

Reading Log #2

In the journal article “We Are Well As We Are” by James P. Ronda, Ronda examines the religious push from the Christian missionaries upon the Indigenous peoples of North America. Written in 1977, Ronda uses historical records from the seventeenth century to better understand the conflicting views of these two groups. Around this time the Europeans were trying to enforce their ways of living upon the Indigenous groups already living in North America. Ronda highlights the difficulty of examining evidence without biases, as well as the differing ideas of sin and diseases between the Europeans and the Indigenous peoples. The two main Indigenous groups mentioned in this article are the Hurons and the Montagnais but may be expanded to other groups as well.

When looking at historical records, Ronda explains how a researcher must identify the biases of the material to get both sides of the story. He continues to clarify that many writings and interpretations tend to focus more on the view of the missionaries because they were the ones keeping physical records of their experiences (67). Ronda states that “Indian speeches were filtered through white interpreters, recorded by white secretaries, and ultimately arranged in the memoirs of white missionaries” (67). In this article Ronda maintains a more equal balance between the cultures and counters the idea that the religious debates were a “one-sided struggle” (67).

When it comes to the religious views the missionaries pushed their ethnocentrism upon the Indigenous peoples and wanted them to be more like Europeans (67). The Indigenous peoples reacted in different ways depending upon the individual; some converted and some

resisted (67). One point the missionaries and Indigenous peoples did not agree on were the ideas of sin and guilt. “Most Indians simply dismissed the concept of personal sin and guilt” and “emphasized instead the presence of certain evil forces and the dangerous consequences” (68-69). Many Indigenous peoples argued against the rules that came with the idea of heaven and hell and questioned why an all loving God would create such a place as brutal as hell (69-70). Since the idea of heaven and hell arrived with the Europeans “the Hurons concluded that heaven was only for the French” (70). Many Indigenous peoples did not wish to go to heaven, believing that their ancestors would not be there to greet them (70). Some even saw hell as “a weapon of intimidation used by the missionaries to force acceptance of French social and political domination” (71).

The last main disagreement between the Europeans and the Indigenous peoples comes when the previously foreign smallpox disease was brought to the Huron villages (72). The missionaries were conducting baptisms around this time and focused on baptising those on the edge of death (72). This led the Hurons to believe that baptisms were leading to the death of their people and “Huron shamans argued persuasively that missionaries ‘had a secret understanding with the disease’ and used baptism to spread it” (72). Likewise, the missionaries did not agree with the healing and medicinal practices of the Indigenous peoples. “Missionaries saw Indian religious leaders as devils, demons, sorcerers, and witches” and the Indigenous saw the same in the missionaries (75).

In the end, each group believed in their own religious system and when the Europeans began pushing their ethnocentric point of views upon the Indigenous peoples, this led to disagreements between the two. Ronda writes that the missionaries’ goal “was neither an attempt to save them from land-hungry settlers nor a guileless exercise in soul-winning”, but rather

suggests social and political control was (66). However, this was just the beginning of these two conflicting groups trying to live on the same land and much more was to come.