

Bankrupt Education, flawed as it may be, deserves a place on library shelves. Its authors remind us of a disturbing fact: "Behind the mountain of studies, statistics, and task forces, we have in Canada today a fundamental debate over the intellectual and moral purposes of education, and the sooner we face it the likelier we are to achieve some real results" (p. 9). All engagements of Canada's community of scholars in this crucial debate are to be welcomed. Perhaps the interest, concerns, efforts, and insights of scholars outside of faculties of education—such as professors Emberley and Newell, who are political scientists—should be particularly appreciated.

Kas Mazurek
University of Lethbridge

Robert Choquette. *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995. Pp. 258. Illus. Can\$27.00 paper.

On Sunday, 3 December 1995, at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope John Paul II canonized Eugène de Mazenod, the founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. There could be no more fitting tribute to this former French bishop and superior general of the Oblates than the publication, in the same year, of this book by Robert Choquette, which analyses the exploits of the Oblates in Canada's Northwest. One of the leading historians of Christianity in Canada, Choquette carried out his research under the auspices of the Oblate-owned Western Canadian Publishers, an organization in the forefront of improving the quality of religious historical studies. Besides approaching Christianity's spread in Canada's north and west with understanding and balance, this book makes an important contribution to Canadian historiography by opening the English-speaking reader to a world of thought and action that has hitherto been closed because the archival sources are largely written in French.

In compelling fashion, Choquette claims that the Oblates succeeded in conquering Canada's Northwest for the Gospel in its ultramontane Roman Catholic form. Opposition to this religious conquest came largely from the Church of England and its evangelical Church Missionary Society. The Oblates triumphed in the Northwest, while Protestants emerged victorious in the Yukon, northern Manitoba, and the easterly portion of northern Saskatchewan. The Oblates aimed to evangelize the Native peoples and destroy their culture. Their conquest was successful and they were responsible, in large part, for 85 percent of today's Canadian Native people considering themselves Christian.

Robert Choquette's scholarship is solid in placing the two main rivals in the Northwest, the Oblates and Church Missionary Society, in the context of nineteenth-century Catholicism and Anglicanism. He explains that the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate were founded and expanded as Catholicism itself underwent revitalization and ultramontanism grew to know its finest hour. In an excellent discussion of ultramontanism, Choquette outlines its distrust of modern societies, which were products of the French Revolution. The Oblates, emerging from this period of renewal and militancy, brought this Euro-Canadian ultramontane Catholic mindset to the Northwest after 1845. Choquette observes that the Church of England was essentially an outpost of an English institution, and saw Rome as the Antichrist. Not surprisingly, the evangelical Church Missionary Society resented the papist French and fought them every step of the way.

Choquette contends that the Catholics had advantages over the Protestants. Catholics differed from Protestants in their respective definitions of Christian doctrine, life, and evangelization. The Catholic Church tended to be more appreciative of the ways of Natives because its theology was based on a continuity between nature and the transcendent. God was made more readily apparent because the administration of the sacraments was embedded in liturgical ritual and forms that were colourful, aesthetically pleasing, and dramatic. Protestant theology assumed a discontinuity between nature and the transcendent; in Protestant theology, one either has grace or not. The same logic cast a pall over Native customs and traditions that were foreign to the Protestant missionary. For example, the Church of England missionaries denounced local marriages *à la façon du pays*; Catholics were more conciliatory and simply asked the parties to normalize their union by renewing their marriage vows before a priest.

There were two Oblates in the Northwest in 1845; there were 273 by the end of the century. Most came from France, although a college for training them in Canada was founded in 1848. Ecclesiastical studies, whether undertaken in either France or Canada, remained minimal throughout the nineteenth century. With a desperate shortage of clergy, the training of seminarians was curtailed in order to get them ordained and into the ministry. Church leaders argued that what was needed was a priest's saintliness and virtue, not his knowledge. For example, Oblate Father Henri Faraud was put in charge of the permanent Athabasca mission of La Nativité at Fort Chipewyan in 1849, a base that would serve as a launching pad for Oblate missionaries to the Peace River, Fond du Lac and Great Slave Lake. Born in France, Faraud took his perpetual vows as an Oblate there in 1844 and was sent to Canada in 1846. Bishop Provencher catapulted him through Holy Orders, making him a subdeacon, a deacon, and finally a priest within months of his arrival. The

French-Canadian born Alexandre-Antonin Taché came west to Red River as a subdeacon; six days after his arrival, he was ordained a deacon and six weeks later, a priest, at age twenty-one. Despite their lack of rigorous theological study, these priests, like the majority of Oblates, proved to be wise "saints" essential to the success of Catholicism's missionary activity in the Northwest. Likewise, Choquette acknowledges that there were "sinners" who also partook of the Oblate activity in the north and west.

Emile Petitot was ordained a priest in 1862 and arrived from France the same year. He developed a reputation as one of the world's leading geographers, linguists, and anthropologists, and proved to be a first-class artist, transforming the inside of the small church of Good Hope into the jewel of the northern Church. Unfortunately, he developed an excessive attachment to a young Indian boy and by the late 1860s, he was showing signs of mental illness that would periodically turn him into a violent and dangerous madman. His bishop removed him from the Northwest.

There were divisions within the Oblate ranks. Depending upon whether they were of French or French-Canadian origin, they differed in their approach to missionary activity. For example, the French-born Grandin defended the French language, not because of pro-French nationalistic convictions, but because he saw it as a useful barrier to Anglicization and hence Protestant evangelization. Canadian Oblates, such as Albert Lacombe, Alexandre Taché, and Adélarde Langevin, saw the battle for French survival in the West as more than the protection of Catholicism. It was a fight for *la survivance* against the English. French Oblates were ready and willing to accept Anglicization, providing the Catholic faith was protected; French-Canadian Oblates were not.

All of these divisions occurred over two specific issues: the settlement of the west by French-speaking Catholics and the establishment of Catholic schools. Because only a minority favoured both of these measures, French-Canadians began to lose the battle to create a vibrant French-speaking community in the west equal to the English-speaking Protestant society. According to Choquette, the real success came in giving the Indians the wherewithal to survive in the alien, but conquering, Euro-Canadian culture. Choquette makes the point that the missionaries came into the Northwest out of their Christian concern for evangelization, and although they were an enemy of Native cultures, their churches and schools assisted the aboriginal people in adjusting to the conquering society. The resurgence of Canada's First Nations today lends support to Choquette's assertion.

Ken Munro
University of Alberta