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# The Impact of Dakota Missions on the Development of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862

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By

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the relationships between three groups of people on the mid-nineteenth century Minnesota frontier: evangelical Protestant missionaries, the Dakota who converted to the Christian faith and lifestyle taught by these missionaries, and the Dakota who remained traditional in their outlook and lifestyle. It does this through an analysis of the impact of these relationships on the development of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. As is made clear through the use of both primary and secondary sources, the missionaries helped create tensions within the Dakota community, tensions expressed through shifting social structures, argument, alienation, and, at times, violence. As traditional Dakota begin and conduct their war against the government and Euroamerican settlers, hoping to reclaim what they have lost, they regard the converted Dakota as their enemies as well, and expand the war to include attacks against them.

# Acknowledgments

My process of becoming an anthropologist and an ethnohistorian has been protracted and challenging, but I have been helped along the way by many people. I wish to offer special thanks to:

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can ever stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

(William Stafford, *The Way It Is*, St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1998)

My interest in the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 emerged in the early 1990s, when I discovered Duane Schulz's *Over the Earth I Come*. I cannot explain how curiosities arise, or passions develop, but I began to read further in the area, collecting a wide range of new and used books that addressed the general topic.

In 1995, I moved from Omaha, Nebraska, to Northfield, Minnesota, to be closer to family, and to continue my pastoral ministry, but also to begin work on a novel that focused on the war. In telling this story, I located events at Lake Shetek, and added a twelfth family to the eleven who actually lived there. I began to tell the story of a fictitious woman whose husband and children were killed in the attack there, and I wrote 130 pages before shelving the project. I'd discovered in the writing that I was too obsessed with historical accuracy to be able to let the story itself unfold. I could not make a passing reference to grasses encircling Lake Shetek, for example, without identifying and describing all of the grasses themselves. For me, good historical fiction is

consistently accurate, and I discovered that I could not meet my own standards without collapsing under their weight. Beyond that, I'd written myself into a corner. I did not know how to move the story past my protagonist's grief and despair.

My interest in the dynamics and experiences of the war remained, however, and I gradually realized that, although I still wanted to write a book, the book needed to be non-fiction. I continued to read and research, and made an especially helpful connection with Bob Burgess, the Executive Director of the Brown County Historical Society. He introduced me to others interested in similar research, especially John LaBatte, a descendent of Francis LaBathe who was killed at the attack on the Lower Sioux Agency. I participated in two tours John conducted of the primary agencies, missions, and battle sites along the Minnesota River.

In spite of my consistent interest in the war, I never actually began to write about it. On the one hand, I was absorbed by more immediate professional work. On the other, I simply found procrastination easy. However, in 2007, I entered MNSU-Mankato's Anthropology program, and soon realized that I wanted to do ethnohistorical research about the war. Specifically, I wanted to analyze aspects of the relationships between Protestant missionaries and the Dakota.

I became especially interested in the work of two men, Dr. Thomas Williamson and Rev. Stephen Riggs. I think that interest was rooted in the research I'd done along the Minnesota River; both men served at sites from Traverse des Sioux to Lac Qui Parle. Too, both men worked within the Congregational and Presbyterian mission system known as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM). My interest continued to deepen as I began to study two books written by Riggs: *Dakota*

*Grammar with Texts and Ethnography*, and *Tah-koo Wah-kan: The Gospel Among the Dakota*.

*Dakato Grammar* is an early anthropological study of the Dakota people. In fact, the book was edited and prefaced by James Owen Dorsey, an ethnologist who studied Sioux life and customs. Riggs' primary focus was linguistic in nature, particularly because he and Williamson spent years working to translate the Bible into Dakota. However, a third of the book is an ethnographic analysis.

As will be made clear, Riggs has been criticized for his assessment of and reactions to Dakota culture. Although *Tah-koo Wah-kan* is vulnerable to such criticism, Riggs clearly tries to carefully represent the character of Dakota religion. His reactions to it are surprisingly empathetic. He evaluates from a distinctly evangelical Christian perspective, but he is as impressed by Dakota spirituality as he is troubled by it. For me, his ambiguity is part of his appeal.

As I engaged in general research, I became increasingly aware of the complexities of the war—both in its development and in its expression. The immediate causes were economic, but the economic catastrophe faced by the Dakota was rooted in a soil of power struggles, greed, betrayal, deceit, good intentions, affection, and sincerity—a very complex mixture. What's more, the development of the war of 1862 was profoundly affected by realities of the Civil War, then in its second year.

One primary question began to drive my research: how did Protestant Christian missions, particularly those along the upper Minnesota River, impact relationships between the Dakota and the U.S. Government, especially as they pertained to the War of 1862? I became increasingly convinced that the impact was significant. As the

missionaries worked among the Dakota, the Indians gradually formed two groups: those who did and those who did not convert. The former, referred to as "farmer Indians," accepted both Christian teachings and a Euroamerican lifestyle. They took on the dress, and even hair styles of the missionaries and others around them. They moved into houses, began farming, sent their children to mission schools, and abandoned their prior spiritual understandings and patterns. Those who refused to convert, the "blanket Indians," retained the spiritual, economic, and kinship and relationship patterns that had been long established among the Dakota.

Tensions grew between the two groups as these changes developed, but the tensions were exacerbated by economic differences. The farmer Indians, having accepted the required cultural changes, were rewarded with a somewhat higher standard of living. However, due to government payment delays, and arbitrary allotment decisions, the blanket Indians faced starvation. They finally responded to their circumstance with violence. Many of them regarded the farmer Indians as their enemies, since those Dakota had aligned themselves with the Euroamericans.

As I continued working within the master's program, I clarified my topic further. My focus is on this triangle of relationships, reflecting the complexity of circumstances inherent in the surrounding events. These are the relationships that existed between the traditional Dakota and the missionaries, between the converted Dakota and the missionaries, and between the two groups of Indians themselves. I will analyze the impact of these relationships on the development of the war.

No one conducts research in a vacuum. I have spent thirty years as an ordained minister, and my training and work as a clergywoman reflect my interest in human

spiritual journeys. Too, the education I have received as an anthropologist reflects my interest in cross-cultural religious and spiritual studies. I have also done extensive study in history, including a master's degree in church history that I completed in 1991. Ethnohistory provides an avenue for me to blend these interests.

As I indicated above, Duane Schulz's book was instrumental in the development of my interest in this area. The very earliest seeds were planted, however, while I was still in high school, when I read Dee Brown's book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970). Brown's book was transformative for me. The assumptions I'd grown up with about Native American life, about "white-red" relations, about American history itself, no longer applied

In some ways, I have come full circle, but that image is not really accurate. I am traveling a spiral. I no longer assume, as I did when reading Brown's book, that history is simple. Although it is true that the Dakota, for example, were tricked and robbed, their culture nearly destroyed, it is also true that human motives are complicated, even messy, and that these complexities permeate all relationships. When I was young, I believed that the settlers (and cowboys, of course) were the entitled ones, not only the victors, but the good guys. After reading Brown's book, for many years I held the opposite view, that the only good guys were the Indians themselves, that absolutely every interaction on the part of the government (and the settlers) was intended to inflict harm of one kind or another on them.

I still believe that the Dakota, as well as the other tribes, were profoundly and systematically abused by the U.S. government, the tribes and their lives systematically deconstructed. Furthermore, the policies and the history of the policies on the part of the

government insured that catastrophe was inevitable on the frontier, including the Minnesota frontier.

All of this was exacerbated by, and, to a much smaller degree than I'd hoped, mitigated by, the work of the missionaries. This is the particular complexity in which I am interested. The missionaries were committed to improving the quality of life among the Dakota. Their letters and records make clear that they came to love many of those they sought to convert. Unfortunately, they were committed to their own definitions of life, and those definitions led to destruction and despair.

Looking at the triangle of relationships in which I am interested, the relationships between the blanket Indians and the missionaries, the farmer Indians and the missionaries, and the two Dakota groups themselves, requires the recognition of complexity and nuance. To analyze the impact of these relationships on the development of the 1862 war requires an even deeper recognition. Without it, little can be understood, and nothing gained.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

Extensive resources exist regarding the interactions between the Dakota and the missionaries, including those provided by the missionaries themselves. Even more resources exist concerning both Dakota life itself and the establishment of trading, military, and farming settlements in the Minnesota Territory. These resources are either primary or secondary in nature. However, nothing has been written describing the impact of mission work on the development of the war.. It has become common to refer to this as Minnesota's Civil War. The divisions referred to here, however, existed between Euroamericans and Dakota. An even deeper, and in some ways ultimately more devastating civil war, was fought between the Dakota themselves.

Gary Clayton Anderson's oral history anthology, *Through Dakota Eyes*, provides a starting point for analysis. Anderson has collected powerful statements from Dakota who described their perspectives on, and their own involvement in, the war. These assessments were provided by both men and women, and by both full- and mixed-bloods. Some of the speakers are concerned with exonerating themselves, if questions about their culpability existed. Many others describe the help they provided settlers, and even military, often at significant risk to themselves. Unfortunately, some who offered such protection did not survive to tell their own stories.

In one particularly tragic situation, an Indian named Chaska provided protection to Sarah Wakefield and her children. In her book, *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees: A Narrative of Indian Captivity*, Wakefield describes this protection. Chaska asks her to

speak in his defense, knowing that that need will arise when the inevitable military reprisals occur. Wakefield tries to do so, but fails. Chaska is one of the 38 hung in Mankato—perhaps because his name is common, and he might have been confused with another Chaska. It is also possible that Wakefield's pleas went unheeded due to rumors of her relationship with Chaska. Many captives accused her of engaging in a sexual relationship with him in order to insure protection for herself and her children. In fact, one of Wakefield's purposes in writing her book was to explain and interpret her experiences, and insist that her behavior was appropriate and acceptable.

One of the most significant secondary resources is Mary Lethert Wingerd's *North Country: The Making of Minnesota*. Wingerd's book is actually an ethnohistorical analysis of Minnesota's history. She carefully, and clearly, describes the interactions between the Euromericans and the Dakota, beginning with French explorers and traders. Wingerd's purpose is not to detail a typical state history, one which focuses on white settlement, even if sensitive to Native American experiences and concerns. Instead, her book analyzes cultural interactions within an historical context, and so is thoroughly ethnohistorical in character.

Wingerd, by the way, provides a quite negative assessment of Stephen Riggs' involvement with the Dakota—especially as she discusses his efforts in the weeks following the war. Riggs worked as an interpreter for the Army during the trials of the Dakota warriors. Wingerd argues that the Dakota came to so mistrust him that, following the trials, the great majority of Dakota who converted, converted to Catholicism or Episcopalianism. They refused to join the system established by Riggs and Williamson.

Although Williamson did not apparently work as a translator at the trials, he was clearly regarded with suspicion because he was Rigg's closest colleague.

Another missionary, Samuel W. Pond, arrived in the Minnesota Territory in 1834, to begin his work as a missionary. Pond proved to be especially interested in, and sympathetic to, Dakota life and belief. He spent a year living and traveling with a Dakota group, absorbing all he could from the experience. He later described his observations in *Dakota Life in the Upper Midwest*, an ethnography first published as *Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834*.

Pond's book was not published until 1906, but it was based on a draft he completed between 1865-75. It is, quite simply, a wonderful book. Pond certainly possessed some of the attitudes typical of his era, but he is respectful of the Dakota, and although he is writing as a Protestant missionary, his analyses are more typical of an anthropologist. He describes not only religious life and rituals, but also economics, tribal relationships (including warfare), governing structures, poetry and music, customs, recreation, and kinship patterns.

Thomas Williamson's descriptions of his life and ministry are found within his ABCFM reports, and in letters. Riggs, and his wife Mary, have left much more complete descriptions—even though Riggs' early journals, sermons, letters, and records were destroyed in a house fire in 1854. When he wrote *Mary and I: Forty Years with the Sioux* (published in 1880), he relied primarily on his own memory and on Mary's letters home, which her family had kept. Those letters were themselves later collected by Maida Leonard Riggs, Mary's great-granddaughter, in *A Small Bit of Bread and Butter: Letters from the Dakota Territory, 1832-1869* (1996).

Stephen Riggs joined Thomas Williamson and others in translating the Bible into the Dakota language, but he worked on additional projects as well. Drawing deeply upon the linguistic studies of Samuel Pond, Riggs published an initial dictionary and grammar in 1852. In 1890, decades of his linguistic work were collected and published posthumously in *A Dakota-English Dictionary*. In 1893, the Department of the Interior, which had published the *Dictionary*, published another important work, *Dakota Grammar: With Texts and Ethnography*, not only a study of Dakota grammar and myths, but also an anthropological description of Dakota life.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, Riggs' most important book is *Tah-koo Wah-kan; or, The Gospel Among the Dakotas* (1869). *Tah-koo Wah-kan* is Riggs' primary assessment of Dakota life and religion. Although writing from a Christian perspective, Riggs goes into great detail in his descriptions of Dakota existence. In an introduction to the book, S. A. Treat, Secretary of the ABCFM, summarizes Riggs' goal for the book, surprisingly ethnographic in character: "He has sought to give a faithful and instructive account of a form of paganism that is soon to pass away, so that those who desire in coming years to study the customs, religion, modes of thought, and manner of life of this large tribe, may have the requisite facilities therefor" (xxxii). The reference to paganism is certainly condescending, but Riggs' effort to record such information reflects an openness and intention characteristic of Franz Boas and his students.

In *Tah-koo Wah-kan*, Riggs lays groundwork early on by attempting to describe the Dakota understanding of *wakan.* (It is important to note that Riggs draws heavily upon materials provided by James W. Lynd and Gideon Pond.) Essentially, he argues, the familiar historical reference to the "Great Spirit" misrepresents the essential aspect of

Dakota belief—the term being far too Christian, and even personal, in its character. Rather, *wakan* is the primary force within the universe: ". . .even the commonest sticks and stones have a spiritual essence which must be reverenced as a manifestation of the all-pervading mysterious power that fills the universe" (56-7). He later adds,

> The Dakota religion has no temples and no proper priesthood. It is, consequently, deficient in the organizational and ceremonial which give unity and power. This is, however, compensated for in part by an inner power. Each individual is a priest, and may receive revelations from the gods, and can offer his own sacrifices (86-7).

Having said this, however, Riggs understands that a group of special religious leaders exists: the *wakan* men and women (or sorcerers or jugglers, as the missionaries most often refer to them). These have been misnamed "medicine men"; they do not simply provide healing. "According to their own story," Riggs writes, "they are not members of the human family, though in human form; they are incarnations of the gods" (87). He soon makes a striking comment, especially so in the context of this thesis: "But, honestly or dishonestly, they are the champions of their pagan religion, the teachers of its traditions and rites, and, by nature, education, and position, are the inevitable foes of another faith. Such have they proved themselves against Christianity" (89). A much more complete description of Riggs' analysis follows in a later section.

The writings of Riggs and Williamson, of course, exist within the extensive context of primary and secondary missionary sources. The ABCFM, for example, expected its missionaries to provide annual reports, and excerpts from such reports are included below. Although Catholic missions do not lie within the scope of this thesis,

Jesuit missionaries, globally, provided a remarkable record of their ministries in their similar reports, *Jesuit Relations*.

Formal autobiographies were another genre. Samuel Pond described his life and work in *Two Volunteer Missionaries Among the Dakotas, or, The Story of the Labors of Samuel W. and Gideon H. Pond.* Still a third genre was that of personal journals, such as S. D. Hinman's, *Journal of the Rev. S. D. Hinman, Missionary to the Santee Sioux Indians and Taopi.*

Secondary resources also abound. Within the context of Minnesota missions, Jon Willand's *Lac Qui Parle: Its Missionaries, Traders, and Indians* is one example. *John P. Williamson: A Brother to the Sioux*, by Winifred Williamson Barton, is another. Anne Beiser Allen's 2008 biography of Whipple, *And the Wilderness Shall Bloom*, provides a very recent example.

Like Riggs, Mary Henderson Eastman was another early ethnographer. Eastman lived at Ft. Snelling with her husband, Seth, who eventually became post commander, and she collected oral histories and tales from the Dakota also living in the area. Her most significant book is *Dahcotah: or, Life and Legends of the Sioux* (1849). Eastman's book is important because it was one of the earliest ethnographic descriptions of the Dakota. Her primary informant was Checkered Cloud, "the medicine woman," who often visited Eastman, especially after discovering the other woman's interest in the Dakota (26).

Three later ethnographies also describe traditional Dakota life and belief, although do so from the perspective of descendants. Amos E. Oneroad and Alanson B. Skinner, both trained anthropologists, wrote *Being Dakota: Tales and Traditions of the Sisseton and Wahpeton*. The book was not published until 2003, when it was edited by

Laura L. Anderson; Skinner had died suddenly in a car accident in 1925, and Oneroad never finished the manuscript. However, the information included, if incomplete, is of great value. The authors describe social and military organizations, material culture, rituals and kinship structures, as well as provide 42 tales. (The list contains 19 stories of Iktomi, the spider; three stories of Mastina, the hare; and 20 other stories, including "Turtle and his Warparty," "The Origin of the Medicine Dance," and "Contest Between Thunder-bird and Monster.")

The second ethnography is *The Dakota Way of Life*, written by Ella Cara Deloria. Deloria was a member of a prestigious Dakota family, and one of Boas' students. Although Margaret Mead supported Deloria's work by submitting it for publication, it was not actually published until 2007. Deloria's book discusses social patterns, and the growth of children, but it is especially valuable in its description of the Dakota kinship system.

The third ethnography is also an autobiographical work, written by Charles Eastman, a Dakota and an anthropologist who lived from 1858-1939. The text used, *Living in Two Worlds: The American Indian Experience*, is edited by Michael Oren Fitzgerald, and actually includes three of Eastman's books: *Life in the Deep Woods*, *Cultures in Collision*, and *The Soul of the Indian.* Unlike either Oneroad or Deloria, Eastman was born before the War of 1862. He was, it should be noted, a grandson of Seth Eastman. During the chaos surrounding the events of the War, four-year old Eastman and members of his family fled to Canada, and the family retained vivid memories of the circumstances. At one point, in *Life in the Deep Woods*, Eastman quotes an uncle who describes the arrival and work of the missionaries:

> There were some praying-men who came to us some time before the trouble arose. They observed every seventh day as a holy day. On that day they met in a house that they had built for that purpose, to sing, pray, and speak of their Great Mystery. I was never in one of these meetings. I understand that they had a large book from which they read. By all accounts they were very different from all other whites we have known, for these never observed any such day, and we never knew them to pray, neither did they ever tell us of their Great Mystery (93).

Other personal histories are important here. The first is Bishop Henry B. Whipple's autobiography, *Lights and Shadows of a Long Episcopate* (1899). Here, Whipple discusses the development of his life and ministry, particularly focusing on his many years of service in Minnesota. Although Whipple did not arrive in the state until 1859, he was instrumental in establishing and nurturing Episcopalian missions among both the Dakota and the Ojibwa. As is well-documented, Whipple was especially important in obtaining stays of execution for 265 of the 303 Dakota scheduled to be hung. The diocesan seal for Minnesota still depicts a peace pipe and a broken tomahawk resting beneath a cross, the symbol of ministry within the denomination. Another perspective on Whipple's life is offered in Anne Beiser Allen's *And the Wilderness Shall Bloom: Henry Benjamin Whipple, Churchman, Educator, Advocate for the Indian* (2008).

Before collaborating with Alan R. Woolworth in *Through Dakota Eyes*, Gary Clayton Anderson produced a biography of Little Crow, entitled *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux* (1986). The book is comprehensive, and includes a detailed section of notes to provide documentation for his arguments, as well as a source list for further study.

A more recent biography, *Cut Nose: Who Stands on a Cloud*, was published in 2006 by Loren Dean Boutin. Boutin provides the story of one of the bitterest opponents

to the presence of both missionaries and settlers. Cut Nose was a brutal man, and he understood the implications of Christian conversions for Dakota life and traditions. In him, brutality and awareness combined. Boutin writes of him:

> Cut Nose became the leader of the Soldier's Lodge and was a very prominent figure in the massacre, personally killing, perhaps, more white people than any other warrior.
>
> At the end of the war he was among the thirty-eight whom were hanged (15).

A remarkable list of resources is available about the war itself, and its development. One category consists of general descriptions. These books discuss events leading up to and following the war, as well during the war itself, and include several significant works. As indicated earlier, Duane Schulz's *Over the Earth I Come* is a particularly helpful discussion of the events. Kenneth Carley's *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* was first published by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1976. It is a classic in the literature. Another book with the similar title, *The Great Sioux Uprising: Rebellion on the Plains August-September 1862*, was written by Jerry Keenan and published in 2003. Although brief, and written for the Battleground America Guides, Keenan's book does include references to the work of Rev. Samuel Hinman, Riggs, Williamson, and Bishop Whipple.

Another category of books consists of those written by settlers who survived the 1862 war, especially those who were located in and near New Ulm. Don Heinrich Tolzmann translated five of these from German. They include: *German Pioneer Accounts of the Great Sioux Uprising of 1862* (2002); *Memories of New Ulm* (2005) by Rudolph Leonhart, a young teacher who describes not only his experiences during the war, but his

earlier experiences upon arriving; *Memories of the Battle of New Ulm* (2001), Marion P. Satterlee's *Outbreak and Massacre by the Dakota Indians in Minnesota in 1862* (2001), and *The Sioux Uprising in Minnesota: Jacob Nix's Eyewitness History* (1994). Tolzmann's translations provide several distinct accounts of events surrounding the war.

In 1926, Bendict Juni published an intriguing booklet called *Held in Captivity: Experiences Related By BENEDICT JUNI, of New Ulm, Minn., as an Indian Captive During the Indian Outbreak in 1862*. Ten years old at the time of the outbreak, Juni was captured near New Ulm and freed at Camp Release. Lavina Eastlick produced a longer booklet, and her account is far more harrowing than Sarah Wakefield's. After her husband and three sons are killed by Dakota at Lake Shetek, Eastlick was severely wounded, and separated from her two other sons, Merton and Johnny. Her skull broken, at times crawling toward help, Eastlick is finally reunited with her sons.

Hank H. Cox's *Lincoln and the Sioux Uprising of 1862* (2005) focuses on the role Lincoln played in the events surrounding the war. Unfortunately, Cox's book is poorly written and frequently inaccurate, so it is ultimately neither a helpful nor a trustworthy resource.

One book is especially pertinent to the topic of this thesis: Elden Lawrence's *The Peace Seekers: Indian Christians and the Dakota Conflict* (2005). Two of Lawrence's chapters, "Minnesota Missionaries" and "The Dakota Christians," provide helpful overviews of their topics, but Lawrence primarily focuses on his great-grandfather, Lorenzo Lawrence, which limits the book's applicability.

Writing a generation after the war, but synthesizing first-person accounts and his own interpretations, Rev. Alexander Berghold, a Catholic priest, published *The Indians'*

*Revenge; or, Days of Horror, Some Appalling Events in the History of the Sioux* in 1891. Although his analysis includes descriptions of the work of Protestant as well as Catholic missionaries, his denominational hostilities toward Protestants severely limits his helpfulness here.

Rev. Edward D. Neill, a historian and, for a time, president of Macalester College, wrote a book entitled *History of Rice County* (1882). The Rice County Historical Society later published one section of that book in *History of the Sioux Massacre of 1862*. Neill's work is comprehensive, and includes discussions of the relationships between the blanket and farmer Indians, and the work of the missionaries. Interestingly, Neill's material provides the only positive description of Thomas Galbraith, the Indian agent along the Minnesota River, which I have come upon. He quotes Galbraith at great length, and includes a particularly interesting comment from him: "'During my term, and up to the time of the outbreak, about one hundred and seventy-five had their hair cut and had adopted the habits and customs of the white men'" (15). Galbraith goes on: "'But the increase of the civilization party and their evident prosperity, only tended to exasperate the Indians of the 'ancient customs' and to widen the breach'" (16).

Other resources provided general background for the writing of this thesis. Evan Jones' *Citadel in the Wilderness: The Story of Fort Snelling and the Northwest Frontier* (1966) describes the development of a military presence in the Minnesota Territory. *Soldier, Settler, and Sioux: Fort Ridgely and the Minnesota River Valley, 1853-1867*, by Paul N. Beck, provides a general history of the Fort, as well as a specific description of the 1862 war. I need to also mention a two-volume travelogue, written by an intriguing Englishman, George W. Featherstonhaugh, *A Canoe Voyage Up the Minnay Sotor with*

*an Account of the Lead and Copper Deposits in Wisconsin; of the Gold Region in the Cherokee Country; and Sketches of Popular Manners* (1847, 1970). While Featherstonhaugh's arrogance is exquisitely honed, he provides extensive descriptions of life in the Minnesota Territory prior to 1847, including during the early years of the missionaries' efforts.

Frank Blackwell Mayer's *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier in 1851* is another travel reminiscence. Mayer's book, however, describes his trip to attend the signing of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux, and his experiences both as an artist and as an observer while there. He describes many aspects of Dakota life, including seasonal activities and housing, medicine, recreation—and religious practices. The Treaty itself, including the work undertaken by missionaries in its development, is described in great detail in *Old Traverse des Sioux*, by Thomas Hughes (1929).

Archaeological studies form another type of resource. Although, as it turns out, most of these studies extend beyond the scope of this thesis, they have provided perspective on Dakota life. In Volume 31 of *Reprints in Anthropology* (1985), two articles were particularly helpful in this regard: Bryce Little's "Early Mdewakanton Dakota Culture and Interpretations for Archaeology: A Re-evaluation—1640-1780," and Janet D. Spector's "Ethnoarchaeology and Little Rapids: A New Approach to 19$^{th}$ Century Eastern Dakota Sites." Spector expands her article in *What This Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village* (1993).

One especially helpful study, however, is Robert L. Hall's *An Archaeology of the Soul: North American Indian Belief and Ritual* (1997). Hall's book discusses the spiritual beliefs and practices of several tribes, but places all of his analyses within broad

categories like “Spirit Bundles, Soul Release, and the Ghost Lodge,” and “The Sweat Bath and Related Female Metaphors.” Again, Hall does not provide information about Dakota-missionary interrelationships, but he does offer a fascinating backdrop for discovering the unfolding of these relationships.

Oral histories provide another category of resources. Anderson’s book, *Through Dakota Eyes*, is one such collection. Mary Henderson Eastman utilized oral history and oral tradition extensively in her ethnographic work. Two other collections of oral tradition have provided helpful background pieces: *Beliefs and Tales of the Canadian Dakota*, collected by Wilson D. Wallis (1999), and *Santee Dakota Indian Legends*, compiled and edited by Alan R. Woolworth (2003). A similar, albeit distinctive collection is found in Mark Diedrich’s *Dakota Oratory: Great Moments in the Recorded Speech of the Eastern Sioux, 1695-1874* (1989).

It is clear that a great number of resources exist for studying the impact of Christian missions on the development of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. No one has undertaken an actual analysis of that impact, however. Elden Lawrence comes the closest in *The Peace Seekers*, but his focus is actually a different one; the question remains for this thesis.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## *Ethnohistory*

To undertake this research, I had to acquaint myself with the methods of ethnohistory. This was not a simple process. Ethnohistory combines ethnology and historical study, focusing on the analysis of cultural interfaces. Its own history is a checkered one, filled with debate and disagreement. The areas of conflict are many, but they especially include such questions as: What are legitimate sources? Should oral traditions and oral history be used as sources? What is the relationship between ethnohistory and contemporary politics? Should ethnohistory be limited in focus to studies of Native American and Euroamerican relationships? Is ethnohistory a methodology or a distinct discipline? What can other fields within anthropology, such as archaeology, linguistics, or such areas as economic or psychological anthropology, bring to ethnohistorical analysis? In preparing for my comprehensive exams, I needed to consider such questions; that preparation has helped me form my own opinions about research methodology, and even basic understandings of ethnohistory.

Essentially, ethnohistory analyzes cultural interactions within an historical context. Recent articles published in the journal *Ethnohistory*, for example, include "Vancouver the Cannibal: Cuisine, Encounter, and the Dilemma of Difference on the Northwest Coast, 1774-1808" (Thrush, Vol. 58, No. 1, 1-35), and "Ethnoscience, Genetics, and Huichol Origins: New Evidence Provides Congruence", (Grady and Furst, Vol. 58, No. 2, 263-291). Traditionally, ethnohistory has focused on interactions between Euroamericans and native peoples (in the Western Hemisphere), but I think the

parameters could be broadened. If the discipline exists to describe historical cultural interactions, it could certainly be used to interpret, for example, interactions between ancient Romans and the Germanic peoples, whom they sought to subjugate.

Over the years, anthropologists and historians have argued about the character and appropriate use of ethnohistory. Some in both camps have regarded it as an unhelpful and unnecessary blurring of disciplines. Historians have argued that it cannot generate reliable information, depending, as it often does, on oral as well as written sources. Anthropologists have argued that it abandons the unique four-field approach so essential to North American anthropology, substituting instead an inadequate historical interpretive model.

The list of resources available for analysis is nearly inexhaustible: diaries, journals, newspaper and magazine articles, government documents, oral traditions, oral histories, ethnological studies, archaeological research, museum collections, letters, trade records, historical analysis, linguistic studies, folklore, dictionaries, grammars, and Biblical translations. Raymond Fogelson points to additional resources, found "in cosmology, in narratives, in rituals and ceremonies, and more generally in native philosophies" (Fogelson, "The Ethnohistory of Events and Non-events" 134-5). More subtle sources include "values, meanings, symbolism, worldviews, social structural principles, and other variables of cultural analysis" (141). Bruce Trigger encourage the use of paleodemography, comparative ethnology, and ethno-semantics (Trigger, "Ethnohistory: The Unfinished Edifice" 253).

One of the primary ongoing conversations within the discipline concerns the role of oral tradition and oral history in ethnohistory. Traditionally, history is derived from

written documents. Traditionally, historians regard diaries and government documents, for example, as more reliable than oral tradition, which is passed verbally through generations. It is assumed that these latter descriptions are inaccurate, and that contemporary written resources are far more reliable. Robert Lowie, in the earliest days of the discipline, rejected the use of oral tradition. In 2000, Mason echoes Lowie. "'History' sans chronology is not *history*'" he writes (Mason, 260). Although he makes a helpful distinction between oral history and oral tradition, arguing that oral history is the collection of an individual's personal memories, while oral tradition extends "beyond living memory," Mason maintains that "oral traditions are more often than not roadblocks than bridges" (263).

A superb example of extensive ethnohistorical analysis is found in Mary Wingred's *North Country*. As indicated earlier, the book is a history of the state of Minnesota, yet it concludes with an analysis of the 1862 war. At first I misunderstood her intentions: I thought she had produced a truncated history. I soon realized that her intentions were unique; hers was a history of cultural interactions in Minnesota, and her story culminated with the completed shattering of Dakota life after the war.

The use of ethnohistory has provided me with a unique avenue for analyzing Dakota-missionary relationships during the 1830s-1860s. It poses questions within a framework of cultural studies. It assumes that history and anthropology are both necessary, and need to be synthesized, in the understanding and explanations of the dynamics and consequences of the above relationships.

The U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 was a cultural war, fought between two cultural entities. The war grew out of increasing tensions resulting from the impinging of

American culture upon that of the Dakota. This was unlike the Civil War, being fought, of course, at the same time. That war, although between two groups who certainly differed in their sub-cultures, was still fought within a single overall culture. It was a war that arose out of differing interpretations of a single national and Constitutional identity. In writing about the Civil War, then, the methodologies of history are sufficient. That is, an analysis of the Civil War does not require the use of ethnohistory.

### *Written vs. oral resources*

The use of oral traditions in ethnohistory is also often regarded with suspicion. Both anthropologists and historians have viewed oral history and oral tradition as unreliable resources, too laced with personal bias and too vulnerable to memory lapse and transmission mistakes to be accurate. What is forgotten here is that virtually all historical analysis risks these problems.

Letters, diaries, newspaper articles, governmental and other records, provide the most immediate logs of events and statistics. They often describe occasions within weeks or days or even hours of their occurrence. Memory is usually still quite fresh. On the other hand, emotion and reactivity can be quite strong. Context will color interpretation—as can official responsibilities or internal and external pressures.

Thus, we cannot pretend that written resources are presented without bias, or without at least the possibility of human error. Even statistics can be include honest errors—or dishonest counts. I am not so much a postprocessualist as to argue that no event is knowable, but written records are not necessarily more reliable than oral ones.

I will provide a simple, personal example.

In 1905, one of my great-uncles drowned in the Minnesota River. His name was John Barth, and he was fifteen years old at the time of his death. He lived in Mankato, which was a town that at the time had two newspapers. He drowned on a Sunday afternoon, and his body was recovered from the water three days later, at LeSueur. The newspapers, however, located in the same town, reporting on the same events, presented several pieces of conflicting pieces of information. One paper said that my great-grandfather had given his son permission to swim, the other that he had expressly refused to give such permission. One said that John was still in high school, the other that he was out of school and working.

My mother grew up with only a bit of information about her uncle's death; her mother was seven years old when he drowned. My mother grew up knowing only that she had an uncle who had drowned in his youth. Until I showed her the articles, and there were several reports within each of the newspapers, she knew nothing else about John except a comment that her grandmother had once made—that John had always told her he would build her a house when he was grown up.

Because there was virtually no oral tradition in my family regarding John's death, I have only the newspaper accounts to look to for information. Discerning the realities of the event is almost impossible at this point, however, because no witnesses remain, and many details in the written records contradict one another.

Another form of written records is the sort written several years or even decades after an event, either by an eyewitness or a third party. The memory of the eyewitness might be quite accurate, or quite inaccurate. The interpretive skills and transmission

accuracy of the third party might be quite good, or quite poor. Essentially, there is no guarantee that a report will reflect the reality of an event.

Having said all of this, it is certainly also true that oral history can be biased and inaccurate, as well. Human beings never tell their stories in a vacuum, and always pack them within their own interpretations. However, this does not make oral history inherently less reliable than written history. On the other hand, simply because oral history is the traditional source of information does not mean it is inherently reliable, either.

If this were a dissertation rather than a thesis, I would have sought the help of Dakota elders in conducting my analysis. The elders certainly carry forward stories and interpretations of the events surrounding the 1862 war, as well as of the relationships between the missionaries and the different groups of Dakota. They would be able to tell me how nineteenth century tensions and conflicts have been carried forward into the twenty-first century.

This is not a dissertation, however. I have incorporated oral history here, but I have done so by using written records of first-person accounts (e.g. Anderson and M. Eastman) or the descriptions of tribal life and belief by descendants (e.g. Deloria and C. Eastman). I have also drawn upon Elden Lawrence's work on the Dakota Christians and the war, which blends both traditional and oral forms of history. I would have preferred less emphasis upon the role of his great-grandfather, Lorenzo, in the events, but much is germane, nonetheless.

### *An unfortunate tale of extraneous research*

Cosmogony, cosmology, folk tales, migration patterns, intertribal relationships, kinship patterns, linguistics, characteristics of seasonal camps—I spent considerable time researching these very interesting and valuable sources of information, but I ultimately set these aside in writing this thesis. Thus, my methodology involved a process of exclusion. I received a helpful piece of advice in the process of writing: focus on the specific thesis topic, include only the material that moves the topic forward, that answers the basic question, what happened between the Dakota groups and the missionaries and how those interactions impacted the war. Thus, one aspect of methodology became that of focus, specifically clarity of focus. This is a thesis, not a dissertation and certainly not a book. The above information could enrich the final results, but were ultimately unnecessary for this project.

It could be argued, however, that none of the material, written or oral, is extraneous, since all of it helps define the Dakota way of life and belief. There is an element of truth in this. The material generates insight into the differences between the worldviews of the Dakota and the missionaries. It helps explain the reactions of the traditional Indians. It certainly, if indirectly, helps explain the content and character of loss, and the anger and grief inherent in the imposition of one culture upon another. All of this is true, but it does not address the realities of focus and responsibility.

### *Honesty*

This might seem a given characteristic of methodology, but I have not found it to be so. I have had to be vigilant, alert to my own defensiveness. Again and again I have had to check my own powers of denial. There are two primary reasons for this.

First, I am the product of the dominant culture—both as a person of Euroamerican descent and as a Protestant clergywoman. I have especially needed to guard against a certain protectiveness of the missionaries, and a yearning to explain them to those who simply dismiss them as government co-conspirators or as smug and condescending preachers with two goals: the transmission of a narrow and repressive religious worldview, and the destruction of a culture. I have, and still do, trust their good intentions more than many have. As I reviewed their writings, it became increasingly clear to me that they wanted, in some ways, to protect the Dakota. They assumed that the triumph of Euroamerican culture over Native American was inevitable, and that individuals could only survive if they adjusted to this reality, taking on the political, economic, educational, familial, and spiritual characteristics of the dominant culture.

However, this explanation only goes so far--which is the place where my defensiveness butts up against my analysis. Whatever concern and compassion the missionaries might have felt toward the Dakota, however simply naive they might have been, they nonetheless worked actively to dismantle Dakota culture.

A second component of my defensiveness is this: to acknowledge the depth of my connection to my national spiritual and political forbears is painful and even overwhelming. I have considered my family genealogy, and pointed out to myself that my immediate family were not culpable for the destruction of native culture. My father's ancestors did not even arrive in the United States until the late nineteenth century, and my mother's family not long before that. (Well, of course, there was the fact that one of my maternal great-grandfathers was born in Wisconsin in 1840, but he didn't move to Mankato until well after the hangings, so, again he was innocent, which means I am

innocent. . . .) I found myself considering the benefits of "revisionist-revisionist history," looking at the complexity of tribal dynamics as a part of the escalating war, but I finally acknowledged to myself that I was blaming the victims.

## *Concluding thoughts*

As previously noted, ethnohistory's essential role is the research and analysis of historical inter-cultural dynamics. In fact, without it the analysis is simply historical. I will quickly point out that historical analysis is inherently meaningful and helpful. It does not only provide information about the past; it helps explain the present. In this, it even impacts the future. Similarly, ethnohistory expands the possibilities of anthropological study. It allows for the analysis of past cultures within the context of specific historical events.

Ethnohistory provides a methodology for more complex, integrated research, however. Thus, coming to understand the dynamics of historical cultural interactions is a challenging, even an exacting process. Many types of awareness are involved. The primary question for such research, however, is quite simple: what happened, and why?

In my research, I utilized a range of sources, both written and oral, historical and contemporary, to answer the questions I address here. I also utilized the broader, more philosophical framework of ethnohistory. I knew that to accomplish my goals I would need to draw upon both history and ethnology--that neither one, alone, could provide the information and perspective that I sought. The methodology has served me well.

# Chapter 4: Dakota Background

## *Dakota Culture*

Before beginning, a word needs to be said about the definition of the word *dakota.* Although it has been traditionally interpreted as "friend" or "ally", Melvin R. Gilmore, contradicts this assumption. After comparing Omaha and Dakota cognates, he argues that the word is actually far more complex, and is grounded in a spiritual understanding. He writes,

> From my study, I conclude that the word *dakota* of the Dakota language, and *endakutha* of the cognate Omaha language, both being very ancient words, are derived from the same root, and that they contain the concept of a group or society of friends, but not in the ordinary sense of the word friend, rather in the mystic sense of a peculiar people (245).

The Dakota, like most peoples, saw themselves as uniquely established and spiritual in essence. They chose a name for themselves that reflected this.

Relatedly, the name "Dakota" can be misleading. According to Ronald Schirmer (email to author, April 5, 2012), "[T]he Dakota were never really a unified tribe, but rather a loose association of bands, the members of which spoke a common language and shared many aspects of culture." These bands included the Mdewakanton, Wapekute, Wahpeton, and Sisseton. Thus, it is risky to be glib about generalizations. Schirmer adds,

> The problem is mostly in the literature, where the authors seldom distinguish which bands they were working with, andwhat the interband relationships were like. It ends up being an interesting and very difficult point to address; since we don't really know much about historical interband relationships (friendships, animosities, etc.), we don't have a good way to assess the degree to which those preexisting conditions played into interband hostilities.Schirmer adds that the concept of a Dakota "tribe" was largely a Euroamerican construction.

Migrations

The Dakota descended from an ancient tribe that was originally located north and east of the Great Lakes (Dorsey, 213). According to Schirmer, archaeological studies indicate that Dakota ancestors actually resided in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota by 600 AD, and perhaps earlier (email, April 3, 2012). Eventually, the tribe lived in the woodland areas along the Mississippi River, and along the "prairie-forest border," that angles northwest/southeast through Minnesota (Grimm, 9).

Oneroad and Skinner identify a story of migration that the Dakota themselves told:

> The Eastern Dakota claim that the Sioux originated in the north, and came south, until, somewhere to the southeast of their starting-point, they were stopped by the ocean, where they scattered and went in different directions. They fought many tribes, and finally grew stronger, and then traveled northwestward towards the prairie. When they reached Minnesota and eastern South Dakota, they came upon the Cheyenne, whom they drove out onto the prairies. The Cheyenne still remember this, according to the Dakota, and declare that their ancestors lived at Enemy Swim Lake, South Dakota. The name of the lake was derived from an incident that occurred in early times, when the Cheyenne were attacked by some enemy from the north. There are Eastern Dakota now living, who claim descent from the Cheyenne who dwelt about Enemy Swim Lake, which is in northeastern South Dakota, not far from Sisseton (191).

Samuel Pond provides another alternative. He writes that the Dakota believed they had traveled to Minnesota from the north—even from the far north. They "were acquainted with some of the habits of the Esquimaux, for whom they had a name, calling them 'Eaters of raw food.'" (174). Pond acknowledges that the Dakota could have heard elsewhere about the "Esquimaux", but adds that "their knowledge of Indian tribes did not extend so far in any other direction" (174).

Once arriving in Minnesota, the Dakota encountered tribes already in residence. According to J. V. Brower, such tribes included the Iowa ("along the Mississippi about Lake Pepin and elsewhere in Southern Minnesota"), the Cheyenne (the Big Stone Lake area), the Cree (the Rainy River area), and smaller groups that moved through the area for short lengths of time. Brower writes that one of those tribes "was undoubtedly a renegade band of Huron refugees of limited numbers" (39). Brower reports that about 100 Huron settled in the Prairie Island area, and stayed for four or five years. Schirmer adds that the Huron settled there because they and the Dakota had already befriended one another.

Organizational and Leadership Patterns

According to Mary Eastman, the primary social structures were grounded in a system of bands. She writes that each band was divided into villages, and that every village had its own headman. Being a headman was hereditary, "though for a cause a chief may be deposed and another substituted" (16). The authority of a headman depended "much more upon his talents and capacity to govern, than upon mere hereditary descent" (16). Eastman adds that each village had a secondary headman, one responsible for coordinating warfare. These leaders planned and led battles, and were less egalitarian, since "the war-chief's command is absolute with his party" (16)

Pond corroborates Eastman's description of Dakota government. As he describes them, villages were loosely governed by headmen, who usually fulfilled a hereditary role. Interestingly, at least according to Pond, the designated chiefs were not necessarily the most talented leaders within a tribe. In his view, non-headmen "often had more authority and influence with the people than the chiefs themselves" (7).

Pond's analysis provides a helpful depiction of the typical Dakota decision-making process. While explaining that such a process was "purely democratic", and based upon "the will of the majority," Pond writes that the villagers "claimed and exercised the right of deciding all questions which concerned the public interest. Their decisions were made in councils, frequently after long and animated debates, and sometimes not until after several successive meetings" (66).

Even though such leaders were in place, a village had additional means for self-government. According to Deloria, most quarrels were resolved through the rules of kinship, although not all. Murder was fairly rare, but it required a quick resolution, and needed to be handled beyond the level of kinship ties. If such resolution was not accomplished, revenge killings could occur, and a cycle of violence be established. In this situation, kinship obligations were superseded by tribal responsibilities, and "magistrates and other prominent citizens . . .formed a deliberative body" (17).

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Other dangerous activities also required a fast response on the part of the community. One example of such wrongdoing was taking an action that could ruin a hunt, such as dashing out in front of other hunters. This could result in a drastically

diminished food supply, and threaten the group's very survival. This infraction was immediately dealt with by the scouts, another leadership group. The scouts did not need orders, since they already had clear responsibilities. In this type of circumstance, according to Deloria, "two or three scouts went after the offender and struck him heavy blows, even perhaps knocking him off his horse. They went further; they shot his pony from under him and killed his dogs" (20). Interestingly, for a Dakota, the physical pain was not the ultimate punishment. "What he was made to suffer," Deloria explains, "was the insult of being struck by a fellow-Dakota. To any but the most obdurate and insensitive that was far worse than physical pain" (21).

Another social structure offered meaning and spiritual sustenance: the lodges and related societies. All of Dakota life existed within a spiritual matrix, but the lodges were especially connected to spiritual belief and expression. As Schirmer writes:

> the lodge structure [was] intimately connected with the many different societies--dance societies, for one--that form[ed] a major component of all adults' lives. Everyone belonged to several societies, and those societies were one way in which fictive relationships were built. Importantly, such fictive kinship structures, managed through societies, were one way in which members of different bands recognized aspects of kinship beyond their immediate, consanguineal kin. The tightness of these social bonds was one reason why the people who deserted them in favor of another belief system were reviled--it was not only abandoning the beliefs but abandoning the entire social structure itself!

Clark Wissler provides an extensive example of this sort of social structure in his outline of the "Societies and Ceremonial Associations in the Oglala Division of the Teton-Dakota." Here, he identifies three types of groups, which he terms Societies for Men, Feast and Dance Associations (which includes both male and female societies), and Dream Cults (5-6). The Societies for Men include six akicita societies, four head men's

societies, and three war societies. Wissler identifies thirteen associations, and fifteen cults, and he identifies six characteristics of men's societies: they 1) were rooted in mystical experiences, 2) were maintained through shared leadership, 3) had closed membership, 4) excluded women except as singers (very rare), 5) regarded membership in each society as independent of any other membership, and 6) were usually open to males of various ages (62-3).

The list of associations reflects an array of shared experiences and interests, and includes the Silent-Eaters, Shield-Bearers, Praise-worthy Women, Owns-Alone, The Tanners, Porcupine Quill Workers, Night Dance, and Scalp Dance (5). The Owns-Alone, for example, was a society for women over 40 who had had one husband and remained "strictly true to the marriage relation" (77). The Porcupine Quill Workers were women who met to eat and work together. The Night Dance and Scalp Dance associations, on the other hand, were open to both men and women (78).

The dream cults comprised a final group. Some cults, such as the Elk, Bear, and Rabbit Cults, formed around animal encounters in dreams. The Berdache Cult, according to Wissler, consisted of transvestites who were also interested in women's chores and lifestyles (90). Too, Wissler identifies the Heyoka as a dream cult (83).

Kinship

Both Deloria and Pond point out another highly significant aspect of Dakota life: kinship. Pond also describes the importance of respect relationships. "After marriage," he writes, "a man was not permitted to look his wife's father or mother in the face, speak their names, or address his conversation directly to either of them" (138). He adds, "If it was necessary for him to speak of or to either of them, he used the plural instead of the

singular number, and, in speaking to them, used the third instead of the second person" (138-9). The same restrictions existed between a wife and her husband's parents, and respect relationships also existed between parents-in-law and children-in-law (139).

Pond also describes the relationships between parents and children. Parents usually dealt gently with their sons and daughters. "Infants," he writes, "were very tenderly cared for", and parents usually provided advice rather make commands (142-3). However, parents also disciplined their children, in order to teach them how to best function in society (143).

Deloria goes on to describe the general character of kinship relationships for children. The hakata was the formal respect relationship that developed between a boy and his "female collaterals, sisters and cousins" or between a girl and her male collaterals. (91). Same-sex collaterals, on the other hand, could both tease and discipline one another; older collaterals educated younger ones (104). Children also developed informal relationships with aunts, uncles, and grandparents. These relatives provided comfort or diversion when parents or collaterals disciplined. They also provided companionship, and (especially the grandparents) affection (105-7).

Dakota society, then, depended upon the maintenance of interpersonal boundaries to insure stability. Kinship ties provided these necessary parameters. They allowed people of differing ages, genders, and social situations, to relate consistently and comfortably with one another. With such structures in place, confusion, embarrassment, and conflict could be kept to a minimum.

## *Dakota Religion*

Dakota culture and life were grounded in a belief in a life force referred to as *taku wakan. Taku wakan* was typically translated (by missionaries and other Euroamericans) as "Great Spirit," but the term is misleading. The term is too reflective of Christian understandings and interpretations. The Great Spirit was used to conveniently relate Christian and Dakota religions, strongly suggesting a reference to a theological understanding of the God of Christianity on the part of the Dakota. This was inaccurate.

*Taku wakan* is best understood as a primary, fundamental life force. This force was not personal, nor did it relate personally to individuals. It had nothing to do with the God of Christianity, or with spiritual considerations of forgiveness, redemption, or salvation. Although missionaries attempted to use the term to build bridges between themselves and the Dakota, and they facilitated many conversions, the theological parallel was inadequate.

*Taku wakan* referred, instead, to an energy—a primal, sustaining energy contained within, and working throughout, creation. This energy was not limited to biological life. It animated things that Euroamericans regarded as inanimate, such as boulders and streams. *Taku wakan* was not a god. It existed before gods, and it generated the gods. No matter how significant, these gods (and the work they accomplished) flowed out of *wakan.*

The Dakota believed in a variety of spirits, some major and others minor in their power and influence. According to Riggs, in *Tah-koo Wah-kan,* the Dakota addressed six primary spirits. (Alternative spellings and additional comments are provided by Ronald Schirmer (personal communication, email to author, April 3, 2012).

1. *Unkteri*—the water spirit; the most powerful of the spirits, which resided under St. Anthony Falls.

2. The thunder spirit—regarded as a bird whose powers generated fierce energy. According to Schirmer, this spirit was understood, more accurately, in the plural, as "'thunderers' or 'thunder beings', which are represented by the eagles of the four directions."

3. *Taku Shkan Shkan* [Inyan]—the stone spirit; residing within a boulder, this was the oldest spirit, regarded as oldest because it was the hardest.

4. *Heyoka*—the spirit dealing with nature's paradoxes, including paradoxes within human beings; its adherents were sometimes known as "contraries," expressing pain with laughter, loss with happiness, etc.

5. *Uktomi* [Inktomi] , the spider.

6. The sun and the moon.

<u>*Wakan* men and women</u>

Often referred to as "medicine men" or, more insultingly, "jugglers," *wakan* men (and a few women) provided the necessary connections between *wakan*, the gods, and human beings. The *wakan* men were responsible both for conducting worship and prayers to the gods, and for providing healing. (The term "jugglers" referred to the missionaries' suspicions of deception on the part of the *wakan* men; they called them jugglers because they believed they were juggling things to fool the members of the tribe.) When missionaries arrived and began to work among the groups of Dakota, the *wakan* men were especially resistant to their teachings. They certainly experienced a loss of authority

and power in the wake of the missionaries' arrival, but they also believed profoundly that the Dakota were being misled and even harmed by missionary interlopers.

Dakota belief was celebrated through a variety of worship rites. The oldest, and most significant, was the rite of sacrifice. A range of items could be offered to the gods, including tobacco, food, dogs, animal skins, and cloth, but sacrifices could also be physical in nature, including participation in the Sun Dance. Sacrifices were typically preceded by purification rituals of seclusion, sweating, and fasting. Overall, however, feasts and dances were the most common public ceremonies. The *wakan* feast was primary, offering gratitude for successful hunts and abundant food.

The Dakota had complex understandings of death and the afterlife. According to Rev. Stephen Riggs, in *Tah-koo Wah-kan*, the Dakota spoke of four spirits associated with dead human beings: "the spirit of the body, [which] dies with the body"; "a spirit which always remains with or near the body"; "the soul which accounts for the deeds done in the body"; and a fourth, which "always lingers with the small bundle of the hair of the deceased, kept by relatives" (101-2).

Dakota beliefs were, of course, central to Dakota life and self-awareness. When missionaries arrived, and began to work for conversions among the Indians, they met with strong resistance. Women were the likeliest to convert, and the *wakan* men the most profound in their animosities. The *wakan* men were certainly protective of their power, but they were also deeply concerned for the stability and even spiritual safety of both individuals and groups. Some of their resistance would take violent forms, and they deterred many from converting, but they were far more dedicated to the spiritual well-being of their people than the missionaries were often willing or able to admit.

Thomas Williamson, as both a missionary and a physician, provides some interesting observations:

> Among the Dakotas [*sic*], as among other heathen races, the offices of physician and priest were, for the most part, united in the same person. This being the case, it is not strange that their pathology should be shaped by the ideas of the spiritual world. Supposing every object, artificial as well as natural, to be the habitation of a spirit capable of hurting or helping them, and that all diseases were caused by some one or more of these spirits taking possession of a part or a whole of the body of the patient, to determine the name and nature of the spirit causing the trouble was regarded as the first business of the physician or conjurer, as we usually call the medicine men of the aborigines of our country. This he attempted not only by observing the symptoms, but by incantations addressed to the spirit or spirits which were the special objects of his worship and expected on that account to befriend him.

When the missionaries reached the Minnesota Territory, then, this was the world they encountered.

# Chapter 4: Missionaries Among the Dakota

A change in a Presbyterian-Congregational organization known as the ABCFM (the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) helped contribute to devastating upheavals in the lives of the Dakota. In the 1830s, the ABCFM decided to broaden its understanding of foreign missions, serving such "foreigners" in the Minnesota Territory as the Dakota Indians. In his introduction to Riggs' *Tah-koo Wah-kan*, S. B. Treat, the organization's secretary, refers to "the amelioration of the Indian race" as the essential task of the missionaries (xxi), and argues that "civilization is the highest achievement of modern evangelism" (xxxi).

The ABCFM missionaries believed that the Indians were destined for spiritual catastrophe, and that they needed to hear the Christian Gospel. In describing his colleagues, Samuel and Gideon Pond, Thomas Williamson wrote that they were "[m]oved by zeal for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and pity for the souls of poor savages who were perishing in ignorance; and sin" (2).

Six representatives of the ABCFM reached Minnesota Territory in the 1830s: Gideon and Samuel Pond, Thomas and Margaret Williamson, and Stephen and Mary Ann Riggs. Other Protestant missionaries arrived on the scene later, including Episcopalian Bishop H.B. Whipple.

At least three primary Christian theological streams flowed among the early missionaries serving in Minnesota. The first was Catholicism, first introduced into the territory through the French explorers and traders. The second was Episcopalianism, a presence solidified in 1859 by the arrival in Faribault of Bishop Henry Whipple. Both of

these groups were rooted in relatively stable, entrenched systems. The third group, however, had a different history, significantly rooted in the religious revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. The Ponds, Riggs, and Williamsons, emerged from this school.

The Second Great Awakening was an attempt to enliven and deepen religious faith in America. It was a Protestant movement, and it was evangelical in character. That is, it centered on the conviction that lives could only be rightly lived, and—more significantly—souls saved, in the context of Christian faith. Diarmaid MacCulloch, in his general study of Christianity, describes it in these terms:

> Protestantism was rediscovering physicality after its two-century diet of preachers' words and planned music, and the discovery came within an Evangelical mode which generally valued a common fervent style and proclamation of sin and redemption more than confessional background or history. Revivalism was firmly rooted in Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian culture already. . . (904).

The Second Great Awakening taught a new religious and spiritual emphasis on human volition. That is, it taught that human beings had the power, and the responsibility, to choose right from wrong. They were not powerless in the face of sin. They could effect change within themselves and within society as a whole. Timothy L. Smith illustrates this with a description of John Wesley's theological teachings: He taught. . .that God had mitigated our sin by giving every man the ability to respond to the call of the gospel" (25). He added that every person was "[f]ree, but morally responsible to yield to God. . ." (25).

Although the United States is thought of as a historically Christian nation, the post-Revolutionary War era was not a Christian one. Church membership had declined

sharply, and there was little interest in spiritual life. Some of this was no doubt due to residual influences of the Enlightenment, but some of it was simply due to the increased distances between American centers. The frontier had expanded beyond Kentucky and Ohio, to Illinois and points further west. Few clergy were available to serve congregations in those areas.

One outcome of the Second Great Awakening was a recognition of this phenomenon, and a profound sense of call on the part of both individuals and groups to share the story of salvation with those who had not yet heard it. If people had not yet heard that story, they could not be transformed by it. If individuals had not experienced transformation, then society could not be improved either. This improvement, the generating of a great culture of faithfulness, was grounded in conversion.

The Methodists, in particular, became adept at addressing this need. They established a system of itinerant preachers—men who traveled hundreds of miles to teach Christianity. They ministered to people who had no other options for worship, many of whom were then deeply touched spiritually.

In addition to a commitment to such movements as abolition and temperance, and in addition to outreach to Americans living on the frontier, the Awakening led to a new focus on global missions. Eventually, as through the ABCFM, it led to the establishment of American missions, as well—specifically, missions to the native peoples living west of the Mississippi River (Riggs, xxi).

The Pond brothers, Thomas and Margaret Williamson, and Stephen and Mary Riggs, were all affected by the Second Great Awakening. The Ponds were from Connecticut, and the Williamsons and Riggses were all from Ohio. Each of these

individuals ultimately responded to the religious revival with a deep and new-found sense of purpose (Williamson, 2). Riggs, in his autobiography, describes his call to serve in these terms:

> Early in my course of education, I had considered the claims of the heathen upon us Christians, and upon myself personally as a believer in Christ; and with very little hesitation or delay, the decision had been reached that, God willing, I would go somewhere among the unevangelized (27).

Thus, to understand Protestant missions among the Dakota, it is necessary to understand this motivation and concern. Judgments about the relationships between missionaries and the U.S. government, for example, or about the role of the missionaries in the establishment of treaties or in the post-war trials, must be made with this in mind. It was this commitment to personal transformation and salvation, then, that characterized evangelical Protestant missions along the Minnesota River.

When the missionaries arrived in the Minnesota Territory, they found an ally sympathetic both to them and to the Dakota: Lawrence Taliaferro. Talioferro would eventually leave Minnesota because he had become so sickened by the treatment of the Dakota by both the U.S. government and the traders (Wingerd, 138). However, he was convinced—and possibly helped shape this conviction in the missionaries—that radical changes needed to occur in the structures of Dakota life, if the Indians were to survive. With an increasing loss of land to treaties, an increasing scarcity of game, and the increasing presence of settlers, the Dakota seemed doomed if they did not make such changes (Wingerd, 107).

Taliaferro saw their salvation in farming. Schirmer points out that a great many Dakota were growing crops, but they were not doing so with the intensity that Euroamericans thought appropriate. Farming would allow them to change their food supply and economic structures. Too, it would most efficiently incorporate them into American culture. It would, according to Wingerd, "teach them the values of hard work, sobriety, and enterprise, wean them from their 'improvident' lifestyle" (107). It would also "eventually replace their collectivist worldview with an appreciation for the superiority of economic individualism and private property" (107).

Overall, the missionaries agreed with this assessment. They worked to form alliances with the American representatives that they regarded as the most trustworthy. Henry Hastings Sibley was one of these. Sibley was a wily trader, perhaps an unusually bright one. Too, he'd convinced himself that he cared deeply for the well-being of the Dakota and that he consistently acted on their behalf. Although he professed such concern, however, he always made sure he profited well in his trade arrangements with them.

Sibley was handsome and charming, and, quite frankly, refined. He had built a striking home in Mendota, and offered it as a center for hospitality. Too, in his own way, Sibley did care about the Dakota. He simply did not care about them as much as he thought he did. According to Wingerd,

> Sibley took pains to win support from the missionaries, who wielded considerable influence among some Dakotas who were beginning to adapt themselves to Euro-American ways. Though the missionaries tended to blame the traders for all of the Indians' ills, they made an exception for the gentlemanly Sibley, who seemed to share their cultural values more than the rest of the rough-hewn backwoods fraternity (187-8).

It should be noted that Wingerd makes a serious accusation against Riggs and Williamson. She argues that, after seeing very little success in their ministries, they eventually decided to change tactics. They actively lobbied on behalf of the later treaties in order to help deprive the Dakota of their lands. Only then, when the Dakota were completely forced into farming, unable to live from the land as they had traditionally done, would they finally embrace Christian teachings, and be, as a people, converted and saved (188)

## *Learning the language*

All of the missionaries were involved to some degree in language study. Before sermons could be heard, languages needed to be learned. The Ponds, as well as the Riggs and Williamsons, worked for years to build up a Dakota-English vocabulary so that communication was possible. Samuel Pond gained a great deal of ground when he spent his first year, in 1834, traveling and hunting with a group of Dakota (cf. *Dakota Life in the Upper Midwest*). In subsequent years, he and his brother kept a diligent record of each word and its meaning—their work was later absorbed and published by Riggs (Williamson, 3-5).

Another overall result occurred in the development of translation skills and vocabularies: the missionaries helped develop a written Dakota language. In order for the Dakota to be able to read and understand the Bible, they needed to be able to read it in their own language. The missionaries used this written language in their education programs. Riggs summed this up with another autobiographical comment: “The chief

work of my life has been the part I have been permitted, by the good Lord, to have in giving the entire Bible to the Sioux Nation" (III).

### *Teaching a new way*

One of the facets of mission work was the development of educational programs. These programs had two purposes: to teach the Dakota (both children and adults) about Christian faith, and to teach them how to enter American life and culture. The missionaries saw the schools as essential to this process. In his introduction to Riggs' autobiography, Jon Willand explains the efforts in these terms:

> The overall objective of mission work was the propagation of the Gospel, the mere reading of which was supposed to result in mass conversion of the aborigines. To make possible such reading, it was thought necessary to educate Indians; this presupposed the creation of day and boarding schools. . .(XIII).

Although Joseph Renville encouraged participation in the ABCFM missions at Lac Qui Parle and elsewhere, few Dakota converted, and very few of those converts were men (Williamson, 4). Riggs writes, in *Tah-koo Wah-kan*, "If a woman changed her religion and her gods, no one cared very much. It was 'only a woman.' In the estimation of the men, the national religion would not suffer much, if a few women abandoned it and embraced the faith of the gospel" (177). Riggs notes the price could still be high, however, and described the experiences of a woman known as To-tee-doo-'ta-win. First, the woman got rid of her medicine sack, "which was regarded by the medicine men, as a high crime. This subjected her to divers (*sic*) sorts of persecutions, which she bore patiently" (179). When she defied the prohibitions of the medicine men, and went to worship at the mission, she was forced to deal with "the spoiling of her goods—the

cutting up of her blanket" (180). Unlike those around her, To-tee-doo-'ta-win rested on the Sabbath, so "she more than once remained behind her company, when they travelled thereon" (180). She learned to spin, knit, and weave, making clothing according to American customs. She was one of the first Dakota to learn how to read, and she became a leader in the mission community. She raised her children as Christians.

According to Riggs, men were required to make more changes than women—at least, more external changes. For men, conversion meant abandonment of traditions, including a reversion to short hair, monogamy, and changes in dress. Men were expected "to go to work like a civilized and Christian man," and they knowingly risked the displeasure of the *wakan* men, who "used all of their power of bad medicine and all their arts of sorcery" to prevent conversions (178). Thus, in the early years of the mission, "with the exception of two or three men of mixed blood, the church was composed of Dakota women alone" (178).

As conversions increased, especially among men, traditionalists began to actively resist the work of the missionaries. Traditional men would sometimes block the road to the mission for Sunday worship, and they would spoil goods. They destroyed the haystacks of the converts, and killed livestock. In a sermon he preached in 1876, reflecting on his ministry, Williamson described some of these events. He reported that in a two-year span of time, twenty head of cattle belonging to the missionaries were killed, leaving only five head, and "making it necessary for Mr. Huggins to put a yoke on our milch cow to haul our fire wood" (9). He also said that several of the Dakota left Lac Qui Parle and did not return to plant, "and those who did were severely persecuted, and the children were forbidden to come to school, and armed men were placed, near the path

from their camp to our houses, to strip the blankets off of any whom they might see coming to church or school" (9).

Most ominously, deaths among the converts occurred. According to Riggs, "it was not an uncommon thing for men who had either embraced the new religion, or were understood to be favorable to it, to die very suddenly and very mysteriously. It was generally supposed that they were put of the way by 'bad medicine,' or by sorcery" (199-200).

The traditionalists harassed the missionaries as well the converts. According to Wingerd, Stephen Riggs became indignant when some of the Dakota began to ask reimbursement for "wood, water, and pasturage" (170). He probably became all the more so when some of the parents "tried to exact payment for sending their children to the mission school" (170). More serious incidents were also occurred. Cattle, horses, and oxen were occasionally slain, the missionaries' safety was threatened, and traditionalists occasionally discussed whether or not they should simply drive the missionaries away (244).

From his vantage point, Riggs was convinced that the use of area resources contributed to increased cultural and religious change. In an 1855 report, he describes the arrival of a saw-mill, which was funded by the ABCFM:

> As is usually the case with everything that breaks in upon our preconceived ideas of things, the saw-mill met with considerable opposition on the part of the Indians. It would soon use up all their timber, they said, but it is nevertheless proving itself to be a civilizer. We have furnished gratuitously floors for nine log cabins, besides enabling the young men to purchase several thousand feet more at the bare cost of sawing. A desire, too, has been created for frame houses. . . .The fields of three acres each, broken by Mr. Robertson for seven of the young who

> have settled in the immediate neighborhood of the station, will, I am persuaded, along with their now comfortable residences, have an influence for good with this people. They are all signs of progress.

Riggs then makes a highly significant observation, one which illustrates the missionaries' purposes clearly:

> It is the development of individuals, subtracting them from the mass and making them feel that they are men. This is an important step. It indicates, too, the direction in which there is still hope for the Dacotahs.

In *The Peace Seekers*, Elden Lawrence argues that religion was not the only challenge to Dakota belief structures. As a physician, Thomas Williamson directly competed with the *wakan* men and women as a healer. According to Lawrence, the Pezuta Wicasta specialized in herbal medicine, and often worked alongside Williamson, figuratively if not literally. The Wicasta Wakan, however, "was the shaman or person who dealt with spirits and called on the spirits for help with many things, including healing" (55). These individuals were far more hostile to Williamson, and refused to cooperate with him in the treatment of the ill.

Several women served at different missions along the river, in addition to Margaret Williamson and Mary Riggs. Jane Williamson, Thomas' sister, worked with her brother and sister-in-law for years, especially in the education of women and girls. Margaret Williamson's sister, Sarah Poage, married Gideon Pond, and ministered with him at Oak Grove (Pond, xvi).

The missionaries tended to shift locations. In 1846, for example, the Williamsons went to Kaposia, the Riggs' to Lac Qui Parle, the Hugginses to Traverse des Sioux,

Samuel Pond to Shakopee, and Robert Hopkins and Gideon Pond to Traverse des Sioux and Oak Grove (Riggs, *Tah-koo Wakan,*147-8). In 1848, other changes occurred. Rev. M.N. Adams began at Lac Qui Parle, and Riggs also identifies a Rev. Joshua Potter and his wife, and a Miss Edwards, who transferred to the Dakota mission in 1849 (151).

In 1855, however, twenty years after the ABCFM missions began, Williamson sent a sober annual report to the Presbytery. "The Dacotah," he explained, "so long as he adheres to the religion of his fathers, cannot be civilized, because he supposes that if he should abandon the customs of his fathers the gods they worship would destroy them" (Missions Report, 2).

Dakota men and women negotiated this world of customs under the guidance of *wakan* men and women. These leaders were primarily healers, but they also helped interpret vision quests, and provided such other services as preparing men for hunting or warfare, and coordinating sacred dances. Although it did happen that a *wakan* man converted to Christianity, they were essentially the keepers of traditions, and they strongly resisted Christian influences (Riggs, *Tah-koo Wakan*, 89, 92). Convinced that these men imperiled the souls of the Dakota through trickery and manipulation, the missionaries often referred to these men as sorcerers, or conjurors. Samuel Pond, for example, spoke of "the superstitions, the inventions of their wakan-men" (86). On the other hand, he added, "Truthfulness has required men to say hard things about wakan-men, and some of them were exceedingly mean; but many of them were good warriors and good hunters, kind to their families and staunch friends. . .(91).

Although the belief systems among Christian denominations varied, sometimes significantly, they all differed greatly from that of the Dakota. First, the Christian system

was monotheistic, acknowledging only one god. Second, and confusingly, it was Trinitarian, maintaining that God was simultaneously Father/Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians believed that God was a personal and loving force, working in the universe and in their lives for good. However, they also believed that human beings had rejected that love and goodness, separated themselves from God through their rebellion and sin, and stood in desperate need of salvation. Because this sin was both condition and action, human beings could not escape from it by themselves. Only a savior both divine and human could close the gap, and replenish the relationship. This Savior was Jesus. In his death he absorbed all sin into himself, and sacrificed himself—in the last sacrifice required of humanity. Dramatically, and miraculously, however, Christians believed that he survived his death, bringing life from death to all who believed in him. When he absented his physical presence from the world, he let a part of himself remain, his Holy Spirit, a power that continued to enliven and strengthen both individual human beings and their church.

Although the Dakota certainly recognized and regretted the power of human cruelty, they found the Christian theological framework bewildering. Not only were Dakota beliefs of a different character, the Dakota simply did not have anything like a system of doctrines, and certainly nothing like a sacred text (Pond, 86). The only thing at all comparable to this last was an extensive realm of oral traditions, which included stories of the creation of the world and living things, as well as stories of morality and historical reminiscence. Oneroad and Skinner write,

> The tradition bearers recalled, retained, and passed on what was familiar. . . .The question arises whether to call [their reports] folklore, legends, stories, tales, or oral history. All the labels skirt the judgment of truth or fiction and impose the segregation of the secular and the spiritual. The Dakota feel that their oral tradition encodes more than just a fictitious yarn; it carries their beliefs, bits of their ancestors, themselves, and reality (50).

## *Mixing religion and politics*

Apart from utilizing their services as translators, the U.S. government did not employ missionaries. The missionaries were not officially responsible for helping incorporate Dakota into American culture, and they certainly often sided with the Dakota against the traders and the government, especially the Indian agents, representatives of the government. S.A. Treat, addresses this quite extensively. He argues that "The administration of our Indian Affairs has been a serious obstacle to Indian missions. . . .[I]t is said, our wars with [the Indians] have been almost constant. Have we been uniformly unjust? We answer, unhesitating, 'Yes.'" He adds, regarding the Commissioners themselves, "[T]hey have ventured to make another averment, which is sufficiently comprehensive: 'Nobody pays any attention to Indian matters.' 'When the progress of settlement reaches the Indian's home, the only question considered is, 'How best to get his lands.' When they are obtained, the Indian is lost sight of'" (xxii-xxv). Treat was convinced that injustice and abuse on the part of the traders and government hindered the acceptance of Christianity by the Dakota.

Mary Wingerd, however, holds the missionaries more culpable, especially Stephen Riggs in the weeks following the arrests and trials of the Dakota. "He informed the prisoners," Wingerd writes, "that regrettably he could not serve as their spiritual

advisor because of his official role as government translator, but surely he did not seriously expect the men to entrust their souls to his care when he had been so deeply involved in their interrogation and convictions." She added, "The work of salvation was left to Dr. Thomas Williamson and Father Augustin Ravoux" (325). The significant number of conversions that the missionaries had hoped for in the preceding years only now became a reality. Prior to their executions, most of the full-bloods did indeed align themselves with the Christian faith, and were baptized. However, Wingerd speculates that this was primarily due not to "a spiritual epiphany" but rather to a desperate attempt on their part to gain reprieves (325). In any event, the vast majority chose to be baptized as Catholics by Father Ravoux. Some historians have speculated that this was due to a congruity between Dakota and Roman Catholic spirituality, since they shared an emphasis on ritual. Riggs argued that it was due to the influence of mixed blood relatives and friends who were Catholic. Wingerd says that, "[I]t is far more probable that Williamson's lack of success was at heart a judgment on his colleague, Stephen Riggs" (325).

Williamson, however, contradicts Wingred's assessment in a 1876 sermon. Summarizing the ministry in which he played a part, he reports that the number of Presbyterian converts skyrocketed after the war, totaling 1350, many of whom were baptized by Riggs. Even if these numbers are inflated, they represent a far larger group than Wingred acknowledges.

### *The commitment of converts*

One of the most interesting, and early, conversions was that of Eagle Help, a war shaman. According to Mark Diedrich, in *Dakota* Oratory, Eagle Help was the first

Dakota male to learn reading and writing in Dakota, and assisted the missionaries in the translation of the Bible. In 1839, he moved from Lac Qui Parle to Lake Traverse "to teach the young men how to read and write" (37). While there, he once told a group of traditionalists:

> My friends, you make sacred feasts; you worship painted stones. Tell me what benefit you or your fathers have obtained from these practices? I have my father's medicine bag, and I am acquainted with all the Dakota customs, but I know of no good that comes to us from them. And now I have brought you the book [the Bible], by means of which we may all become wise; but you still choose to pray to painted stones (37).

A later convert, Spirit Walker, made similar comments in 1850:

> If anyone should bring me a very fine horse, one that could run very swiftly and could catch buffalo well, and should say to me, "If you forsake the religion of the Bible, I will give you this fine horse," I would not do it. And if someone should offer me embroidered leggings and a very fine coat and blanket, on condition that I should leave Christ, I would not do it. And finally, if someone should bring a great deal of what is very good to eat, sugar for instance, and should say to me, "Throw away this religion and I will give you all this," I would not do it (41).

# Chapter 5: Ramifications of Religious Mingling

According to Elden Lawrence, there were important subgroups involved in the tensions leading up to the war. Lawrence distinguishes between the farmer Indians and the Christian Indians. He is the only one who does so, but the distinctions are valuable. "There were four main groups which the hostile Indians targeted," he writes, "the Americans, half-breeds, farmer Indians, and the Christian Indians whom the Dakota referred to as 'cut-hairs'" (42). Lawrence argues that it is important to distinguish between the farmer and the Christian Indians, because the two groups did not necessarily overlap. The farmer, or "improvement," Indians "were not necessarily Christian but had a 'civilized' vocation" (43).

The ramifications of religious mingling were important, and, eventually, tragic, and tensions began to arise early on. Andrew Williamson, Thomas Williamson's son, provides one description in a letter he wrote in 1899:

> There were many discouragements. There were bitter persecutions. The native conjurors felt that their hope of gain would be destroyed. Many of the fur traders believed that if the mission work went on the Indians would become farmers and their gains by the fur trade would cease. Both classes stirred up persecutions (4).

The traditional Indians, those who refused to convert and absorb Christian/American lifestyles, became increasingly ostracized. Joseph R. Brown, who followed Taliaferro as Indian agent, was resented by the traditional Indians. "Brown put much effort into making the Dakotas farmers," Lawrence writes. "He furnished them with equipment and provided incentives to get them to take up farmer ways. . . .The

blanket Indians looked upon the efforts of Joseph Brown as favoritism" (43). According to Big Eagle, a Mdewakanton who fought with the Dakota in the war, these supplies included seeds, tools, and even brick houses (Anderson, 24-6). He adds,

> The "farmers" were favored by the government in every way, . . .and they were not allowed to suffer. The other Indians did not like this. They were envious of them and jealous, and disliked them because they were favored. They called them "farmers," as if it was disgraceful to be a farmer. They called them "cut-hairs," because they had given up the Indian fashion of wearing the hair, and "breeches men," because they wore pantaloons, and "Dutchmen," because so many of the settlers on the north side of the river and elsewhere in the country were Germans (26-7).

The ramifications were five-fold: political, economic, educational, relational, and spiritual.

As indicated above, the traditional Dakota were gradually ostracized by the U.S. government. Economically, the traditionalists grew poorer while the farmers grew richer, relatively richer, at least, and triangulated tensions had been increasing, especially during the decade preceding the war (12). The U.S. government, through poor and dishonest implementation of treaties, deepened the Dakota dependency upon itself and the traders. Wingerd writes that the "annuities created a new sort of dependence--on the good faith and competence of the federal government, both of which frequently proved lacking" (139). The treaties placed severe restrictions on Dakota living space and livelihoods. By limiting the Dakota to first twenty miles along the Minnesota, and then only ten, roughly between the Upper and Lower Agencies, the Dakota were deprived of most hunting and trapping opportunities (8). The hunting was affected not only by geographical restrictions but by the competition developing with the settlers, who not only usurped land but also used up supplies of game. The farmer Dakota, on the other hand, as Big Eagle explained

above, received greater financial support as they made changes in focus and style of life. These included supplies for farming, as well as supplies for housekeeping.

In order to succeed in making such shifts, the character of education changed for many Dakota. Instead of learning the traditional skills in the traditional ways, the Dakota men, women, and children, who were adjusting to a new way of life, learned new things in new ways. They learned in churches and classrooms. They learned the Euroamerican way of doing things, which included earning a living, cooking, sewing, studying, language use, and reading (M. L. Riggs, 116).

Socially, all of the Dakota, regardless of party, age, gender, or lineage, were witnessing the deepening decline of their culture during the years of the missionaries. Again, this was not simply due to the work of the missionaries, but that work certainly dovetailed with the efforts and goals of the government (Wingerd, 107). With the increased isolation brought about through a farming lifestyle, for example, traditional social structures, such tribal decision-making and kinship patterns, gradually lost hold. New patterns of marriage and child-rearing emerged. Old allegiances—or, at least, old expressions of allegiance—fell away. Charles Eastman writes, "Tribe after tribe underwent the catastrophe of a disorganized and disunited family life" (128).

In addition to the political, economic, educational, and social changes, the Dakota also encountered , a particularly deep source of tension between the traditionalists and the converted. As indicated earlier, the *wakan* men and women had for centuries nurtured Dakota spiritual life, through lodges, healing rituals, dances, vision quests, and related activities. As also indicated earlier, the missionaries were determined to draw the Dakota away from that existing spiritual framework.

By 1860, tensions between the two Dakota groups led to violence of increasing strength and frequency. In 1854, the missionaries had helped establish an autonomous Dakota community near the Upper Agency, called the Hazelwood Republic (Williamson, 13). The year 1860 was particularly troubling. The traditionalists told those living in the Republic that the year would be one of violence, and "that no man who wore pantaloons the next summer would see the leaves fall" (Lawrence, 90). Before the end of the year, "a succession of murders and retaliations led to the breakup" of the community (90).

As these tensions increased, another sort of mistrust gained power. According to historian MaryWingerd, many of the younger Dakota warriors "viewed mixed-blood relatives with new suspicion as agents of the hated accommodationism. This intratribal cultural conflict eroded traditional structures of authority and community coherence" (272). As during the Civil War, splits between individuals and groups of people were not tidy. One or more members of a Dakota family might convert, while others did not. There were also those among the traditional Dakota who simply mistrusted the mixed-bloods; even Wabasha commented that, sometime prior to the beginning of the war, "I did not want the half-breeds to be admitted to our councils. . . .[T]hey had always been the tools of the traders, and aided them to deceive the Indians" (Anderson, 30).

Some of the traditional Dakota leaders were very clear about the lines that were drawn as the U.S.-Dakota War began. Big Eagle reports that, in the hours after the attack against the settlers in Acton, while a group that included Wabasha, Wacouta, and himself, were arguing for peace, "nobody would listen to us, and soon the cry was 'Kill the whites and kill all these cut-hairs who will not join us'" (36).

Thomas Williamson cast the war in the light of these tensions. In his 1876 report, he blamed the outbreak of the war specifically on Little Crow's designs to stop Christianization, arguing that Little Crow "began a war for this purpose, intending to kill all the Christian Indians, and kill or drive from this neighbourhood all civilized men" (17).

In fact, Williamson discusses the violence between Dakota groups quite extensively:

> But those who were appointed to murder the Christian Indians failed to attempt it. Several of these had been daring and successful warriors, and though for years that had abandoned the war path it was justly apprehended that if an attempt was made to kill them or their families some body [sic] else would be hurt. So the Indian Christians lived (17).

Williamson claimed that the Christian Dakota helped save the lives of 107 who were connected either to the missions or the U.S. government (18). "Subsequently," he added, "these Christian Indians rescued nearly 300 women and children who had been captured by the hostiles [most of them at Camp Release]" (18).

The work of the evangelical missionaries, and their colleagues, did not stop after the 1862 war. It simply changed in location and, to some extent, in style. Both Riggs and Williamson worked with the prisoners and those detained at Fort Snelling, providing spiritual comfort, conducting baptisms, and, on the part of Williamson, addressing the medical needs of the communities. However, the ramifications continued to express themselves. On Oct. 16, 1871, Gabriel Renville, the head chief at the Sisseton Agency, sent a letter to Williamson. Renville was then the head chief of the Sisseton and Wahpeton, and his letter was in response to one sent by Williamson to the present Indian

agent. Williamson's letter apparently lobbied on behalf of one of his adherents, recommending him as the new agent. Renville's words must have struck pain into Williamson's heart, as well as into the hearts of any other missionaries with whom he might have shared the letter:

> Dr Williamson,
>
> You wrote a letter to our Agent, which I have heard read, and on that account I write you this, We have never known of any good from the teachings of yourself and Mr. Riggs among this people.
>
> Whenever you come among us you always make a great deal of trouble-some talk and ill feeling. For that reason it is far better that you should never come among us. If you still keep on working here you will be the cause of a fight and great trouble among us is the reason I say this.
>
> You have shown us by your activities that you are the people who are spoken of in a chapter of the bible [*sic*]
>
> Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheeps [*sic*] clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves, ye shall know them by their fruits. We know you only as such.
>
> For that reason we dont [*sic*] want one of your sect for our Agent for it would be just the same as having you for our Agent and we cannot see anything but fighting among us, which you will be the cause of.
>
> We want for our Agent a man who will advance in civilization as we are being advanced now. And if we are to have ministers among us it would be well to have those who would teach us in the ways of truth and honesty, a thing which you cannot do.
>
> We the head men of this people have decided to have missionaries of another denomination among us, You lay this to our Agent and attack him with slander and ill feeling. He has done none of this and you blame him without a cause.
>
> I am
> The head chief of the Sissiton [*sic*] Wahpeton [illegible]
> Gabriel Renville [from BCHS archives]

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

The evangelical Protestants who worked as missionaries among the Dakota in the Minnesota Territory entered into their ministries convinced of the rightness of their understandings and the imperative nature of their responsibilities: they needed to preach the Gospel and save the Dakota. They were convinced that the Dakota could only be saved through conversion to the Christian faith. When such conversion occurred, it would mean that a soul was safe for eternity, and that a body, mind, and heart were safe for life in this world.

Christian missionaries believed the Dakota, and all Indian tribes, were locked in a terrible world of superstition, ignorance, brutality, and death. Riggs, Williamson, and the rest were unhappily amazed at the Dakota worldview. In this, as they saw it, confusion, misinformation, and, at times, raw untruth, ruled. The Dakotas' world was actually a terrifying one; every rock, every leaf, in other words every thing, held a spirit that threatened the Dakota with danger and even death.

If that were not enough, the missionaries saw another great vulnerability: the Dakota were being destroyed by the impact of American civilization upon them. Traders, treaties, incompetent or corrupt Indian agents, the prejudices of settlers against the Indians, wars with the Ojibwe, loss of land and water for hunting, fishing, and gathering, the sale (and gifting) of whiskey along with the risks of alcoholism, the violence of American men against Dakota women, the loss of livelihood—all of these were seen, by the missionaries, as things the Dakota needed to be rescued from. Even Samuel Pond, the

most culturally sensitive of the group, agreed with his colleagues that the Dakota needed to be saved from both their inner and outer worlds. Their only hope lay in conversion, and conversion meant abandoning virtually everything that had given meaning and regularity to their lives.

First, the Dakota needed to learn how to farm. Farming would accomplish several things. It would give the Dakota a new economic resource, one distinct from that of hunting. It would allow them financial independence; they would no longer be forced to rely upon the traders, or even, eventually, upon the government, for support. Beyond that, farming would provide a reliable source of food. Starvation was a familiar aspect of Dakota life, but farming could help eradicate it.

Of course, farming required sacrifice. The Dakotas who assumed this new way of life needed to remove themselves physically from the tribe. They received land, tools, seed, clothing, and houses. As years passed, and problems increased, they even received more food than the traditional Indians. However, they were expected to disconnect from their culture. That was the trade-off.

Second, the Dakota needed to assume American clothing and hairstyles. These things symbolized the acceptance of their new life. They indicated, to absolutely anyone observing them, that the Dakota were willing to fully participate in American life, that they had claimed it for their own.

Third, the Dakota agreed to receive an American type of education. That is, the men and boys, the women and girls, learned how to plant and harvest, how to sew and weave, but they were also taught to read. Specifically, they were taught to read the Bible. Often education required a move from either a village or a family farm to the mission.

Children were often left with missionaries to receive intensive education. One of the great frustrations of the missionaries, in fact, was the lack of funding for schools that had been promised in the treaties.

Fourth, the missionaries expected the Dakota to have only one spouse, and anybody who had more than that was expected to keep only one. Monogamy was yet another indication of an acceptance of American culture, and of a willingness to live according to the precepts of the missionaries. The Dakota who made these changes did so for a variety of reasons.

Some saw the old ways losing ground to the new, and agreed with the perception of the Euroamericans that only an accommodation to this new world would assure survival—individually and collectively. If the Dakota did not acquiesce to change, they would be destroyed by it. Such accommodation did not require a religious conversion, although such was typical.

Others adopted the new lifestyle out of a religious awareness. For some, all of the social, political, economic, religious, and cultural upheaval indicated a failure on the part of the old gods. Perhaps the gods had abandoned the Dakota. At least as likely, they were no longer up to the task of protecting the Indians and providing them with good things. In any event, the Dakotas' once-familiar world now seemed as hostile and unstable as the missionaries assumed it to be. Protection needed to be found somewhere, and it seemed likely located within the churches and teachings of people like the Williamsons and Riggs'. Others were more aware not of what the old faith lacked but of what the new faith offered. The stories that the missionaries told, of Jesus and of salvation, resonated deeply. They offered a new, perhaps even an unfamiliar hope.

Most likely, as is usually the case, the motivations for conversion were complicated ones, rooted in a variety of awarenesses and concerns. Certainly, not all of the Dakota who converted remained in the new faith. On the other hand, among those who did remain, some became leaders in the Dakota congregations, even becoming pastors themselves to provide better spiritual care for their people.

The Dakota who converted, becoming farmer Indians, did so in the wake of the cultural changes they were experiencing. Ironically, their responses to cultural change helped exacerbate cultural change. By leaving their villages, separating from traditional social and kinship structures, seeking new economic niches, setting aside former religious leaders and rituals, leaving behind old gods, these Dakota brought about further change and even upheaval. The traditional Dakota responded with fear and anger.

The missionaries believed that the Dakota were controlled by the "conjurors," men and women who preserved their own power at the expense of those dependent upon them for guidance and healing. This was an unfair generalization. As a whole, the *wakan* leaders certainly resented and resisted the work of the missionaries, but they also, as a whole, were dedicated to caring for their people. Again, motivations were complex. Jealousy was certainly a factor in the *wakan* leaders' responses to the Christian leaders, but so was spiritual and physical protectiveness. According to some accounts, even an occasional *wakan* man or woman converted to the new faith, but most found nothing life-giving or even helpful in Christianity. This new religion was simply one aspect of a much larger American culture—a culture seeking to destroy that of the Dakota.

This fundamental assumption is true. Clearly, the missionaries worked along with the American government, and with the settlers themselves, to de-construct Dakota life.

The fact that they did this with the best of intentions, and even with compassion, does not change the reality. The missionaries did not want to blend cultures; they wanted to replace one with the other, that is, replace the Dakota's with their own. New homes, new work, new clothing, new education, new medicine, new language skills, new allegiances, new assumptions, a new religion—these are the things that would help dismantle the Dakota world.

There were many causes of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Some causes were historical in nature, rooted in problems that had developed over decades. Others were cultural in nature. They reflected not only the economic and political impact of the traders and the U.S. government, but of the missionaries as well. The changes ranged from the loss of land and traditions, to starvation. Still other causes were rooted in more immediate crises that occurred during the year prior to August, 1862.

As indicated earlier, one cause was the loss of increasingly large sections of Dakota land to treaties. The open lands were sold to American settlers, who wanted good, cheap land. The settlers broke the soil for farming, altering the ecological makeup along the Minnesota River. They also expected protection from the antagonisms they were helping to generate among the Dakota.

The settlers' activities, along with drastically reduced numbers of game for food and trapping, contributed to a second cause of the war: the loss of economic livelihood. These concerns affected all Dakota, but here, in fact, was a specific pressure coming to bear on the traditional Indians. By retaining their social and economic patterns, they were especially vulnerable to problems that accompanied these changes. By refusing to accommodate themselves to the pressures to take up farming, in particular, they were out

of a highly significant new economic loop. Such economic loss, which would have been a sufficient problem in itself, was exacerbated by losses to the traders—hugely inflated sums of debt that kept the Dakota impoverished and still more dependent on the traders.

In 1861-2, problems of a severe and more immediate nature arose. The first also involved food supply: in 1861, a drought sharply reduced the Dakota harvest, affecting food availability for both traditional and farmer Indians. (The farmer Indians often shared resources with family and friends who were not farming.) Over the next months, famine became an increasing problem, until starvation began to kill some among the Dakota. Even in the face of this, the traders continued to refuse to provide food to those needing it. They were supported in this decision by Thomas Galbraith, the Indian agent. A little food was released from a warehouse at Upper Agency in July, but an insufficient amount and only when Captain John Marsh, from Ft. Ridgeley, finally insisted that be done.

In spite of these circumstances, the traders, rather mysteriously after all these years, continued to refuse to provide the Dakota with any food stores until the government payments arrived from Washington. The payment had been delayed in part because of a focus on the Civil War in the East, and in part because Congress could not decide whether to send the money as paper or as gold. In perhaps the greatest irony in Minnesota's history, the gold arrived in St. Paul on Monday, August 18, 1862, one day after the attacks began at Acton.

Within all of these events and circumstances, political and economic, resided the most profound cause of the war: the Dakota had lost their way of life. Those who took up farming, and especially those who also converted to Christianity, understood the reality

of this change. The old social and political structures, the former patterns of life, could no longer give the same definition, shape, and meaning, to Dakota existence.

The traditional Dakota responded with anger and fear.

On the one hand, the traditional Dakota challenged and resisted the missionaries. They interfered with mission work and life through verbal disagreement, threat, and the destruction of crops and livestock. They refused to convert, or to send their children to the mission schools. They refused to become farmers, or to change their clothing or hairstyles. Many of them refused to recognize the boundaries of the reservation, since they refused to recognize the validity of the treaties. Thus, they hunted and traveled in areas they were not supposed to enter. Gradually, their defiance of the missionaries and of the government blurred. Since they regarded the missionaries as agents of the government, this could not be surprising.

On the other hand, the traditional Dakota reacted even more strongly against the farmer Dakota. Since they were of the same people, of the same culture, this was virtually inevitable. The farmer Dakota were not the Other. They were not missionaries, or soldiers, or settlers. They were not Americans. They were themselves.

The farmer Dakota and the traditional Dakota had once shared the same spirits, the same rituals, the same hunts. They had shared the same beliefs, the same kinship patterns, the same child-rearing practices. They knew what was required at each stage of life; they knew what was required of men, of women, of girls, of boys. They knew how to celebrate a birth; they knew how to honor a death; they knew how to deal with love. They knew how to find healing, and how to worship the gods. They knew the stories and the

tales. They knew who their enemies were. They knew how to process hides, and how to make tools and weapons. They knew what it meant to live together as a people.

This is what the Dakota lost. And this is why the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 was fought on two fronts: along the line drawn between the traditional Dakota and the Americans, and along the line drawn between the blanket Indians and the farmer Indians.

Of course, part of the problem was that many of the Dakota were not experiencing loss. Many of those who converted remained firm in their commitment to Christianity. The missionaries had convinced them that, for whatever reason or combination of reasons, they were better off as Christians, that their bodies, their souls, and their children stood a better chance of surviving if they made such a change. Many refused to be intimidated by the threats and activities of the traditionalists.

The latter recognized a helplessness in the face of all this. In the wake of the first attack at Acton, they became convinced that they faced two enemies: the Americans and the converted Dakota. Both represented a serious danger to their way of life, and, if the traditional Indians wanted to reclaim the old ways, they needed to eradicate both influences.

Thus, when the war broke out, and as it unfolded, both the settlers and the farmer Indians were vulnerable. They were ultimately view as a single, threatening group. The traditionalists killed and captured many from both groups—although a few of the farmer Indians were freed even before Camp Release because of the pleas of family members who remained a part of the warring group. Similarly, a small number of settlers were never captured because they were recognized as friendly and even supportive of Dakota life. However, this group was small. Even Philander Prescott, who had a Dakota wife and

had lived among the Dakota for decades, in a supportive, positive way, was killed. Attacking groups varied in the level of their aggressiveness.

The distinction between friend and enemy continued to blur in the immediate wake of the war. Several of the Dakota who helped the settlers were included among those imprisoned, and many of their family members were transported to Fort Snelling, where the Army established a camp for them. During a hellish winter, many Dakota died from disease, and a general lack of care.

The distinction between the traditionalists and the farmer Indians continued after the war. A small group of Dakota, those who helped the settlers and worked as scouts for the U.S. Army, were granted land on Prairie Island. Here, they established a village that continues to exist today. A few others, who had fled in the wake of general retribution, eventually and quietly returned to Minnesota. By then, if they were not welcomed, they were at least tolerated. Unfortunately, however, the hostility on the part of the settlers carried forward for generations.

Thomas Williamson, Stephen Riggs, and Williamson's son, John, along with other missionaries, worked among the imprisoned and detained Dakota, attempting to alleviate conditions and continue their work of conversion. Williamson provided medical assistance, as well. In an undated article archived at the Blue Earth County Historical Society, Barbara Busack describes the anger that Williamson faced because of his defense of the Dakota, and his pleas on their behalf for better treatment. Quoting an article from the St. Paul *Pioneer and Democrat*, she writes that the paper "condemned. . . Williamson, for his concern over the cruel manner in which the Sioux were handled." She adds that, "The writer sarcastically suggested that 'he should be appointed a committee of

one to try and alleviate their suffering condition, and extend to them our apologies and regrets.'"

Busack also reports an ironic reaction: "There were also those, such as Indian Agent Galbraith, who placed the blame for the outbreak directly on Christianity. In their opinion the Sioux were no longer willing to tolerate the encroachment of Christianity upon their habits and customs." Galbraith conveniently overlooked his own inept work as Indian agent, as well as the host of other contributing factors, and chose to place all responsibility for the war upon the missionaries.

In spite of Galbraith's argument, the work of the evangelical missionaries, along with that of their colleagues, was not the only factor in the development and unfolding of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. However, the missionaries' commitment to religious and cultural conversion helped establish a deep sense of alienation on the part of the traditional Dakota. This alienation, and its under-girding loss of culture, profoundly increased tensions between the traditionalists and the Euroamericans, as well as those Indians who converted to Christianity. The work of the missionaries, then, helped generate the war, in spite of the message they tried to preach of peace and hope.

It is important to note that the tensions between the two groups of Dakota did not ease with the end of the war. In fact, aspects of those tensions are still felt today, and further study remains to be done in this area. Two especially significant questions are these: what is the character of Dakota spiritual life today, and how are the ramifications of the war still being experienced? A third question is perhaps most important: how can healing in these areas be accomplished? History is never simply the past.

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