

Crucifying the Great Bear: Christianity and East James Bay Cree bush religion in comparison

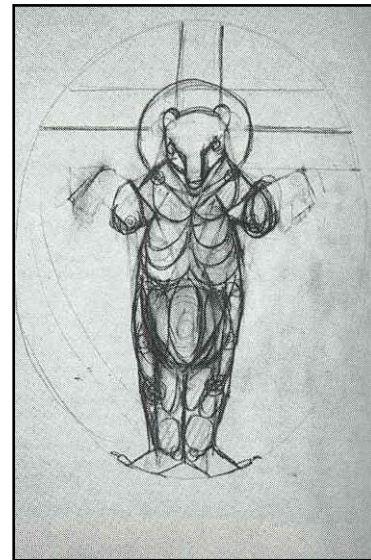
Preface

Roger Vandersteene, a Belgian-born Catholic, came as a missionary to the Plains Cree in Northern Alberta in the mid-1940s. Expecting to find a pure strain of Cree religiosity there that he would attempt to replace with Christianity, he discovered instead a hybridized religion, already a blend of Christian and traditional Cree beliefs. During the subsequent 30 years, he developed a profound understanding of religion, both Christian and Cree, the Cree language, and Cree ways of life. By his death in 1976, he had become deeply integrated into and respected by the Cree with whom he had spent his adult life.

Amidst a culture of intolerance and Cree religious oppression, Vandersteene developed a much different strategy for his work amongst the Cree than did his fellow church officials. “He saw the possibility of a genuine new creation, a Catholic Church whose rituals, theology and culture were drawn from the Cree tradition, yet profoundly Christian” (Waugh, 1996: 118). He recognized that the two religious systems had much to learn from each other. He focused on integrating the two, not replacing Cree religiosity with Catholicism, believing that this was most the most ideal religion for Indians whose daily lives were becoming increasingly influenced by Euro-Canadian society, yet who already had a religion of their own.

He came to recognize a pattern that connects—that the symbols of Cree religion and Christianity are markedly similar. He reinterpreted Bible stories into a context that was appropriate to the Cree. He equated God with Cree spirits such as *Manitou* “which refers to the mysterious reality behind all known things,” *Kisemanitou* which refers to benevolent forces in the world, and *Micimanitou* who reminded Vandersteene of God’s judgement (Waugh, 1996: 135).

His art also reflected his efforts to resymbolize Christianity in order to make it context-appropriate. Most revealing of these pieces, which also include an Indian Virgin Mary and Cree village nativity scenes, is his sketch of a crucified bear, an animal of central cultural importance to the Cree with whom he lived (Waugh, 1996: 189). His inspiration for this sketch likely came from a legend he had heard in many of the communities he had visited. A rendition of this legend was found amongst his personal effects:



BEAR came to earth one day and saw a berry-picking Cree woman. It was in the fall. He took her as his wife. They had two children: a boy and a girl. The boy and the girl were BEAR-CHILDREN. They had their father’s and their mother’s natures. They could appear as bear or as man.

When the children had already grown, a famine broke out in the land of the Cree and people were starving.

BIG BEAR told his wife, “Why should your family die? We have plenty of food. Send for them.” So the BEAR-CHILDREN went to tell their grandparents. They came with the

whole family. When BEAR saw them coming, He went out to receive them and told them: “Shoot me and eat my body so you will never starve again” (Waugh, 1996: 189-90).

Waugh (1996: 189) writes that Vandersteene “moved away from adapting Christian images for the Cree; rather, he began to choose Cree images through which to explore the meaning of Christianity.” Thus, Cree beliefs became a mirror to Vandersteene, allowing him to reflect upon the foundations of his own Christianity.

Introduction

Humans, largely driven by the Western obsession with progress in modernist terms, have caused unprecedented rates of change in the natural world. Lynn White Jr. (1992) has claimed that the roots of this destructive change are in Christianity. He argues that the historically predominant religion of the Western world, Christianity, started humans down a path of depersonifying nature, treating *it* as something to be understood, explained, and used.

However, we now face a world wherein we increasingly recognize that these rates of change cannot be sustained. We require a new approach to the natural world, one that will set us off this path of destruction and onto a path of balance between human and ecosystem needs. White (1992: 143-4) argues that “[s]ince the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not.”

When the Cree of East James Bay faced great rates of change (political, cultural, social, and environmental) in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, they integrated a new religious worldview, Christianity, into their long-standing Cree beliefs. This offered them a means to cope with the changed world they faced: that of Euro-Canada.

It is time to revisit the pre-Christian Cree religious beliefs (bush religion)—not because they were perfect—but, because they offer us a new approach to a growing ecological problem that our prevalent frameworks have proved incapable of solving. Just as Vandersteene found a deep comprehension of Cree beliefs illuminating of his own Christian beliefs, we can use Cree bush religion to enlighten us on where our worldview has gone so wrong, allowing us to perpetrate environmental destruction without much remorse. The integration of Cree beliefs into the Western belief system of today may help us to build a new syncretic worldview, one equipped to create a more symbiotic relationship between humans and the natural world. Therefore, just as the Cree integrated Christian elements into bush religion in order to cope with the changing world with which they were faced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Westerners, substantially influenced by Christian views on nature, have much to learn from integrating aspects of bush religion into our worldview in order to cope with our environmentally changing world.

I will commence by discussing the history of the East James Bay Cree, delving into detail on both the fur trading and Christian missionization periods. I will discuss the history of the twentieth century by identifying three processes that were highly influential on Cree spirituality: (1) food scarcity and starvation, (2) residential schooling, and (3) hydro-electric development. I will then turn to a discussion of Christianity in terms of two types of interpretations on what it means for humans to have dominion over the natural world, as God proclaimed. Then, I will discuss Christianity and bush religion

thematically in comparison. I will conclude with some prescriptions for what we can learn from bush religion in our changing world.

Prehistory

The Cree in Eastern James Bay are Algonquians, a group of aboriginals that stretches across Canada, from the Atlantic Ocean to the prairies (Preston, 1975: 1). Although Indians¹ have been grouped together since European colonialism began, there was no unifying sense of identity or formal political organization amongst the groups until more recently. Nonetheless, Preston (1975: 2) accounts for the degree of similarity between the indigenous groups in the East James Bay area saying that, “[u]niformity in culture among these people stems, in part, from linguistic and geographic-ecological continuity. A large number of semi-autonomous hunting/trapping groups have maintained a surprisingly uniform culture in spite of the lack of any obvious or explicit unifying cultural structures” (Preston, 1975: 2). For this reason, the Algonquian Cree of East James Bay are an identifiable group for research interest.

The ancestors of the modern-day Cree first inhabited the Eastern James Bay area approximately 5000 years ago (Morantz, 2002: 29; Francis and Morantz, 1983: 13). The story of these five millennia does not survive in any written documents or chronological records. Rather, it lives on in the form of narratives that have passed from generation to generation in the societies of James Bay. Each has used its own experiences to build new versions of the past, constantly altering, adding to, and editing the narratives that will be communicated into the future. The narratives consolidate five thousand years of experience and wisdom about the natural world. They communicate the role of humans in relation to nature, allowing the condensed wisdom of the deceased to guide the living in the daily tasks of survival.

Research strategies

While the culture of narratives as a method of retaining historical experiential knowledge worked markedly well for the Cree and their ancestors, it complicates the task of a modern-day researcher who seeks out information about pre-contact Cree society. Waugh (1996: 39) puts the problem of searching out the pre-contact information on religion this way:

[Religious traditions] might be better described as converging streams of various colours. This notion stresses the merging and jostling that goes on, with new hues and shades [as] the result. Unfortunately we are never able to examine the “original” colours, because the merging has been going on for some time, and we have no reliable description of the “original” colours.

Lacking primary sources on the “original colours” of Cree life and beliefs, researchers have turned instead to the accounts of the earliest Europeans in the region, explorers, fur traders, and missionaries, hoping that their records will shed some light on the pre-contact past. However, the writings of the early Europeans are frequently less revealing of Cree society than they are of the biases and colonialist agenda of the Europeans themselves. Oftentimes, attempting to get a fair interpretation of Cree society

¹ I will use the term ‘Indian’ when discussing the historical context in which this term was used by Europeans and Euro-Canadians to refer to indigenous peoples.

by distilling the pejorative language of the colonialist Europeans leaves one with more questions than answers. Nonetheless, these accounts, while largely ignoring the story of the millennia of Cree narrative-based wisdom, are useful in that they recount one version of the history of the colonization period, albeit from the skewed perspective of the ‘Whiteman.’

The most fruitful strategy for researchers trying to develop a more Cree-centric history of the region has been through anthropological inquiry. The current culture of the Eastern James Bay Cree is a mosaic of ancestral and Western influences. As a strategy, then, to engage in historical research about the Cree, researchers have assumed that those aspects of modern-day Cree culture that are inexplicable by Western cultural influence, must take their roots in narrative Cree culture.

For this analysis, I have done the same. As current Cree religion is an amalgamation of Christian and pre-contact Cree beliefs, I have distilled the identifiable Christian influences out of the mixture in order to understand the historic Cree belief system. This allows me the opportunity to compare how Christianity and the ancestral Cree belief system, which I refer to as bush religion, guide their followers in relations with the natural world. This is not in an effort to polarize or essentialize the two, but rather to work to understand each of them better through comparison, ultimately coming to discuss their convergence in current Cree religiosity.

I. History

I will begin by tracing the history of the East James Bay Cree thematically, beginning with their first contact with Europeans. This is not an exhaustive survey of the elapsed time and it is willingly centered on European and later Euro-Canadian interactions with the Cree as it was through these interactions that bush religion and Christianity came into relation.

Early contact and the fur trade

The problem of scarcity in reliable primary sources remains during the early contact period. While observational accounts of Cree life do exist from the explorers, fur traders, and missionaries who visited or lived in the area, they are often laden with the European biases of the times in which they were written.

The first recorded meeting between Europeans and the East James Bay Cree occurred in 1611 during Henry Hudson’s expedition in search of a route to the Orient. His expedition proved that the James Bay did not provide access to the Western Sea. As a result, the James Bay was of little interest to the Europeans and remained mostly unexplored for the next fifty years (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 16-7).

Then, in 1668, the British returned by ship to the James Bay to trade furs with the Cree, who had long been involved in an overland fur trade with the French. Two years later, King Charles II of England granted exclusive trading rights to the great northern expanse of the New World, an area totalling approximately three million square miles, to the recently-formed Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC). Later that year, the HBC set up permanent trading posts in James Bay (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 17, 22-3; Morantz, 2002: 17, 97).

As the European post managers are the sole group responsible for written records from the time, the history of the fur trade and Cree life that has emerged is unduly

focused on the Europeans' activities in the Eastern James Bay. (Morantz, 2002: 48-9). While a read through many of the histories written by Europeans or Euro-Canadians leads one to believe that the focal point of Cree life at this time was the trading post, the version anthropologists have gathered about the actual impact of the fur trade on Cree life suggests otherwise. Interviews with an elderly woman named Ellen Smallboy in 1933 who spoke freely about the fur trade of the 1880s and '90s recorded by anthropologist Regina Flannery are striking in their lack of attention to the trading posts themselves. This shows that the meaningful events in Cree life prior to the twentieth century had less to do with the Europeans and their settlements than our history texts would have us believe (Morantz, 2002: 48-9). In actual fact, participation in the fur trade did not change profoundly Cree ways of life or Cree perceptions of the world (Morantz, 2002: 73). As Morantz (2002: 25) points out, most hunters continued to live about 349 days inland, away from the coastal trading posts. She goes further to say that this discrepancy between the histories that have been written about Cree history and those that have emerged as a result of anthropological inquiry "serves as a reminder of how sadly Eurocentric our histories of northern life are, reliant as they are on the post journals" (Morantz, 2002: 49).

For the Cree, the significance of contact with Europeans is not retold in terms of the arrival of the Whiteman, but rather in terms of the new technologies that the Whiteman brought. Specifically, the contact period is marked by the arrival of cloth and flour into the region (Morantz, 2002: 15). The Cree had much to gain from the new technologies that the Europeans offered in exchange with furs. Certainly, cloth, flour, and the metal products such as iron axes and copper kettles proved to be of great use (Morantz, 2002: 23-4). Thus, the white man was welcomed "not because [the Indians] were naïve or helpless, but because the Europeans brought rare and useful items to trade for the most common of New World commodities, furs" (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 22).

Although the fur trade created a technological dependence on European goods amongst the Cree, it did not establish a political or economic reliance, nor did it change Cree spirituality in any profound way. Morantz (2002: 26, 73) contends that although it may have contributed to the series of events that eventually lead to the Cree's political and economic dependency in the twentieth century, the trade itself was not a disruptive force in Cree culture. She argues that participation in it did not change the Cree perception of the world profoundly. The fur trade developed *in situ* with the input of both the Europeans and the Indians (Feit, 2004: 99). Francis and Morantz (1983: 41) state:

The fur trade was not an economic enterprise developed in the Old World and imposed on the New. Quite the contrary, trading practices were shaped in large part by the environment of the north and the cultures of the peoples who lived there.

Additionally, the fur trade did not drastically change the hunting motivations of the Cree:

When the European fur-trading companies arrived in the region, the people did not become trappers in the sense that acquiring pelts for trade superseded hunting for food. Trapping always was subordinate to their subsistence pursuits, much to the annoyance of the traders (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 7).

The Cree only trapped and traded the minimum quantity of furs as was required to ensure that they could receive the European goods they desired from the trading post. Additionally, the majority of the trade consisted of beaver pelts that were superfluous to

the subsistence needs of the hunter and his family. Before the trade, these pelts would have been burned in a ritual of reciprocity between the hunter and the animal spirits. After the trade, the surplus allowed Cree hunters to acquire European technologies without having to diminish the animal stocks in the hunting territories (Morantz, 2002: 22-3). While we cannot reconstruct with certainty the spiritual implications of this, we know that Cree beliefs remained intact to the extent that they continued to effectively guide Cree hunters in sustainable land tenure.

Still, while the changes to Cree culture that would prove to be more threatening to the survival of Cree spiritual beliefs would occur later on through the Christian religion, some changes in the social organization of the Cree did occur as a result of the fur trade. These changes were most apparent in the families with hunting territories geographically closest to the coastal trading posts (Morantz, 2002: 71). The posts provided seasonal labour opportunities for some Indians. This allowed them to supplement their food procurement and fur trading activities with wage labour, lessening their dependence on the land for subsistence (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 86). Additionally, trading likely underpinned a shift towards smaller hunting groups. This allowed hunters to produce a larger hunt per capita, thereby increasing the surplus of furs to be traded. The trade may have also caused the family-managed hunting territories to become more defined (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 97).

The European fur traders, while impacting significantly the technologies used in food procurement, had little interest in altering the cultural and social structure of the Cree with whom they exchanged goods. The fur trade was beneficial to both parties, and neither side strived to influence much more than the economics of the exchange. However, Christian missionaries, the next group of Europeans to arrive in East James Bay, “proposed nothing less than a complete transformation of Indian society” and caused a radical change to the East James Bay Cree culture and society (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 166).

Missionaries establish

The first Europeans with a religious agenda made it to Eastern James Bay as early as 1670 by following overland trade routes. However, it was not until the nineteenth century that the missionaries came to East James Bay en masse (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 160-1; Adelson, 1992: 111-2). Early in the nineteenth century, they visited the area with ever-increasing frequency. They began to settle by the middle of the century, building churches alongside the trading posts (Morantz, 2002: 74, Francis and Morantz, 1983: 161). Today, from our somewhat less-racist and slightly-wizened stance, we can judge the actions of the missionaries harshly, blaming them for the role they played in the colonization of the Cree. Morantz (2002: 73) writes, “[t]he tremendous social changes that befell Native Peoples in Canada is popularly attributed to the missionary as the agent, par excellence, of Western society.”

The well-intentioned missionaries had grandiose goals of reform for the Cree culture they found in the James Bay area. They were strongly influenced by European colonialist culture, with its Christian values and Victorian cultural behaviours that were seen as the pinnacles of advancement, both desirable by and universalizable to all (Pettipas, 1994: 19). They believed that humanity evolved through a series of stages, progressing to a peak of which European society was emblematic. They found their lives’

calling in pity for the barbarians believing that in return for the great privilege of this position of ultimate progress, it was the Christian's duty to civilize the so-called uncivilized (Pettipas, 1994: 20).

The European colonizers' viewpoint that the religious beliefs of the colonized peoples were to blame for holding back progress in colonial terms backed the missionaries' efforts at conversion. They came to recognize the predominance of religious belief systems of indigenous peoples in the colonies that emphasized the importance of a spiritual relationship to the natural world. Anthropologists of the time associated indigenous spiritual rites that emphasised connection to the natural world with irrationality, imagination, and the emotions. They argued that if a scientific understanding of the natural world were to take the place of the indigenous peoples' experiential understanding, material progress in Christian capitalist terms would take place. Thus, the Europeans linked material and spiritual progress, and the Church took on an important role in the colonial empires (Pettipas, 1994: 23).

It was thought that one could recognize the level of progress in a society by the society's key subsistence or economic activities. Hunting and gathering were seen as savage, raising livestock and cultivating crops as slightly better, and converting natural products using industrial techniques as civilized (Pettipas, 1994: 25). Working up the ladder of progress towards the ideal of an agricultural society, the missionaries' project in East James Bay involved the "reorganization of domestic space, of the division of labour, of the family, and of individualism" (Morantz, 2002: 7). Young (1887?: 44), a missionary to the East James Bay in the late nineteenth century remarks:

It is true that there are vast regions of this great country that are of but little value to civilized people as a home. Still there are hundreds of millions of acres of land as fertile as any in the world, and thousands of people are crowding in every year and taking possession of what will yet become one of the greatest wheat producing portions of the globe.

While many of the early attempts to establish strong congregations of Indians in James Bay failed or met with only mediocre success, the Anglican mission of John Horden in Moose Fort stood above the rest. Relying on syllabics, a system of written Cree language that had been developed by an earlier minister in the region, Horden imported a printing press in 1852 that allowed him to produce religious texts (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 163; Leith and Leith, 1912: 51-2). With this, he began to teach the Indians literacy, foreign to them in their oral culture. This was an appealing aspect of Christianity for the Cree (Morantz, 2002: 93) and Young interprets a sense of excitement from them regarding the power of information contained in books (Young 1887?: 69-70). He (1887?: 89-90). Leith and Leith (1912: 51-2) report that a copy of the syllabic Bible was most treasured by the Cree and was very cared for by all who were lucky enough to have one. In 1854, John Horden built a schoolhouse and began training Indian clergy (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 163). He is heralded as playing a key role in the establishment of Anglicanism in the East James Bay and was named the first bishop of the diocese of Moosonee when it was created in 1872 (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 163; Diocese of Moosonee, 2006; Herklots, 1961: 191-2).

It is hard to decipher what the Cree early impressions of the missionaries were as only missionary accounts of these meetings exist (Morantz, 2002: 74). What is certain, however, from these accounts is that the missionaries' impressions were that the Cree

way of life was in need of modernization, and that their intentions were to impose upon the Cree people an entirely exotic way of life, the European way, which was utterly disconnected from the millennia of cultural development in East James Bay. Adelson (1992: 112) writes:

The missionaries were vigilant in their attempts to obliterate what they perceived as the barbaric ways of primitive peoples. The process of proselytization left no room for the consideration of indigenous practices since it was assumed that they were heathen and hence without significance or utility.

While a minority of missionaries did adopt a tolerant stance with the bush religion customs of the Indians, believing that they would die out over time (Tanner, 1979: 211), the majority launched a full-scale assault on Cree society. They “denied any value to Indian customs...they attacked native belief systems as evil and superstitious and undermined Indian self-respect and cultural pride” (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 166). The missionary Young (1887?: 45) recorded this attitude in his journals, referring to the practices of the Indians as “vile and abominable,” proving to him that they were “in need of the Gospel.”

The deeply engrained religion of the East James Bay Cree threatened the success of the missionaries’ civilization project and the missionaries undertook a variety of strategies to stomp the beliefs out. They preached, counselled, replaced Cree traditions at social gatherings with European hymns and prayers, and destroyed cultural artefacts that had religious significance to the Cree (Morantz, 2002: 91; Francis and Morantz, 1983: 164-6).

Eventually, these racist Eurocentric misconceptions of Cree culture came to be internalized by the Cree themselves. Leith and Leith (1912: 50) tell of one man who confessed to being a conjurer, promising the priest that he would bring his conjuring drum to the priest so that it could be destroyed. Similarly, Young (1887?: 60-1) recounts women in the community mimicking the housekeeping and dressing habits of his wife. He says:

a noble ambition stirred in those Indian women’s lives to try and keep house like [his wife]; and thus, they endeavoured to let their husbands and children see, that no longer did they wish to live in the careless way of the old pagan life, but, as now they had become Christians in their profession, so in their homes, they would have the neatness, and cleanliness, that should belong to those who are thus called.

Nonetheless, alongside the converts ran an initial resistance to conversion coming from some members of Cree society. Francis and Morantz (1983: 165) refer to “conjurers who refused to cease their customary practices and hunters who held to a belief in the efficacy of the venerable ways.” Additionally, in the early stages of conversion, the Cree would practice Christianity when at the trading post or in the sight of the missionaries, but would go back to bush religion when they returned to the hunting grounds, away from the missionary’s watchful eye (Morantz, 2002: 79; Adelson, 1992: 112). However, outwardly expressions of resistance were neither widespread nor long-lasting and missionaries shortly after their arrival began reporting high conversion and baptism rates (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 165).

The question arises: why did the East James Bay Cree who had resisted substantial change to their lifestyles during the centuries of contact with fur traders and

travelling missionaries suddenly convert in the late nineteenth century? After all, the Cree cultural resiliency in the face of 200 years of the fur trade proves the robustness of Cree ways of life (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 166). Much of the explanation for this comes from the timing of events. Even communities that had only sporadic visits from missionaries converted to Christianity at the same time as those communities that had constant missionary presence. Morantz (2002: 93) argues that “the time was ripe” for conversion (Morantz, 2002: 93). Concurrently with Christianity, new modes of living, ideas, diseases, and hunting competition were entering the East James Bay. Morantz (2002: 88-9) argues that the epidemics of disease at the time had a significant effect on the Cree’s acceptance of Christianity. She says that “the range of domains covered by [the Cree’s] traditional religion” must have been strained by the epidemic death rates, thereby “making them all the more vulnerable to a religion that preached an after-life and reunification with family” (Morantz, 2002: 88-9).

At the same time the hunting situation rapidly began to change in the late nineteenth century. The Cree, due to technological advancements in the methods of hunting (guns and store-bought food), experienced diminished risks associated with life on the land. This enabled them to be less dependent on bush religion, the function of which was primarily to aid in bush life. The shortage of large game and beaver at the time also lessened the necessity for practicing bush religion as they were eating greater amounts of fish, an animal with less spiritual import (Morantz, 2002: 73, 92).

Christianity offered religious explanations for the new aspects of Cree life about which bush religion could offer less specific guidance. The Cree were, in effect, open to conversion in the late nineteenth century as they were becoming aware of and influenced by the ever-expanding and much changed post-colonial world to the south (Morantz, 2002: 73). Christianity held an appeal for the Cree as it expanded spirituality into the new realms of life, such as the market economy, around which bush religion had not developed and thus had little guidance to provide. Morantz (2002: 87) writes:

Christianity contains within it a richness of messages and symbols that has appealed to a great diversity of peoples and world views. The Crees were a profoundly spiritual people; their whole world, material and non-material – animals, plants, rocks, clothes, doorways of tents – was infused with spirits and spiritual powers. As John Webster Grant, the historian of Canadian church missions, observed, the Indians could find in Christianity some elements which their own traditions lacked. From this perspective, then, it is not surprising [that] the Crees were open to additional religious thoughts and concepts.

As a result, Christianity was welcomed by the Cree in East James Bay as they recognized its value for coping in the post-colonial world with which they were confronted (Morantz, 2002: 243).

Conflicts between the early missionaries and the fur traders

The first attempts to have Christian church officials residing in East James Bay were made by the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC). When they were finally able to coerce a clergyman to set-up a ministry there in the 1840s, he was as equally interested in ministering to the full-blooded Cree as he was in ministering to those for whom he was intentioned by the HBC, the Whites and half-bloods [*sic*]. Eventually, many in the HBC grew opposed to missionary activity as they were “not convinced that a Christian Indian population served their best interests” (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 161).

When the missionaries arrived in East James Bay of their own accord, without the sanction of the HBC, the relationship between them and the longer-established fur traders was often stressed. The radical reformation of Cree society proposed by the missionaries was of great concern to many involved with the HBC. Most serious of these concerns was the missionaries' intention to shift Cree food procurement practices from hunting to agriculture. This would necessitate a change in the living patterns of Cree families from inland migration to permanent coastal settlement (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 163). The HBC post managers recognized that this would not only greatly diminish the quantity of furs being traded, but would also decrease the self-sufficiency of the Crees, making them more dependent upon foodstuffs from the HBC for subsistence.

Egerton R Young, a Methodist minister at an inland settlement in Manitoba with river access to Hudson's Bay (Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, 2005; Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, 2006), recounts an occasion in which his own religious aspirations and the economic aspirations of the HBC postmaster came into conflict. He details how his congregation, after a great amount of persuasion, agrees to abide by the fourth commandment which requires Christians to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20: 8) by refraining from labour on that day (Exodus 20: 8-11). The missionary recounts that every seventh day:

...the guns and bows and arrows were put aside, and the fish-nets were left hanging in the breeze for that day. No traps were visited, neither were the axes lifted up against the trees. Their simple meals were cooked and eaten, and all who could attend, were found in the house of God three times each Sabbath (Young 1887?: 175-6).

He goes on to describe the HBC post manager's reaction:

But now arose fierce opposition from an unexpected quarter. The great fur-trading company that had for so long a time held despotic power in the land, in their short-sightedness,--fearing a diminution in the returns of the fur by the hunters if one-seventh of the time was to be, as they put it, spent in idleness,--sneered at the actions of the missionaries, and by bribes and threats, endeavoured to induce the Indians to ignore their teachings on the subject (Young 1887?: 175-6).

The HBC and missionaries also disagreed from time to time on cultural issues such as divorce and polygamy, issues in which the HBC had remained generally uninvolved until that point. While the missionaries sought to purge the sinful practices of polygamy from Cree society, the HBC worried that the divorced second wives would become the responsibility of the Company and burdensome to the fur trading system (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 164). However, when pressed, the HBC post managers were Christians after all, and recognized that their religious obligations required them to not stand in the way of the Christianization of the Indians and to at least tolerate the social restructuring that would follow as a result of it. Thus, "by 1870 differences seem to have been resolved and company officials seem[ed] to have accepted the benefits of a missionary presence" (Francis and Morantz, 1983: 163-4).

As a testament to these benefits, Leith and Leith (1912: 37-8, 57), brothers and geologists in the area in the early 1900s write that trappers for the HBC would take a debt to get hunting supplies (such as guns and ammunition) from the HBC that would be used for the hunting season. At the end of the season, the trappers repay their debt by returning with furs to exchange. A French company, Revillon Frères of Paris, was creating

competition for the HBC in the region by offering better prices for pelts, and some Cree began getting their debt at one company and taking their pelts, the equivalent of debt repayments, to the other. Leith and Leith remark that “[t]he church...[was] active in preaching against this particular form of dishonesty and seem[ed] to be checking it” (Leith and Leith, 1912: 38). In another case, in York Factory, an establishment on the west side of James Bay, the locals would tithe in pelts, offering furs to the minister who would trade them to the HBC in exchange for money for the mission (Beardy and Coutts, 1996: 53). Thus the religious leaders played a role in upholding the new market values that had been introduced into the area by the fur traders.

Missionary activities in a broader political history

The Anglican Church served as the main colonial tool of the Canadian government in the East James Bay, particularly in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries (Morantz, 2002: 8). If found political backing in the emerging and solidifying Canadian state, to which we turn our attention now.

Cree territory, called Rupert’s Land by the whites, was first officially controlled by the Hudson’s Bay Company after initial contact between the Indians and the Europeans. However, Morantz (2002: 132) remarks that it is “highly doubtful whether anyone, including the post managers in James Bay, saw themselves as governing anything other than the particulars of the trade.” Rupert’s Land was formally transferred to the Canadian government in 1870 (Morantz, 2002: 132, Herklots, 1961: 179-80).

In the late 1800s, at the same time as the missionaries took up residence in James Bay, the Canadian government outlawed different manifestations of indigenous spirituality across Canada on the grounds that these manifestations were immoral and prohibitive to the aims of assimilation (Pettipas, 1994: 3). Pettipas (1994: 3) explains that the strategy of using the church to integrate the Indians relied on the correct belief by the Department of Indian Affairs “that there existed a direct connection between indigenous worldview, ceremonial life, and the social, economic, and political structures of the community” and that this connection stood in the way of total integration into Canadian white society. In other words, “[t]he federal government supported various means of religious control because administrators and missionaries understood the connections between religious ideology and practices and the persistence of indigenous social, economic, and political systems” (Pettipas, 1994: 18).

At this time, the predominant strategy in the Department of Indian Affairs was of encapsulation. Cummins (2004: 2) argues that while assimilation can result in a positive outcome for the assimilated group in which they come to thrive in the larger culture, encapsulation is ultimately a negative experience for the less-dominant culture. He says “[e]ncapsulation...is ultimately *control*.” As evidence he writes:

The State has pursued (consciously or not) the encapsulation of Native people in Canada through such measures as the Indian Act, the various treaties, a complex bureaucracy and various and sundry forms of legislation. The degree of encapsulation is reflected in the fact that there are fourteen federal ministries or departments alone dealing with Native people, in addition to (in some instances) provincial ministries and departments (Cummins, 2004: 2).

What Cummins calls encapsulation, Morantz (2002: 4) calls domination. She writes:

That there was, on the part of the Canadian government, an inexorable march towards near total domination of Native Peoples is apparent from the history of the Indian-white relations in Canada and quite evident for James Bay in the correspondence of the Department of Indian Affairs (Morantz, 2002: 4).

As we will see in the following section, with the declining importance of the fur trade in the Canadian economy, the focus of the government's policy towards Indians shifted from controlling Indians to controlling their land (Pettipas, 1994: 211, 3). This "resulted in the land itself being transformed into a commodity for exchange and eventually led to the separation of [some] indigenous societies from their resource base" (Pettipas, 1994: 213). Morantz (2002: 132) identifies this as part of the Canadian government's encapsulation strategy arguing that "[a] significant feature of colonialism is the colonial society's domination over the land."

Eventually, the Indian Act of 1951, an update of the previous Indian Acts that had all advocated strategies of encapsulation, shifted to a strategy of integration in an attempt to be less repressive of indigenous culture (Pettipas, 1994: 212). Yet, even with this written change, many indigenous groups remained fearful of openly practicing indigenous spiritual rites, and the damage caused by the missionaries' condemnation of indigenous spirituality had already been done (Pettipas, 1994: 7). Substantively, Pettipas (1994: 193) argues there was not much change in the government's policies until 1985.

Thus, the Canadian government, ever-cognizant of the importance of the role spirituality played in indigenous cultures' resistances, sought to achieve the incorporation of indigenous peoples through a strategy of encapsulation. The missionaries functioned as soldiers in this battle, and Christianity, the main weapon.

The Twentieth Century

By the turn of the twentieth century, East James Bay Cree society had radically transformed with Christianity becoming evermore integrated into the belief system. Writing based on their four-and-a-half month geological expedition to Hudson Bay, Leith and Leith (1912) paint an interesting portrait of the East James Bay Cree in the early 1900s with all of the perspectives and opinions of Euro-North Americans at the time. They describe widespread acceptance of Christianity throughout the region. In a chapter titled "Moral Development of the Natives," Leith and Leith remark that the natives attend church, sing hymns, and pray with great fervour, both at the posts and inland. They say that it is not uncommon to see children singing Christian hymns such as 'Onward Christian Soldiers' in the bush. They suggest that Christianity has led to an improvement in the "moral and ethical stability" of the people (Leith and Leith, 1912: 46-7). They also report that the missionaries are satisfied with the conversion process as they find that "the superstitious spirit" of the Indian's is gradually decreasing as the church's influence expands (Leith and Leith, 1912: 51).

Morantz (2002: 130) paints a portrait of this period differently, in more negative light, saying that "the options for the Crees to organize their daily lives had become much more restricted" due to the influence of "the church's conception of the family, wage employment, schooling, and government bureaucracy" (Morantz, 2002: 130). She says:

It was events in the twentieth century, especially the imposition of extensive powers and the financial supremacy of the Canadian government that inexorably overwhelmed Cree

society, sapping it of its ability to administer itself. It is here that an unequal economic relationship [became] a classic dependent or colonial relationship (Morantz, 2002: 26).

With the stage set and all the main players introduced, the Cree of East James Bay found themselves in a more vulnerable position in the twentieth century. Both portraits offered above show that at the turn of it, the Cree were already becoming more integrated into broader Canadian society. The fur trade as the predominant outsider influence was being replaced by the missionaries and later, by the governments of Canada and Quebec. In the following I will outline three periods in the twentieth century that had a profound impact on Cree life and spirituality—periods that facilitated the syncretism of Christianity and bush religion: (1) food scarcity and starvation, (2) residential schooling, and (3) hydroelectric development.

1. Food scarcity and starvation

The period of food scarcity that had begun in the late 1860s had decreased the level of self-sufficiency amongst the Cree by the early twentieth century, making them more open to Christianity and economic change (Morantz, 2002: 27). Leith and Leith (1912: 38) remarked that as a result of growing food dependence “[n]one of the natives [were] independent” and that “[t]he Indian [was] in a condition not far removed from slavery.” The HBC records from the time are also testament to food shortages, revealing that the beaver, a key subsistence food source, became second to the muskrat in terms of quantity traded. It must be mentioned, however, that partially this was because of changes in fashion tastes in Europe. Nonetheless, beaver numbers were recognizably in decline, and the Cree responded by shifting their hunting focus to smaller and smaller animals—animals that held less spiritual significance in bush religion terms.

By the 1920s, food shortages were becoming acute. However, the flapper era caused a boom in demand that briefly increased fur prices for the Cree (Morantz, 2002: 124). As a result, the Cree, experiencing lower returns on their hunting efforts (Morantz, 2002: 32), could afford more store-bought food and were less reliant upon the diminishing natural stocks of food in the hunting territories. At this time, it became common for families to carry a basic stock of store-bought food with them to their inland hunting territories. This meant they could afford to take more risks in their trapping—trap for trade and not just for survival. Morantz (2002: 244) says that as a result of this, “the Cree’s perception of themselves changed from full-time hunters to part-time trappers engaged in [the] exchange of skins for food.” She comments on the spiritual implications of this saying:

Correspondingly, as foxes, muskrats, and mink were not part of the Cree spiritual pantheon, their approach to trapping, at least of these non-food animals, might have become more secular. With food now also coming from the store, the traditional religion might well have lost much of its function; the dream-spirits seemed to fade away and Cree culture lost much of its cognitive underpinnings (Morantz, 2002: 244).

The price boom of the 1920s did not last long however, and in 1929, both international markets and animal populations in East James Bay crashed, only furthering Cree dependence on the coastal trading posts (Morantz, 2002: 124).

After the Great War, technology made its way north at a speedy pace (Morantz, 2002: 135). Planes first appeared in the 1930s and had a significant impact on Cree

hunting strategies as they allowed hunters to become even less dependent on their subsistence hunt and more reliant on store-bought provisions. Hunters began to charter planes that would take themselves, their families, and a stock of supplies directly to their inland hunting camps. Often, a plane would be arranged to return midway through winter to pick-up furs and drop-off more store-bought provisions from the coastal post (Morantz, 2002: 139-40).

To further exacerbate food scarcity matters, the general increase in air travel throughout Canada and the construction of encroaching railways opened Cree territory to Southerners. This meant that unprecedented numbers of outsiders began to hunt in and inhabit the East James Bay area (Morantz, 2002: 27). This seriously affected Cree life. Many lost their summer employment opportunities at the post as the new technologies allowed for more efficient and less labour-intensive transporting, and as the company streamlined its operations, hunters lost the monetary advances they had formerly received from the HBC (Morantz, 2002: 140). More profoundly however, the influx of white hunters with no knowledge of sustainable hunting practices caused a further decline in animal populations. In reaction, the Cree harvested more than what they knew to be sustainable amounts, recognizing that nothing would be left anyway if the white hunters were allowed to run their own course, continuing to hunt unabated (Morantz, 2002: 141).

Of course, food scarcity and starvation experiences were not uniform amongst the entire population (Morantz, 2002: 109). However, for the majority of Cree in East James Bay, the `20s and `30s were incredibly difficult years. Morantz (2002: 121) writes:

When the Crees talk about the late 1920s and 1930s, they recount how they survived. They talk of specific episodes where two families might have dined out on the remains of one squirrel or on a broth made from boiling lichens scraped off rocks. A number recount the horror of finding whole tipis of relatives and friends starved to death.

In this time of difficulty, the Cree expected their partners in exchange, the fur traders to assist. Whereas according to the European point of view the fur-trading relationship was primarily economic and neither side owed the other anything after the economic transactions had occurred, the Cree saw the Europeans as more than just economic partners. In the same way that they would have expected assistance from their fellow Cree community members in a time of need, the Cree expected the white fur traders to provide assistance in the starvation period, the way that the Crees had provided expertise and assistance to the early fur-traders (Feit, 2004: 98-100). However, for the most part, the HBC traders did not come through for the Cree in their time of hunger. Additionally, during this time, the federal and provincial governments did very little to help as neither wanted to accept responsibility for the Indians and thereby become obliged to provide assistance to them (Morantz, 2002: 149-50).

However, of some benefit to the Cree, rivalrous missionaries in the area began to use food relief as a conversion tool (Morantz, 2002: 158). Much to the chagrin of the Anglican ministers, Catholic missionaries established at the various posts throughout the `20s, `30s, and `40s. They helped some Cree to secure food relief; yet, were unsuccessful in their attempts to catholicize the Cree. Morantz (2002: 150-1, 156-8) remarks that this is likely because Anglicanism and Catholicism looked very similar to the Crees and as a result there was very little reason for conversion. Additionally, Cree culture prized loyalty. In the same way that most hunters had been loyal to the HBC despite competition

from the often better-paying French Revillon-Frères trading company, the Cree communities remained loyal to the Anglican Church despite the potential benefits offered by membership in the politically and economically better-off Catholic Church (Morantz, 2002: 156).

The period of food scarcity was eventually remedied by a beaver conservation plan in 1932 through which the Quebec government declared the northern areas a game preserve wherein no white hunting would be permitted and Cree takes would be regulated. (Morantz, 2002: 145, 158-161). Maud Watt, a French Canadian, built on Cree management structures for beaver to set up a beaver sanctuary, the logic of which was easily understood by the Cree trappers. The scheme worked and beaver populations were restored by 1940 (Feit, 2004: 100).

2. Residential schooling

Another significant influence on East James Bay Cree religious beliefs in the twentieth century, residential schools, began following World War II. However, by the time it became a force in the East James Bay, it had already had significant impacts on other aboriginal groups across North America.

Beginning in the 1820s in what would soon become Canada, church-run schools were established for aboriginal children by the Protestant, Methodist, Catholic, and Anglican Churches (“Timeline,” 2005). In 1879, the newly-formed Canadian government partnered with the Christian churches. They adopted a system of residential manual labour schools (developed in the United States for the Indians there) that aimed to integrate Indian children into Euro-Canadian society and to convert them to Christianity (Pettipas, 1994: 38). The Churches retained their central role in the schools until 1969 when the federal government took over (“Historical Overview,” 2005). At the peak of the residential schooling system in 1931, approximately 80 schools were operating in every part of Canada except Newfoundland, PEI, and New Brunswick (“FAQs,” 2005). Many thousands of Aboriginal children attended these schools until 1996, when the final school closed (Stout and Kipling, 2003: 38, “Historical Overview,” 2005).

The inspiration for what came to be known as the residential schooling system came from a long line of colonial thinking on Aboriginal issues. It emphasised educational campaigns directed towards the younger generations as the most effective way to rid Indians of their so-called savage culture and to rapidly integrate them into the European values of the colonial empire. For this reason, attempts to convert Indians to Christian civilization were directed at indigenous children (Pettipas, 1994: 38; Stout and Kipling, 2003: 40). It was thought that by removing Indian children from their families and communities, they would become eager converts to Christianity and, later, missionaries of Christian civilization to their own people (Pettipas, 1994: 38).

Residential schooling in its most menacing form did not impact the Cree of East James Bay until midway through the twentieth century—well after it had already seriously affected other indigenous groups across Canada. East James Bay Cree children were sent to the Anglican and Catholic residential schools in Fort George (Miller, 1996: map at front). Although Indian children were technically required to attend school in the 1920s, James Bay Cree children did not feel pressured to go until after the war years, when family allowance, a government transfer payment system that began in 1944, became contingent upon the children’s attendance at school (Morantz, 2002: 208, 213).

Morantz (2002: 176) writes that “[i]n the post Second World War era, still guided by the inspiration that the Indians had to be led to civilization, the Department of Indian Affairs simply grafted onto Cree life institutions from the south” (see also Miller, 2000: 277). At this time, in the 1950s, there was a heightened push to move away from the church-operated residential schools to secular versions of the same. However, as most of the same church-appointed teaching staff stayed on at the schools following the supposed secularization, the shift to secular schools occurred more on paper than it did in practice (Morantz, 2002: 213-4).

It is likely that the residential schooling system in East James Bay had effects that were less profound on the culture as a whole when compared to other aboriginal groups in Canada, though similarly damaging for the individuals themselves who attended the schools. The system commenced much later in East James Bay than it had in Canada’s South and West. Also, the Cree of East James Bay were in a relatively better position with regards to the domination of the Canadian government than were other indigenous groups located in areas more encapsulated by Euro-Canadian society and more accessible to government control. The Cree children that were enrolled in residential schools still had strong communities that were maintaining to a greater degree their traditional lifestyles than were indigenous groups in other parts of Canada. At the beginning of the residential school period, most families still hunted full-time and spoke Cree, long-after indigenous food subsistence practices and languages had begun to disappear in other parts of Canada (Morantz, 2002: 219-20; Pettipas, 1994: 218).

The greatest effect of the residential schooling system in cultural terms both amongst the James Bay Cree and across indigenous groups in Canada was that it created often-insurmountable rifts between generations. Pettipas (1994: 215) writes that this was done by undermining “the traditional role of the parents, relatives, and elders as producers and transmitters of culture and ideology.” A main strategy used by residential school supervisors was the absolute prohibition of indigenous languages which are “a crucial factor in the communication of any culture’s ideology, particularly one that stresses socialization through oral tradition” (Pettipas, 1994: 215). Upon returning to their homes, youths educated in the residential system became outsiders to their communities and families. They had lost the use of their indigenous languages and saw indigenous spirituality as evil or immoral. The millennia of knowledge about the world that had been passed in narratives became unintelligible for many (Pettipas, 1994: 227; Grant, 1996: 193-5, 205-7). Grant (1996: 232, 258-60) refers to the spiritual abuse perpetrated by the schooling system explaining that many youths, upon graduation, abhorred their communities traditional belief system. The rate of cultural change in Indian communities, or, the size of the rift between generations that occurred as a result of forced residential schooling was dramatic. Many residential school students, particularly those who were away from their families for much of their youth, missed the cultural training through participation and observation that was vital to the dissemination of knowledge about life on the land and of the intricacies of the spiritual ceremonies that are part of the bush lifestyle.

Some church officials involved in the school system were attuned to the loss of informal education that resulted from the formal education. Roger Vandersteene, the Catholic missionary in northern Alberta from the preface to this discussion, exclaimed in a heated debate with another Catholic Church official about the residential schools:

I know the Cree! They have their own school...it's nature. They have their own training...it's by their parents. They have their own industry...it's living with the natural processes of the land. They are being bulldozed into the ground by white society, by western culture. I can't, I won't support it! (Waugh, 1996: 102).

Pettipas (1994: 226-7) quotes another Church official, Reverend James Donaghy of the Ojibway Swan Lake Reserve in Manitoba. His journal entry demonstrates the cultural change that occurred between just two generations as he states:

The young are already tiring of some of these customs, and them to the old folks....At one of their annual picnics the old people put on a pow-wow in an enclosure, while the young men had a series of baseball games to manage. The old folks ordered them to help within the pow-wow, but the ball players told them they were too busy playing ball to dance pow-wow. The old men felt that their superior position had been challenged.

While the effects of the residential schooling system in terms of cultural change stand in and of themselves as dark blemishes on the history of Canada, the rampant sexual abuse of indigenous children in residential schools makes the stain that much darker and implicates the Anglican and Catholic Churches, and various other denominations as well. In 1990, Phil Fontaine, a national leader in aboriginal issues at the time and the current National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, went public with allegations of sexual and physical abuse committed by the residential school officials (Grant, 1996: 221; "Phil Fontaine," 2006; "FAQs," 2005). Since, many more individuals have come forward with similar allegations and it is estimated that as many as 100 of the 130 residential schools were involved in the abuse of their students ("Historical Overview," 2005). The Canadian government through the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada has stated that:

While it is not uncommon to hear some former students speak about the positive experience in these institutions, their stories are overshadowed by disclosures of abuse, criminal convictions of perpetrators and the findings of various studies such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which tell of the tragic legacy that the residential school system has left with many former students. In addition to allegations of physical and sexual abuse, which are found in 90% of the legal claims, allegations relating to such things as cultural loss, breach of treaty, loss of education opportunity, forcible confinement and poor conditions at the schools are also alleged ("Historical Overview," 2005).

Piecing together the remains of traditional religions and re-appropriating them is an important part of the struggle for empowerment today. This process has been especially challenging for residential school survivors (Pettipas, 1994: 231). Morantz (2002: 219) writes "[t]he Crees, as other Native Peoples across the country, are now beginning to grasp the extent of psychological injury done to them, a subject that only recently have people begun to articulate and analyse."

However, the federal government seems to be increasingly willing to take the necessary, yet very difficult steps to address the pain experienced in indigenous communities as a result of the residential schooling experience. On November 23, 2005, the government announced a compensation package valued at \$2 billion for residential school survivors. The plan gives \$10,000 to survivors plus \$3000 for each year of attendance in one of the schools ("Timeline," 2005). Part of this plan also provides

financial support to organizations such as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation which encourages and supports residential school survivors in coping with the negative effects the experience has had on their own lives and their families and communities (“Aboriginal Healing Foundation,” 2005).

Nevertheless, the impact that residential schools had on aboriginal communities cannot be overstated. It meant a radical transformation of knowledge and cosmology in not only social, political, and cultural terms, but in spiritual terms as well, making a life back on the land impossible for some (Grant, 1996: 247).

3. Hydroelectric development

Hydroelectric development and its effects on Cree life have been described by many authors. I offer here only a brief overview of this ongoing period in the colonial history of the East James Bay, ending with comments on how Cree spirituality and broader worldview have been used strategically in the politics of development in East James Bay.

While already under Canadian jurisdiction on paper, the 400,000 km² of land (1/5th of Quebec) that the Cree inhabited didn't truly fall into Canadian command until after WWII. Soon after, during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, the Quebec government began to take an interest in the northern territory as Premier Lesage and later René Lévesque sought economic autonomy for the province. In 1961, they formed the Direction Général du Nouveau Quebec that oversaw the area north of the Eastmain River (Morantz, 2002: 28, 180).

In May 1971, the Quebec government, under the leadership of Premier Robert Bourassa, formed the James Bay Development Corporation with ambitions “to satisfy the power needs of the province as a whole, to provide jobs for Quebecers throughout the province, and hopefully also to make a profit from sales of electricity not initially needed by the province” through hydroelectric development in the North (Salisbury et. al., 1972: 1-2; see also Hornig, 1999: xi). That year, the first roads for the project were paved and by early 1973, construction work on the first dams had commenced. The La Grande phase of construction was briefly held up in court by a coalition of Cree and Inuit leaders, but the courts eventually ruled against the coalition and construction resumed soon thereafter. In 1974, Cree communities grouped together, forming the Grand Council of the Cree and in 1975, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) was negotiated and signed between Inuit and Cree leaders and the government (Hornig, 1999: 159-60). This agreement provisioned that in the first phase of hydroelectric development, the Cree were to receive \$150 million in grants and royalties over 10 years, control of some areas outside of the flooding impact, and continued hunting and fishing rights (Miller, 2000: 342-4). However, the terms were less than ideal in the opinions of many Cree. The JBNQA was seen not as fair but as the best the Cree could do. As the political climate was unfavourable to aboriginal land claim rights at the time, this agreement did not signal so much of an acceptance amongst the Cree of hydroelectric development on their land as it did a recognition that this settlement was the best deal they would get (Tanner, 1999: 130-1). This was acknowledged by some government officials, including Premier Bourassa himself, who reflected in his account of the period, *Power of the North*, that compensatory money was not entirely satisfactory to the Cree who were motivated to

fight the development in court not for monetary reasons but in order to ensure that their way of life could continue (Bourassa, 1985: 33-4).

The James Bay development planning lacked a social or environmental assessment at its inception and continues to assess social impact only on a project by project basis as opposed to comprehensively, by analyzing the impacts of hydroelectric development on the region in their entirety (Warner, 1999: 110). Furthermore, the rate and breadth of changes occurring in Cree culture is attributable to many factors as hydro-development has occurred in the midst of a myriad of many other initiators of change. Nevertheless, Warner (1999: 100) writes that “[t]he transformation of the natural environment (from the effects of reservoirs, roads, and powerlines) is identified as the central contemporary force eroding and dismantling their traditional way of life.”

What is certain however is that whereas the Cree retained agency in many of their early interactions with the Whiteman, they experienced a lessening of this agency as a result of the projects. Warner (1999: 103-4) in his social impact assessment writes that:

[Historically,] the Cree have not simply had a broad spectrum of technological and social change thrust upon them but have exercised a significant measure of agency or choice in what is to be adopted, the terms of its introduction, and the shape of its use. By contrast, the undertaking to dam the major rivers of James Bay and create a comprehensive system of reservoirs, roads, and powerlines is [more] invasive and intrusive.

As a result of the James Bay hydro projects, hunting territories were flooded, and communities were relocated (Warner, 1999: 93). Yet, the component of the development that has had the most impact is the 1500 kilometres of roads that have made the East James Bay easily accessible to outsiders. They have allowed for a preponderance of sport hunters who often disrespect Cree land tenure practices and who have increased hunting pressures in the region (Warner, 1999: 107).

In terms of bush religion, an identifiable and widespread impact of hydroelectric development has been the politicization of the core principles of bush religion. Facing the legal and political institutions of the South on their own turf has made the East James Bay Cree much more politically savvy. In the political wrangling over the fight for autonomy in the face of hydro-development, many have had to frame their beliefs about the importance of the natural world in Euro-Canadian terms in order for them to be strategically useful (Scott, 2001: 7-8). Cree leaders have used their worldview as a tool, extracting aspects from it and packaging them in terms that are to be understandable by the media, public, and government officials. Ironically, residential schooling contributed to the ability of the Cree leaders to mount their very impressive challenge to the provincial government (Morantz, 2002: 219).

Thus, throughout the twentieth century, “Cree society has evolved in transformational stages that have incorporated new sources of income and livelihood while preserving a matrix of cultural values and practices from earlier times” (Warner, 1999: 97). The religious beliefs of today are a blend of bush religion and Christian influences, a discussion of which we will turn to now.

Syncretism between bush religion and Christianity historically

In the 1870s, at the time when Christianity began to take hold in the East James Bay, the Crees were still predominantly subsistence hunters practicing bush religion, despite over two centuries of involvement with the HBC fur traders who had pressed for

increasing commercial exchange in furs (Morantz, 2002: 30). Since then, bush religion and Cree subsistence lifestyles have become less pronounced in Cree communities. Currently, less than a century and a half later, while some Cree continue to live the hunting for subsistence lifestyle, most have instead entered the formal economy or are unemployed, living in the bush for only brief periods at certain times of the year (Warner, 1999: 102-3). Accompanying the Cree's shift to the economy of the West has been the shift towards Christianity, the religion responsible for much of the West's underpinnings. Understatedly, this has had a significant impact on East James Bay Cree society.

However, Catherine James (2001: 316) cautions us from assuming that "any cultural change that appears to move away from what was traditionally Aboriginal amounts to cultural loss." Bush religion was not lost as the integration of Christianity did not exclude it. Rather, the Cree were critical of aspects of Christianity and barred these aspects from the syncretism of bush religion and Christianity that they adopted for their own. Morantz (2002: 87) explains that:

Obviously there was a selection process at play, for there must have been aspects of Christianity that they could not accept. Rather than holding an appeal for them, some of these beliefs must have left them confused. For a more or less egalitarian, consensual society, it must have seemed strange to learn of hierarchy and authoritarianism, of a highly structured patriarchal society, as one does in Christianity. Another problem would have been the Christian attitude towards animals. Even though flocks and shepherds might be seen as respect for animals, domesticating, controlling, and killing them was not consistent with the Cree view that they and the animals were guided by their "attending spirits," and that the animals gave themselves to the hunter. The notion that a man would dominate an animal, rather than the other way around, as in the hunt leading up to the kill, must have seemed alien. So would have the Christian obsession with sin, a concept which, at the time, likely did not have a Cree counterpart.

Richardson's anthropological work (1991: 269) supports this. He asks a man identified as Sam the following question:

But the Christian religion seems to suggest that man can control and change nature and man is made in God's image. What you people do seems completely different, since you regard yourselves as just one of the participants in nature.

To which Sam responds:

It appeals to us because—well, we have not gone into the Christian religion so deeply to understand the whole idea of man in the central place. We know there is a Great Spirit who is watching over us all, and we want to be with him.

Thus, to Sam, the apparent contradictions between bush religion and Christianity are reconcilable through syncretism.

Furthermore, bush religion was experiential in nature, dynamically evolving with each generation's experiences of the world. In this sense, Christianity was simply another tool for survival, another lens through which the Cree could view the world. Waugh (1996: 44-5), in the context of the Plains Cree, writes:

One could contend that it is precisely the flexible nature of the religious category that allowed the Cree to adapt and integrate outside rituals and symbols. Vital aspects from

other peoples were recognized for what they were: powerful. They accepted that the sacred came to them from many directions.

Thus, the Cree embarked on a process of critical integration, finding other channels through which the world could be explained, supplementing bush religion with the aspects of Christianity that were useful in the changing context of East James Bay (Morantz 2002: 90).

Tanner (1979: 108) offers another analysis of the syncretism between the two spiritual influences. He posits that the two religions, while seemingly incompatible on some issues, have been able to coexist and amalgamate because they are instructive of different aspects of Cree life. Whereas bush religion is useful in the hunting territories, Christianity is applicable in the trading post or village context. This can also be interpreted economically. Cree religion is most invoked in the sites of hunting activities whereas Christianity is more common in the locations of cash economy interactions (Tanner, 1979: 109).

Yet, the mention of the differences between the two religions in both the content of their guidance and the context of their usage is not to say that the boundary between them is impenetrable or makes them exclusive of each other. In fact, it is more useful to see the religions as two roots of what has become the syncretic whole of today's Cree belief system. Still, while they are coexistent today, the principles of bush religion and Christianity have come into confrontation in the past, especially as the missionaries focused their efforts on ridding the Cree of the spirituality of their hunting technique. For example, W. G. Walton, called the "reindeer man" by the Cree, was a priest in Fort George around the turn of the twentieth century. He was very popular with community members as he learned to speak Cree and was more tolerant of their traditional practices. Yet, he insisted that the fishers should not return the first fish of the spring to the water as it was a sacrifice to the wrong god. He also strove to lessen the love-like relationship that the Cree shared with the animals by insisting that humans are of a different class of living species according to the Bible (Morantz, 2002: 84, 6). This influence of Christianity in what was once the territory of bush religion has remained with the Cree unto today and some hunters use the technical aspects of bush religion while denying their spiritual aspect. Tanner (1979: 207-8) describes one devout Christian hunter who was adamantly opposed to hunting with the rituals of bush religion, not because they were ineffective, but because he thought that "in this day and age they should be replaced by Christian prayer."

Thus, the balance between bush religion and Christianity continues to be one that individuals must strive to find for themselves. Yet, on the whole, the Cree have found a syncretistic solution in the face of change, supplementing their own ancestor's beliefs with another religious tradition in order to find solutions for living in a changing world.

II. Christianity on Nature

Telescoping out of the East James Bay, let us turn to a broader discussion on Christianity's teachings on nature. While I offer neither an extensive survey of the Bible's teachings on the natural world, nor their various interpretations, I will discuss the crux of the Christian debate over how humans are to interact with the natural world. I will then limit my discussion to the interpretation that was taught to the Cree at the end of the

nineteenth century. However, let's begin with an important thinker on the topic, Lynn White Jr.

White (1970:143) argues that Christianity, with its axiom that "nature has no reason for existence save to serve man" is largely responsible for the ecological predicament in which we find ourselves today. His paper, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," sparked a divisive debate about the interpretation of Christianity's teachings on the environment that continues today. At issue are two broad camps of interpretations on Biblical teachings about the natural world.

Two Camps on "Dominion"

What is uncontested in the debate over Christianity's teachings on the environment is that God's first commandment to humans gives humankind dominion over nature. This sets the stage for the predominantly anthropocentric worldview Western civilization has come to adopt (Dempsey and Butkus, 1999: 281). Genesis 1: 28 (KJV) reads:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

However, while the text itself is uncontested, what is highly contested is the meaning of dominion. Dominion may signify, as Christianity's critics would argue and as many Christian societies have behaved, a despotic exploitation of the natural world. In another interpretation, dominion may require a more moderate dominion, stewardship-based and care-giving. Put in other terms, Christianity teaches that humanity is king, but whether or not God commands humans to be abusive bad kings or compassionate good kings is up for debate.

The first camp on dominion, the attack upon which has been led by Lynn White Jr., has held a use-and-abuse view of nature. This camp's view has been most common throughout history, and is what, according to Lynn White Jr. is responsible for Western society's pattern of environmental destruction. He explains that the Bible places humans in a position of dominance over the animals as seen through Genesis 1: 28 and that the act of Adam naming the animals creates a dualism between humans and nature. Through this, "Christianity [...] insist[s] that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" (White 1970: 134-5).

To this camp, nature is perceived as a tool humans can use for survival and was historically thought to be a means through which believers would be able to understand more about their God (Haught, 1996: 273). White explains how this came to be. He says that while Christians initially focused on nature as revealing of God's character, Westerners eventually began focusing less on the message of nature, and more on how nature works through what has come to be known as 'Science.' Originally done in the name of God, Science gradually became an endeavour devoid of any Christian meaning. In this process, natural phenomenon, such as the rainbow, ceased being messages from God, but a-religious, completely explainable natural events. Thus, by "the late eighteenth century [...] the hypothesis of God became unnecessary to many scientists" (White 1970: 138). This left the natural world entirely demystified, nothing more than a tool for human needs and desires.

Nash (1996) explains that for Lynn White Jr. religion needed to be understood in its functionalist terms, through an analysis of the role it played in ordering societies. He was more interested in the application of the various interpretations of the scriptures than he was in actually interpreting the scriptures themselves. Nash (1996: 196) writes:

As a scholar concerned with the history of ideas, White knew the relevant question was not, what does Christianity mean? but what did it mean to a particular society at a give time and place? His approach, in other words, was pragmatic: How was the Judeo-Christian tradition used? [...] He agreed that there was a biblical basis for environmentalism. But his point was that for nearly two thousand years the Christian tradition had not been so construed.

Lynn White concedes that not all brands of Christianity result in the same treatment of the environment. He writes that caution is important when making generalizations. He acknowledges that “Christianity is a complex faith, and its consequences differ in differing contexts” (White 1970: 136). Nevertheless, he offers a stinging critique of Christianity, attributing blame to the role the religion has played in structuring Western society in ecologically unsustainable ways.

The defenders of Christianity’s views on nature, the second camp on dominion, argue that fair Biblical interpretations position humans not as users but as caretakers of nature, responsible for ensuring the environment’s well-being and continuation. As Attfield (2001: 96) writes,

dominion facilitates responsible stewardship and need not involve domination, recklessness, or ruthfulness. [...] Central Christian teachings turn out to encourage ecological sensitivity, despite episodes (and whole periods) in history which seem to suggest the contrary.

Further she explains that “for Christians who are true to their scriptures, stewardship is best construed not anthropocentrically [...], but as involving humble recognition of the intrinsic value of fellow-creatures” (Attfield, 2001: 107). Kinsley (1995: 115) points out that “the Bible has several passages that suggest that the natural world was respected, if not revered, while, conversely, there are no passages that suggest that nature was viewed as dead matter to be easily manipulated by human beings.”

Davies (2005: 78) writes that eco-theology became a trend in the late twentieth century with Christian theologians beginning to advocate for stewardship. Nonetheless, while Christianity’s recent crop of apologists argue that accurate interpretations make Christianity compatible with environmentalism, it remains that with the exception of some notable individuals (for example, St. Francis of Assisi) Christians and their societies have used the ‘bad king’ interpretation of dominion in the Bible to justify prevalent abuse of the natural world by Western humankind.

Let’s return, then, to the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, the historical time period that I have been describing in the previous section, and discuss the version of Christianity presented to the East James Bay Cree by the missionaries at that time. Official records of the position of the Anglican Church, the denomination of greatest influence in East James Bay, on how humans should treat nature are sparse. Yates (1998: 483) writes that “[u]nlike the Roman Catholic Church, there is no body of theory to which the enquirer may turn for an understanding of the Church’s mind.” Yet, based on the records that do exist, the version of Christianity presented to the East James Bay Cree can easily be situated in the dominion as domination camp of which Lynn White Jr. is

critical. Adelson (1992: 34) observes that the Cree were limited to the dominion as domination interpretation of the Bible. She points to a shortage of Biblical texts in the Cree language at the time that would have enabled the Cree to reinterpret a more stewardship-based understanding. Even in 1992, when she completed her manuscript, she reports that the only Bible translated into Cree syllabics was a literal translation of a 17th Century King James Version of the text. Her conclusion is that even recently, “despite radical changes in the interpretations and thinking of the modern Anglican church, local Cree interpretations are suspended in this much older English version” (Adelson 1992: 34).

The incongruity between Christianity and bush religion with regards to the natural world likely played a prominent role in the syncretism of the two in Cree society as the Cree kept out those aspects of Christianity that did not fit with what their lived experienced of the natural world through bush religion (Morantz, 2002: 87).

III. Topical comparison between bush religion and Christianity

Let us turn now to a thematic comparison between bush religion and Christianity. The aim of this is not to essentialize either of the two nor to create tension between them, but rather to illuminate the differences between two belief systems that have guided groups of humans in their thoughts about and actions in the natural world. As the comparison develops, it will become apparent that the study of bush religion is useful to the formulation of a new environmental ethic—the need for which cannot be overstated.

1. The divine

In Christianity, the divine is otherworldly and access to it, in its entirety at least, is constrained to experts and the dead. In bush religion, the natural world is itself divine and all members of the community have, to a greater or lesser extent, access to experiences of it in its fullness.

Where is the divine located?

For Christians, the location of the divine is of utmost importance. The Old Testament – New Testament division marks the point in time at which the divine took on human form and walked on earth. Additionally, Christians wait with eagerness for the Second Coming of Christ, a time when the divine will once again inhabit the earth. God, the Christian divinity, is perceived to live both in heaven and on earth. He is conceptualized as three parts of the same whole. God the Father dwells in heaven, God the Son rejoined Him there after a brief life amongst the mortals, and God the Holy Spirit came in the Son’s place, to live on earth amongst the Christians as a link to heaven. Thus, for Christians divinity is predominantly otherworldly with only a conduit, offered strictly to humans, to a worldly experience of divinity through the Holy Spirit. The Divine is a being external to the world and an experience only attainable in its fullness upon death. Christianity rigidly rejects animism and pantheism, insisting on the existence of only one divinity. Nash (1996: 197) calls the Judeo-Christian tradition “[r]igidly monotheistic.” He says that “[n]atural objects might be created by God, but they were not gods, nor did they possess souls or spirits of any sort.”

According to bush religion however, the divine pervades the natural world. Humans are not seen as separate from nature as is common in Western thought, but fully

integrated within it. Whitt (2001: 7) writes of indigenous spirituality generally that “[t]he land and living entities which make it up are not apart from, but part of, the people...The relation of belonging [to the land] is ontologically basic.” Thus, in many indigenous spiritualities, the divine imbues all earthly things. For the East James Bay Cree, the word *aataacaak*, captures this concept. Tanner (1979: 114) translates it as everything in the world that can be named has a ‘spirit.’ As a result of this concept, a hunter and his prey are part of the same spiritual whole. This demonstrates the interrelation between the natural and spiritual worlds, and humans and animals in the Cree worldview. However, this is not to say that all things are spiritually the same in bush religion. Certain animals or classes of animals have a spiritual being which is the master of the larger group (Tanner, 1979: 114). Yet, diffuse spirits dwell in all natural things. In Berkes’ words (1998: 80), the environment is “a community of beings that are supernatural as well as natural.”

Thus, for the Cree at the time of the arrival of the missionaries, “[t]here was no natural order apart from the supernatural, nor supernatural from natural. There was no simple dichotomy [between humans and their environment], as the Europeans would contend” (Waugh, 1996: 45-6). Whereas the Anglican missionaries’ view of nature tended to be “secularized, utilitarian, [and] depersonalized” (Berkes, 1998: 79), the Crees’ view was highly spiritual and personal. For them, ethical considerability included nature. Nash (1996: 197) writes that “[e]thical relevancy did not end with God, angels, saints, and other people. Everything had a sacred quality.” On the other hand, for the missionaries, “[t]he land, or nature, [was] only sacred indirectly, as having been created by God” (Kinsley, 1995: 106). For the missionaries then, “[t]he earth was no mother but a kind of halfway house of trial and testing from which one was released at death” (Nash, 1996: 198). For the Cree, the earth was the location of the divine.

Alongside this spatial difference, there is also a temporal difference between the two in terms of where the divine is situated. Christianity, with its focus on eternity, temporally relocates the experience of the divine from earth to heaven, making life a waiting room for the experience of divinity through life after death. In bush religion, the sacred is experienced in its fullness during life as every action of survival includes a sense of the divinity (Adelson, 1992: 33). The divine is experienced daily.

How is the divine accessed?

As Christianity situates the divine in heaven, conceptualized as above, authority from the divine is disseminated from the top-down. It comes out of often indecipherable texts and from religious figures who have acquired authority through formalized processes of training. While this has changed recently in some denominations of Christianity that are rethinking the traditions of the Church in spirituality, the form that was presented to the Cree by the early missionaries relied on a strict hierarchy between mission officials and laypersons and taught that knowledge of the divine is “in the hands of a few specialists” (Tanner, 1979: 108). Nevertheless, the hierarchy was penetrable by Cree people who wished to become church officials as the Anglican Church encouraged the eventual indigenization of its missions and eventually many Cree did become Christian religious leaders in their communities. However, their training did not involve experiential learning about the natural world; rather, it focused on otherworldly divinity.

As expertise about the divine is based in written works and not on personal experience as in bush religion, Christian training retains a rigidity that bush religion lacks.

In contrast, just as divinity in bush religion permeates from the soil up, access to the divine is through personal experience, a bottom-up approach. It grows, quite literally even, out of the ground as a form of experiential knowledge about nature's sacredness. Tanner (1979: 108) writes that "the aboriginal Cree religious tradition places particular emphasis on the development of religious competence by the individual." He continues, stating that:

[Bush religion] is not primarily a system of elaborate and explicit verbal explanations and exegesis. At the centre it is a system of symbolic action available for the individual to use or to ignore as he wishes. Because the bush religion is not passed on by formal instruction and is not surrounded in secrecy, it is approached very much as a set of environmental phenomena, much like the natural characteristics of the various animal species (Tanner, 1979:213).

Thus, bush religion encourages the individual to engage in personal communion with nature, as one would with a fellow human being (Nash, 1996: 197). This materializes itself, for example, in what Leith and Leith (1912: 50) describe as Cree hunters talking to the animals they hunt, explaining the rationale of their death to them before they are killed.

All of this is not to say that there is no hierarchy in bush religion. Those at the top of the hierarchy in bush religion, the purveyors of its knowledge, are not ministers and priests as in Christianity, but, rather the elder generation. Elders and the most experienced hunters are seen to be at the top of social hierarchies and *uuchimaauch* or hunting bosses are expected to be leaders for their hunting group both materially and spiritually (Berkes, 1998: 89). The quality of the social relationship between him and the animals that he hunts is responsible for the survival of the hunting group (Tanner, 1979: 202). Thus the hierarchy is important in terms of survival. However, it is thought of as penetrable. With experience and practice, young hunters become good hunters and leaders of successful hunting groups, all the members of which share in the experience of divinity in subsistence lifestyles through their own roles.

Knowledge of the sacred then is not monopolized or institutionalized as in the missionaries' version of Christianity. Thus, the difference between Christianity and bush religion is that Christianity relocates a portion of the divine from personal experience in the natural world to hierarchal expertise—in other terms, from the hunting grounds to the pew.

2. Humans and nature

In Christianity, humans are seen as more important according to the standards of the divine than is nature and they cast nature in utilitarian terms. In bush religion, humans are seen as a part of the complex web of nature and perceive non-human living things as spiritual beings unto themselves.

Where do humans fit in nature?

Christianity emphasizes the importance of spiritual beings over nature and matter (Kinsley, 1995: 106). The Bible describes a hierarchy, wherein God, the perfect spiritual being, is at the top; the natural world, entirely non-spiritual, is at the bottom; and humans,

imperfect spiritual beings, are in-between. As an example of the Bible's assertion that God positions humans over nature, Matthew 6: 26 (KJV) states:

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? (Passage referred to by Attfield, 2001: 97.)

Matthew 12: 12 (KJV) says:

How much then is a man better than a sheep? (Passage referred to by Attfield, 2001: 97.)

Thus, through passages such as these, humans are positioned as in-between God and nature. Furthermore, as mentioned in the above section, the Bible presents the earth as a transitory location that humans pass through on their way to eternity. In this way, humans are again positioned as of a different class than nature. Matthew 6: 19-20 (KJV) says:

(19)Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:
 (20)But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. (Passage referred to by Attfield, 2001: 97).

Humans, therefore, are to focus their attention not on earth but on heaven, sacrificing earthly symbiosis with nature in the pursuit of otherworldly accord. As Kinsley (1995: 106) writes, in Christianity, “[h]armony is defined in terms of proper relations with God, not with proper attitudes toward the land or toward the spirits who dwell in the land.”

By comparison, the Cree conceptualize of humans and nature as members of the same class. Feit (2004: 103-4) writes:

In the Cree hunters' view there is no fundamental separation in kind between the social world and the natural world, or between humans and nature, and the land is not a thing. The social world of the Crees extends beyond Cree society not just to other humans: the whole of the cosmos is understood as being a social world. That is, the whole of the Cree world is conceived of by most Cree hunters as comprising beings that are like persons. The world of Cree hunters is a society of non-human persons with wills, idiosyncrasies, intelligence and capacities of communication. Hunters emphasize that they know the non-human persons of the lands they hunt as individuals, not only as generalized categories of persons. They know the world through the relationships they know intimately.

Scott (in press) uses Cree terminology to elucidate the degree to which humans are thought of as members of the community of nature in bush religion. He explains that “[i]n the term Eeyou Istchee, the fundamentals of Cree ontology are powerfully condensed” (Scott, in press: 4-5). In *iyiyuu* (Eeyou), there are simultaneous meanings: broadly it means all living things, but also humans as distinct from non-humans, then Amerindians as distinct from other humans, and finally Cree as distinct from other Amerindian groups. Similarly, in *ischii* (Istchee), there is simultaneous signification of the world, the hunting territories, moss, and finally soil itself as a living entity. This shows the ability of the Cree language and worldview to conceptualize humanity as entirely integrated in the natural world.

In hunting practices, bush religion guides the Cree in anthropomorphizing the animals, their relationship to the animals, and the relationships between animals (Tanner,

1979: 136). They come to know the various animals as persons. Preston (1975: 226) writes that “[t]he nature of the interrelationships between classes of persons, from the Cree point of view, depends substantially upon the personality, needs and competences of the particular species.” Writing about the Plains Cree, Waugh (1996: 45-6) describes the relationship between a group of Plains Cree and their land in beautiful terms:

Ritual forms graced Cree culture because those forms rested upon interaction with specially endowed entities, in a perpetual movement to engage those “persons.”...The movement to engage these powers was seen to be present in all aspects of life, in the bear that gave himself for meat, in the frightful scurry of rabbit from coyote, and submissive behaviour of the dog rolling on its back, or lowering its ears in acknowledgement of power. One could not be neutral in relating to the reality represented by this quality, for it was stuff out of which one’s own self was constructed. No matter how ghastly the situation, the fury that raged towards the people was a sign of belonging, cut from the same mysterious cloth as the world around. Even as it raged, it was *their* world, imparting new lessons. The people had to learn how to react to its forces.

Additionally, unlike in Christianity which uses God-proclaimed differences between humans and other species to justify dominion, the differences between species do not justify a hierarchy in bush religion. Preston (1975: 222-3) writes:

In short, while narratives provide a character for a distinction between human persons and food-animal persons, the distinction is not a gross one...Also, some of the other kinds of persons have competences that men cannot attain: 1) bear cope with winter through hibernation, while man must face the cold and keep on hunting. It is doubtful that a bear ever starves to death, and he is stronger than man; 2) the man who moves on snowshoes, appreciates the mobility of geese who cope with winter by migration; 3) also, beaver and otter are able to utilize water for security, food, and pleasure. Clearly man is not supreme in any absolute sense.

Not supreme, the Cree see themselves through bush religion as another chain in a complex web of interacting spirits and beings with the ultimate goal of survival. As a result of this, bush religion conceives of humans as circularly connected to the natural world as opposed to horizontally connected as in Christianity.

How can humans use nature?

As already outlined, God gives Christians dominion over the natural world through his first commandment to humankind. Christians are to use the natural world as both a tool for survival and a tool for revelations about the nature of God, its Creator. As a result, Christians have adopted a largely instrumentalist stance towards nature, often seeing it as pieces of raw material even in its living forms. Christianity, in the interpretation presented to the Cree, taught that humans can use nature as a tool to further their own aims with little regard to any relationships that may exist between living things other than the one directly linking to humans.

Bush religion, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of the multiplicity of linkages between all living things. Bush religion’s primary objective in functional terms is to provide direction regarding how humans should use nature. It guides the Cree in survival—in food procurement practices. Yet, bush religion leaves no space for living things themselves to be turned into tools. In a sense then, bush religion is itself a tool that keeps the other living beings with whom the Cree interact from becoming tools.

For the Cree, successful hunters in material terms are first successful hunters in spiritual terms (Kinsley, 1995: 15). Indeed, the entire hunting process is a spiritual communion with the natural world. Feit (1986: 173-4) writes:

The animal is given to the hunter. A successful hunt is not simply the result of the intention and work of the hunter; it is also the outcome of the intention and actions of the animals. In the process of hunting a hunter enters into a reciprocal relationship: animals are given to hunters to meet their needs and wants, and in return the hunters incur obligations to the animals. Thus the Cree conception of hunting involves a complex and moral relationship in which the outcome of the hunt is the result of the mutual efforts of the hunter and the environment.

Thus, the natural world with all of its spiritual force is seen as a partner in survival.

As opposed to Christian societies, the Cree, like many indigenous groups (Whitt, 2001:7), do not see themselves as owners of the land, even though they may speak in terms of which *uuchimaa* is the hunting boss of a given territory. Tanner (1997: 202) says that the idea of owning land (as in European culture) is sometimes mocked by the Cree. In a 1974 film by Boyce Richardson called "Cree Hunters of Mistissini," hunter Sam Blacksmith says:

A man is told that he owns the land. But even if he says he does, he cannot, because eventually he dies.

The Cree understanding of land and resource ownership sheds light on many of the disputes between the Canadian government and First Nations communities over treaties that were signed by each side in the early years following contact. A deeper understanding of Cree ideas about land ownership shows that the Indians and the Whitemen clearly had different understandings of what the treaties really meant. For the Indians, it was impossible to sign away the property rights to land they did not conceive of as being theirs in the first place.

The bush religion also guides the Cree in respectful reciprocity with the parts of the natural world of which they make use. They show respect for the animals they eat by not tolerating any waste (Berkes, 1998: 86). Tanner (1979: 130) explains that:

A central attitude in the conduct of Cree hunting is that game animals are persons and that they must be respected. The rules of respect after the killing involve essentially taking care of all the elements of the carcass, and not allowing anything to be thoughtlessly discarded.

The Cree return through various rituals a portion of what they take for survival. The portion that they return, usually bones, fur, skin, and intestines, is in excess to their actual subsistence needs (Tanner, 1979: 130). The proper disposal of bones is a way of ensuring a continued rapport with the master of the species and a way of returning the bones to the species as a whole in order to ensure continued hunting success (Tanner, 1979: 180).

These implicit food regulations in bush religion serve to keep members of Cree society in check. Preston (1975: 25-6) discusses the way in which Cree bush spirituality functions as a mechanism for social order. He writes:

Mental competence, in turn, is the basis of social organization; particularly so in Cree culture, due to the lack of formal external social controls, and to the prevalence of self-controlled social standardization. To an unusual extent, social control in Cree culture is embedded in the

knowledge and will of each individual. A person deliberately controls his own acts, with the control deriving partly from his knowledge of the consequences of transgression. These consequences are usually not physical punishment, but stem more from his opinion of himself and his anticipation of the opinions of others.

He cautions us however from faulty perceptions saying that:

Where hunting-gathering social systems are often described as “uncentralized” or as “lacking formal social controls,” such phrases only tell us what is absent. Social patterning is real, precise, and persistent in Cree culture, yet control is rarely effected [*sic*] through physical force or threat of physical force. Cree social control is effected [*sic*] essentially through a mental force (Preston, 1975: 26).

Thus, bush religion functions as a control mechanism in Cree society ensuring that individuals do not use nature in ways that would be deleterious to the survival of the people.

3. Nature without humans

Let us turn now to a discussion of the natural world without humans: its intrinsic value. To address this question, let’s examine the story that each religion tells of the natural world back in time, before humans came to inhabit it.

The Christian version of this story teaches that God created the natural world in five days. At the end of each step along the process, God found his creation good, yet incomplete. Thus, God continued creating until the last step, the creation of humankind on day six. After this, creation was pronounced good and finished, permitting God to rest contentedly on the seventh day.

In this story, humankind is necessary to complete the process. Yet, humanity is not simply inserted into creation the way that each of the other living beings had been. Although each living creature received the command to be fruitful and multiply from God, only humans were told to have dominion. Furthermore, only humans were created as earthly versions of the divine, closer to God than the other species. Genesis 1:26 (KJV) reads:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Thus, for Christianity, nature without humans was good but incomplete.

For bush religion, humans enter the natural world without much pomp and circumstance, but with a specific role to play in the same way that each other species fits into natural systems. Preston (1975: 221-2) describes the Cree’s perception of their relationship to nature through an analysis of their narratives. He writes:

When humans appear on the scene, they assume a satisfactory position in the great society of beings by simply moving into the existing social structure. The integration of men into the Cree world of persons does not, however, follow a revolutionary path, where man is given dominion over the other animals and a categorical superiority in some kind of vertical hierarchy. Instead, man derives his status on the basis of his particular needs and competences, apparently in very much the same way as the other persons have done.

Thus, for bush religion, nature without humans is good just as nature with humans is good. Both are complete communities.

Difference and Similarity

In the end, these comparisons can be boiled down to one foundational difference. Whereas Westerners, influenced by Christian beliefs about humans and nature, take the approach that nature and humans are different and thus try to find similarities between the two in order to motivate ecological concern, bush religion beliefs about humans and their environment take the approach that human life and non-human life are similar and through various mythologies strive to find differences in order to justify hunting.

Wagenar (1977) explains that all human societies have taken one of two approaches to knowledge creation. Some societies have created knowledge figuratively by building metaphors for how things are different from each other. Other societies have created knowledge literally by making metaphors for how things are the same as other things. Underpinning this then, is that figurative societies which are concerned with differentiating must start from the assumption that things are the same, and that literal societies which are concerned with relating things must start from the assumption that things are different. While Scott (1996: 73) claims that “the opposition is misplaced as one of societal types” and that in fact, cultures have aspects of both to lesser or greater degrees, the distinction is useful in the comparison between Christianity and bush religion.

Scott (1996: 72) writes that “[the Western] conventional attitude is to assume fundamental difference between people and animals, while exploring the nature of their connections.” Christianity starts in Genesis 1 with the assumption that humans are distinct from the natural world. Ingold (1987: 117) criticizes these underpinnings of our worldview which assume difference between humans and the natural world. He argues that this distinction is nonsensical in hunter-gatherer societies. He writes that “the world can only be ‘nature’ for a being that does not belong there, yet only through belonging can the world be constituted, in *relation* to a being, as its environment.” As Christianity has underpinned much of the theoretical foundations for Western societies, Western environmentalists have resorted to the strategy of attempting to prove sameness between humans and other species in order to justify ethical standing for the natural world. Yet, in so doing, they fail to get to the foundation of difference which anchors the environmental problems that we face today.

In contrast, bush religion starts from the assumption that humans are of the same category as the natural world. Scott (1996: 72) writes that “[t]he Cree disposition [is...] to assume common connections among people, animals and other entities while exploring the nature of their differences.” Thus, without an assumption of difference to justify the taking of an animal’s life, much of the spiritual work of hunting is focused on establishing difference between the hunter and his prey. Preston (1975: 223) writes that:

In spite of the lack of any great social distance between human persons and other-than-human persons, there is nevertheless considerable importance attached to defining and maintaining the distinction between human and other persons. Perhaps their very closeness makes the difference more crucial.

With a foundation of sameness, as in bush religion, ethical consideration is extended to nature by default. The challenge, rather, would be to justify the disrespectful treatment of nature. By comparison, Christian-influenced ethical theory has been able to provide a justification for this through its foundation of presuming difference. Routley and Routley (1980: 108) find that this foundation of Western thought on nature, the assumption of difference, is neither useful nor well-founded. They argue that “the human/nonhuman distinction is not an ethically significant one, and can, and should, be demoted from its dominant, and damaging position in ethical theory.”

VI. Prescription

Just as elements of Christianity were amalgamated into bush religion to form the Cree syncretic religion of today, there are many elements of bush religion that we, as members of Western society (whose ideas on nature have been greatly influenced by Christianity), could incorporate into our collective belief systems in an effort to live symbiotically with our environment. Lynn White Jr. (1970: 140) writes that “[w]hat we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink the old one.” Westerners, with a worldview that sees nature as a tool that is devoid of divinity and over which humans have dominion, must replace these foundations with an ethic that positions humans as members of the natural world, as in bush religion. In this way, we must reject our foundational assumption of difference from the natural world and work to build an assumption of sameness. Ingold (1987: 121) writes:

[We must] reverse this order of primacy and follow the lead of hunter-gatherers in taking the human condition to be that of a being immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with constituents of the dwelt-in world. This ontology of dwelling, I contend, provides us with a better way of coming to grips with the nature of human existence than the alternative, Western ontology whose point of departure is that of a mind detached from the world and which has literally to formulate it – to build an intentional world in consciousness – prior to any attempt at engagement.

Bush religion offers an alternative to Christianity’s position that assumes ethical difference between humans and nature. The study of bush religion illuminates the inadequacies of the Western worldview of the environment, offering us new perspectives on how humans can live in mutualism with nature.

Yet, in studying bush religion, it is important not to romanticize uncritically the past or present culture of the East James Bay Cree. Jared Diamond in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* says that while there is much to learn from studies of other groups, it is important to not idealize indigenous cultures. He says that both “the racists and the believers in a past Eden...are committing the error of viewing past indigenous peoples as fundamentally different from (whether inferior to or superior to) modern First World peoples” (Diamond, 2005: 9). Rather, we must recognize the functional similarity between their worldviews and our own. Bush religion was a strategy that made survival in the specific context of East James Bay possible, as was Christianity for many Euro-Canadians and the Cree when they were confronted with pressures from Euro-Canadian society in the second half of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth

century. Both belief systems are based on generations of knowledge from lived experience in specific contexts. Diamond (2005: 10) continues:

Past peoples were neither ignorant bad managers who deserved to be exterminated or dispossessed, nor all-knowing conscientious environmentalists who solved problems that we can't solve today. They were people like us, facing problems broadly similar to those that we now face. They were prone either to succeed or to fail, depending on circumstances similar to those making us prone to succeed or fail today. Yes, there are differences between the situations we face today and that faced by past peoples, but there are still enough similarities for us to be able to learn from the past (Diamond, 2005:10).

In the case of the East James Bay Cree, a culture still evolving, Diamond's point can be rephrased to say that there are still enough similarities for us to be able to learn from the past *and present* diversity of cultures.

While all cross-cultural studies are useful and interrogations into many other cultural views on the human-nature relationship have and will continue to yield new perspectives, studies of the Cree of East James Bay deserve special attention for two reasons. Firstly, the Cree have a proven track record of sustainable subsistence (Feit, 1992). Even though the Cree had the technological means to overexploit their resources, they refrained. This is attributable to the function of cultural control that bush religion plays in Cree land tenure practices. Secondly, to this day there exist many East James Bay Cree experts on bush religion, albeit in its ever-changing syncretic form. For example, Berkes writes that "[the] belief in animal spirits persists among the Chsisasibi Cree despite the best efforts of missionaries to eradicate it [...] and it [continues to shape] their worldview" (Berkes, 1986b in Berkes 1998: 80) Sadly, this is not the case for many other groups as the colonial history of many indigenous societies has resulted in a much more total destruction of beliefs.

VII. Conclusion

Vandersteene, the Catholic missionary to the Plains Cree with whom we commenced this discussion, exemplifies this struggle towards syncretism. Over the course of his life, he became aware of the pattern that connects Plains Cree religiosity and Christianity. He reinterpreted Cree myths into a Christian form, ultimately coming to replacing Jesus Christ himself, the most important symbol in Christianity, with the Great Bear, a symbol of utmost importance in Cree spirituality.

Now the winds are blowing a different direction, and it is no longer just the East James Bay Cree who are facing a world of change. In our world of unprecedented environmental change, largely brought about by our own failure to develop an adequate environmental ethic, we must search out new symbols that offer us the possibility to think of the environment in sustainable terms in the same way that the Cree sought out new religious symbols for the economic, social, cultural, and environmental changes they have faced over the past centuries. Here, just as Vandersteene did through his drawings, I offer my own attempt at reconstructing the religious foundations of Western culture's view on nature through poetry in a first attempt at rewriting Genesis 1, our founding myth of dominion over the natural world:

Magic Ashes to Magic Ashes

*In the beginning
there was an end
and it was the same
as the beginning that began*

*In the beginning
there was no division
everything was the same
a glob of trembling magic
waiting*

*And then it happened
and we could begin
to divide one from another
while maintaining that it's all cut from the same cloth
anyway*

*we gave names to things
like 'seahorse' and 'horse'
made horror films about dinosaurs by
projecting iguana shadows onto model city scapes
noticed that a horse with painted stripes
could pass as a zebra*

*we killed each other and it was good
beautiful sorrowful bloody murder scenes
where our flesh met
one to the other's stomach lining
and the spirit was returned to that magic
that hovers,
in over around through out of us
to which one day we would return, us all*

*we weren't always good with division
and often made mistakes
but drove ourselves madly onward to find
the perfect balance to two sides of the same equation
we took only what we needed and gave it all back
on death days*

*but back to the beginning we would return
a blob of magic anyway*

and it is good

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