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The Native-Wilderness Equation: Catholic and Other School Orientations in the Western Arctic

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About the history of schooling in the Western Arctic, two generalizations must be made. Firstly, policies governing the provision and control of schools have usually originated as part of northern development strategies; they are thus broadly significant, touching such issues as aboriginal rights, regional development plans, and other unresolved questions relating to the status of native people. Secondly, they have generally been based on a particular version of the Native-Wilderness Equation; that is, that native destinies, as opposed to those of newcomers or settlers, are inextricably linked to the northern wilderness.

The paper will examine three variations on this theme of the native-wilderness equation: first, that of the Sisters of Charity and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Roman Catholic missionary groups in that part of the Western Arctic known as the Mackenzie District from the 1850s to the 1950s; second, that of the federal and territorial governments from the 1920s to the early 1970s; and third, that of Justice Thomas Berger in his Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland* (1977).[1]

It is the paper's contention that the concept of the native-wilderness equation was important in shaping Catholic missionary objectives, government directives, and Berger's recommendations concerning northern development, including their respective schooling proposals. However it will be argued that the traditional Roman Catholic orientation, as a variation of the equation, was fundamentally progressive in character, while ironically Berger's liberal vision and that of the federal government have been restrictive, if not anachronistic in nature.

The traditional missionary point of view was that native people should have at least three choices; life in the wilderness, life in the nonwilderness

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[1] T. Berger, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland,* the Report of the MacKenzie *Valley Pipeline Inquiry*, 2 vols. (Ottawa : Ministry of Supply and Services, 1977).

North, or some combination of both. Government, on the other hand, initially defined the equation in its classic sense; that is, that a traditional hunting-trapping life in the wilderness was the sole native destiny. In the 1950s however, it reversed direction for a perspective in which industrial participation in the North or elsewhere became the only native option. Berger's position is less easily summarized, not only because of its highly speculative nature, but also because its findings and conclusions appear to be based on the erroneous assumption that the church and state conceptions of the equation were identical. Of equal if not greater significance, however, is Berger's reformulation of the equation so that differences between "whites" and "natives" rather than their common humanity become the basis for a new northern social order.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the proposition that the recommendations of Justice Berger are based on an analysis that is essentially ahistorical and are thus inappropriate as a basis for policy formulation for the Western Arctic. Moreover, contemporary Catholic northern development activists, in addition to espousing the Justice's position, appear to be misinformed about if not indifferent to much of the past work of their northern co-religionists.

One cannot comprehend the social theory that provided the basis of the Catholic version of the native-wilderness equation without an appreciation of the experience of the missionaries. The Catholic advance into the Mackenzie began in 1852, when Henri Faraud, an Oblate priest, travelled to Fort Resolution at the request of some Metis Catholics. In 1858 three of his colleagues, having learned that an Anglican missionary had gone North, followed him, and by 1860 seven new Oblate mission stations had been raised. In the same year Bishop Taché appointed Vital Grandin coadjutor and sent him to the Great Slave Lake country to ensure the "triumph of Catholicism."[2] Following the setting up of a mission at Fort Providence, Grandin wrote Mother Deschamps, Superior-General of the Sisters of Charity, asking for sisters, who would teach, nurse, and provide care for orphans, and who would by their very lives give the Indians "an example of true charity."[3] Five Grey Nuns arrived in Providence in 1867, and along with eight orphans experienced a winter so severe that it prompted Deschamps to grant them a longer period of nightly rest in the hope that a relaxation of the Rule would make up for the lack of food.[4] With such secular goals as

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[2] A. TACHÉ, *Vingt Années de Missions* (Montréal: Eusebe Senecal, 1866), 134, 142.

[3] Grandin to Deschamps, Mai 3, 1962, in Providence Historique (Archives Srs. Grises de Montréal, Maison-Mère, Montréal), doc. ii.

[4] Slocombe to Faraud, Providence SGM, XXVI, 2.

providing education and care for the poor and sick in mind, by the early 1930s the Grey Nuns had established six convents in the Mackenzie Vicariate to serve four hospitals and six schools.

When Bishop Grandin left the Mackenzie in 1864, his successors Faraud, Grouard, and Breynat worked vigorously to assure the success of the missions among the Mackenzie Dene. By the early 1900s, except for Fort McPherson, the Catholic presence prevailed in the forts, with the Arctic Coast remaining the only uncontested area. Two priests went overland to Coronation Gulf in 1911, but their murder by Inuit from the Coppermine along with other reverses meant that it was 1920 before Breynat received news of the first Inuit baptisms "in the fields of Ice"[5] north of Great Bear Lake. From the 1920s on the Oblates, aided by the Grey Nuns, intensified their efforts with a zeal that dismayed the hardiest of their Anglican rivals. During this time Breynat received representations from several Anglican officials and a proposal from the Hon. Charles Stewart, federal minister of the Interior, that a gentleman's agreement be struck in which the Indian missions would be left to the Oblates in exchange for Catholic non-interference in Eskimo territories.[6] As his reply to Stewart in 1928 testifies, Breynat dismissed these overtures:

> Regarding the establishment of any limits to our sphere in activity, I hope you will not resent it too much if, instead of following your advice, however friendly it be, to come to some agreement with representatives of the Anglican Church, I rather stand by the directives imparted to me by our ecclesiastical Superior in Rome.[7]

Even though Breynat established a line of seven permanent Eskimo missions, less than 20 per cent of the Inuit in the District were Roman Catholic when he retired in 1943. At this same time Indian Affairs statistics indicate that the Dene Catholic population had risen to 83 per cent. Breynat and his successors, Trocellier and Piché, were to become more and more aware, as one Oblate put it, that the "war for ... souls in the Northland" had ended.[8] From the 1930s on the Catholic task was to maintain the affinity

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[5] P. DUCHAUSSOIS, *Mid Snow and Ice* Trans. R. Dawson (London : Burns and Oates, 1923), 318.

[6] For a discussion of these negotiations see R. Carney, "Church-State and Northern Education 1867-1961" (unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Department of Educational Foundations, University of Alberta, 1971), 141-143.

[7] Breynat to Stewart, May 25, 1928, Indian Affairs File, Archives of the Vicariate of the Mackenzie.

[8] *Indian Record*, XVII, 10 (December, 1954).

between what Westhues describes as "the communitarian thrust of Catholic theology"[9] and the communal orientation of traditional native communities that had been so assiduously nurtured in the Dene and Inuit camps. The social and economic potential of the coming together of these traditions was, of course, never realized. Government officials either ignored the relationship or saw it as nothing more than a form of Catholic aggrandizement.[10] Missionary views and those of native people themselves, including understandings existing between them, were seldom taken seriously by government in its mapping out of native futures. In rising mining settlements like Yellowknife and administrative centers like Fort Smith, the Indian was an anachronism, a dweller outside, who soon felt himself unwelcome. By the 1950s Piché observed that the "invasion of the North by whites"[11] had resulted in Catholics becoming a minority. The church was losing the support of its former partners, the federal and territorial governments especially; and its social and educational work was seen by most whites coming into the country as either negligible in accomplishment or inappropriate for the new industrial and administrative order.

From the time of regular native-European contact in the nineteenth century almost to the mid-twentieth, the conceptualization and the working out of the destiny of the Mackenzie District's aboriginal population was left to the missionaries and fur traders. Despite their differences both saw the wilderness – where traditional beliefs would be tempered by the promise of the gospel and the vagaries of the chase would be lessened by the benefits of trade – as an utopian environment where the native backwoodsman would be both virtuous and free. Assignment to this sphere of activity would not have been possible without Dene and Inuit consent; moreover, the interdependence that characterized it reduced the possibility of serious abuse

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[9] K. WESTHURES, "The Adaptation of the Roman Catholic Church in Canadian Society," in S.T. Crysdale and L. Wheatcroft, *Religion in Canadian Society* (Toronto MacMillan Company of Canada, 1976), 291-293

[10] Shortly after the signing of the first northern treaty, J. McRae (Inspector, Treaty 8) expressed concern that grants to mission schools were nothing more than "subventions for spiritual enterprises." McRae to C. Sifton (Minister of Indian Affairs), December 7, 1900, Indians Affairs Black Series, Public Archives of Canada, Vol. 398. This theme was taken up later by Hawthorn who explained oblate resistance to school integration in the 1960s "disapproval at seeing a community which they had created according to their religious beliefs disintegrate." (Hawthorn, 94); and by Frideres, a fellow social scientist, who summed up the Oblate educational work as follows: "The concern of these "educators" for "profits" and maintenance of property instead of for the natives in sometimes striking." J.S. Frideres, *Canada's Indians Contemporary Conflicts* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1974), 33.

[11] P. PICHÉ, "The Educator and the Eskimo." *Northern Affairs Bulletin*, VI, 2 (May-June, 1959).

by any of the partners.[12] Once religious commitment had been secured, Catholic missionaires were particularly given to fostering the wilderness archetype, the Christian trapper, who was free to follow his traditional ways, subject, of course, to certain but not inescapable trade and religious expectations. The Catholic view was that assignment to the wilderness was not necessarily permanent, and that it was possible for people who are utterly different from one another, but who profess the same faith to live and work together. Indeed the Church alone held that education was necessary not only for life in the wilderness, but also for other chances that existed or that would eventually present themselves.

Although the design of the aboriginal commonwealth was disturbed by such developments as the Yukon mining rush, the coming of entrepreneurs and government officials to the District did not initially upset the missionary version of the equation. In time, however, it became apparent that the support of the newcomers, government officials particularly, for this version of the equation was at best unenthusiastic. They did not see the equation as allowing for the possibility of entry into non-wilderness activities. Meanwhile, the Church struggled, albeit not always consistently, to have the equation defined more broadly, particularly in terms of educational opportunities.

Both the territorial and federal governments, which were essentially one and the same, tended to see the Mackenzie as a mission field, and as they often reminded Breynat and others,[13] a responsibility of the Church. The state had no policy for the region and thus responded reluctantly, if at all, to Oblate submissions for health and educational services, for the protection of aboriginal rights, and for various forms of economic assistance.[14] At times the government's passivity discouraged the Oblates, but they invariably returned to the offensive, urging the state to assume its responsibilities. Grouard and Breynat, for example, continually pressed the federal government to extend treaty rights into the vicariate. When they were finally negotiated in 1899 and 1921, however, it was not because of the Oblate insistence of Indian rights, but rather because of government fears that gold

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[12] For a discussion of the theme of mutual dependence; see E.P. Patterson, *The Canadian Indian : A History Since 1500* (Don Mills: Collier Macmillan Canada, 1972), A.J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) and S. Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980).

[13] G. BREYNAT, *The Flying Bishop,* trans, A.G. Smith (London : Bums and Oates, 1955), 132.

[14] Oblate initiatives in these areas are well documented in R. Fumoleau's, *As Long As This Land Shall Last* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975).

and petroleum discoveries might be compromised if aboriginal title[15] were not extinguished.

During the 1920s and 1930s the uneasy alliance between church and state was being undermined slowly, almost imperceptibly, by the demands of new settlers and agencies. As well as attempting to placate the demands of the Church for improved services to native people, the government was forced to respond to constant appeals from new entrepreneurial elements, merchants, mining interests, and transportation companies. In the meantime its aboriginal policy continued to be premised on the belief that the native people should be engaged only in the ancestral forms of activity afforded by the barrens, waters, and forests of the district.

During his last years in office, Breynat became increasingly preoccupied with the general welfare of the Dene and Inuit, believing, with cause, that their levels of health and economic well-being were steadily declining. By 1940, after futile representations to the press, to the territorial government, and to the Governor General, Breynat's disenchantment was such that he resigned from the Canadian Oblate Indian Committee, convinced that even his confrères had been ineffectual, if not negligent, in their efforts "to demand and secure the full range of Indian rights."[16]

Following the second world war, the Canadian government was prompted by resource and strategic concerns as well as the demands of white communities in the Mackenzie. It thus moved to end what Prime Minister St. Laurent described in 1953 as the country's traditional attitude to its North: "We have administered the vast territories ... in an almost continuing state of absence of mind."[17] As government expenditures increased, settlements like Smith and Aklavik became enclaves for new government officials who soon laid claim to most activities formerly undertaken by the Oblates and Grey Nuns. Even pre-1945 government workers, such as the R.C.M.P. and Indian agents, disassociated themselves from the missionaries in order to find places in the burgeoning federal hierarchy. During the 1950s and 1960s social scientists and bureaucrats discovered the existence of an all-pervasive social and economic dichotomy between white and native populations. The previous version of the native-wilderness equation, which had been a fundamental axiom of federal northern policy was abandoned. Its origin as well as its inadequacy, however, was not ascribed to the limited vision of

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[15] For a review of treaty discussions, and related government initiatives, see Carney, 30-36 and 121-131.

[16] BREYNAT to Guy (Oblate Indian Commission), May 1, 1940, Écoles Indiennes, AVM.

[17] Quoted in R.A.J. Phillips, *Canada's North* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1967), 161-162.

pre-1945 governments, but rather to the Catholic Church and its system of schooling.

Government had left the staffing, curriculum, and management of Catholic day and residential schools in the District in the hands of the missionaries from the time of the establishment of the first school in 1867 until the 1950s.[18] At that time Jean Lesage, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, announced a "New Education Programme for the Northwest Territories,"[19] one which effectively brought an end to the church's educational role. It is not possible here to trace the development of the mission institutions, other than to underline the fact that the Bishop and other vicariate personnel attempted to make them generally consistent with the Oblate version of the native-wilderness equation. Notwithstanding this, most government comments on the schools were favourable; that is, until 1943, when Andrew Moore, a school inspector from Manitoba, raised questions about their worth.[20] Subsequently, Euro-Canadian residents and a spate of government reports argued for their dissolution.

With the introduction in 1955 of Lesage's "New Education Programme," the federal government, in theoretical terms at least, abandoned the limited parameters of its version of the native-wilderness equation for one which implied a new schooling arrangement, one designed to lead to "other [non-wilderness] employment and sources of income" and to make "education more important than it had been previously."[21] Lesage's plan nevertheless held out the two objectives common to the earlier Oblate equation; that is, preparation for life in the wilderness, and/or for life in the developing North.

Until Lesage's announcement the state had seemed confident that its narrow interpretation of the native-wilderness equation was a sound model, not only for its aboriginal charges, but also for its schooling agents. However these agents, the Oblates in particular, refused to accept the limitations of

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[18] R. HOEY (Superintendent of Welfare and Training, Indian Affairs Branch) indicated the extent to which Departmental schooling regulations were met: "... I think you [Andrew Moore] are absolutely safe in the preparation of your Report to proceed on the assumption that regulations governing educational effort amongst Indians and Eskimos in the Northwest Territories are practically non-existent." Hoey to Andrew Moore, September 21, 1944, quoted in A. Moore's "Report of an Educational Survey in the Mackenzie District ..." November, 1944. Submitted jointly to the Northwest Territories Administration and the Department of Mines and Resources, 24 (manuscript).

[19] J. Lesage "New Education Programme in the Northwest Territories" (press release), Marsh 28, 1955, AVM.

[20] Carney, "The Moore Report," 317-347.

[21] Lesage, 1.

this interpretation, and their demands for better funded and more elaborate schools were in direct contradiction to government policies which saw native life chances to be based solely on wilderness activities that required little or no schooling.

Nowhere is the distinction between the two versions of the equation more pronounced than in the debate between church and state officials over the funding of native school programs. A common justification advanced for the church-state accord in Indian education by government officials was its cheapness. Thus D.C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, noted that Indian schooling was a cooperative venture in which "... the churches loyally made up the deficiency [from] their own revenues ..."[22] H. Conroy, one of Scott's employees in the Mackenzie, commented similarly in 1910. The Catholic mission schools at Providence and Resolution were doing "good work [at] very small cost to the government: It would be difficult to see how a better or cheaper policy in regard to schools could be formulated than the one now in vogue."[23] Oblate arguments for increased operating and capital grants that called upon the Department of Indian Affairs to meet its statutory and treaty obligations were invariably deflected either because it was argued funds were not available or because it was felt that the costs should be met locally. Notwithstanding treaty promises, only limited amounts of money were made available in the appropriations. In 1939, for example, the Department was prepared to pay subsidies for only twenty-nine per cent of school-age Indian children in the District,[24]and most of the grant was assigned to residential school places for children who had been designated as orphan, sick, or neglected.[25] On the other hand, no such restrictions were in place for the white children of Yellowknife. In 1944 government per capita grants to the Yellowknife Public School District were seventy per cent higher than that given native pupils in Fort Smith.[26]

To some extent government officials were familiar with the work of mission schools, yet they tended not to comment either on religious education or on the common residential school practice of providing instruction in French and vernacular languages, including syllabics.[27] Such

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[22] F. STACEY (Unionist, Westminster District), quoting remarks made by D.C. Scott, *Commons Debates*, 1920, 4027.

[23] *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs*, 1910, 310.

[24] Carney, 201-202.

[25] *Ibid*., 186-187.

[26] *Ibid*., 305.

[27] H. CLERISSE, *Du Grand Nord à l'Atlas* (Paris : Éditions Jules Tallendier; 1938), 154. Noting that Indian languages and Indian life were on the decline, Breynat wrote his friend M. Martin in 1945 indicating his support for the inclusion of native

instruction may have been ignored because it was seen to be consistent with a wilderness oriented curriculum; but whenever they saw too much secular or higher learning, they had something to say. H. Bury, an official in the Department of the Interior, thought the program at Providence in 1913 was "perhaps unnecessarily prolonged": after all not much time was needed for pupils "to be equipped with merely sufficient education to fear God, honour the King, and respect the laws of the country."[28] Responding to a request from Bishop Breynat for grants for promising scholars beyond the age of sixteen, the Territorial Council formulated a policy in 1934 which reduced the existing subsidy level from sixteen years of age to twelve for boys, and to fifteen for girls. It was argued that as these children were "going to live out their lives in the country," they should not be "over-educated in a scholastic way ..."[29] And when instances of "over-education" were reported, they prompted reprimands such as the following in 1942 from R. Hoey (Superintendant of Training, Department of Indian Affairs) to Sister Souka, principal of the School at Providence:

> The officials here [Ottawa] are inclined to believe that the course of study should be confined largely to reading, writing and arithmetic ..."'any future education is unnecessary and of no particular benefit in the sort of life which they must inevitably lead."[30]

A departmental working paper circulated at the time of Lesage's announcement recommended the closing down of mission schools.[31] By the mid-1960s this was accomplished. As the schooling work of the missionaries was brought to an end, they moved into such areas as catechetical programs and the co-operative movement, leaving the field of formal education to a massive federal initiative, which in a short time provided free, universal, compulsory, English language, non-sectarian, schools in virtually every community in the District. The new schools were conducted by certified teachers from the south, who adhered to curriculum, examinations, and administrative procedures identical to those favoured in southern centers like

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languages in all Indian schools. Breynat to Martin, November 14, 1945, Martin File, VLL, AVM.

[28] H.B. BURY, November 7, 1917, "Report on Indian Affairs – Education" RGIO IABS – 4042 - 336877, 4-7 (manuscript).

[29] "Extract from the Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth Session of Council," November 26, 1934, Minutes of the Northwest Territories Council.

[30] Hoey to Souka, July 2. 1942, Archives of the Vicariate of the Mackenzie.

[31] "Education in the Northwest Territories," January 21, 1955, 1-10, Education Office, Fort Smith, NANR, 1-10.

Edmonton. There was Catholic opposition to the changes, but it was poorly co-ordinated, often defensive, and sometimes so hostile to be self-defeating. In 1961, for example, Father A. Renaud (Director, Oblate Indian Eskimo Commission) in a speech before a meeting of school trustees in Quebec, reserved his most acerbic comments for the department's education officials: "Thanks to the virtual elimination of Catholics from top posts, the education section of the Northern Affairs department is a veritable Orangeman's paradise."[32] It should also be borne in mind that the Catholic missionaires went North to work with native people, and despite the Oblate's declining numbers in the 1950s[33] and appeals from recently arrived whites for their ministry, they remained steadfast to their original commitment. This together with the fact that they were francophones whose second language was often a native dialect, and who in many instances were from France[34] combined to make it difficult for them to get in step with the new northern social order.

Nevertheless the Oblates were reluctant to criticize the logistical support or the academic elements in the Grade One to Twelve orientation of the new education program. They had petitioned for such arrangements for years only to be continually rebuffed by governments wedded to the classic definition of the native-wilderness equation. As academic opportunity was seen to be an element of one of the two central themes of the Oblate version of the equation, that is participation in non-wilderness activities in the North, the missionaires could hardly criticize the governement for finally expanding opportunities for formal education. What is more difficult to understand is the Oblate's failure to voice more public criticism of the programs for ignoring the other major theme in their version of the native-wilderness equation, that is, the need to sustain and respect the religious, linguistic, economic and environmental orientations of Dene and Inuit cultures. The few instances when the Oblates did speak out,[35] were more than counteracted by the prevailing view, which was essentially that expressed by Diamond Jenness, a respected ethnologist, who dismissed mission schools as "religious kindergartens" and ongoing effforts by Oblates and others to maintain northern cultures as unrealistic: "... it is preferable that they [Dene and Inuit] should succumb struggling for a life in southern Canada than rotting away in the Arctic ... It is only their distinctive race and culture that will

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[32] "Priest Calls Department Anti-Catholic," *Ottawa Citizen,* June 10, 1961.

[33] Oblate numbers droped from 114 to 1953 to 100 in 1960. *Personnel de Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats* (Roma: Curia Generaliza, 1960), 263.

[34] See F. Banin, "The Centenary of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate," *The Canadian Catholic Historical Association Report* (1941-1942), 29-31.

[35] Piché, the first Canadian born Bishop of the vicariate, offered several suggestions in an article referred to earlier, "The Educator and the Eskimo," *Northern Affairs Bulletin*, VI, 2, (May-June, 1959).

disappear..."[36] It was not until Justice Berger's report was issued in 1977 that this aspect of Oblate northern social theory, by implication at least, was restored to credibility.

In March, 1974, the Canadian government appointed Justice T. Berger "to inquire into and report upon the terms and conditions that should be imposed in respect of ... the proposed MacKenzie Valley Pipeline having regard to [its] ... social, environmental, and economic impact..."[37] Three years later in April, 1977, Berger submitted Volume One to the Hon. Warren Allmand, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The first volume, the key document, presented arguments for a ten year pipeline moratorium allowing for the settlement of native claims. The second volume, submitted to government in November of the same year, set out the conditions for a pipeline should a Mackenzie energy corridor be decided upon at some future date.

The Mackenzie District had never before been subject to such comprehensive study. It included formal hearings in Yellowknife involving some 300 experts, public sessions in ten southern urban centers, and visits to thirty-five communities in the Western Arctic where the testimony of one thousand northerners was heard. His report was hailed by many native leaders as a "significant victory,"[38] by social scientists as "clearly one of the most important public documents of the century in Canada,"[39] and by such Christian coalition groups as Project North as marking an end to "violation of the Dene Nation."[40] Shortly after the tabling of the first volume the National Energy Board recommended against the Mackenzie Valley corridor in favour of the Alaskan highway route. In April of this year, however, the NEB, following hearings on a proposal for a pipeline from Norman Wells in the Mackenzie to Zama, Alberta, recommended the construction of a $400 million line. Catholic social action groups, citing Berger's recommendations, view the Board's decision as an act of "cultural genocide."[41] At the time of writing the final decision rests with the federal cabinet.

Berger's analysis and procedures are commendable in many respects and his comments on northern ecosystems and engineering design underline the

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[36] D. Jenness, *Eskimo Administration: II. Canada* (Washington, Arctic Institute of North America, 1964), 48, 175.

[37] Berger, 1, 205-206.

[38] Project North, *Newsletter*, Vol. 5, No. 9 (December, 1980).

[39] P.L. MCCREATH et al., *Learning from the North A Guide to the Berger Report* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1977), 1.

[40] Project North, *Newsletter*, Vol. 5, No. 9 (December, 1980).

[41] *Loc. cit.*

uniqueness as well as the complexity of arctic megaprojects. Future commission would do well to achieve the levels of participation that his inquiry elicited. But there are three important analytic areas where his Report can be found wanting: the first concerns its historical interpretation; the second lies in its concept of native homeland, which will be shown to be a variant of the native-wilderness equation; and the third concerns its analysis of educational programs.

One cannot fault Berger's report for a lack of historical facts; he gives them in some quantity. His analysis, however, wrenches events from historical context. The Dene and Inuit traditions take on mythic proportions, while European involvements in the North are invariably treated as having been touched with malevolency. The native people of the Western Arctic inhabit a homeland while whites (in the same place) move in and out of the frontier like phantoms. Whites, we are told, "have never listened [to native people] in the past."[42] As agents of the metropolis whites have not been changed by the experience of the frontier; as a result they do not merit the right to share it in the same way as indigenous peoples. Using the theme of metropolitan dominance, Berger questions the outcomes of successive Canadian frontier encounters and seeks to arrest further tragedies by stopping the metropole's "final assault on the original people of the North."[43]

One can understand Berger's desire to redress the lack of understanding that has characterized much inter-group contact in the North. But it is not clear if his purpose is primarily didactic; that is, whether the "distinctive [native] ethno-scientific traditions"[44] are evoked in order to cast doubt upon the merit of the "civilization [whites are] trying to transmit;"[45] or whether he seeks to replace the tradition of ethnocentrism with one of cultural relativism. In either case the outcome is about the same; in fact it does little more than exchange the paternalism of thinly-veiled revulsion for the paternalism of unreflective approval.[46] Berger, despite his protestations to the contrary, tends to replicate the myth in which natives are seen "as part of the local flora and fauna and not men of like passions with ourselves."[47] Given

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[42] Berger, I, 198.

[43] *Ibid*., 116.

[44] *Ibid*., 7.

[45] O. MANNONI, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (London Methuen, 1956), 105.

[46] For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon in terms of educational practice, see J. Kleinfeld, "Positive Sterotyping: The Cultural Relativist in the Classroom," *Human Organization*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Fall, 1975) 269-273.

[47] A.J. TOYNBEE, *A Study of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), Vol. I, 152.

such an obscurantist stance, understanding of native values, other than in the form of unquestioning assent, is not possible. Like Hawthorne, in his *Survey of the Contemporary Indian of Canada* (1967),[48] Berger assigns such values as respect for the land, mutual sharing of resources, etc. universally to native people, emphasizing their unique nature by positing an alternate and largely irreconcilable set of white middle class values. This assumption of values unity within each of the two societies fails to explain power differences and conflicts within each, or the possibility of congruence between the two societies.

Problems arising from northern interaction, according to Berger, were not serious during the fur and mission era, which he sees as lasting until the 1950s, "... for it was a time when life still had a coherence and purpose consistent with native values and life on the land."[49] An increased governmental presence and the advance of the industrial system in the last twenty years, on the other hand, are seen as having produced deeper inequalities in the North, greater abuse of alcohol, marked increases in welfare, higher incidences of crime, to mention several of the pervasive social pathologies identified by the Commissioner.[50] What should be noted is that his analysis of the pre-1950 period is deficient in at least two respects. First, while he chronicles such phenomena as the advent of the whalers, the introduction of tuberculosis and the ethical imperatives brought by missionaries, the substantive emotions associated with these and other visitations are not analyzed, nor are their long-term effects traced. The reason for this is clear. Berger sees the collapse of the fur trade in the 1950s as the principal cause of the present dilemma, while other past occurences are deemed to be relatively inconsequential.

Given the simplicity of this interpretation, it is not surprising to find a second deficiency in his examination of the pre-industrial era. While recognizing the significance of the police, traders, and missionaries, Berger does not discuss the developing nature and context of their interaction with native people. Indeed, he ignores completely the syncretic and ideological systems that evolved. Such matters, of course, are not easily shared nor are they often identified. And oral testimony before a commissioner, in this case concerning the pipeline, is not a likely forum for them to be revealed.

The commissioner's recommendation that the pipeline not be built is based on his concept of native homeland. Three major attributes characterize

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[48] H. HAWTHORNE (ed), *Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada* (Ottawa Indian Affairs Branch, 1967), Vol. 2, 112-114.

[49] Berger, I, 86.

[50] *Ibid.,* Chapter 10, *passim.*

this notion of homeland, each of which involve "a growing sense of native awareness and native identity,"[51] and each of which requires profound changes in the course of northern development. The first attribute affirms the need to recognize a radically unique set of native claims. The native people of the North are seen as a people apart, having special status unlike other Canadians, whether native or white. Berger does not attempt to predict the outcome of the negotiations necessary to realize this claim, but he emphasizes that the attribute of unique nativeness is closely related to a second theme, that of the wilderness. The land itself, it is argued, will retain its present character but yet become the basis of a diversified economy of new institutions. The third attribute, the time required to bring about the realization of the first two attributes, depends very much on extrinsic forces. Ten years is seen as the minimum period, but it would take longer if the Government frustrates the articulation of the first two elements. In affirming the factors of nativeness, wilderness, and time as essential components in an equation leading to a native homeland, Berger, albeit unwittingly, reiterates themes which Catholic missionaires in the Mackenzie had articulated decades before, but with different outcomes in mind.

What Berger concluded about the missionary period of schooling could be summed up as follows: what little was done in the mission schools was fortunately done to very few. Enough has been said already to indicate that this is simplistic. The paucity of information in his account together with errors of fact and questionable interpretations reflect the general ahistorical character of his report. For example, his references to the opening of the first school, to the clientele of day schools, to the use of native languages, and to the procedures for selecting residential interns are incorrect; and his use of such sources as Reed and Devitt, as well as non-mission school informants as interpreters of the mission period has prevented him from determining the broad outlines, not to speak of the nuances, of the Oblate version of the native-wilderness equation.

On the other hand his critique of the new educational program that began in the 1950s is more telling, though it too tends to be rather one-sided in its condemnation. What is most important to note is that it reveals his particular version of the native-wilderness equation. The post-1950 system of education is found wanting in two ways. Firstly, it is seen to have failed to provide appropriate academic programs leading to any degree of achievement and opportunity for native students in the non-wilderness north or elsewhere. Secondly, by ignoring native values, histories, and languages, the new schools had alienated native children from their families and

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[51] *Ibid*., XXV.

cultures. According to Berger, Lesage's promise to provide wilderness and development preparation had not been kept.

A major component in Berger's version of the native-wilderness equation attempts to resolve the imbalance resulting from Lesage's plan. The Dene and Inuit should be given what is rightfully theirs, and "basic to their idea of self-determination, is their right to educate their children – the right to pass on to them their values, their languages, their knowledge and their history." He thus sees no alternative but a separate system of native education in which the Dene and Inuit would be given complete authority over the education of their children: "The transfer of authority must be real, and it must occur at all levels." This would not result, he insists, in a rejection of "all knowledge that is basic to the society of southern Canada," but rather to a "balance of the two cultures that is of the native people's own making."[52] In several respects Berger's version of the equation is similar to that articulated in the earlier Oblate formula; but unlike the missionaires, Berger sees progress only by dividing northern white and native societies. He moves from the paternalism of ethnocentrism so characteristic of the federal government in the mission and Lesage eras to a paternalism of cultural relativism in which white societies are seen neither as intrinsically valuable nor even as modifiable. Needless to say this version of the equation stands in marked contrast to what the Oblates had in mind.

Using a colonial model to interpret northern historical events, Berger has fitted the various contact stages into the model without too much difficulty. Not surprisingly, he has found all of them wanting in terms of their meaning or benefit to native people. As such his arguments are convincing. The colonial relationship is essentially dehumanizing, northern people have been colonized, and, unless their claims are settled, ... "there is a real possibility of civil disobedience and civil disorder in the North."[53] Government must therefore abandon its policies of cultural replacement and assimilation and accept the idea of native self-determination. In arriving at this conclusion Berger dismisses other possibilities. Using a "we" and "they" context, he has failed to identify alternatives that have either existed in the past or that might be formulated to resolve the critical issues he has identified. The Oblate version of the native wilderness equation, though it was not clearly articulated nor implemented to any significant degree, might well contribute to a new northern policy. Given his lack of historical perspective, one can understand why Berger did not identify and thereby did not assign any value to missionary social theory. What is difficult to understand is why Catholic northern social activists have not taken the Christian

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[52] Berger, 1, 90-93, 181-184.

[53] *Ibid*., 194.

experience of northern peoples into account. By ignoring or worse by disassociating themselves from their own history, they appear to rely entirely on Berger for explanations and solutions bringing nothing new to the dialogue.

One probable reason why Catholic northern commentators, particularly those involved in Diocesan Social Justice Commissions, and in such organizations as Project North and Development and Peace, lack a northern historical perspective is because of their reliance on contemporary interpretation only. For most the starting point would appear to be the Canadian Catholic Bishops 1976 Labour Day Message, "Northern Development: At What Cost ?,"[54] a 3500 word statement that outlines some of the exploitation that has occurred or that is anticipated in the North. The Church's role in contributing to disruptive changes in native cultures is acknowledged, though in keeping with the ahistoricity of most such documents, neither examples nor the contexts of the exploitative behaviour is given.

Arguing for just land settlements, environmental protection, and energy conservation, the Bishop urge Canadians to become involved in a variety of study and lobbying activities directed toward resolving these issues. In many ways the Bishop's observations antedate what Berger had to say in his Report. Indeed, the Catholic Church as a member of Project North called for a "moratorium of northern energy resource development" before the Berger Commission Hearings in Ottawa in July, 1976.[55] The relationship between Berger and the Church on matters relating to the North has become symbiotic, though Berger seems to have taken on the task of historical interpretation for both. In an address entitled "Native Rights in the New World: A Glance at History" in February, 1979, he cites some of the arguments of Las Casas, Bishop of Chiapas, before a royal junta at Valladolid in 1550 called to enquire into the methods used to extend Spanish dominions in the new world. From Berger's sketchy outline it would appear that Las Casas and the Oblates had much the same in mind; namely that "Indian culture, customs, and institutions deserve respect on their own terms."[56] Unfortunately however, the Justice's ahistorical penchant prevents him from seeing the continuity of this view withing the Church.

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[54] Labour Day Message of the Canadian Catholic Conference, September l, 1975, Administrative Board, Canadian Catholic Conference, Ottawa.

[55] *Canadian Churchman* (July-August, 1976).

[56] T.R. BERGER, "Native Rights in the New World: A Glance at History," an Address to the Canadian Ethnology Society (Banff, Alberta), February 24, 1979, quote in *Canadian Native Law Reporter,* 2 (1979), 5-22.

It is therefore not surprising that when C. Monk (Chairman, Project North) refers to Berger's address in an article in March of this year, he misinterprets the subject of the Valladolid enquiry. Las Casas did not question "the right to colonize," his arguments concerned the means of colonization not the activity itself. Using history as a rhetorical instrument in which events are bent to serve the "victory of justice," Monk raises two possibilities: "solidarity with the victims of the present order" or co-option by "governments, financial institutions, and corporations"; leaving the reader with the following question: "Which Side Are You On?"[57]

Whether or not the advocates of this new orientation would find any merit in what the Oblates and Grey Nuns had in mind is a debatable question. One would hope, however, that the work of these missionaires would not be judged simply as an example of co-option, and that their efforts will be seen as having some contemporary relevance.

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[57] Project North, *Newsletter* (March, 1981).