

MANUEL MENRATH, *Mission Sitting Bull: Die Geschichte der katholischen Sioux* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016), 372 pp.

In the course of approaching American history with the methods of New Western History, a rich body of studies has emerged that reveals the vastness of Native American experiences in a new distinctiveness. In his new book, Menrath takes a close look at the Catholic proselytization of the Sioux during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Menrath approaches the topic with the methods of New Western History, that is, to regard (established) historical sources with a new critical distance and to re-evaluate them. It also means to incorporate sources that may have been neglected, and to consider multiple perspectives in order to reach a balanced, richer, and more complete depiction of past events. He considers a global-historical interconnectedness of the nineteenth century and pursues a transnational-comparative approach. Thus, Menrath shows that the secularization movement in Europe prompted the Catholic abbot Martin Marty (1834-1896), whose Catholic biography Menrath traces in his book, and hundreds of Benedictines and Catholic nuns (mostly from Switzerland and the German Reich) to immigrate to the U.S. and create a "Catholic frontier" (Menrath 77). Menrath demonstrates that Marty's endeavors were substantial in the establishment and strengthening of the Catholic Church (62) in the United States, especially among the Sioux. Today, Marty is still widely known as the "apostle of the Sioux" (9). Thus, the culture wars that were taking place in Europe had a direct impact on Native American lives.

A novelty in Menrath's study is a new historical source: an unfinished 300-page biography about Martin Marty, written by Albert Kleber, that Menrath discovered during his research, and which forms an important pillar of information for his critical portrait of the abbot (14, 270). Menrath's aim is to move away from a hagiographic reception of Marty and focus instead on religious and cultural interactions between the Sioux and the Catholics. In so doing, Menrath considers Marty's socio-political environment (Marty's ultramontane socialization, chapter three) and is quite successful in offering an unadorned re-evaluation of the man and his motivations. In his re-assessment, Menrath traces the intricate strategies pursued by the Catholic Church

in the United States to assimilate the Sioux. Marty specifically targeted Indian children in his efforts to convert America's "heathens" because he realized that breaking their ties to their heathen parents would best ensure their salvation. Menrath concludes that Marty's work was a definitive ethnocide, something over which researchers differ (Ross Enochs, Karl Markus Kreis 15). In Menrath's focus on human interaction and his aim to provide a balanced analysis, Menrath includes various Native American perspectives throughout the book, a historical context ("Kriege in den Great Plains" 38, "Friedenspolitik" 43) and a comparative analysis of Sioux spirituality and worldview (the universal energy *Wakan Tanka* that pervades all) and the Catholic monotheistic Maker (37). The result is a very well researched book that provides a tightly interwoven study that offers intriguing details of individual experiences.

Menrath should have elaborated on one point. The ideology of the assimilation programs during the late nineteenth century wanted complete annihilation of everything Indian. The goal was to transform Native Americans into a homogeneous population of Christian farmers. Menrath concludes that Marty's Catholic mission failed in this regard; meaning that conglomerations of Sioux spirituality and Christian denominations emerged, rather than a new, exclusively Catholic indigenous population. On the other hand, Menrath mentions that most of the 60,000 Lakota living on reservations today are Catholic due to Marty's endeavors (62). The author should have given a clarifying explanation of how these somewhat contrary arguments correlate.

As suggested by the title of the book *Mission Sitting Bull*, Menrath draws upon Sitting Bull as a specific example of Marty's 'failure,' delineating the chief's dealings with the Christian missionizing efforts. For Marty, the conversion of the wildest bunch of the Sioux (as Sitting Bull and his followers were seen in the U.S.) was the ultimate goal. Among many others, Marty wanted to succeed in convincing Sitting Bull and his followers, who then lived in exile in Canada, to surrender and return to the reservation in the United States to become Christian farmers there. The two men were of about the same age when they met for the first time in 1878. An encounter with Sitting Bull was then considered a dangerous undertaking because of Sitting Bull's reputation as the most hostile of the Sioux. Marty was aware of

that and was ready to martyr himself for the cause (221). Sitting Bull, however, realized that the Episcopalians also wanted to convert him, as missionaries from two denominations courted him. This proved lucrative to Sitting Bull and assured him a certain amount of sovereignty that he was unwilling to give up (240). After Sitting Bull's death, Marty claimed that his conversion efforts had been successful. He said that the chief had asked him to build a church and a school and that he agreed to become a Christian (243). However, some of Sitting Bull's children went to Mary Collins's Congregationalist school. Menrath calls this "posthumous proselytization" (249) and considers Marty's appropriation of Sitting Bull an attempt to rehabilitate his reputation, for he had already on several occasions proclaimed to have successfully converted Sitting Bull.

The study of nineteenth-century Sioux Catholicism is closely linked to on-reservation boarding schools because Christian assimilation efforts were concentrated there. Off-reservation boarding schools have been thoroughly analyzed since the 1990s,<sup>1</sup> however, in-depth studies of on-reservation schools have only rarely been conducted.<sup>2</sup> Menrath

refers to this research gap and incorporates an analysis of several schools that were established by Marty (*Fort Yates Indian Industrial School* at Standing Rock, *St. Francis Mission* at Rosebud, *Holy Rosary Mission* at Pine Ridge). Menrath focuses on the enlistment of Sioux children, on everyday life at school, including disease and death, chastisement, and individual reactions and resistance to school rules (178, 181-202). Especially the latter is among the most interesting and valuable to the research within New Western History; for Menrath shows how Indian children dealt with the new foreign life forced upon them. Many ran away again and did so repeatedly. Others simply did not follow specific rules, and in some cases the Catholic personnel gave in to such disobedience and compromised (for example, at *St. Francis Mission* Indian children would always take off the uncomfortable shoes they had to wear and ran around in their socks; for a while they were scolded until the nuns eventually allowed the children to wear moccasins again, 198). Besides such openly disobedient behavior, Menrath also shows that many Indian children revolted passively against the missionaries' demands to embrace Catholicism exclusively (178-79, 199, 248).

Merely at a glance, Menrath includes a transnational comparison to Canada's Indian Residential Schools and Australia's and New Zealand's Native Schools and notes that it is exactly those comparative, transnational studies of Indian boarding schools of the nineteenth-century settler societies that are still missing in contemporary research.<sup>3</sup> Menrath argues, that this needs to be taken one step further: Because the nineteenth century in Germany and Switzerland can be considered the century of correctional institutions—"Anstaltsjahrhundert" (213)—and, because a considerable number of German-speaking missionaries emigrated to the U.S., bringing with them, for example, their ideologies concerning re-education in correctional institutions. Menrath suggests here the importance of a global-historical examination as part of post-colonial studies (214).

*Missionen in South Dakota 1884-1932* (2007) by Karl Markus Kreis.

<sup>3</sup> One study should be mentioned: Margaret D. Jacobs: *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (2009).

<sup>1</sup> Coleman's *American Indian Children at School* (1993) and Adams' *Education for Extinction* (1995) should be mentioned here. Many in-depth studies followed. Recently, several important studies emerged that offer case studies of specific institutions putting focus on Native American voices: Jacqueline Fear-Segal's *White Man's Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (2009) and Carlisle *Indian Industrial School: Indigenous Histories, memories and Reclamations* (2016), Trafzer's *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences* (2010) and Archuleta's, Child's, Lomawaima's *Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences, 1879-2000* (2000).

<sup>2</sup> Except for Tanya L. Rathbun's *Hail Mary: The Catholic Experience at St. Boniface Indian School* (2006), Clyde Ellis: "To Change them Forever: Indian Education at the Rainy Mountain Boarding School, 1893-1920," and James T. Carroll's *Americanization or Indoctrination: Catholic Indian Boarding Schools, 1874-1926* (1997). A valuable German research contribution to this field is *Schulen und Kirchen für die Sioux-Indianer: Deutsche Dokumente aus den katholischen*

One interesting example in this respect is Menrath's transnational perspective of Marty's endeavors with the Sioux in regard to Marty's character (Chapter 4, 80). In 1860, Marty was sent to the U.S. where he was to lead the recently founded priory St. Meinrad in Indiana, which became a monastery under Pope Pius IX. In 1876, Marty was called by the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions to work in the Dakota Territory where he remained for 20 years until his death in 1896. He became a traveling missionary among the Sioux and made it his utmost goal to save as many souls as possible. Menrath assesses this to be a "biographic caesura" (63) because Marty practically went against the majority of his fellow monks and bishops, who discredited him for traveling as a missionary. However, among the Catholic population, Marty was praised and held a good reputation (68). Menrath explains that Marty saw his calling in being a traveling missionary among the "heathens" much like early medieval Benedictine monks. In this respect, Menrath's study is also a valuable contribution to German-speaking American Studies and Swiss American post-colonial research that sets important impetus for further research.<sup>4</sup>

In his aim to present an unbiased and unadorned analysis of the history of Sioux Catholicism, Menrath should be praised for discussing the issue of clergy sexual abuse, a topic which has long been held concealed. While recently the topic has received wide press attention and has been studied by researchers

(e.g. Claire M. Renzetti *Clergy Sexual Abuse*, 2013), the same cannot be said for cases of Native American abuse in Catholic institutions. Menrath pleads for a comprehensive study of sexual abuse in Catholic on-reservation boarding schools, especially because of the numerous charges for sexual assault, rape, and sodomy (210) that have been brought against the Catholic dioceses of Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Blue Cloud Abbey (the three latter founded by Martin Marty) lately. Menrath gives shocking proof that sexual abuse of Indian children happened at several Catholic Indian boarding schools and shows that it not only took place, but was mostly done with impunity (211). As a reaction to those accusations, a statutory limitation was enacted that made it impossible for victims older than 40 years to sue an institution, like the Catholic Church (210), thus clearly protecting the alleged perpetrators (211) while making the issue cumbersome for Native American victims. Thus, for Native American victims, the only possibility left is to sue a specific person, a fact that makes the procedure very difficult since many perpetrators are no longer alive (210).

Menrath argues that an independent expert commission, which would systematically investigate Indian boarding schools in their full dimension, is urgently needed in the United States. Unfortunately, the government still shuns its responsibility (209).

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<sup>4</sup> One such study should be mentioned here: Tina Kühr: *On a Civilizing Mission. Die imperiale Zivilisierungspropaganda in den USA und im Deutschen Kaiserreich, 1889-1914* (2006).