the maintenance and viability of the religion. Others indicate that it is immaterial whether a religion follows traditional paths or adopts new ones since religion can evolve, change, and adapt all in the interest of “serving the needs of parishioners”… Yet, questions arise as to the motives for this blending, and what are the perspectives of people in the communities that witness these changes? Is the mixing of traditions a move toward preserving the faith of Native Catholics or a way of saving face given the Church’s historic role in Native communities in the United States? This then, is the metaphor for this paper: Saving Face or Saving Faith.

If, as some authors would lead us to believe, images and their meaning are understood momentarily with some of the meaning unnoticed (Fornberg, 1998), it is incumbent upon us to examine the contexts, images and symbols in a critical way. In this article, we examine these issues through the voices of Native Peoples and contemporary photographs of Catholic Church contexts. Therefore, the purposes of this study are: 1) to examine the use and appropriation of symbols and religious traditions in Catholic churches or missions on American Indian reservations in the United States; and 2) illuminate the personal perspectives of Native women and men regarding religious expression and symbol usage who also are familiar with Catholic theology. Ultimately, beliefs and values are the personal property and right of those who choose to uphold them, and this article does not critique or review religious beliefs. Rather, the focus is the organization of the Church and its system of hierarchy, which acts separately from individuals. It endeavors to examine the context in which beliefs are embedded through the voices of Native People and to share in
the discussion of syncretism and appropriation. The use, misuse, and appropriation of Native American traditions are critically reviewed in the literature (Deloria, 1994, 1999; Jaimes, 1992; Tinker, 1993; Weaver, 1998). However, a study of Catholic contexts that presents photographic images of symbols and of their use in churches has not been part of the discussions.

An examination of church contexts reveals conflicting images and generates questions regarding the appropriation of symbols and traditions such as: Which symbols and traditions are used? Are they context or type specific? What purpose does blending traditions serve, particularly since Catholic Church doctrine does not allow for the worship of multiple gods or spirits? Most significantly, what effect does incorporating symbols have on cultural identities, traditions and beliefs? Some historians and philosophers pose that the single greatest influence in the preservation of culture for American Indian Nations has been the fact that traditions were outlawed. If cultural traditions and images are to be assimilated into Catholic tradition, isn't the danger of loss more imminent? Therefore, this is an important topic of study for the larger community and for American Indian Nations whose culture and traditions have struggled to thwart systematic attempts at disruption and destruction.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

"What kinds of people, institutions, laws and so on are favored when we speak in one set of terms as opposed to another; what traditions or ways of life are suppressed or destroyed?" Kenneth Gergen 4

This section provides an historical perspective of the Catholic Church's relationship with American Indian People and to the Church's interconnecting relationship with United States government policies.\(^5\) The intention is to set a contrast for the discussion and to provide historical background of the relationships for that context. Notions of Western ideology and 'manifest destiny' are closely, if not inseparably, tied to Christianity both through historical contexts and philosophical ideologies.


5 Although the Catholic Church was not alone in its efforts to "civilize and Christianize" and other denominations shared in the parcelling out of potential Indian converts based on government policies, this article examines the Catholic Church's relationship.
In fact, "Christian notions of dominion, choseness, singularity of truth, and divine sanction of temporal patriarchal authority were well-suited to the task of justifying the institution of slavery, land theft, and other forms of White supremacy" (Howard, 1999, p. 56). These notions are based in philosophical traditions of the Enlightenment such as the singularity of self that is endowed with rights, empiricist and inductive reasoning, and dualist ontology. Furthermore, "Roman Catholicism has had a greater impact on American Indians than any other Christian denomination for half a millennium" (Vecsey, 1996, p. xi). Therefore, this section is woefully brief in a discussion of the issues that frame the Church's relationship with American Indian Nations, yet it attempts to highlight particular aspects of the relationship. The intention is to frame the context of discussion within a limited set of areas, not to provide an extensive discussion of these relations. Some of the aspects that frame this complex and historical relationship include the following: agriculture and education, inculturation, and ongoing relationships in Native communities.

Agriculture and Education
From first contact to present, differences in perceptions and understandings between Native and Euroamerican land use, agriculture, and education persisted. Previously, the issues of "control through the development of agriculture, which demands close attention, and the boarding schools, which dislocates young people from culture, were obsessive preoccupations" (Grant, 1984, p. 225). These two features of existence, agriculture and education, were meant to constrain nomadic movement of Indian Peoples, particularly during the 1800s when Western expansionism was at its height. "One need only look at the course of American expansionism to see the scale of civilization, and its corollary, the doctrine of progress, vividly displayed" (Adams, 1995, p. 13). An underlying philosophy for agriculture was to tie its practitioners to the soil, thereby "promoting stability and facilitating self-sufficiency" (Grant, 1984). It also mandated aid and facilitated the sale of Indian lands through the 1887 Dawes Act (among others), which established parcels of land with individual ownership and provided large tracts of land euphemistically referred to as "surplus land". In effect, the ultimate colonialism of "agriculture facilitated the creation of a controlled environment" (Grant, 1984, p. 225) in which people were more easily dominated when tied to specific areas of land that produced food.

6 See in greater detail Berkhofer, 1971; Delona, 1994, Delora & Lytle, 1984; Grant, 1984, Tinker, 1993
Education and Christian boarding schools were perceived as essential in the process of creating sedentary civilized peoples. "As the theory went, Indian children, once removed from the savage surroundings of the Indian camp and placed in the purified environment of the all-encompassing institution, would slowly learn to look, act and eventually think like their white counterparts" (Adams, 1995, p. 335). Complete assimilation into Euroamerican culture was the primary goal. "The residential school, with its combination of character formation, elementary education, and the inculcation of habits of industry, represented the missionary program of christianization and civilization in its most fully developed form" (Grant, 1984, p. 226). The assimilation, sometimes referred to as acculturation, process was deemed to be but one or two short generations away if children were isolated from family and community.

Removing children hundreds or thousands of miles away for long periods of time without family and community contact was deemed essential to the process of assimilation. "In pursuit of the twin aims of christianization and civilization, the missionaries assumed the role of guardians, ...[and] they could prevent the Indians from following their inclinations" (Grant, 1984, p. 225). Yet for most Indian students in the schools, the experience was vastly different than what Christian or government intentions alleged. As Zitkala-Sa (1909) discovered, "Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends. The natural coat of bark which had protected my oversensitive nature was scraped off to the very quick." Like many students of the boarding schools, Zitkala-Sa presents the story of "education" with the violence it included.

The U.S. government perceived the boarding schools as a way to mold the "savage" Indian when they were most pliable and eventually create a people that upheld a European ethic and fit with dominant ideologies. The theory was that even though "white civilization had taken centuries to emerge to its present level, if Indian children could gain entrance to the common school, they would enter the struggle of life with roughly the same advantages as the children of their more civilized white neighbors" (Adams, 1995, p. 19). A factor viewed as beneficial for this process and for influencing the parents of students is based in the establishment of a sedentary lifestyle.

Although some children were removed great distances from their communities, others were placed in day schools in which students either

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7 Cited in Adams, 1995, p. 313

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went home overnight or stayed during the week returning home on weekends. According to Howard (1999) and others, Native Nations view their children as a gift and believe that closeness to them is the ultimate commitment of a parent. The thoughts of a participant in this study suggest further interpretations of the issue.

Closeness is the ultimate commitment of the family because, even in troublesome times between parent and child, some family member usually steps in [or children are sent to] trusted friends to learn new skills. So the problem of being away from home may not be a general conflict, but one specifically relating to being under the purview of those not trusted (Amanda).

By placing children in schools, parents were not as inclined to move, choosing instead to remain for their children's sake.

**Inculturation**

The notion that Indian Peoples need to be controlled and guided to the appropriate reflection of the world or "image of God" was a belief held by early Catholic missionaries. They evidenced this belief through an attitude of paternalism, domination, and cultural destruction supported by government policies and sanctions against any Native individual who continued in traditional practice. Dating from first contact through the nineteenth century, Indian Peoples were perceived as "less than", in need of help, "savage and godless". Missionaries emphasized the need for abandonment of culture and traditions in favour of Christian ideology, and they often acted as agents of the U.S. government to enforce policies.

Prior to the 1900s, expansionism and the role of the Church in saving souls was an eminent concern of the mission philosophy. The Church's goal was to acquire converts for the glory of God and to acculturate the Peoples to the prevailing U.S. government philosophy. Simultaneously, however, there was growing concern for the poverty and depreciation of the Peoples. According to Grant (1984), early anthropologists contributed to this heightened awareness and concern reportedly by looking at cultural loss more objectively and with greater concern. With the increased attention to anthropology and the Meriam Report of 1928, discussions about culture and criticisms regarding the

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8 For discussion, see Berkhofer, 1971; Deloria, 1994; Kidwell, Noley, & Tinker, 2001.
treatment of Native Peoples increased awareness on the part of the Church into its own actions and culpability in cultural persecution and destruction. This may have been one of the contributing factors to the change of philosophy decreed in Vatican II during the 1960s, albeit some forty to sixty years later.

More recently, the Church espouses a philosophy of inculturation⁹ that, in some ways, continues to maintain contact with Native Nations without substantial differences in historically paternalistic attitudes. According to Christopher Vecsey (1996),

The Church's missionary method emphasizes contextualization, or inculturation. The Church is now pan-cultural, truly Catholic. Each culture is recognized as a context necessary for understanding the text of the gospel. The contemporary Church sees accommodationalism as an attempt by the missionary to place a superficial veneer on the gospel (p. 381).

The missionary maintains and supervises the inculturation process because he is the emissary of the Church and the primary discusssant of the Gospel. Yet, the missionary no longer establishes the Church he represents with all its cultural accretions, instead he invites individuals who hear him to find Christ within their daily lives.

During the time of Vatican II, theologians began to speak of "inculturation" as a unique "lived experience" in which all people work together to understand the teachings of God. René Jaouen (1985) indicates, "the process of inculturation itself is independent of the missionary, and it occurs as the Word interacts with the recipient culture to produce a unique response. This encounter produces 'a local Church, the place of a culturally new response to the Gospel'"¹⁰ All members of the community are encouraged to contribute, and Catholic dioceses form policy-making committees for the purpose of incorporating Native and Catholic traditions. For instance, the Lakota Inculturation Task Force (LITF, 1997) in South Dakota is composed of priests, lay leaders, and Catholic Lakota people whose purpose is to come together to find a

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⁹ Another definition of inculturation presented by a parish in Arizona is, "Finding God in our culture is called IN-CULTURATION. That is the term that is presently used in Catholic theology to describe the attitude we are to have to relate Christianity and Culture. We ask, 'How is Christ found in the good and authentic parts of any culture?'" (parish publication, 1993)

¹⁰ Cited in Huell, 1996, p. 284-5 with italics in original

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"common faith". Yet, the use of Native symbols and traditions in Christian contexts are often contradictory and unacceptable to Catholic and non-Catholic Native Peoples in the communities. Although the LITF acknowledges this as a "controversial issue among the Lakota people" (LITF, 1997), efforts to incorporate both traditions remain. The Church and LITF responds to criticism by saying it is the "right" of Lakota Catholics to practice both traditions.

Vatican II did stipulate a change in the way Native Peoples and missionaries were to interact, however, this change primarily related to the actions of missionaries. At the time, and it could be argued today, missionaries often were confused over the new policies because some statements from the Second Vatican Council appeared paradoxical toward missionary activity (Dries, 1998). "Lumen Gentium" (The Constitution of the Church), which proclaimed the necessity of baptism for salvation (par. 14), also acknowledged a positive recognition of those persons who lead a moral life without knowing the Christian God. The Vatican decree on missionary activity indicated a "secret presence of God" among people of other religious traditions (Dries, 1998, p. 257).

Paul Steinmetz (1998) elaborates on the "secret presence of God" as being inherent in spiritual or religious peoples who are "anonymous Christians" and unaware of their inherent Christianity. From this interpretation, the missionary's task of today seems difficult to distinguish from earlier missionizing efforts. Such terminology continues to cast Native Peoples as ignorant of their religious understandings and in need of education to bring to light their religiosity. Ironically, confusion over issues of faith, appropriate interactions, and personal attitudes may be more of a reality for missionaries than Native Peoples. Subsequent to Vatican II and the 1960s, a number of texts highlight interactions and changes regarding missionary and Native relationships and are presented by Catholic clergy and lay people attempting to clarify or understand the relationships (Steinmetz, 1990, 1998; Stolzman, 1989/1995). These often are one-sided discussions and generally appear to be the result of lack of understanding on the part of Catholics and a search for clarification, or more simply attempts to find justification for past wrong doing.

**Continuing Relationships in Communities**
Confusion over authority, place of the missionary within the Native context, and the drive to convert remains part of the ongoing problems for Native communities and their relationships with Catholics. For instance, many missionaries continue to be entrenched in notions typical of previous generations (Costo & Costo, 1987). A discussion with a priest at Pala...
Mission in California as recently as 1991 reveals attitudes reminiscent of earlier efforts.

Indians have a great belief in externals, but no internals, leading to a religious practice that is not grounded in understanding. Catholic spirituality is largely superstitious rather than an informed expression of faith. [They] need to be informed ...before they can partake of the mysteries of the Church (Vecsey, 1996, p 312).

Although these are the sentiments of only one priest, repetitions of this argument are evident elsewhere (Fornberg, 1998; Steinmetz, 1998). In recent discussions surrounding the Junipero Serra controversy and his canonization as saint in the Catholic Church, Dr. Michael Mathes states, "there is no [written] proof of Serra's cruelty, only stories by Indian People."11 The continuing Western notion of history as written and not told plays a significant role in the discussions and validates authenticity, while oral histories are denigrated.

Relative to Vatican II, the missionary maintains the primary role of power and authority over what actions are considered acceptable Catholic practice, and as the Church's emissary whose authority is vested by the Church. In part, this may be attributed to continuing paternalism regarding, not only spirituality and knowledge, but also American Indian leadership capabilities and priests' responses to Indian abilities of leadership. As indicated by the priest at Pala Mission, Indian People have a receptive mode to the Church, but

They will not take ownership. The priest attributes this reluctance to 'own' the Church to Indian mentality and psychology. For these people the community is supreme, and no one likes to stand out from the group. It is difficult to elicit leadership from them because each person will say, 'I don't know enough; I'm unworthy, and so forth' (Vecsey, 1996, p 312).

In general, the notion of Indian knowledge, worthiness and ability continues to be maligned and misunderstood, and missionaries today maintain the final say in all decisions regarding church doctrine and

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11 Cited in Costo & Costo, 1987

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"authentic expressions" of faith.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, few Native vocations in the Catholic Church exist, and the reports of difficulty for Native People entering the ministry, such as hiding tribal affiliations while in the seminary, continue to surface. It seems unlikely that Native priests would have any significant impact on leadership.\textsuperscript{13}

Development of new approaches to a cooperative format such as the Lakota Inculturation Task Force (LITF) and various religious retreats designed for reflection, and non-denominational spirituality and acceptance of new ideas have been adopted by some parishes and transformed to fit the Vatican II decree (Huell, 1996). Yet, any new missions or church practices and configurations on reservations are overseen and approved by priests and clergy so that it is consistent with Church theology. A recent example of negotiations between the Oblates and First Nations is too early to predict the results of discussions and negotiations, but they emphasize a need for First Nations' leadership.

First Nations must have the deciding voice in determining the nature of that relationship. Attractive as the concepts of the ‘Amerindian Church’ and inculturation might be to the current generation of missionaries, these ideas cannot be imposed on the First Nations as a legitimate expression of spirituality. To do so would be to invite a far greater frustration and disenchantment than that brought about by the classical period of missionary activity. The First Nations themselves must decide if they are willing to accept Christianity and on what terms (Huell, 1996, p. 289).

For this discussion, we also might examine the use of the Pipe in church contexts as purported by Paul Steinmetz (1990) and William Stoltzman (1989, 1995). This too may indicate a surface incorporation and change in Church policy to include a Native symbol, rather than an equal incorporation of both traditions. Yet, it is unclear the effect such usage in a

\textsuperscript{12} Huell (1996) asserts, "once this encounter has taken place, the missionary must verify that the resulting church is an authentic expression of the faith" (p. 357). See also directions and guidelines for inculturation and verification in F. E. George, OMI. (1988).

\textsuperscript{13} According to a study by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2002), there currently are 27 Native priests, and 8 Native seminarians. "Dioceses admit to not effectively targeting Native American men for the priesthood and say that they are not able to provide culturally appropriate formation programs for them" (Pelotte, 2001). 
http://www.usccb.org/education/statement.shtml
church context under Catholic ideology has on the meaning of the Pipe for Lakota People. This usage may obscure and co-opt traditional ideas and beliefs associated with this sacred object. However, the underlying structure of the Catholic Church remains intact, and it places any analysis of the incorporation of the Pipe within the context and structure of Catholic ideology. Hence, a more serious issue is that the discussion does not separate issues out of the Catholic context, but reframes the meaning of the symbol to fit Catholic ideology.

As historically is the case, we might ask if the Church and its clergy still decides what is accurate and authentic about beliefs and practices, and is this an expression of faith that reflects community beliefs? These issues and dilemmas lead to an often-repeated question, "Are the missionaries and missions still a needed presence or should they remove themselves from the reservations?"\(^{14}\) Additionally, Karl Rahner's questions are particularly significant in light of this discussion. "Could one be Christian without acknowledging Christ? If so, of what use is the missionary?"\(^{15}\) Furthermore, the term Christian assumes the presence and pre-existence of a particularly Christian philosophy inherent in being.

It is within these contexts of education, acculturation, and the Catholic Church's relationship with American Indian communities that we investigate the use of symbols and the appropriation of traditions into Catholic contexts.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

"Basic philosophical questions are raised in the course of observing and questioning people with respect to notions of inquiry, explanation, technology, science, and religion, as they relate to particular lifeways." Oscar Kawagley\(^{16}\)

An ethnographic case study method that examines the topic from an ethno-historical perspective highlights key aspects of the phenomenon within the broader context of historical relationships, church organization and the communities it serves. An ethnographic approach is most appropriate to investigate "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context

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\(^{14}\) See Dries, 1998; Huell, 1996; Grant, 1984 for further discussion

\(^{15}\) Cited in Dries, 1998, p. 257

are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). The intent in using this design is to present a “telling case” that provides insights into a common, but not typically explored phenomenon. This method also is appropriate for exploring social contexts and issues in which multiple layers are embedded and interact, and where the beliefs, philosophy and actions of individuals are not easily separated. Combining ethnography and history, we endeavor to look retrospectively to gain insights into phenomena.

The topic of this paper, so intimately tied to personal beliefs and religious practice, is rife with opportunities to make assumptions. Yet, similar to other ethnographers, I made decisions that affected the meaning of old data and the collection of new data. Ultimately, the goal is to arrive on the “believably firm ground of interpretation” (Peshkin, 2000, p. 5). From this, my intention is to present a “perspectival accounting” (Peshkin, 2000) of what I have learned from the shaping of meanings and understandings of what transpired (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997), leading to an examination of church contexts from the point of view of the participants. Further, ethnographic and qualitative research rests not on internal tests that substantiate interpretations, but on the strength of the interpretations to make a point that is deemed useful or interesting to an audience who can then re-construe the order and relationships (Denzin & Guba, 1994). The aim of this study is to present these interpretations and to open the field for further investigation and discussion.

**Personal Context**

While visiting relatives in southeastern South Dakota in 1994, my mother and I went to a local mission where a great-aunt was a member of the order of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and taught at the mission school. Her parents moved to the area in 1910, and she joined the convent in the early 1920s, working there until approximately 1945 when she left for a reservation in the four corners area of Arizona. Although I met my aunt when I was in my teens, our lives did not often intersect. The South Dakota mission and a Lakota Oblate Sister who knew my aunt as her teacher and still resided at the mission in 1994, fondly remember her. I was attentive to the stories I heard of my aunt, but more profoundly interested when I saw a representation of her on the altar amid other images of a woman known as Kateri Tekakwitha. The stories and images I saw and heard that day remained with me and continue to influence the questions I ask and the care I take in representation and interpretation.

This project poses a number of dilemmas that affect the complexity of the research process. First, my personal history and experience within the church, now as a non-Catholic, grounds my interactions and
evaluations of the benefits and detriments of the Church’s relationship with Native communities. Second, the good work and high regard with which some people are held, including my great-aunt, by Native people within the communities cannot be denied or devalued. Third, the Catholic communities supported my efforts with willingness to supply information, allow me to photograph the churches, and provide access to the communities. Yet, Native scholars indicate American Indian theology involves a “process of remembering and dreaming” that someone else cannot do (Kidwell, Noley, & Tinker, 2001), and often, Christian “form and functions act to subvert and co-opt the culture of the Indian community” (Tinker, 1993: 114). The question then arises, “What are the motives for this blending, and the perspectives of peoples in the communities that witness these changes?

So the heart of my ongoing dilemma; respect for both Catholic and Native communities and participants within this project, yet, a profound sense that my original question regarding the appropriation and incorporation of Native symbols into the Catholic Church must be critically examined.

Participants
Most important for this study, are the candid reflections provided by participants, particularly in light of the American Indian ethic of respect for the beliefs of others. Their honesty and expertise when responding to church photographs is the most critical element of this project. Without their knowledge and perspectives, it would not have been possible to write, reflect or interpret the photographs and draw conclusions. Ethical considerations continue to be a significant and important part of this research. Consents for interviews and observation, and photographs have been obtained and will be maintained throughout the research process. Additionally, interview participants are active participants in the process and have the opportunity to review transcriptions, view photographs, read materials and texts, and provide ongoing feedback. Honorariums and gifts for participants are an important consideration and necessary condition and provide a small compensation for their valued participation.

Participants live in a variety of settings and contexts (i.e., rural, city, reservation). All are interested in education as students and as individuals working within educational settings. Table 1 presents demographic information for participants indicating gender, age, familiarity and knowledge of Catholicism, educational attainment, tribal affiliation and ethnicity, and date the interview was conducted.

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Table 1. Presents demographic information for the ten interview participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Familiarity With Catholicism</th>
<th>Practicing Catholic</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Tribal Affiliation-Ethnicity</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MA/Can Phil</td>
<td>Batwat Wiyot (Humboldt)</td>
<td>5/11/00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Pomo/Miwok</td>
<td>6/09/00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MA/Can Phil</td>
<td>Lakota</td>
<td>6/17/00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>Child/Adult</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>BA/TE Credential</td>
<td>Huchol/Mayan/Mexican</td>
<td>7/20/00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikal</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>HS/some college</td>
<td>Irish/German</td>
<td>8/07/00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/MA</td>
<td>Pima/Gila River</td>
<td>8/08/00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>Child/Adult</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>BA/TE Credential</td>
<td>Yaqui/Irish</td>
<td>8/09/00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10/16/00</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
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<td>Chicana/Apache</td>
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<tr>
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<td>40+</td>
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<td>BA</td>
<td>Mexican/Zacatecas</td>
<td>2/27/01</td>
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</table>

As indicated in Table 1, the perspectives of eight women and two men will be highlighted in this article. Pseudonyms were used unless requested by participants. In addition, most have advanced degrees and have thought deeply about the issues posed in this project. Although the number of participants is small, their responses to the interview protocol are the principal focus for this paper and present a portion of the larger photographic study of church contexts. Participants posed critical questions and perspectives that were essential to a discussion of the phenomenon and the presentation of a “telling case”.

Data Collection
Multiple data sources were used for triangulation including photographs of church contexts, interviews, extant materials, and observations. These sources provide information across contexts and settings, and generate questions for further investigation consistent with ethnographic studies. Data collection, interviews and transcriptions, and preliminary data analysis for this paper were conducted between June 15, 1998 and August 15, 2000 as part of the larger study.

Photographs
Photographic data collection provides an important source of record regarding the context and use of symbols within the churches. A goal of
photographic data collection is to tie ideas to "the worlds in which we live and photographs are one way of pursuing that reflective and elusive goal" (Wagner, 1979, p. 199). Photographic data collection also provides a record of cultural contexts that can illuminate differences and similarities between and among communities. Although decoration in churches routinely changes to some degree, some elements such as paintings, statues and facades typically remain unchanged. A number of the churches are visited repeatedly to gain insight into any changes or consistencies.

As part of the larger study, Catholic Churches and missions in Arizona, California, Nebraska, New Mexico, South Dakota and Alaska were photographed beginning in 1997 and continuing to the present time. When authorized and appropriate, approximately 2-3 rolls of 24-exposure film (or digital images) were taken at each church or mission. Photographs of symbols in the churches and surrounding communities were developed and converted to computer format creating a source of physical data for later analysis. Currently, between 30-40 churches have been photographed and approximately 300-400 photographs catalogued, archived and cross-referenced. For this study, images of Native women and of symbols specific to Native Nations were selected for focused analysis. These photos present an overview of two categories of symbols from across all churches in the larger study. They also help to frame the presentation of perspectives by interview participants since some of the photographs from the interview protocol were from these two categories.

**Interviews**

Through interviews we seek to understand the meaning of another's experience and perspectives, and to learn about their opinions, beliefs, and reactions. The interviews provide insight into participants' perspectives regarding the use of Native symbols in Catholic churches. Identification and selection of interview participants utilized the following criteria: 1) willingness to participate; 2) knowledge of Catholic theology as practicing or non-practicing Catholics; 3) Tribal affiliation; and 4) knowledge of art or symbols. A total of 15 one-hour interviews were conducted. Follow-up interviews were conducted with a number of participants as subsequent questions arose during preliminary data analysis.

Initially, five interviews of one-hour in length were conducted in 1998. Field notes were taken and then transcribed. Interviews were designed to ascertain demographic information and church affiliation through descriptive, structural and contrasting questions. They were exploratory in nature and conducted at the beginning of the larger study to determine feasibility and participants' interest. Although informative in

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nature, it became evident during the interviews that without benefit of photographs or representations of church contexts, participants were at a disadvantage in talking about their feelings and ideas of symbol usage.

During the summer of 2000, ten interviews of one-hour in length were conducted using a second interview protocol with photographs depicting Native and Catholic symbols and traditions in churches. Photo elicitation offers a means for grounding cultural studies in the mundane interpretations of culture users” (Harper, 2002, p. 19). Further, this process prefaces the authority of the participants rather than the researcher (Harper 2002). In this process, “basic philosophical questions are raised in the course of observing and questioning people with respect to notions of inquiry, explanation, technology, science, and religion, as they relate to particular lifeways” (Kawagley, 1997, p. 7). For this project, images specific to symbols and artifacts from Native and Catholic communities were used to frame and discuss the meanings of representations.

The photo elicitation interview protocol was composed of ten photographs (with nine supporting photographs) designed to frame discussions as well as to provide the opportunity to “explore the photographs together. The images invited people to take the lead in inquiry, making full use of their expertise” (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 105). This provided a context for candid discussions with participants not possible without actual images to view and respond to during the interview. In effect, this grounded responses to specific contexts, spurred other associations, and elicited rich discussions. The open-ended interview format contributed to a collaborative and spontaneous sharing of feelings and ideas about the photos, while limiting directed discussion by the researcher. Interviews were audio taped, and tapes were transcribed and prepared for data analysis. These ten one-hour interviews with participants using the photo elicitation interview protocol are the focus of discussion.

Interview protocol

The ten photographs were pre-selected for the interview protocol and all participants viewed the same ten photographs. The photos were placed in an order that seemed to approximate degrees of appropriation and integration of symbols. Of the photographs selected, some were perceived to contain emotional content or graphic detail, and these were placed at the end of the protocol. Those with the least perceived emotional content were placed at the beginning of the protocol.

Further information on the photo elicitation interview protocol can be obtained from the author by request.
The photo interview protocol was described to participants prior to the interview, and participants were asked to: first, tell the researcher a little about themselves, their family and/or educational history; second, read and respond to two quotes; and third, view and respond to either photographs from the churches or images from printed materials distributed by Catholic organizations. Initially, participants shared personal, family histories, stories and educational information, then participants and researcher read aloud the following two quotes.

1. The force of a religion in supporting social values rests on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients (Geertz, 1973).

2. Traditional iconography gives witness to the human face of the Sacred. This icon imaged in the face of America’s indigenous peoples, reveals anew that sacred power. It celebrates the soul of the Native American as the original spiritual presence on this continent, and as a prophetic sign, it celebrates the reconciliation of the spiritual vision of Native and Christian peoples of this land (Guiliani, printed materials).

Most participants believed these quotes were difficult to understand, but referenced them later in their discussion of the photographs. Following a discussion of the quotes, participants and researcher reviewed the photographs and nine supplemental photographs of the protocol together.

**Extant data**
Sources include materials collected from churches and missions, cards with religious figures printed and distributed through Bridge Building Images, Inc., and web based information and materials supplied by archdiocese offices and organizations affiliated with the Catholic Church.

**Data Analysis**
Interview data were coded and organized to exhibit patterns, illuminate categories and draw conclusions (Spradley, 1979; Yin, 1989). Transcripts were read and reviewed for emergent themes; then, themes from each interview were put into charts so that they could be compared across and between interviews. Preliminary data analysis revealed categories and themes related to issues of context and presentation, differences in women’s perspectives, and the purpose for using symbols and images.
Analysis of responses to photographs in the interview protocol also illuminated the structure of participants' responses and comments on the photographs both individually and when viewed across the ten interviews.

Photographs were organized into groupings that presented themes and categories from a variety of churches and geographical locations. Then, these groups were analyzed for similarity and difference from the churches and contexts. For example, photographs were organized around Catholic and Native images, contextual similarities between and across church sites in the United States, and symbol usage as decorations and/or exhibition in the church. Preliminary analysis of photographs revealed two general categories of the use of symbols in Catholic churches: 1) symbols specific to the Indian community in which the church is located; and 2) symbols associated with all Native communities (albeit often erroneously). These might include the Pipe, Plains Indian dress, and images of Kateri Tekakwitha.

Finally, a third level of analysis examined the data sets for any overlap, similarity or difference of emergent themes and categories. Then, any additional themes and categories were identified and comparisons among and across levels were made. Through the use of this comparative method, data analysis proceeded until relevant categories and themes emerged.

PHOTOGRAPHS, SYMBOLS AND PERSPECTIVES

"An icon is an image of a thing, not the thing itself; it's symbolic. Sacred power is imagined in the actual thing. It's like saying a picture of a basket is as powerful as the basket itself, which can't be true since the picture of the basket doesn't have the saliva of the woman who made it." Teresa¹⁸

This section presents a selection of photographs that are representative of the two categories of images used in churches on reservations in the United States. It also presents the perspectives and reflections of participants regarding the images and photographs viewed during the photo elicitation interviews. A challenge of this type of research is the varied and competing interpretations and perspectives of images when viewed by individuals as well as when photographed by the researcher. It is imperative to situate images within their history of reception, refusing to see them as fixed, aesthetically permanent entities, but seeing instead a social phenomenon defined by an ongoing history of thought and practice (Morgan, 2005). We begin with a discussion of the

¹⁸ Research participant.
photographs and the two emergent categories, and then present the participants' reflections from the interviews.

**Figure 1.** Representative sample of images of women displayed in Catholic Churches in the United States that utilize similar themes across states and churches.

**Alaska:** Native mother and child in the sanctuary (Athabascan) 2000

**Arizona:** Garden statue of Kateri on church grounds (Diné) 2000

**Arizona:** Poster of Kateri in the back of the church (Diné) 2000

**South Dakota:** Kateri at the entrance of a church hall (Lakota). 1998

**California:** Statue in the Pala mission church. (Luiseño) 2001

**Nebraska:** Statue at church school (Winnebago) 2002
Representative Photographs Across Churches

Data analysis of the photographs revealed the use of American Indian symbols could be grouped around two categories pertinent to this article. First, images in all churches were examined geographically for similarities across communities, and then the images were grouped together based on any similarities and differences among and between communities. Second, context specific images endemic to the surrounding Native communities, but not represented in other Catholic churches across the United States. This category includes symbols and images representative of the American Indian Nation surrounding the local mission church, but not reflective of Indian Nations in other areas or reservation churches.

Figure 1 presents the first category of similarities. These six images of women in Catholic missions from Alaska to Arizona are a representative sample of common images across Catholic Churches on reservations. The images from Alaska and California are non-specific women, but reflect typical Catholic representations of holy women, Kateri Tekakwitha, and the Virgin Mary with child. For example, four of the six representations of women have their eyes averted either looking upwards or downwards with arms folded near their heart. The three photographs from Arizona and South Dakota are of Kateri, and the image of Kateri consistently was present across nearly all of the churches photographed. Thus, providing preliminary indication that there are similarities in the use of images across reservation churches throughout the United States.

Figure 2 presents a representative sample of six images from South Dakota, New Mexico, Arizona, Alaska and California and the relationship to the local community. For instance, Plains Indian dress and images of the Pipe were used in Lakota communities, while churches in Arizona and New Mexico, incorporated Diné symbols and images such as representations of the Ye’ii on altars and in doorways. In addition, churches in New Mexico incorporated Apache symbols such as the headdress of the Crown Dancers. In Alaskan communities, the representation of individuals in local dress as seen in the parka clothed figure and the use of Athabascan language in displays were specific to those surrounding Native communities.
**Figure 2.** Collection of context specific images from Catholic Churches in Native communities in South Dakota, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska and California

**South Dakota:** Drawing above the rear door of the church (Lakota) 1998

**South Dakota:** "Native Church" wall behind altar (Lakota) 1999

**New Mexico:** Wall sconces above Stations of the Cross (Apache) 2001

**California:** Drawing on outside of Pala mission (Luiseno). 2001

**Arizona:** Sand painting displayed on main altar (Diné) 2000

**Alaska:** Stained glass window in a church door (Yup’ik) 2000
Participants' Reflections on the Images
Although the complete photo interview protocol included ten photographs, responses by participants to six of the images will be discussed since they illuminate pertinent ideas. The main purpose is to present the responses through the voices of participants. Figures 3 through 7 presents the following photos from the interview: 3) Eagle and Mary; 4) PAX Sign with Feathers; 5) “Native Church”; 6) Holding Up Christ by Fr. John Guiliani (n.d.); and 7) Apache Christ by Robert Lentz (1990). 19

Eagle and Mary
Figure 3 was photographed in 1998 in South Dakota at a Catholic Church located on one of the Lakota reservations. According to a priest at the church, the Catholic Church's mission on reservations is “to be a constant beacon of hope—a sign of hope” for the people, and the use of symbols in the church helps them to feel welcome. Inside the church, to the left of the main altar, stands a statue of Mary (some participants felt it was a statue of Jesus) and a podium. Hanging on the paneled wall behind the statue is a plaster cast of an eagle.

Figure 3. Image of the “Eagle and Mary” photographed (1999) in a reservation church in South Dakota, is the first image in the photo elicitation protocol.

19 For Figures 6 and 7, see Bridge Building Images, Inc. www.bridgebuilding.com
Participants responded to the photograph in a variety of ways, typically discussing aspects of the eagle first. Teresa felt that it was a "very unusual eagle . especially with the circularity on the top." She wondered where this came from since it didn't seem to be a Native image. Cory, Rosa, Elida and Elena expressed confusion about the origin and felt that it was somewhat representative of the Mexican Flag or government with overtones of power and authority, but not necessarily those of the Catholic Church or Native traditions. In fact, several participants believed that it was reminiscent of "romantic horrible rapacious tales of big birds going after women" (Amanda), or that it reminded them of the "strong icon for Mexicans of a mean looking eagle on top of a cactus eating a snake" (Elida). This eagle's face appears "mean and ugly", not like the "benevolent messenger" that goes "between the humans that live on the earth and the creator" (Cory) or "the eagle that has strength . .they say their prayers [to]" (Elena).

Although participants often tried to find a relationship between the images, they expressed difficulty with the placement of the two images. They interpreted them as "not belonging together" (Mikal) since the eagle and Mary are "two separate very distinct pieces that really have no relationship to each other" (Sheila). Some participants spoke directly to the notion of association and relationship between the symbols as contrived. For Teresa, the idea that you can "live peacefully...have two worlds and hold them both in your hands and be that peaceful about it—that there's no conflict" is a lie. Some participants did make interpretations for the arrangement by saying, "The eagle is an important Native American symbol and it is above the statue. It seems to say the eagle is above the other [and Mary is] accepting of it" (Sonya). Sheila felt "the juxtaposition is interesting if the eagle is supposed to represent Native traditions and it's higher than the image of Jesus. " Other participants made no attempt to find a connection between the two images. They stated, "Mary has really nothing to do with any kind of message that I want to give to my Creator" (Cory), and it is "really a contrast because [we] don't have a belief in the Virgin Mary" (Elena).

In general, participants felt ambiguous about the two images and their placement within the church. There was a sense that they were disjointed and didn't belong together, yet the photograph did not provoke strong negative or positive reactions. Often, participants indicated they were perplexed as to their meaning and placement, but felt little connection to either image Sheila elaborated on this general impression.

I've seen different culture things side by side...but usually in a
more complicated or complex presentation, and this is two very distinct pieces that really have no relationship. They’re not parts of a whole.

**PAX Sign with Feathers**

Figure 4 also was photographed in 1998 in South Dakota at the same Catholic Church as the Eagle and Mary image. This church employed Native symbols and images sparingly throughout the church, more in the style of decoration than integration. Such is the case with the tabernacle and stand in Figure 4, set on the side altar to the right of the main altar.

**Figure 4:** Tabernacle stand with PAX sign and feathers (1998) photographed in a Catholic Church in South Dakota is the third image in the photo elicitation protocol.

Most participants were unaware of the meaning of the PAX sign, but recognized the four feathers in four colors as representative of the four directions. For those participants who were unfamiliar with the PAX sign, a brief description was shared that included the notion of it as a sign of peace. Several participants felt that it was an attempt to “utilize the symbols from both cultures ... [and] to create an association that these two symbols are similar” (Teresa). Sara responded saying, “there’s something that’s comforting looking at this picture and knowing the symbol of the four directions. It’s like honoring the people that are there.” Other participants were skeptical regarding the integration, yet elaborated on the significance of the union of both symbols. “It’s really interesting because...”
.. they're trying to combine the Catholic symbol for peace with the Native American symbol of the four directions for harmony and world balance” (Teresa).

Many participants wanted to know “who put it there?” They commented, “it would make a difference if it were someone from the clergy ... or if it was an Indian kid who said, ‘hey, I’m going to do this’” (Sheila). Elena stated, “I would have to look at who the congregation is and see who they are trying to get in.” Other participants interpreted it simply as a way to “Indian it up...almost as an afterthought”, reminiscent of “classrooms that you go into and they’re having Indian week” (Amanda).

For all participants, the responses to this photograph were limited, and participants generally found little to comment on beyond the notion that it was a minimal attempt to integrate two ideas. In addition, the feathers seemed to provide a less ambiguous message to participants than the eagle and Mary images. Although participants generally had less difficulty in understanding the meaning of the symbol and making an interpretation, they expressed the sense that it was less offensive and more in keeping with an integration of the two as stated in the initial quotes.

“Native Church”
Figure 5 garnered responses unlike earlier images, and was photographed at a church in South Dakota. Participants shared their impressions of what looked to them like a “Native church”. The altar is draped in a Pendleton blanket that changes with the church’s liturgical calendar. A poster, distributed by Bridge Building Images, hangs on the right side of the altar, and there is an abalone shell with sage at the base of the altar. There is space for a drum group between the altar and pews, and a wreath of natural fibers and decorated with symbols of the four directions hangs behind the altar. A headdress rests on a shelf above the wreath, and wall sconces on either side of the wreath are decorated with leather and beads (Figure 5). The church is decorated by one of the clergy in residence who feels it is important to present both cultures. His goal is to make an “artistic inside of a Lakota/Dakota Catholic Church as an expression of who the people are” that belong to this community.

Unlike many Catholic churches that are rectangular in shape with the altar at the far end from the front door, this church is circular with sixteen ceiling beams that meet in the center to support the roof similar to a tipi. Participants were informed of the additional features of the church and shown some supporting photographs to provide a sense of the church context. The main altar is set off to one side of the large open interior with
pews on approximately three sides and people enter through a corridor that surrounds the three sides.

**Figure 5.** Wall decoration in a South Dakota Catholic Church (photographed in 1999), participants referred to the image in the interview as reflective of a “Native Church”.

![Wall decoration](image)

Often participant responses to photographs of the “Native Church” are self-reflective and contain embedded meanings from their own experience. Some participant responses to this church were positive and supportive of the integration of the two philosophies. Amanda shared, “I would say I like it better than the other images. I think it’s definitely more inclusive…the intimidation factor’s not there.” Teresa stated, “I don’t see anything Catholic about this church. This is a Native Church.”

Discussions with participants examined what this notion of “Native Church” means to them and how it is perceived. One participant responded, “You know, that’s more palatable to me … the way that it’s not overtly Christian or overtly Catholic” (Amanda). Other participants concurred with this assessment, believing it to be evidence of “more powerful influences of Native” (Sonya), and that “it’s a place that invites you to think … the intimidation factor’s not there” (Amanda).

I respond more favorably to this knowing that it is a Hogan or tipi structure with the use of the number four in it. I just like the different textures in it. It’s more inviting and real to me rather than this real flat, slick, ugly surface, and it looks to me like local people may have created these things (Sheila).
Cory, the only Lakota interviewed, saw the 16-pole structure of the church as an attempt to give the impression of "going home". He related,

I have some strong feelings, but negative feelings about this...They're trying to give the image of 'welcome into my home'. You're welcome in my home that's a traditional way of inviting people into your house.

Although generally viewed by participants as an integration of the two traditions, the photograph evoked a range of feelings and responses. For some, it was unusual and, for others, it presented troubling images of blended traditions. Rosa expressed sentiments based on experiences with her parish church in California. "My response is, 'What happened to the church?' [My church] is devoid of everything except Jesus Christ and God and Mary and the Apostles and the steps to crucifixion." Elena felt that she would "feel comfortable", but stated "I could never see anything like this in my church because they keep themselves separate so to see it combined... just seems like a contradiction." Sara felt that the mission reflected an integration and negotiation of images that is typical of the Catholic Church, and said, "That's what is interesting about Catholicism because you wouldn't necessarily find the same thing in Protestant churches." For Elida, it revealed, "local culture...with decorations that reflect people's interest." For Sheila, "I don't know—not so sterile. Maybe that's what it is? It seems more welcoming."

Comments from participants often included disclaimers about "not growing up in this particular culture, so I can't speak for them" (Amanda). They asked clarifying questions such as "Is this their representation of God?" (Rosa). Some participants were hesitant to speak because of individuals in their communities. Cory stated, "It's hard for me to talk about. I know a lot of Indian people who have a strong belief in this. So it's hard for me to go against their right to believe the way they want." He continued, "I keep going back to the idea that I don't believe it's right to mix the two belief systems... that is what the spirits have told us."

**Virgin Mother and Child**

An image of the Virgin Mother and Child from the Renaissance period was purposefully selected and placed at the halfway mark of the interview protocol. Participants had the opportunity to respond to a picture that was
interpreted as "a traditional Catholic or Christian" image, and they provided comments that reflect respect and appreciation for the image.

Many participants were respectful of the image for what it portrayed. "It is a sacred illustration of a relationship I consider very sacred" (Cory). Others indicated they appreciated it for its beauty as a piece of art, but added, "I would not want it in my house" (Sheila). Amanda said, "I love these old pictures especially the old religious ones because they try to cram everything in and make it all look beautiful. You know it's very opulent." Although most participants are no longer practicing Catholics, they viewed the image as "Italian", possibly "pre-renaissance", and a "non-descript" Catholic representation of the virgin mother. Sheila declared, "Well, it's a very lovely Italian image ... I like it for the detail and the artwork and the Italian influence." As participants viewed this photograph, they did not ask clarifying questions regarding the context, image, or the purpose. Unlike other photographs in the interview protocol that generated many questions specifically associated with context, responses to this photo were direct, clear, short and concise.

**Holding Up Christ**

Figure 6 is a scanned copy of a painting by Father John Guiliani (n. d.) that is reprinted and sold as greeting cards, posters and holy cards by Bridge Building Images, Inc. It presents a representation of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ after he has been taken down from the cross. A description next to the image indicates that his body is supported on the left by "Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, a 17th century Mohawk", and, on the right by "Nicholas Black Elk, the visionary Lakota Medicine Man who when baptized a Catholic became a leading catechist on the Pine Ridge Reservation."

Unlike earlier images in the interview protocol, this picture evoked strong negative feelings for most of the participants. Amanda’s initial response was one of the most descriptive and is representative of responses by other participants.

I just loathe that. It reminds me of stuff that actually happened over here in this land of people being tortured and lynched and put through a lot of pain against their will—and the sorrow of the parents. (pause) Oh, I just loathe that. I really do. This is just a real painful strange image ... and he’s just so naked and you don’t usually see Indian men like that. (pause) I mean we’re not very body shy, but more modest, and its just kind of startling to see that, and it’s kind of hard to tell what happened,
you know? I don’t know what it’s trying to say (pause). It’s a painful picture (pause). It’s a strange picture too. It’s almost like there’s a story there, but I don’t know what it is.


Other participants echoed Amanda’s sentiments by expressing notions of pain and suffering, and cultural dislocation. Mikal responded by saying, “It’s disturbing. I see a suffering brought on here. I mean it seems abnormal. It represents suffering of people. It represents suffering of perhaps a way of life being transformed into something that it never was.” For Teresa, it evoked images of bloodshed. “If I came into a church and I saw these things it would—I would immediately associate it with massacre.” This theme of suffering continued in comments made by Sonya during her interview.

It’s very disturbing. First, Mary at the top—poles of the cross are Indian People—Indian Jesus being held up by two converted Indians—both wearing crosses—Mary trying to keep them all together under her cloak. I really don’t like it.

Cory’s response focused on the use of the image of Black Elk.
I really don’t know what to think of it. You know, I think that’s crazy putting Black Elk in there. I understand that Black Elk was a lay priest or preacher, but you know the Indian people were persecuted so badly because of their own religious understanding of the world. Their own ceremonies were banned by law [so] these healers—these medicine people among my people—the only way they could continue to minister to their own people and make sure they were OK was to act as if they threw away the Lakota way and picked up the Christian way, then they had the freedom to go out among the people and hold gatherings …and try to soothe them in their suffering. But not suffering in the sense of how Christianity looks at suffering. They’re suffering because they lost their homes. They lost everything they had, including their livelihoods—their culture—live on one piece of land—wear foreign clothes—speak a foreign language. So, I mean that kind of suffering, not the suffering that Jesus and Tekakwitha and whoever else is in this picture tries to portray of poor Jesus. I think that’s crazy that they’d have Black Elk in there because certainly he is not as well-known as a Christian minister that was just kind of incidental to what his life was all about. Now, the Catholic Church is trying to use that to bring Lakota people in—manipulating people into saying, “Well, if Black Elk was part of us, then you should be part of us too.”

Interview participants also felt that the picture compiled a variety of themes not often seen in Catholic iconography. First, some participants equated the image of Mary with “the Virgin of Guadalupe, the woman who stands above and embraces all … and Spanish or Mexican images of Catholicism” (Teresa). Second, some participants were surprised by the modern attire of the characters in the picture that presented “someone in modern clothes dressed in a picture with an ancient theme” (Rosa). Finally, Elena voiced sentiments expressed by other participants. “Maybe that’s supposed to be Christ? Is he supposed to be Jesus? Because Jesus was a Jew—so they’re confusing people. I don’t know who these people are supposed to be.”

By far, the image of Holding up Christ was the most troubling for participants to this point in the interview. It evoked the swiftest responses and also was viewed or thought about for the shortest time. It seemed to mark a transition point during the interviews from one of viewing images with little emotional response to personalizing the interview and
discussion. Sheila’s comments are instructive for bringing to a close the perspectives on this photo.

What bugs me is they’ve made the Jesus figure so Indian—looking pretty much like [Kateri and Black Elk] are holding him—so the crucifixion has already occurred? Well that’s fine, but why aren’t the things that Indian People have already done sacrificially adequate? That really bugs me a lot. And Jesus was not an Indian.

Apache Christ

Figure 7 by Robert Lentz and distributed through Bridge Building Images, Inc., also is available in posters, holy cards and note cards. It presents the image of an Apache man in traditional dress with minimal representations of Catholic iconography. The halo and inscriptions above his head are the only indications that the drawing is tied to Catholicism. A large poster-sized version of this image hangs above the main altar in a church in New Mexico, and, unlike other Catholic churches that display Christ on the cross, this is the only image on the altar. The church is built in a traditional rectangular style with pews leading to the altar, and there are smaller rooms and alcoves off to the sides of the main aisle with statues and votive candles for worship.

Participants responded to this image in ways that ranged from amazement to disbelief. Of all the images in the interview protocol, this generated the most questions from participants during the interviews. Most were incredulous that such an image existed and commented, “There was an Apache Christ? He was like Christ or are they saying he was Christ?” (Elena). Amanda declared, “What a strange thing to be saying, ‘Apache Christ’. Do we all get one? Is there a Norwegian Christ and a Pomo Christ? You start wondering.” Others voiced, “Why would they do that? I mean if they were really true to their belief systems, why would they disrespect Christ?” (Cory). As a practicing Catholic when asked if she was familiar with the Apache Christ or believed in the image, Rosa speculated, “I wouldn’t believe in it, but I guess there could be. They have him, and if maybe a lot of Apache People are around and felt that this one person, the Apache Christ, was the one that God made for them”.

For all participants, the image provoked consternation and skepticism reflected in their comments and questions. A notation on a holy card that accompanies the image of the Apache Christ references the “reconciliation of the spiritual vision of Native and Christian peoples…the icon celebrates the beauty of Apache culture” a holy man greeting the
sun on the fourth morning of the women's puberty rites" (Bridge Building Images, Inc., 1990). Sonja stated, “This icon was not imaged by Native Peoples. What does it mean ‘reconciliation’? That they made him look Indian? Sacred power is always there. The Christ image does not reveal sacred power. What makes that Christ a prophetic sign?”

**Figure 7.** *Apache Christ* by Robert Lentz (1990) is the eighth image in the photo elicitation protocol and was photographed in a church on an Apache reservation.

Some participants were judicious and circumspect in their comments about the image. Mikal stated,

> Well, I did not know there was an Apache Christ. It seems like a fabrication. It seems like the symbols have been changed. I mean here you have one symbol of Christ and here you have another symbol of Christ. I don’t think you can change a religion and tailor it to meet demographics of certain people.

Many participants alluded to issues of respect for Native Peoples as well as for Catholic beliefs. Teresa declared, “I would think a Catholic person would think this was sacrilegious.” Other participants touched upon issues of respect for revered individuals regardless of Native or
Christian background. Changing the image of someone was seen as disrespectful to that person. The sense of "reality in representation" was viewed as important for many of the participants, and it raised issues of how symbols and images are understood.

My most immediate reaction is, yeah he’s brown-skinned and he’s dressed in what probably looks like traditional Apache clothing, but look at his facial characteristics. He’s just another brown European. They didn’t even give him the respect of painting his face to look like a real Indian. (Cory).

Elena’s comment regarding truthfulness in representation is illustrative. “I believe Jesus was supposed to be a Jew. So if somebody doesn’t know that and sees this I don’t think it’s OK to misrepresent it...I just think, let the truth show whatever it is.” Some participants were more critical of the Church’s motives.

I almost wonder if there wasn’t some kind of manual that these priests got that said three things you have to do. “You’re going to find some holy person that’s from that group, and build it up as an icon, and then display it” (Elida).

**Overview of Participants’ Reflections**

An overview of participants’ responses and data analysis provides insights. First, the most striking occurrence during these interviews was the predominance of questions asked by interview participants. This was particularly true as participants examined images that were ambiguous or generated strong feelings. Participants asked context, rhetorical, and clarifying questions as well as questions regarding the researcher’s opinions and insights. They wanted to know the location of the image in the church, and asked, “How is it set up?” “What are those in the background?” “Who are these people?” More importantly, they asked questions related to purpose. They wanted to know, “Why these images were there, who put them there, and who painted them?” Participants asked, “Who placed the images in the churches?” and “What do the people in the community think about them?” Authorship and identity were important to understand prior to giving a response

Participants viewed the images and symbols as token reflections and attempts at an integration of beliefs, and felt it was an attempt to get people into the church. Sonya conceded, “It’s almost as if the church is saying, ‘We can be generous and include some of your stuff, but we don’t...”
have to give up who we are.” Often participants thought such as, “people [are] searching for more meaning and spiritual understanding of what the world should mean … and trying to blend them. But that’s an indication to me that Christianity is failing them” (Cory).

Finally, as the interviews proceeded, participants’ voiced a sense of ambiguity, confusion and disbelief, as well as questions regarding motive for the placement of images and incredulity regarding their existence. Traditional Catholic symbols and images that are familiar to Catholic participants became unusual and alien when altered to include Native themes. Elena’s questions express the sentiments and reflections of other participants. “So this is supposed to be a cross? That’s God and this is Jesus? Is that what it’s saying?”

With insights from the participants’ responses, and analysis of the photographic images, we turn to a discussion of the perceptions and interpretations. Participant responses to the interview images provided evidence of a significant difference in the degree of response, and will be discussed based on the categories illuminated from the data analysis.

**DISCUSSION OF PERCEPTIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

"Respect must be given and shown to all that is creation. Without respect for self and all that is creation, the Aboriginal person is unable to live his or her life to the fullest and will be unable to fulfill his or her purpose for being.” Dennis McPherson²⁰

We begin the discussion with the six photographs (Figures 3 through 7) from the interviews, and then move to an analysis of the photographs from multiple contexts as seen in Figures 1 and 2. Responses to the six images from the interview protocol are grouped into three categories based on the degree of emphasis or variety of responses given to each symbol by the participants. The first category includes Figure 3, Eagle and Mary; Figure 4, PAX sign with feathers; and the Mother and Child image. Category 2 includes only one photograph, the one termed a “Native Church”. Category 3 includes Figure 6, Holding up Christ, and Figure 7, Apache Christ.

**Interview Responses to the Photographs**

**Category 1**

Images in the first category reflect similar degrees of response by participants. In the Eagle and Mary image in Figure 3, participants

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separated the two images as distinct representations of important Native and Catholic traditions. Often, participants noted that the two images didn’t belong together, and that the presentation was simplistic without the complexity of design or integration that is often seen in other arrangements. However, all participants expressed limited emotional response or positive or negative feelings toward the images.

Discussion of the image of the eagle provided insights into its use. Although participants recognized it as an eagle and an important American Indian symbol, typically it was not associated with representations of that more specific eagle. More often, participants associated it with Mexican or mythic images. For instance, Cory indicated that eagles are “a little more benevolent, but this one’s face looks mean and ugly—a very Hispanic or Spanish interpretation of an eagle.” It seems understandable that participants’ responses would evidence less of a reaction to an image that is not what they perceive the image to look like. In addition, the relationship between the images was viewed as less direct in relation to personal experiences and therefore perceived as less offensive.

The second image, Figure 4, PAX sign with feathers, also appeared to generate minimal responses. Participants felt it was less complicated to understand, more familiar in the sense of something seen in classrooms, and a transparent attempt to create associations between the two traditions. It was a decoration that would have had more meaning if it had been put there by an “Indian child”, but was viewed as a display and a way to “Indian it up” more than anything related directly to beliefs or unfamiliar experiences.

The Mother and Child image surfaced the least amount of discomfort for participants, and they spoke about it with confidence and knowledge. They understood where the image came from, who made the representation, what tradition it represented, and the purpose of the picture. In fact, no questions were asked seeking information about the context or the opinions of the researcher. This was a striking difference from discussions of other images in the interview protocol.

**Category 2**

Figure 5 is the only image in this category, and participants identified it as a “Native Church”. The image elicited responses and perspectives that were more complex and difficult to understand from the perspective of what it represented and to whom. For very few participants, the image was offensive. However, it was most so for Cory, the only Lakota interviewed. Other participants qualified their answers by wondering who put it in the

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church; yet, they saw it as respectful of the surrounding Native community.

The number of questions asked by participants' rose significantly as they examined this image. They were interested to know things such as, "Who decorated it?" and "How is this a Catholic Church?" Questions asking for clarification increased as well as questions related to the purpose and context of the church. Most striking was the difference in interpretation based on the notion that this was an integration of two traditions, more Native than Catholic, and that participants felt they would feel comfortable worshipping there. The interpretation of this church as a "Native Church" appeared to have more to do with decoration of the church context rather than specific Native or Catholic traditions.

As a "Native Church", participants based interpretations on what was visible in the image, things that were seen as inviting and respectful such as the Pendleton blanket on the altar and the wall decorations. This could be interpreted as the result of a combination of factors. First, participants who were not Lakota believed it to be a representation of the community that surrounded the church, and therefore, must have been at minimum supported by that community or placed there by community members. Catholic relationships with Native communities over the last 300 years have fostered a mixture of understandings of religious practice and experience, presumably enough to qualify this as a Native church.

Second, the image was seen as "inclusive" and respectful by many of the interview participants, a place that "invites you to think—the intimidation factor's not there." Often discussions about the "Native Church" turned to belief in the Catholic Church, but absent the overall imposition of the organization of the church that typically enfolds and co-opts Native traditions into that context. It became a Native Church because it was comforting and reflected the interaction of the community. It seemed harder for participants to separate personal experiences with the Catholic Church and with the photograph of this church. The next category presents a discussion of Figures 6 and 7 as significantly different in the content and substance of the images.

**Category 3**

Figure 6, *Holding Up Christ*, and Figure 7, *Apache Christ* were the most offensive images to all participants. They freely responded to the images, and, unlike other images, their responses were often immediate. Although a few participants were circumspect in their response, others were more vocal and viewed the images as disrespectful and loathsome. Participants expressed a high level of ambiguity regarding the meaning of the images
and to their purposes. In addition, participants perceived the multiple images in the pictures that blended traditions as confusing the meaning of the symbol or image for both traditions.

In the *Holding Up Christ* image, participants often saw the suffering of Christ as happening a long time ago and not equivalent to the current day-to-day suffering of Native Peoples. It also was interpreted as a representation of the historical weight of oppression on Indian Peoples. As well, in the *Apache Christ*, participants wanted to know what they were trying to do by putting the image in the church, and they wanted to know what relationship was being portrayed. There were multiple levels of bewilderment evidenced by participants, both practicing Catholic and non-Catholic. Participants were most interested in the purpose and why the Catholic Church would disrespect one of their most sacred people.

Finally, of any of the images viewed during the interviews, these two generated the most rhetorical questions and questions regarding context. This may indicate evidence for, not only the confusing nature of the symbols and images and the resulting ambiguity in the minds of participants, but also the significance of fostering confusion around issues of purpose, motive, intent, and meaning.

**Image Analysis from the Church Photographs**

Data analysis of the photographs from churches in Arizona, Nebraska, New Mexico, Alaska, California, and South Dakota revealed the degree of incorporation of Native symbols was not systematic, but varied across missions and churches. Often, the use of symbols was evident in a limited, obscure or superficial way as church decorations. For instance, in churches where the use of Native themed symbols or images was not pervasive, but were based on the reservation, there may be a small picture or image in the back of the church or in a small alcove away from the main altar. In others, small statues or artifacts such as an abalone shell used to hold holy water were evident. We might attribute this to the church's degree of affiliation with the community, pastoral decision-making, or community members' influence and participation in the church.

As reflected in Figure 1, the similarity of images across and between churches was striking, and can be interpreted as an attempt at a pan-Indian Catholicism in North America. This unification under one or two images has been useful in other areas of the world such as Mexico, South America, and Korea among others. However, the Catholic Church in Native North America has not followed the same paths for a variety of reasons. Yet, with the advent of Vatican II in the 1960s, this has changed. Although this is a relatively short period of time (forty years) when
compared to 500 years of association in Mexico, attempts to utilize one or two identifying images such as Tekakwitha and Black Elk in Figure 6 may be increasing. According to Vecsey (1996), at regional and national meetings of the National Tekakwitha Conference, the message is:

A person can be Indian and Catholic simultaneously; however, some of the California Indians find that the conference tries to establish a pan-Indian Catholic ritualism that is basically Plains Indian in form, one that flattens all other modes of expression (p. 324).

Although data analysis generally focused on images of Tekakwitha, this assessment seems to be accurate when examining reservation churches across American Indian Nations in the United States.

Pan-Indian symbolism, such as representations of Tekakwitha (Figure 1), was present across communities. Another aspect in evidence was the use of reservation specific symbols (Figure 2). This appropriation and use of context specific local symbols may be related to the Church’s attempts at a pan-Indian Catholicism as well. For instance, as participants viewed Figure 5, most assumed it to be a Native Church in service of the local people and a place that they would feel comfortable coming in to pray. Yet, Cory voiced his dismay with the church and the way it incorporated specifically Lakota symbols, placed them in an improper context, and used them inappropriately. This tended to divide participants in the assessment of the church even as they continued to wonder how the church came to look like this and who decorated it. This could be interpreted as a way of dividing North American Native Peoples by utilizing colonizing methods of the past in combination with ethics typical of Native communities. This ethic is respect for the beliefs of others and reluctance to speak against those beliefs. Therefore, during the interview, those most disturbed by the images were from the surrounding Native Nation and community.

For members of other Indian Nations, the images seemed to invite entrance, and they responded by saying, ‘This is a Native Church’. Thus, Native Peoples across communities felt encouraged and invited to come in to the church, contributing to a separation and misunderstanding of the use of the symbols and images that are specific to only one Nation. Ultimately, this contributes to the notion of a pan-Indian Catholicism that presents the Church as respectful of individual communities, yet brings all communities together under the umbrella of Catholicism. Maybe it is as a number of participants rhetorically asked, “Why don’t they just leave?”
the end of her interview, Sonya concludes, “I believe we should live more in the tribal way...Christians should remove their presence from the Indian reservations. Let things go on the way they are meant to, whatever that means. I don’t know if it is possible, but it is a big part of colonization.”

CONCLUSION

“Welcome, John Paul II, to these lands that originally belonged to our ancestors and that we do not possess today. In their name and ours, survivors of the massacre and genocide...we declare you guest and brother”

Message from 2,500 aborigines to the Pope, April 8, 1987. 21

Returning to the original purposes of this study, this article attempts to examine the use and appropriation of symbols and religious traditions in Catholic churches and missions on American Indian reservations in the United States. It endeavors to privilege and illuminate the perspectives of Native women and men regarding religious expression and symbol usage, those whose voices are often unheard. Through knowledgeable participants coupled with a photographic record of church contexts, we are able to examine this complex relationship between social contexts, and attitudes and beliefs from the perspective of what is thought and understood by individuals within communities.

Photographic research examines the space between what is seen and what is felt. By examining the contexts of images and symbols, we have the opportunity to consider underlying assumptions, and gain insights into the meaning and structure of situated action (Wagner, 1979). Visual imagery provides a concrete example of phenomena, that while reflective of the photographer’s point-of-view, also is a very real representation of what “is” and an explicit contextual referent. Without this kind of visual representation combined with the perceptions of individuals, it is not possible to answer the questions “what is?” and “what does it look like?” During the interviews, the photographs tied perceptions and feelings to real world contexts and illuminated culturally specific information and beliefs. The collection of photographs from churches across states provided information regarding multiple contexts as well as the possibility for drawing larger conclusions concerning the Church’s actions in reservation communities. Although motivations are difficult to ascertain, it seems likely that the notion of unification under a pan-Indian Catholicism


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is a significant attempt by the Church at increasing the sense of ownership for Native Catholics and in the communities, and comes with a price for Native communities.

Some of the most troubling themes to surface in this study were the confusion and ambiguity that arose in the minds of the participants as they encountered the images. This was evidenced through the disproportionate amount of questions that surfaced regarding contexts that specifically sought an explanation, and the rhetorical questions that expressed incredulity at the use of the image. One explanation for this occurrence posed in Christian theological circles is that confusion takes place in the minds of “ordinary lay people” who don’t understand the images. Furthermore, we should not expect too much of them since “images and symbols like those used by Christian dialogue theologians must be explained carefully, if they are not to be misunderstood as expressions of syncretism or of general theological liberalism” (Fornberg, 1995, p. 136). However, this attitude of religious arrogance about knowledge and an elitist mentality regarding religious symbols negates the active role viewers take when they encounter symbols, images or texts. Certainly, for the participants in this study as well as for my own initial response to the images, confusion and uncertainty to their meaning was based in knowledge and understanding of the Catholic and Native contexts to which they were associated. An alternative explanation may be that the images themselves are confusing and ambiguous and are so purposefully. Although this idea needs further investigation, the use of symbols in inappropriate contexts or in unfamiliar ways often is done with the intent to confuse the viewer and create an ambiguous circumstance surrounding the image.

Returning to the original metaphor for this article, answering the question of “why don’t they leave?” may have been a moot point. However, it reveals the complexity when considering the ‘saving faith and saving face’ metaphor that began the discussion. With the change in the Church’s stance toward acceptance and reconciliation as stated in Vatican II, missions on reservations have been forced to find ways to make amends and save face for past wrong doings. We see the incorporation of the Pipe in church services, the use of “Indian” decorations, and the creation of an Apache Christ. These “apologizing” efforts have been construed as attempts to retain some of the viability in the communities, and as Sonya noted in her interview “apologies are always part of reconciliation.” Belief in the “reconciliation of the spiritual vision of Native and Christian peoples” is largely a Catholic idea as indicated in the Holding Up Christ image, in which the central Christ figure is supported
by two Native People. Reconciliation can be interpreted as a way of saving face in communities that have been the victims of attempts at cultural destruction, yet the Church retains the central role of authority. In other words, reconciliation must be attempted through the avenue of apology. The ultimate purpose may be saving the faith of those previously converted as well as enticing others into the church through the use of images that make people feel welcome.

Most significant, are the underlying assumptions of the saving faith and saving face metaphor in an era of apology, faith and kindness. These efforts may be interpreted as a more pernicious and deadly assault on American Indian cultural viability as well as a significant reason for not only 'why they don't leave' but why leaving is most necessary. As noted in the introduction, the notion that American Indian traditions have survived through resistance to persecution by pushing against the assault of Christianity and maintaining traditions, often in secret, is important since it isolated Native traditions from the direct influence of the Church and pushed peoples to fight for survival. Ironically, the lack of acceptance by the Catholic Church may have supported the survival of Native traditions through efforts of resistance. However, with current efforts, it is more difficult to resist someone who is apologizing and "making saints of one of your own such as Kateri Tekakwitha and Black Elk" (Cory). These efforts play into the mentality that "my people are not so bad and they are accepting one of us as holy or important" (Cory). For some of the participants, if Native traditions are to survive, it will require a "readjustment of the intensity of resistance" to the Church's apologizing and proselytizing efforts. Thus, the necessity of continued resistance ultimately may be more significant than waiting for answers to why they don't leave.

Although this article begins present some of the circumstances of the Catholic Church's relationship with Native communities, other questions remain difficult to answer. "How will future generations view the adoption of Native symbols?" and "How will the Church's motivations be perceived?" Most importantly, "what continuing effects will "inculturation" efforts have on Native traditions?" These questions cannot be answered simply or easily. For some, the Church's efforts are construed as the creation of American Indian Catholicism in service of the people. Alternatively, they are a method of "controlling and civilizing," reminiscent of historical attempts to Christianize and convert. Regardless, authority and power continues to reside in the Church's emissaries and clergy, yet the use of Native symbols, articles, and traditions within churches are a way to "make the people feel comfortable" and "place a
superficial veneer on the gospel” (Vecsey, 1996, p. 381). More than likely, the present move to join Native and Catholic theology into a blended amalgam of differing philosophies under the umbrella of Catholicism is in reality the same historic agenda of assimilation and acculturation albeit under another name.

John Grant (1984) indicates, “syncretistic movements can be interpreted not as rejections of Christianity but as attempts to appropriate it on terms consonant with Native modes of thought and relevant to perceived needs” (p. 263). Although this may be a correct assessment of syncretistic movements in general, this study reveals that Native traditions are housed within and under the scope of the Church. Grant (1984) also cautions, however, “if one looks honestly at the record, one is nagged by a suspicion that what was embraced was so different from Christianity as the missionaries understood it as to be classified more properly as imitation of its externals or, at best, as a blend neither quite Christian nor quite traditional” (p. 246). This may not address current conditions fully since the colonizing efforts of the Church continue, and, similar to previous times, necessitates the “elimination of the culture and value system of the colonized and the imposition of values and culture of the colonizer” (Tinker, 1993, p. 119). Today, this is accomplished under the guise of reconciliation and apology. It is yet to be determined how these more recent efforts by the Church will be perceived either in terms of reconciliation, integration, or in the end abandonment. If past assessments of Native and Catholic relationships continue as accurate reflections of current interactions between the two traditions, there must be further investigation, thought and reflection, and most importantly, resistance.

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