Reading Log 2

The interactions between the Indigenous peoples of Canada and Jesuit missionaries during the seventeenth century have been severely misconstrued by historians over the years. As a result, historians have labelled missionaries as, “Humble servants, saving souls from savagery and damnation, all for the greater glory of God,” (p 66). In reality, missionaries encouraged and coerced Indians to engage in cultural suicide. This also led to subsequent missionaries and agencies incorrectly perceiving Indigenous people as inferior and uncivilized, in need of saving from eternal damnation. As a result, the Indigenous peoples of North America were coerced into forsaking their traditional beliefs in the name of “cultural revolution,” (p 67).

This so called “cultural revolution,” (p 67) called for Indigenous peoples to completely remove themselves from their traditions, and convert to Christianity. In an attempt to persuade Indians to convert to Christianity, missionaries regaled them with the benefits of Christianity. One of the main points of persuasion was being granted access into Heaven. However, in the eyes of the Indians, to be granted, “…an everlasting life without marriage or labor was a highly undesirable fate,” (p 70). In other words, giving up the prospect of spending eternity with their ancestors and continuing on just as they did in life, for only a chance of ending up in Heaven, did very little to persuade the Indians. Seeing as the allure of Heaven was not enough to tempt Indians, missionaries then tried to horrify them with the prospect of eternal suffering in Hell. If anything, Indians viewed Hell as, “… a weapon of intimidation used by missionaries to force an acceptance of French social and political domination,” (71).

By utilizing methods of persuasion and fear-mongering, the Jesuits were able to convert some, but not enough Indians. Not only were they unprepared for Indians to openly resist and question Christianity, they were unprepared for Indians proving, “…their traditions were dynamic intellectual systems, capable of change,” (p67). Their ability to partake in traditional practices, while incorporating Christian practices and ideas, was troublesome in the eyes of missionaries.

Seeing as most accounts of interactions between these two groups were interpreted and recorded by Europeans, the full truth of how Indians perceived missionaries is still unfathomable. James P. Ronda correctly warns that, “Historians searching for Indian perspective must read such accounts with caution,” (p 67). To understand just how far missionaries were willing to go to overhaul and wipe out Indian tradition will never be understood if we only listen to one side’s account of events.