

**“FOR GOD AND COUNTRY”:  
THE CHANGING ROLE OF  
ST. STEPHEN’S MISSION**

by  
**Barbara L. Flasch**

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[Flasch 1] Various Christian denominations established mission schools among the Indian tribes in the nineteenth century, attempting to convert, civilize, and educate the Native Americans. The administrators of these institutions insisted upon Indian assimilation of white society’s life style and values. Within the last fifteen years, however, this emphasis upon Indian conformity to an alien culture has been modified. Public and parochial education on the reservation today, while striving to prepare

the Indian for competition in the white man's world, also promotes an appreciation of Indian cultural heritage. This alteration in policy reflects a recent development in the character of the American people themselves. The nation has become cognizant of the American Indian's right to self-identity and preservation of culture.

The history of St. Stephens Catholic Mission near Riverton, Wyoming typifies this shift of interest in Indian education. Ministering to the needs of the Arapahoe Indians on the Wind River Reservation since the 1880s, the mission and school have adapted their goals from evangelization of the Heathens to the intellectual, practical, and spiritual education of the established Christian community.

In the nineteenth century, Americans generally deplored what they considered the unfortunate and pitiable state of [Flasch 2] the Indian. His alleged alienation from idealized white moral standards convinced whites of Indian's degeneracy. A Catholic missionary to the Potawatomi tribe in 1854 summarized contemporary public opinion of the condition of the Indians.

“What a chaos of miseries of all kinds is the life of the savage! What a hideous mixture of ignorance and corruption in these souls which the lights of faith are never illuminating with their divine rays and which Civilization seems to be ashamed to receive in its heart! What a deep degradation of human nature.”<sup>1</sup>

The United States Government, desirous of improving the moral, intellectual, and physical lives of its Indian dependents, enacted legislation supporting education for the Indians. In 1819 Congress allotted \$10,000 per year “to instruct the Indians in the mode of agriculture and mechanical arts suited to their situation and to teach their children in reading, writing and arithmetic.”<sup>2</sup> This appropriation was gradually increased during the middle of the century and was used to finance a wide variety of sectarian mission schools. Beginning in 1870,

moreover, [Flasch 3] the federal government negotiated contracts with religious schools, paying the board and tuition of the resident Indian students.<sup>3</sup>

The national government settled the Northern Arapahoes on the Wind River Reservation in 1878. The Arapahoes had previously been at war with the United States. Government officials did not attempt to “civilize” the tribe after the Indians were placed on the reservation. For six years both secular and religious leaders were hesitant to introduce white cultural patterns among the tribe. Yet, by 1884, Father D.W. Moriarity, the diocesan priest at Lander, believed that the reservation could benefit from a Catholic mission.

Moriarity contacted Bishop James O’Connor of Omaha, whose jurisdiction included the Territory of Wyoming, and recommended a mission for the evangelization of the reservation Indians in Wyoming. O’Connor, aware of rumored federal government plans for an Indian school, offered \$5,000, which had been collected for missionary work in the area, to equip the building. The administration accepted the funds, allowing the bishop to select the teaching staff.

[Flasch 4] Bishop O’Connor encountered difficulty in securing a permanent director for the mission. The Jesuit Order in Missouri, due to other commitments, could spare no missionary to undertake a new assignment. O’Connor then contacted the German Jesuits in Buffalo, New York, who responded to the ecclesiastic’s appeal. They sent Father John Jutz and an assistant, Brother Ursus Nunlitz, to the reservation in the spring of 1884. When Jutz discovered that the supervision of the government school among the Shoshoni at Fort Washakie had already been assigned to an Episcopalian, Reverend John Roberts, he arranged with the Arapahoe chief Black Coal to establish a Catholic mission and school on the eastern end of the reservation. Father Moriarity assisted the Jesuit priest for a short time, advising him on reservation life and helping to acquaint him with the Indians. The superior of the German

Jesuits recalled Father Jutz in 1885, however, when he learned of the harsh wilder-ness conditions and the lack of spiritual advancement among the Indians. He reassigned the missionary to the Sioux in South Dakota, where Jutz founded the mission of St. Francis.

Disappointed, but unwilling to abandon the mission, Bishop O'Connor enlisted the aid of Father Joseph Stephan, director of the Catholic Bureau of Indian Missions in Washington. The United States Government had granted a con-tract for a mission school in 1886, and the immediate resumption of mission activities was necessary in order that [Flasch 5] the funds not be forfeited. This time the Missouri Jesuits heeded the petition, assuming supervision of the mission for the next five years. Although ensuing years brought St. Stephens under the jurisdiction of several different branches of the Jesuit order, the mission never lacked a superior after 1886.

Shortly after Father Jutz first arrived at St. Stephens, a newspaper article reprinted his report to Bishop O'Connor on the construction of the mission's first building. This progress inspired two donations of \$500 and \$5,000 for the continued pursuit of the undertaking. Miss Katherine Drexel of Philadelphia, benefactress of every Catholic Indian mission in Oklahoma,<sup>4</sup> contributed the latter gift, which established the enterprise financially. Four years later, in 1888, the mission expanded to include an Indian school.

In that year, St. Stephens School welcomed an initial enrollment of some ninety students. The first religious order to serve as teachers were the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, "but owing to difficulties with curric-ulum and other problems,"<sup>5</sup> they remained at the school for [Flasch 6] only two years. In 1891, they were succeeded by the Sisters of St. Joseph, who served for only one year. They, in turn, were replaced by the Franciscan Sisters of Pendleton, Oregon. Members of this religious order have educated the children at the mission school since 1892.<sup>6</sup>

Prominent members of the Arapahoe tribe, including Plenty Bear, Lone Bear, Shakespeare, Little Ant, and Goggles, greeted the Franciscan sisters when they arrived.<sup>7</sup> In September, 1892, one month following their reception, Chief Lone Bear assisted the nuns in securing pupils for the new school year. They met with limited success. Stephen and Francis Sitting Eagle were the first scholars,<sup>8</sup> and class enrollments gradually increased.

[Flasch 7] Under contract with the federal government, St. Stephens was organized as a boarding school. The government considered this a method of education more effective than a day school, “because the Indian would be under white influence during all waking hours and would then be more likely to absorb the white man’s ways.”<sup>9</sup> It mattered not to the administrators of nineteenth century Indian boarding schools that the children would be homesick, would be uncomfortable in strange clothing, would experience difficulty speaking only English, and would be confused when “old customs” conflicted with “new rules.”<sup>10</sup> What was important was that the Indian adopt the white man’s life style and value system.

For more than half a century the educational system at St. Stephens School reflected this American objective. As late as 1926, Father J. J. Lannon, a mission official, reiterated the faculty’s goal.

“The purpose of the mission is today what it was in the minds of the original founders, namely, the civilization and the advancement of the Arapahoe Indians along religious, educational and industrial lines, making of a superstitious and aimless race, a God-fearing and industrious [Flasch 8] people who could take their place beside their white brother as worthy citizens of their loved land.”<sup>11</sup>

In order to achieve the stated goal, the curriculum at the school consisted of both academic subjects and industrial arts. At St. Stephens, as at other mission schools,

“ . . . the liberal arts courses were intended to endow the Indian children with the rudiments of Western Civilization into which they were expected to step and play a constructive role, [and] the vocational portion of the curriculum sought to develop specific skills whereby the children might become self-supporting citizens of an economic society somewhat more complex than the hunting-fishing-gathering pursuits of their forebearers.”<sup>12</sup>

The girls learned such domestic arts as cooking, cleaning, and sewing; the boys tended farm animals and performed other farm chores. The pupils often were dismissed from class to aid in planting and harvesting on the mission farm. Instruction in manual labor for the boys was especially important, for Indian values taught that women, rather than men, worked; that it was beneath a man’s dignity to carry on any occupation other than hunting, fishing, and engaging in warfare.<sup>13</sup>

[Flasch 9] The school made some progress toward its goal of acculturation. One of the teacher’s recorded in 1908 that several pupils were laboring in white person’s homes in the neighboring area, and that “one or two in particular have no desire to follow the Indian mode of life.”<sup>14</sup>

Other children were not so willing to accept the white man’s ways. Two nuns often were required to control the children during their play periods and to prevent them from fleeing school.<sup>15</sup> Despite the convent diarist’s contention in 1908 that children no longer escaped and that “now we have no trouble, when there is a question of coming to school the Mission always has the preference,”<sup>16</sup> the mission school continued for years to be plagued by the problem of runaways. Truancy was not the sole cause for absenteeism. Fairs held in the local area in September usually attracted students, thereby delaying the opening of the school year. Sometimes parents kept their children home for short periods of time to help with household chores. Other parents disliked the manual labor required of students at the mission. One Indian father [Flasch 10]

lodged the complaint that “there was to [sic] much work at the mission and not enough school.”<sup>17</sup>

Administrators imposed disciplinary measures upon runaways and other violators of school rules. A captured runaway, Martin Runsbehind, was punished and chained.<sup>18</sup> George Behan and Joseph Addison received “a public flogging for misconduct in the dining room and for grave disrespect towards the sisters.” School officials reported that “the chastisement had a very salutary effect on the whole crowd.”<sup>19</sup> Failure to speak English at all times resulted in some type of penance in the classroom.<sup>20</sup> Expulsion from school was rare, but at least three students were asked to leave. Although the offence leading to expulsion was not mentioned specifically, it was pronounced very “serious,” and no alternative was possible.<sup>21</sup>

[Flasch 11] Yet, the directors of St. Stephens Indian School made every attempt to maintain their student body. In 1905 Father William McMillan, superior of the mission, quarreled with the Indian agent, Major Wadsworth, over the proposed removal of two students, Annie and Nellie Van Dussen, to the Haskell Indian School in Kansas. Father McMillan absolutely refused to approve the transfer of the girls.<sup>22</sup> He preferred that they remain at the Catholic mission school. A note of denominational jealousy was also observable in the record of the loss of a few pupils to a new school at Arapahoe in 1913 under the influence of the Presbyterians. The convent diarist commented that the Protestant group

“ . . . with all their craft, succeeded in taking about a dozen of our children. The Indians however soon began to see their mistake and it is to be hoped that the children will return to the Mission for the next school term.”<sup>23</sup>

Other problems plagued the school during the early years of the twentieth century. School officials often were hard pressed to find

teachers that matched their academic and religious standards. At first, the sisters were responsible for the education of the girls and younger boys. A man, referred to as a prefect, had charge of the [Flasch 12] older boys. Besides the nuns, the successive superiors of the mission and school preferred the services of the Jesuit scholastics, who were required to spend a number of years instructing youth. On some occasions, however, the directors found themselves compelled to employ lay prefects (i.e. non-religious personnel). The superior's diary revealed the seriousness of the problem in its disclosure of the characters of two unsatisfactory lay teachers. In 1906, the diarist admitted that the male prefect

“. . . knows and understands about as much as our poor Indian boys. Who takes advice and instructions in one ear & lets it out the other & requires more watching than the boys. It is difficult to get men to do the work as perfectly as our scholastics do it.”

Six years later, school officials faced a personnel problem of a different kind. Charles F. Miller was discharged in January, 1912, having taught at St. Stephens for only three months. The man claimed to be Count C.F.L. von Muhlau of Bavaria and planned to marry a half-blood Arapahoe girl, Mary Hanway, a former student at the school. The superior's diary related, “The man's mind is certainly not normal,-- & he may yet be a source of scandal and annoyance to us.”<sup>25</sup> The prediction proved true. The embittered [Flasch 13] Miller advised the Indians against the mission and successfully kept Mary Hanway's father from attending religious services.<sup>26</sup>

While problems arose with specific instructors, generally the mission school was well operated. The Indian agent periodically inspected the mission and held conferences with the superior on business matters. His general impression was usually favorable. The Indian Commissioner from Washington, Cato Sells, visited St. Stephens in 1920, escorted by the agent, Judge Hutchison. Mr. Sells “went through the house and inspected everything. He seemed well satisfied and spoke very highly of

the work done by the Catholics in general for the uplift of the Indian.”<sup>27</sup> He remarked on the importance of the children learning English, thereby assisting their elders as translators.<sup>28</sup> Visiting with parents at the mission the following year, Judge Hutchison observed “that they ought to appreciate the fact that St. Stephens is the best school in the Reserve.”<sup>29</sup>

[Flasch 14] St. Stephen’s has also been hard pressed in maintaining adequate financing. Following the school’s inception, the United States Government contributed a major source of funds through contracts supplying financial aid subject to the number of pupils enrolled at the school. Within a decade, however, opposition to such monetary assistance arose, and appropriations to sectarian schools were severely curtailed. As succeeding years witnessed a dwindling in government financial aid and supplies, St. Stephens came to rely more heavily on private sources for its subsistence. Monetary support came from Katherine Drexel, from the sale of articles made by the children, and from charitable donations. As in the past, construction costs were saved through the physical labor of friends of the mission.

Throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century, part of the food supply for teachers and pupils was raised on the mission farm and garden. These agri-cultural pursuits, moreover, were used as a means of instructing the Indians in farming methods developed by the white man. Nurtured by the Jesuits and young students, the farm and garden “were a constant agricultural example to the Indians, and samples of their produce garnered a host of prize-ribbons at state and county fairs for many years.”<sup>30</sup>

[Flasch 15] Yet St. Stephens was never able to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. Despite such attempts at economy, in 1939 lack of funds ultimately forced the abandonment of the boarding school concept. The availability of public schools on the reservation at Fort Washakie, Mill Creek, and Arapahoe occasioned reductions in public

funds, leaving the mission with no alternative other than to operate as a day school.

St. Stephens, however, continued to seek income from such fund-raising activities as penny sales and rummage sales. Rallies stimulating contributions to missionary activity brought some relief to the mission's financial burden. Most notable among such activities were the rallies of Father Bernard A. Cullen, Director General of the Marquette League. St. Stephens contributed a number of boys to Cullen's programs in the east, although school officials often found it difficult to meet the priest's demands. In 1940 the mission diarist recorded, "It's hard to find three who qualify in every respect. Good, intelligent, singers, dancers, around 12 years old."<sup>31</sup> Cullen's programs were designed to develop Indian leadership, for funds from the rallies provided Marquette League scholarships enabling Indian youths to acquire a formal education. Cullen believed that the Wind River youths [Flasch 16] educated through such scholarships would return to the reservation and provide a nucleus of Catholic leadership for their people.<sup>32</sup>

Although St. Stephens School concerned itself with the education of the Arapahoe children, the primary purpose of the mission for more than half a century was evangelization, the conversion of the Indians to Catholicism. Beginning with the entry of the first Arapahoe to receive Holy Communion – Maggie Cole [Coal], on June 29, 1893<sup>33</sup> – the diaries of the priests and nuns record numerous accounts of the various religious activities of the Indians. The comments of the religious personnel reveal their satisfaction with past successes add continued hope for the future of their work. They hoped to utilize the children's activities as a means of securing religious education of the parents.

"After a little instruction to the Indians, the prayers were taught in church. The children were made to say them – in a body & then singly. [Flasch 17] Contrary to all expectations about half a dozen of the old stamp, repeated them, individually and in a body. The plan is to drum the

prayers into their ears by making them listen to their children, until such a day, as the Lord has in view for these poor people.”<sup>34</sup>

Such plans sometimes failed. The children frequently neglected to attend to their religious duties during vacations. Although excuses for such negligence occasionally were legitimate, often the children simply did not wish to go to church. “Faithlessness” was blamed for this lack of devotion and sometimes caused discouraged teachers to question the validity of keeping “up a school with much cost and labors to come to such fruits.”<sup>35</sup> Further disillusionment is evident in the superior’s diary entries of 1919. On many Sundays students and adults did not attend Mass in the morning, yet they crowded the mission hall to watch moving pictures in the evening. One priest commented, “The neighboring indians [sic] seem to scent the movies, and come even in bad weather. . . . They show far more zeal for these passing things than they do for the Holy Sacrifice.”<sup>36</sup>

[Flasch 18] As a boarding school, St. Stephens provided material needs as well as spiritual guidance for its students. After it changed to a day school in 1939, the institution shifted responsibility for the daily provisioning of material necessities to Indian parents. The parents sometimes assumed this role with reluctance.<sup>37</sup> The children were pleased, though, excited at the prospect of riding the bus and returning home daily.<sup>38</sup> The teachers were relieved of extra duties, but as one nun commented, “it seemed so strange to see no beds ready for the opening of school. . . . Everything seemed so different, it was a little hard to get used to.”<sup>39</sup>

Visible changes among the Arapahoe people paralleled the emergence of the day school. Acculturation of white standards in the home better prepared the children for adjusting to white practices in the school.

Nearly two decades of development in the day school inspired the establishment of a secondary school. Opening in 1957, the high school

furnished a source of pride and a sense of accomplishment for the Indian community. Besides providing an academic and industrial preparation [Flasch 19] for existing in the white man's world, St. Stephens High School also enabled Indian students to participate in extra-curricular activities and athletics. The basketball team, dubbed the "Cinderella Team" by newspapermen, was an especial symbol of pride for the Arapahoes. St. Stephens won the state basketball championship two years in a row, as well as securing a championship in track.<sup>40</sup> Father Jerome Zummach, in directing these inter-school events, had a special purpose in confronting his Indian school team with those of white schools.

"He was not trying to destroy tribal life but rather to establish a kind of competitive communication with the outside world that actually would bolster tribal morale with a sense of accomplishment and purpose. He wanted to integrate the tribe in the real world."<sup>41</sup>

In the 1960s, a real experiment in integration was in operation at the school itself. By 1966, almost one-third of the high school's enrollment (30 of 95 students) were non-Indian.<sup>42</sup> Nearly fifty years earlier the Folsom Training School in Oklahoma conducted by Methodists had ventured a trial in the educational integration of whites [Flasch 20] and Indians. The administrators had found this to be "an advantage to both races, as each learned the ability and merits of the other, which broadened their sympathies and reduced their prejudices."

St. Stephens objectives were obviously the same, yet, in 1966, lack of sufficient funds brought an end to the functioning of St. Stephens High School. Financial support continues to be a major concern of the mission. In 1973 the mission operated at an annual deficit of \$25,000. The chief source of income today for the maintenance of the mission and school is contributions from interested benefactors. Financial assistance is solicited through the circulation of a newsletter, *The Wind River Rendezvous*.<sup>45</sup> Articles in the paper describe the work of the

mission and the history and activities of the Arapahoe parishioners. A 1972 issue of the *Rendezvous* reminded potential contributors that

“The historical reality is that they are a dispos-sessed people, by whose loss our ancestors gained so much that we enjoy. And the actual fact is that they are a people who in our day need our sympathetic understanding and our support.”<sup>46</sup>

[Flasch 21] Limited finances prevent the administrators from paying the teachers a standard wage. Thus those who teach at the school are volunteers, receiving room and board plus a small salary. Giving generously of their talents are two priests, four teaching nuns, one principal, and about nineteen lay teachers and teacher aides.<sup>47</sup> The latter are often members of the surrounding Indian community, assisting the teachers for several hours each week.

The instructors at St. Stephens are better qualified today than in earlier decades. Some individuals have been assigned to the school as members of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. One need not be a Catholic, however, to offer his services. Judy Klingsich, a Lutheran girl interviewed in the *Rendezvous* in 1971 remarked, “And the religion an-gle . . . was no problem at all. The orientation here is Christian and educational and not narrowly sectarian.”<sup>48</sup>

Curriculum at St. Stephens has also changed. In 1969, the superior of the mission, Father Len Murray, observed that, “There has been a change in attitudes in the last ten years. . . . The emphasis now is on making the Indians conscious of their own culture and language [Flasch 22] so they will respect their ancestors.”<sup>49</sup> The educational activities at the mission are indicative of this transformation.

Leonard Moss, an Indian teacher at the school since 1971, teaches a course in Indian history and culture. His task implements the changed attitude toward the edu-cation of Indians. Preparation for a future career

is still a goal at St. Stephens, but emphasis is placed on the appreciation of Indian culture and heritage. Mr. Moss interviews elderly people in the tribe, rather than rely-ing on a textbook for his information on pre-Columbian Indian life. His class focuses on the Four Important Things to Indians: “God; one’s fellow man; the world; and one’s self. In making moral decisions and in evaluating all types of activities, these values are employed.”<sup>50</sup>

The religious atmosphere at the mission similarly reflects the Indian heritage of the community. The Church of St. Stephen itself is decorated with colors and symbols traditional among the Arapahoes. The artist, Raphael Norse, used such techniques to assert the cultural dignity of his people. The Indian-ness of the church is important, because [Flasch 23] “a people’s church as an expression of their worship must be OF and BY as well as FOR them.”<sup>51</sup> No longer must Indians accept the white man’s formula for worshipping God, with a total rejection of their own means of expression.

In addition, Arapahoe culture has been integrated into traditional Catholic ceremonies. The Christmas crib in 1970 delighted the parishioners. The scene depicted a teepee, an Indian mother and child, Joseph and the shepherds as Indian braves, and a dog drawing an Indian travois. This affirmation of Indian identity and self-acceptance was especially important to these Arapahoes. For, as the Rendezvous pointed out, “all over the world his [sic] people see Him in their image . . . [They see] a person like themselves . . . with whom they can identify.”<sup>52</sup>

The pupils have attended and have participated in a pow-wow Mass, with the priest and people clothed in tradi-tional Indian garb. The placement of their sacred pipe on the altar reaffirmed respect for Indian custom. The chil-dren have heard their elders worship in the Arapahoe language which, their white friends lament, was suppressed by earlier missionaries. Such prayers as the “Our Father” and [Flasch 24] the litany of Mary, and the Christmas hymn “O Come All Ye Faithful” demonstrate

an integration of belief and culture when performed in the Arapahoe tongue.<sup>53</sup>

The contemporary educational role of the school and mission, according to Father Lewis O'Neil, present superior of St. Stephens, includes not only the religious development of the students, but also the formation of the moral, ethical, cultural, and intellectual character of the Indians. The accent, therefore, is on the growth of the individual as a whole, as an integrated personality.<sup>54</sup>

The procedure of instructing these individuals includes an understanding of concepts different from those of whites. Today the notion of time is an important distinction. The Indian concerns himself "with beginnings, past and present. Planning for the future is presumptuous [sic]."<sup>55</sup> Thus the children, working in an "open classroom" situation, work at their own rate, challenging themselves to progress, performing, and then checking their achievement with their projection. Closely allied with this is the Indian custom of sharing. Competition is uncommon in their tradition. [Flasch 25] Helping one another, drawing upon another's strength is the rule. The unstructured approach at St. Stephens permits this cooperation. "There is no jealousy about another's performance. More than that, it instills confidence in the children."<sup>57</sup>

An understanding of Indian family structure is also utilized by the teachers. The maintenance of close ties with the extended family demands flexibility in the school environment. Occasionally a child does not live with his entire nuclear family. At other times members of the family will travel to visit relatives. Students must sometimes care for someone ill at home. Teachers at St. Stephens are aware of these particular circumstances and have adapted their instruction to insure no educational loss to the children.

The individualized program, employed in kindergarten through grade three, is called "Follow Through." Out of the more than 200 such

programs in the United States, the project at St. Stephens ranks in the top three.<sup>58</sup> This educational design follows the Headstart Program for [Flasch 26] pre-schoolers. The latter scheme provides children from low-income families with a familiarity with health, nutritional, educational, and social experiences preparing them to enter elementary school with a knowledge of the world more comparable to that of white children than had previously been theirs.<sup>59</sup> Sister Mary Steward, an elementary teacher, indicates, “The Indian needs to know the reason for things. If the child understands and believes, . . . his endurance . . . [is] phenomenal. If he is losing and does not understand or care, like the ordinary child, he may give up.”<sup>60</sup> These programs specially suited to the Indian temperament are designed to foster an interest in learning and a desire to achieve some personal goal or accomplishment in their lives.

Officials at St. Stephens are anxious for Indian people to control their own lives. A major educational aim of the school, relates Father O’Neil, is the complete administration of the institution by the Indians themselves. Under these circumstances the church facilities would serve to minister to the spiritual needs of the Christian community. Control of school policy would be in the hands of an Indian school board. Mission administrators also [Flasch 27] plan to continue an emphasis on Indian heritage in the school curriculum. Similarly, they desire progressive integration of Indian culture with the Christian faith.<sup>61</sup>

Mission acceptance of the Sun Dance is indicative of such integration. For many decades white men “con-sidered the Sun Dance as one of the most heathen and most barbarous and unchristian [sic] ceremonies ever participated [in] by the Savages. . . .”<sup>62</sup> They thought that the Indians worshipped the sun or even the center dance pole. In 1940 and again in 1942, controversy raged at St. Stephens over the promotion of the Sun Dance by some of the Catholic Indians. The situation in the latter year was so serious, that some of the Arapahoe parents threatened to transfer their children from the school, because of the mission’s objection to and denunciation of their tribe’s traditional custom.

The mission diarist attended a parish meeting at which he explained the position of the Catholic Church on the performance of various Indian rites. He later recorded the discourse.

[Flasch 28] “The Indians . . . would have to give up the Sun Dance. They should not approach the Sacraments unless they are ready to give it & other Indian religious practices up. That participation in these practices was forbidden by the First Commandment – and greatly diminished in their minds the supreme value of Catholic practices . . . that the bishop had given his full approval to our stand and that getting rid of me would never change the stand of the Mission.”<sup>63</sup>

The growing understanding and appreciation of Indian culture within recent years have led white men to a realization of their mistaken interpretation of the Sun Dance ceremonial. The Supreme Being, who the Indians insist is identical to the white man’s God, not the sun, is worshipped through the ritual.

“The sun is addressed simply as an instrument of the Supreme being who, through the sun, sends down to earthy children warmth and lights, health, green growing things and all things good.”<sup>64</sup>

Chief Dick Washakie, recognizing the unconventionality of the expression of Indian devotion in white men’s eyes, indicated, nevertheless, that “this is the only form of worship the Red Man, my people has known for generations [Flasch 29] past and is known throughout the Indian race as the Indians Church.”<sup>65</sup>

In the Sun Dance the Indians acknowledge the Great Spirit’s beneficence in the wonders of nature and recognize man’s responsibility to his neighbor in the “Give-Away” of gifts. They express in a more obvious, perhaps in a more meaningful, way the white man’s familiar Judeo-Christian ideals.<sup>66</sup>

St. Stephens now publicizes the celebration of the Sun Dance ceremonial on the reservation. The Catholic Church has accepted this native worship of God, admitting the beauty and truth of its symbolism.

This appreciation for the Sun Dance illustrates the changing attitudes at the mission toward the Arapahoes. The utilization of Indian tradition in faith, in worship, in education, and in cultural activities at St. Stephens has been approved following more than three-quarters of a century of efforts to form the Indian into a white man's mold. Despite financial difficulties, the present [Flasch 30] directors of St. Stephens hope to maintain the mission and school in order to continue their work of serving the Arapahoes as a people prepared to exist in a non-Indian world but aware, fully appreciative, and proud of their Indian identity.

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