From Swiss Monk to Lakota Missionary

How Sitting Bull Transformed Bishop Martin Marty

Paul G. Monson

In the summer of 1877, an extraordinary encounter took place between a monk and a holy man on the high plains of present-day Saskatchewan, one that would have consequences for the history of South Dakota. After traversing vast prairies, a young Benedictine, gaunt and malnourished, finally located the camp of the renowned Lakota man he had been seeking. A native of Alpine Switzerland, the monk had sacrificed the comforts of an Indiana monastery more than a thousand miles away, where he served as abbot, to become a self-appointed missionary to the Lakotas. The holy man, a native of the Dakota plains and a fugitive wanted by the United States government, was a brawny, indomitable visionary who, in refusing to surrender his people's sacred lands, had become a warrior. The monk's name was Martin Marty (1834–1896), later South Dakota's first Catholic bishop; Tȟatȟáŋka Íyotake, the holy man, is better known as Sitting Bull (ca. 1831–1890).

Over time, historians have attempted to make sense of the fascinating encounters between Marty and Sitting Bull in 1877 and again in 1879. Most Catholic biographers have crowned Marty the "Apostle to the Sioux" and friend of the American Indian. From this hagiographical approach came a narrative of a fearless, selfless priest bringing the salve of salvation to the sinister Sitting Bull, who insolently rejects it. Starting late in the last century, a group of historians shifted their assessment in the opposite direction. Cognizant of the atrocities American Indians have suffered, they portrayed Marty as an emissary of European American oppression, Christian intolerance, and brutal cultural genocide. In this narrative, a bigoted Marty approaches the indefatigable Sitting Bull, who heroically works to preserve his culture against all odds. Within this second group a third has emerged. While agreeing with the "ethnocide" verdict, it attempts to recover indigenous agency through a nuanced reexamination of Marty himself. At the forefront of this new approach is Manuel Menrath, whose book *Mission Sitting*

Bull: Die Geschichte der katholischen Sioux was published in late 2016 and received the prestigious German Opus-Primum Prize.[1]

Recently released in English, Menrath's book is the best scholarly assessment of Marty's life as a missionary in Dakota. Nevertheless, a significant influence in Marty's life continues to be overlooked: his background as a Benedictine monk.[2] Examining Marty's monastic vision reveals the extent to which his encounters with Sitting Bull initiated Marty's transformation from a staunch advocate of the Benedictine family as the linchpin of evangelization to an enthusiastic supporter of American Indian individualization; from a monk set on the ideal of

1. The best hagiographical example is the *Indian Sentinel* 2 (Jan. 1920), an issue about Marty published by the Benedictine missionaries of South Dakota. *See also* Albert Kuhn, "Bischof Martinus Marty, ein Indianer-Apostel," *Alte und Neue Welt: Illustriertes und Katholisches Familienblatt* 31 (Jan. 1897): 285–88; Luke Gruwe, "Martin Marty, O.S.B.: Erster Abt von St. Meinrad, Erster Apostolischer Vikar des Territoriums Dakota, Bischof von Sioux Falls und St. Cloud, Apostel der Sioux-Indianer," *Paradieses-früchte* (Dec. 1914–Oct. 1916); Ildefons Betschart, *Der Apostel der Siouxindianer, Bischof Martinus Marty, O.S.B., 1834–1896* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Benziger, 1934). The most common hagiographic treatment is Robert F. Karolevitz, *Bishop Martin Marty: "The Black Robe Lean Chief"* (Yankton, S.Dak.: Benedictine Sisters of the Sacred Heart Convent, 1980), which lacks citations on Marty's monastic history and reproduces significant portions of an unpublished biography that a monk of St. Meinrad Archabbey wrote before his death. *See* Albert Kleber, "Bishop Martin Marty," compiled by Alcuin Leibold, Box 6, Vol. 1, Bishop Martin Marty, Archival Historical Series, St. Meinrad Archabbey Archives, St. Meinrad, Ind. (hereafter SMAA). A similar tone can be found in Matthew Alan Gaumer, "The Catholic 'Apostle of the Sioux': Martin Marty and the Beginnings of the Church in Dakota Territory," *South Dakota History* 42 (Fall 2012): 256–81. Although he does not refer to Marty explicitly, the most vocal of revisionist historians is George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). With respect to the actual encounter, this approach manifests itself in Joseph Manzione, *"I Am Looking to the North for My Life": Sitting Bull, 1876–1881* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991), pp. 48–50.

2. For Manuel Menrath's work, *see Mission Sitting Bull: Die Geschichte der katholischen Sioux* (Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016). An "unofficial" English translation, now out of print, was produced by the Swiss American Historical Society for its members. *See* Manuel Menrath, *Mission Sitting Bull: The Cultural Conquest of the Sioux and Their Varied Response*, trans. Leo Schelbert (Morgantown, Penn.: Masthof Press, 2017). Citations in this article are to the German version. For the inspiration of Menrath's scholarship, *see* Leo Schelbert, "Conflicting Identities: The Swiss Missionary Martin Marty (1834–1896) and the Lakota Resistance-Leader Tatanka Iyotanka (Sitting Bull) (c. 1831–1890)," in *Migration: Challenge to Religious Identity/Migration: Herausforderung für die religiöse Identität*, ed. Josef Meili, Ernstpeter Heiniger, and Paul Stadler, Forum Mission series, vol. 4 (Kriens, Switzerland: Brunner Verlag, 2008), pp. 177–209.

a communal family rooted in "prayer and work" to a missionary promoting individualized self-determination. In effect, a story emerges in which it was not Marty who converted Sitting Bull, but Sitting Bull who converted Marty.

Born in 1834 in the small cantonal capital of Schwyz nestled in the German-speaking region of Switzerland, Alois Marty was the oldest of eleven children. Having given their son an education in traditional Swiss Catholicism from an early age, his parents chose the boarding school of the Abbey of Maria Einsiedeln, a millennium-old Benedictine monastery south of Zürich for its continuation.[3] There, Marty's monastic imagination thrived. A gifted student, he translated a collection of French reports and letters from famous Catholic missionaries, which likely planted seeds for his eventual missionary vocation. However, Marty's heroes were Carolingian monks, whom he considered pioneers of Christian civilization and the models for Benedictine evangelization.[4] In the wake of a Swiss civil war and the ensuing anti-monastic sentiment, Einsiedeln's abbot sent two monks to the United States to establish a monastery in 1852. To mark the occasion of their departure, Marty composed a panegyric lauding the venture as "a return of the Benedictine Order to its original, world-historical purpose, as expressed most clearly in its earliest days." Two years later, Marty became

3. The outline of Marty's life in the paragraphs that follow come from the work of Joel Rippinger, a monk of Marmion Abbey. *See* "Martin Marty: Monk, Abbot, Missionary and Bishop—I," *American Benedictine Review* 33, no. 3 (Sept. 1982): 223–40, "Martin Marty: Monk, Abbot, Missionary and Bishop—II," *American Benedictine Review* 33, no. 4 (Dec. 1982): 376–93, and "Martin Marty: Founder, First Abbot and Missionary Bishop," in *To Prefer Nothing to Christ: Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 1854–2004*, ed. Cyprian Davis (St. Meinrad, Ind.: St. Meinrad Archabbey, 2004), pp. 55–84.

4. Marty's translation project concerned the *Annales* of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (based in Lyon, France). *See also* Rippinger, "Martin Marty: Monk—I," p. 224. Rippinger follows Betschart, *Der Apostel der Siouxindianer,* p. 17, in claiming that Marty introduced the "foreign missions" to the *Stiftschule* through the translation project. No archival evidence supports this claim. It is more likely that the students at Einsiedeln gained interest in the foreign missions from their Swiss-Catholic milieu rather than from Marty personally. The Carolingian reforms of Benedictine monasticism in the Frankish realms stem from the work of Saint Benedict of Aniane (747–821), often referred to as the "Second Benedict." *See also* Giles Constable, *Medieval Monasticism* (New York: Routledge, 2017), and Renie S. Choy, *Intercessory Prayer and the Monastic Ideal in the Time of the Carolingian Reforms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

a monk himself, leaving the school to join Einsiedeln's monastic community and taking the name Martin.[5]

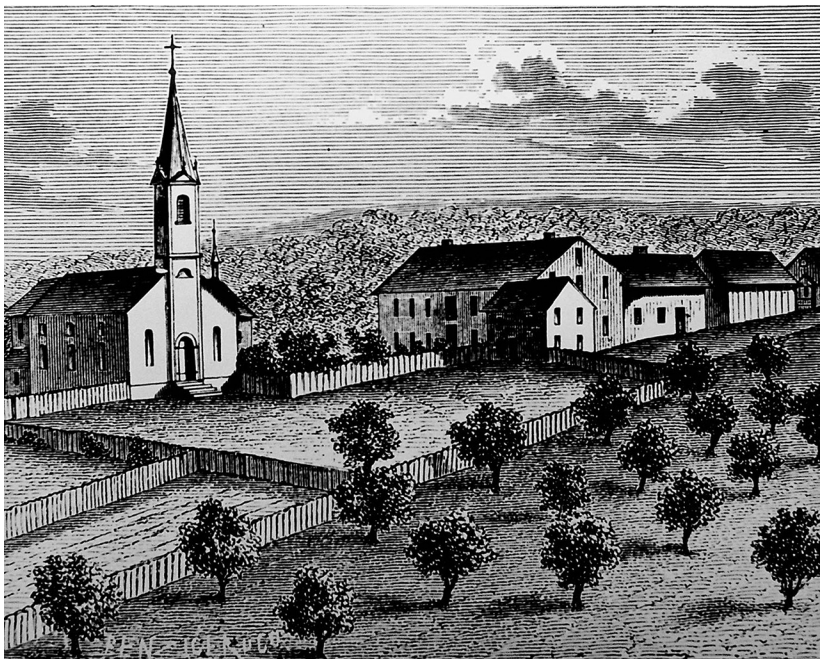
The choice of "Martin" for a monastic name is significant. Not only was its inspiration Saint Martin of Tours (316–397), the patron saint of both Schwyz and the church of Marty's baptism, but Saint Martin was also revered in nineteenth-century historiography as the first monk of Gaul and thus the father of Carolingian monasticism. Marty became a priest in 1856 and eventually a professor at Einsiedeln. He expressed his idolization of the Carolingians in a published essay on Walafrid Strabo (ca. 808–849) as a model for monastic education. That Marty crafted Strabo's life from various monastic sources intimates a deep identification with the story.[6]

In 1860, Marty's abbot sent him to Einsiedeln's fledgling daughter house in southern Indiana, Saint Meinrad, then six years old. The monk's administrative prowess pulled Saint Meinrad from insolvency and transformed its home from a log cabin into a flourishing stone monastery. As prior, Marty mandated strict monastic discipline, inculcated a love for Gregorian chant, and established a school and seminary to foster the monastic vocation. At the heart of Marty's leadership was a "familial imagination" that forged bonds between monks, students, and the surrounding German Catholic immigrant population, with the monastery serving as the liturgical, spiritual, and intellectual center point. In 1870, twenty-four years after the Bavarian monk Boniface Wimmer (1809–1887) founded a Benedictine community in western Pennsylvania, Saint Meinrad's became the second Benedictine abbey in the United States, with Marty as its first abbot.

Both Marty and Wimmer drew upon Carolingian history for their visions of the church's mission to American German-Catholics, yet their monastic origins were radically different. While Wimmer looked to the

5. On Marty's panegyric, *see* Marty, "Abschied," p. 71, vol. 2, Box 1, St. Meinrad Abbey Letters in Einsiedeln Archives Collection, SMAA. On Marty's choice for his monastic name, *see* Kleber, "Bishop Martin Marty," p. 56; Betschart, *Der Apostel der Siouxindianer*, p. 30; and Rippinger, "Martin Marty: Founder," p. 57.

6. On the historiography of Martin of Tours, *see* C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 3d ed. (London: Pearson, 2001), pp. 12–13. For Marty's essay on Strabo, *see* "Wie Man vor Tausend Jahren Lehrte und Lernte," *Jahresbericht der Stiftschule Maria-Einsiedeln* (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Benziger, 1857), pp. 3–18.



Saint Meinrad Abbey grew to this collection of wooden buildings under Martin Marty's direction. A stone monastery replaced the structures after a fire in 1887.

vast monastic network of the Benedictine abbey of Cluny in France, Marty trusted Einsiedeln's Swiss-Benedictine heritage and its focus on one monastery serving the local church. Wimmer had no misgivings about the indefinite absence of his monks from their home monastery, scattered among individual pastoral assignments or missions. Marty, on the other hand, insisted on an *excurrendo* model of monastic life, whereby monks daily returned from their individual tasks to their religious family, praying, eating, and sleeping under the same roof.[7]

Nevertheless, Marty's tenure as an American abbot was brief, and in 1876, Marty the abbot began to emerge as Marty the missionary. Var-

7. On Marty's monastic reforms and models, see my dissertation, "*Stabilitas in congregatione*: The Benedictine Evangelization of America in the Life and Thought of Martin Marty, O.S.B." (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2014). The term "familial imagination" is my own. On the comparison between Marty and Wimmer, *see* my work, "Abbot Martin Marty and the Pursuit of a Monastic Family for the American Church," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 55–77, and "Monastic Evangelization? The Sacramental Vision of America's Early Benedictine Monks," *American Catholic Studies* 124, no. 3 (2013): 45–59.

ious American bishops had invited Saint Meinrad to establish new communities, and Marty finally accepted the invitation of the Catholic Bureau of Indian Missions to consider a mission among the Lakotas at Standing Rock in Dakota Territory. On 31 July 1876, Marty arrived at Fort Yates, a mere month after warriors defeated Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in neighboring Montana Territory. Over the next year, Marty began working to establish a mission and boarding school at Standing Rock, with visions of building an abbey modeled on those of Europe. In 1877, Marty took it upon himself to find Sitting Bull, who had taken his people to Canada, in order to convince the Sioux leader to return to the United States. Although Marty returned unsuccessful from the encounter described at the beginning of this essay, the act earned him national fame and an enduring association with Sitting Bull among his contemporaries and historians. Even Rome took notice, appointing Marty in 1879 as "vicar apostolic," the Catholic title for a missionary bishop. He succeeded in establishing other Catholic missions among the Sioux, including those at the Crow Creek, Pine Ridge, and Rosebud agencies. With South Dakota statehood in 1889, Marty became the state's first Catholic bishop with the new Diocese of Sioux Falls. However, ill health forced Marty to leave for the Diocese of Saint Cloud, Minnesota, in 1895, where he died as its bishop a year later at the age of sixty-two.[8]

It is in light of the later and better-known chapters of Marty's life that a significant interpretive problem emerges. If one isolates Marty's legacy in South Dakota from his monastic roots, his life as a missionary appears unremarkable, ostensibly similar to the stories of the Jesuits in New France or the Franciscans in California. Indeed, most historians, including Menrath, place Marty's work alongside that of the famous Dakota missionary and Jesuit Pierre-Jean De Smet (1801–1873), and with good reason—Marty does so himself. However, Marty's idolization of De Smet comes later in the 1880s as a missionary bishop, only *after* his

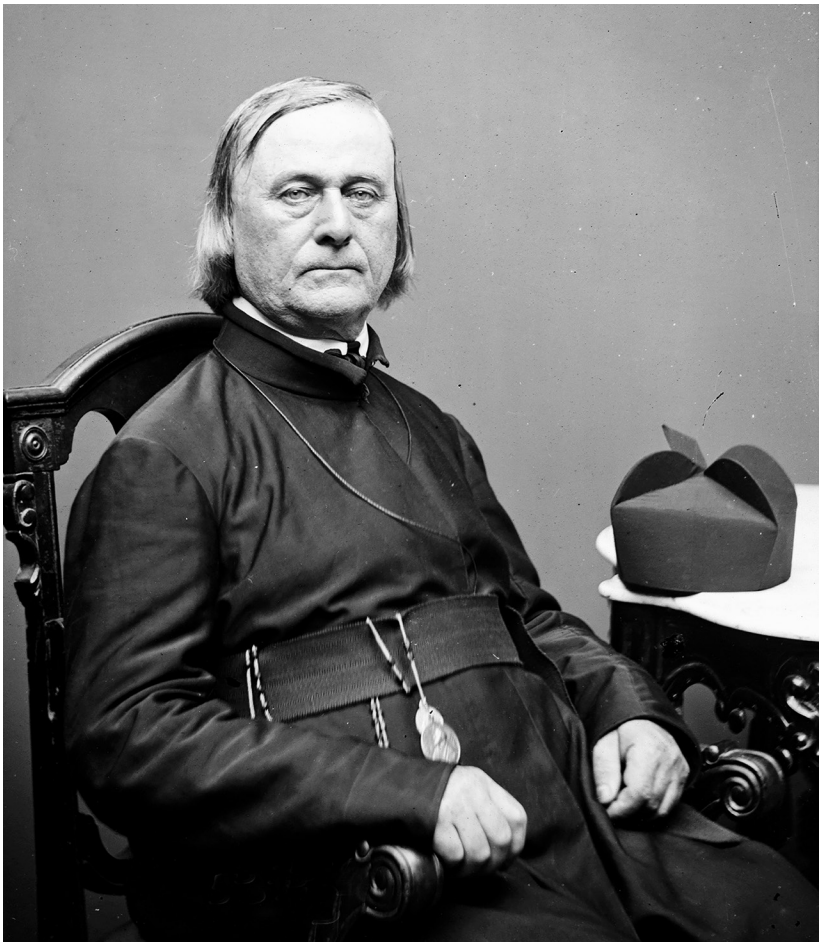
8. On Marty's role in the establishment of various missions in South Dakota, *see* Mary Claudia Duratschek, *Crusading along Sioux Trails: A History of the Catholic Indian Missions of South Dakota* (Yankton, S.Dak.: Benedictine Convent of the Sacred Heart, 1947), and Kevin Abing, "'To Make Them True and Faithful Christians and Good Citizens': Missionaries of Saint Meinrad Abbey and the Sioux Indians, 1876–1896," in *To Prefer Nothing to Christ: Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 1854–2004*, ed. Cyprian Davis (St. Meinrad, Ind.: Abbey Press, 2004), 153–205.

arrival in Dakota Territory. Moreover, Marty was neither a Jesuit nor a Franciscan, both of whom maintain the common vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Benedictines, in addition, have a distinct vow of stability, binding the monk to a particular monastery for the rest of his life. This idea of spatial permanency sets Benedictine monks apart. Following the *Rule of Saint Benedict,* monks form a permanent family with an "abbot," a title derived from the Aramaic word for father. They rise together, pray together, eat together, and work together before praying together again. Benedictine stability, in other words, challenges and even censures any impulse for a transient, individualist life, making Marty's transition from a monk and abbot to a missionary and bishop all the more intriguing.[9]

This dissonance between monastic and missionary identities continues to escape Marty's biographers. To his credit, Menrath wrestles with the dissonance, but stubborn assumptions eclipse distinctions. Although he admits the importance of this Benedictine principle of stability, Menrath insists that stability has never been a "rigid principle" among Benedictines. He thus points to a more ubiquitous Benedictine motto as enigmatic of Marty: *ora et labora,* "prayer and work," which, he aptly notes, is not in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Both points are true, yet both are also problematic with respect to Marty's transition from monk to missionary.[10]

9. The first instance of Marty referring explicitly to De Smet is Martin Marty to J. B .A. Brouillet, 7 Aug. 1876, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 6: Correspondence, Dakota Territory, Standing Rock Agency, Fort Yates, 1876, Bureau of Catholic Indian Mission Records, Special Collections and University Archives, Raynor Memorial Library, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisc. (hereafter BCIM, MUA). Rippinger, noting how Marty was later heralded as De Smet's successor on the Dakota prairie, asserts that the famed Jesuit visited Einsiedeln while Marty was a student and directly inspired him to take up missionary work in America ("Martin Marty: Founder" [2004], p. 72). De Smet did indeed visit Europe to elicit financial support for his missions in 1853–1854 and 1856–1857, yet he only visited Belgium and France. *See* George Bishop, *Black Robe and Tomahawk: The Life and Travels of Fr. Pierre-Jean De Smet, SJ., 1801–1873* (Leominster, U.K. : Gracewing, 2003), pp. 182–98, and Robert C. Carriker, *Father Peter John De Smet: Jesuit in the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 141–45. The source that Rippinger cites is this 7 Aug. 1876 letter from Dakota Territory. However, Marty only mentions in passing that the Sioux expressed how they had not seen a missionary since De Smet; Marty says nothing about De Smet in Einsiedeln.

10. Menrath, *Mission Sitting Bull,* pp. 59–60. "Historisch betrachtet war die Stabilität kein starres Prinzip." Indeed, circumstances throughout Benedictine history have miti-



The Jesuit Pierre-Jean De Smet was among the first Catholic missionaries on the Northern Great Plains, traveling up the Missouri River in the 1830s.

As abbots, both Marty and Wimmer envisioned stability to be the Benedictines' distinct and unparalleled contribution to the young American church and what set them apart from other religious communities. Nevertheless, they disagreed on the meaning of stability. For Marty, Benedictine stability meant *stabilitas loci*, "stability of place," whereas Wimmer maintained it meant *stabilitas status* or "stability of one's

gated and influenced the interpretation of this vow. Nevertheless, Marty's own branch of Swiss-Benedictine monasticism maintained a more traditional, literal understanding.

monastic or moral state." Marty objected to Wimmer's idea of missionary monks scattered beyond the cloister. In Marty's Swiss-Benedictine view, the monastery was fundamentally a *familias*, a family with an abbot as father; any other model forfeited the *Rule of Saint Benedict* and produced "frustrated" monks who acted as if they were Jesuits or Franciscans. Wimmer refused to yield his ideas, leading to the formation of two separate Benedictine congregations in the United States: Wimmer's Bavarian American-Cassinese Congregation and Marty's Swiss-American Congregation.[11]

Furthermore, there is no trace of the phrase *ora et labora,* "prayer and work" among Marty's contemporaries, and it is completely absent from Benedictine publications until 1899, after his death. What matters, rather, is not only *that* Marty uses the phrase (which is fascinating in its own right), but also *when* he first employs it, in 1876. Shortly after his arrival in Dakota Territory in July, and almost a year before setting out for Sitting Bull's camp, an appeal to *ora et labora* "prayer and work" suddenly appears in Marty's assessment of conditions at Standing Rock: "The education of several generations is unthinkable without stability, and the family life of a true Benedictine house of worship, encompassing material as well as spiritual progress, is the model and ideal of Christian family life, upon which rests the welfare of the individual and society. The Ora et Labora is still today the only formula for curing the children of Adam, and both cannot be taught with words."[12] Although scattered references to both prayer and work appear in Mar-

11. On this controversy and its archival documentation, *see* my article, "*Status* or *Loci*? How the Question of Stability Altered the Course of American Benedictine Monasticism," *American Benedictine Review* 67 (2016): 309–35.

12. Martin Marty to Frowin Conrad, 20 Nov. 1876, Drawer 1, File Cabinet 515, File "Abbot Frowin's Correspondence with Bishop Martin Marty," Conception Abbey Archives, Conception, Mo. (hereafter CAA). "Die Erziehung mehrerer Generationen ist ohne Stabilität nicht denkbar und das den materiellen wie geistigen Fortschritt umfassende Familienleben eines echt benediktinischen Gotteshauses ist das Muster und Vorbild des christlichen Familienlebens, auch welchem das Wohl des Individuums und der Gesellschaft beruht. Des Ora et labora ist auch Heute noch das einzige Rezept für die Heilung der Adamskinder und beides kann nicht mit Worten gelehrt werden." After consulting the original handwriting, I have altered the translation of the letter as found in Albert Kleber, *History of St. Meinrad Archabbey, 1854–1954* (St. Meinrad, Ind.: Grail, 1954), p. 267. Kleber renders "Gotteshaus" as "family," which fails to express the liturgical character of Marty's monastic family.

ty's writings before this letter, these lines mark the first instance of *ora et labora* as a distinct missionary paradigm.[13]

In addition to these larger sectarian disagreements, Marty had also faced controversies about prayer and work within his own abbey in the early 1870s. For one, he attempted to change the version of daily prayer so that it mirrored that of the rest of the church. A second reform concerned Marty's decision that the entire community, including priests and "choir monks" rather than only the less educated, nonordained brothers, should work in the fields. Both reforms failed, but they further reinforced Marty's conviction that "prayer and work" were the true marks of a stable but vivacious Benedictine family.[14]

As he had prepared to leave Indiana for Dakota Territory, Marty held three binaries together: stability and family, prayer and work, individual and society. In his mind, Standing Rock was to become the crucible for their convergence, recovering and implementing a Benedictine paradigm of evangelization through a new monastic family planted in the virgin soil of the American prairie. As it had for the Benedictines in northern Europe a millennium earlier, daily prayer and agrarian work would nurture individual souls and cultivate a thriving society. In a letter to the church's Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Marty articulated this model as a "double family" of monks and Lakotas "united by faith, labor, and common prayer." Importantly, Marty believed that conversion of a people began with their leader, as it had among the tribes of Germania in the distant past.[15]

13. For further background on Marty's use of the motto, see my article, "*Ora et Labora*: A Benedictine Motto Born in America?" in *God Has Begun a Great Work in Us: Embodied Love in Consecrated Life and Ecclesial Movements*, ed. Jason King and Shannon Schrein, College Theology Society Annual Volume 60 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2015), pp. 66–83. The first surviving instance of Marty's use of "ora et labora" is found in his 7 Aug. 1876 letter, cited above (footnote 9, concerning De Smet).

14. On these reforms, *see* Kleber, *History of St. Meinrad Archabbey*, pp. 205–57.

15. Marty to J. B. A. Brouillet, 9 Oct. 1878, Series 1, Box 5, Folder 4, BCIM, MUA. A transcription is in Box 7, Bishop Martin Marty Letters, vol. 2, pp. 520–23, Martin Marty Archival Historical Series, SMAA. Rippinger reproduces a portion of this letter that Kleber overlooks ("Martin Marty: Monk—II," p. 383) using Duratschek, *Crusading along Sioux Trails*, p. 74. One could assert that this idea of a "double family" comes a year after Marty's first contact with Sitting Bull in June 1877, thereby demonstrating that the Lakota leader did not change the abbot's mind at all. Marty did indeed oscillate between preserving his original Benedictine vision and abandoning it between 1877 and 1879. This particular

In spring 1877, after less than a year at Standing Rock, Marty took it upon himself to convince Sitting Bull to return to the United States. No evidence exists that Marty considered Sitting Bull at all before he arrived at Standing Rock, and he later related that rumors of Sitting Bull's baptism (subsequently disproved) had inspired his mission. Marty approached the United States government for permission to find the La-

---

1878 letter came on the heels of Marty's visit to Spotted Tail at Rosebud Agency and Red Cloud at Pine Ridge Agency. Both Lakota leaders seemed more receptive to Marty's idea of monastic schools, yet a Catholic presence at these agencies could not be established until 1886, after the demise of Grant's Peace Policy. *See* Harvey Markowitz, *Converting the Rosebud: Catholic Mission and the Lakotas, 1886–1916* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), pp. 51–59.

Marty is pictured here as abbot of Saint Meinrad Abbey before leaving Indiana to work with the Sioux in Dakota Territory.

kota leader and communicate an official assurance that any Sioux who returned to the American agencies would be greeted with peace and supplies. Marty received permission to seek Sitting Bull, but not as an official government representative. Undaunted, he set out for Canada in May, reaching Sitting Bull's camp by early June.[16]

At this point, Marty's first encounter with Sitting Bull and the "hostile" Sioux becomes entangled in a labyrinth of eyewitness accounts, journalistic lore, official reports, and specious propaganda. All sources confirm that Sitting Bull's camp received Marty, that the abbot met with the famed Lakota leader on 2 June 1877, and that Marty left the meeting without convincing Sitting Bull to return. Aside from these points, the story drifts into a fog of contradiction. Some accounts place Marty in the camp for eight days; others fourteen. Some accounts record a cordial welcome; others a cold, wary reception that almost resulted in Marty's death. Nevertheless, this first meeting between Marty and Sitting Bull can be reconstructed through three sources with overlapping coverage: local newspapers, Catholic publications, and official Canadian reports.[17]

Contemporary newspaper accounts are both informative and problematic. News of Marty's journey quickly reached both coasts by telegraph. One of the first came from the *Bismarck Tribune*, noting Marty's return on 15 June 1877 and providing readers with a detailed report three days later. This latter report claims to have received its information from the "lips" of Marty. The article related how Sitting Bull and a band of mounted Lakota warriors greeted Marty and showed him hospitality as a "black gown," including hosting a ceremony with a pipe. The author, while unflattering toward Sitting Bull, nevertheless is sober with respect to Marty. Sitting Bull would not meet with Marty until the arrival of the North-West Mounted Police, complained to him about the abuses of American Indian policy, and informed him that the exiled Lakotas were aware of the terms for returning to the United States. Marty's mission appears as more or less a quixotic failure.[18]

16. "Aus dem Indianerlande," *St. Louis* (Mo.) *Amerika*, 14 Aug. 1877. On Marty's request to be an official government emissary, *see* Marty to J. B. A. Brouillet, 22 Jan., 23 Feb. 1877, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 7, BCIM, MUA.

17. Rippinger notes the diversity of accounts. *See* "Martin Marty: Monk— II," p. 378n7.

18. "Father Martin's Report of His Visit to Sitting Bull," *New Orleans Daily Picayune,* 17

More favorable accounts of Marty's encounter appeared in the American Catholic press. An article in the German-Catholic periodical *Amerika,* published in Saint Louis and republished in Saint Paul's *Der Wanderer*, highlights Marty's judgment of Sitting Bull as a "demagogue," a crafty politician, and the source of troubles among the Sioux. Details from both the *Bismarck Tribune* and *Der Wanderer* articles reappeared the following year in the most problematic (and most cited) contemporary account, which appeared in the *Annals of the Catholic Indian Missions of America.* This report, quoting a portion of the *Bismarck Tribune* article without citation, embellished Sitting Bull's reception of Marty and furnished additional details about his personal character alongside the customs of Sioux culture. The *Annals* article also attempted to associate Sitting Bull's alleged hospitality with the legacy of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet among the Sioux by inventing a flattering dialogue in which Sitting Bull expresses his confidence in Marty as a "friend" because he is a "priest."[19]

The Canadian North-West Mounted Police reports give a quite different picture. Two reports survive from officers at Fort Walsh: those of Superintendent James M. Walsh and his superior, Assistant Commissioner A. G. Irvine. Walsh, the first Canadian official to ride out to meet Sitting Bull after his escape into Canada, left a fragmented memoir about his service career that includes the meeting with Marty. Irvine's letter to his superiors in Ottawa is more reliable. The report confirmed many of the *Bismarck Tribune* details, including that Sitting Bull refused to talk with Marty until Walsh and Irvine arrived. Irvine's account further disclosed Sitting Bull's initial desire to kill Marty and his two

---

June 1877; "Sitting Bull under the Protection of John Bull," *Baltimore Sun*, 18 June 1877; "Father Martin," *New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, N.H.), 21 June 1877; "Sitting Bull to be Interviewed," *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*, 16 June 1877. All of these reports more or less follow those of the *Bismarck Tri-Weekly Tribune*, 15, 18 June 1877. For approximately one week between 1877 and 1878, the *Bismarck Tribune* was known as the *Bismarck Tri-weekly Tribune.* To limit confusion, it is referred to as the *Bismarck Tribune* here. On these articles, *see also* Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), p. 370n5.

19. "Abt Marty bei Sitting Bull," *Minneapolis* (Minn.) *Der Wanderer*, 1 Sept. 1877; "Abbot Marty Visits Sitting Bull," *Annals of the Catholic Indian Missions of America* 2, no. 1 (1878): 7–10. An uncritical use of the bureau's account is found in Kleber, *History of St. Meinrad*, p. 280n25, and Schelbert, "Conflicting Identities," p. 185n22.

guides, intimating that the Lakota leader's reluctance to do so stemmed from a desire to show that he respected the laws of his new home.

Irvine provided additional quotations for the 2 June council between Sitting Bull, Marty, and the officers. Sitting Bull reportedly berated the Americans, including Marty, for the injustices his people had suffered under the "Great Father," the president of the United States. After the British officers assured him that he could stay in peace in Canada, Sitting Bull declared that his people had found a better home under their new "Great Mother," Queen Victoria. Furthermore, Irvine's report recorded Sitting Bull's mockery of Marty's description of himself as a "messenger of God," a title that challenged Sitting Bull's spiritual authority.

For his part, Marty had apparently first told Sitting Bull that the Lakotas were not wanted in Canada and should return while the conditions were still favorable. After hearing assurances from the North-West Mounted Police, Marty changed his mind and advised Sitting Bull to remain where the bison were plenty and peace seemed promising. This shift infuriated Sitting Bull, and Marty, frustrated, repeated his conviction, then simply left the meeting. Assistant Commissioner Irvine took credit for convincing Sitting Bull to let Marty and his guides leave without harm.[20]

Marty's own words, published in *Amerika* more than a month after his return, add another layer of complexity; they hint, in fact, at a salient shift in his worldview. In correspondence with the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions taken up immediately upon his return, Marty told his audience that his objective of securing peace for the Lakotas seemed to have been achieved, since in Canada they had plenty of buffalo herds for sustenance, and that he had encouraged Sitting Bull to remain there. However, the *Amerika* interview placed an undeniable emphasis on individual decision making, a focus at odds with Marty's monastic, communal vision.[21]

In the interview, the abbot confessed he had been mistaken about Sitting Bull, complimenting him as a shrewd "diplomat" and "demagogue";

20. For a discussion of these sources, *see* Utley, *Lance and the Shield*, p. 369n1, and Manzione, *"I Am Looking to the North for My Life,"* pp. 48–50.

21. Marty to Brouillet, 9 June 1877, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 7, BCIM, MUA. The later account in the *Annals* seems to have used this letter with additional embellishment.

Sitting Bull resisted Marty's efforts to convert him to Catholicism and caused the missionary to adjust his own views.

in other words, an active leader as gifted politically as any white man—not the bloodthirsty warrior the press portrayed. Yet in the interview's most remarkable line, Marty also claimed that Sitting Bull was "weary" of his new home. Unlike Americans, the British viewed the Lakotas as individuals before the law, whereas Sitting Bull wished to speak for the entire tribe as a "sovereign prince." Although this description undeniably stems more from Marty's imagination than Sitting Bull's self-perception, it also demonstrates Marty's sudden willingness to abandon his original Benedictine strategy as naïve. The Sitting Bull of his imagination was a baptized king who, once persuaded, could return to lead a Lakota Catholic community at Standing Rock. His vision shattered upon meeting the man rather than the idea, Marty came to consider the British strategy wiser. Indeed, in a letter to the editor of *Amerika* published one month later, Marty explicitly argued that Americans should adopt a policy similar to that of the British, permitting individual Lakotas who wished to join Sitting Bull in Canada to do so while providing those who elected to remain on the reservations with the supplies needed for farming.[22]

By 1879, Marty fully embraced this idea of individualization among Indians and applied it to Sitting Bull himself. In August, rumors of dwindling buffalo herds in Canada prompted Marty to visit the holy man's camp again. In an Indiana newspaper interview just before his departure, Marty not only echoed his earlier assessment of Sitting Bull as a "demagogue," but also revealed a new strategy to "break Sitting

22. "Aus dem Indianerlande," *St. Louis Amerika*, 14 Aug. 1877. The same article appears in the weekly edition, *St. Louis Wochenblatt der Amerika*, 15 Aug. 1877. Surprisingly, this article appears nowhere in prior scholarship on Marty, even though it appears in two of the three separate editions in which *Amerika* circulated; it is only missing from the Sunday edition, *St. Louis Sonntagsblatt der Amerika*. *See* Karl Arndt and May Olsen, *German-American Newspapers and Periodicals, 1732–1955: History and Bibliography* (Heidelberg, Germany: Quelle and Meyer, 1961), pp. 248–49. Over a month later, Marty sent a letter to *Amerika's* editor as a follow-up to the August interview. *Amerika* reproduced this letter in two front-page installments but only in the weekly edition: "Dakota-Briefe," *St. Louis Wochenblatt der Amerika*, 19 Sept. 1877, and "Dakota-Briefe II," ibid., 10 Oct. 1877. *Der Wanderer*, a German-Catholic newspaper published in St. Paul, Minnesota, republished them as "Dakota-Briefe," 29 Sept. 1877, and "Die Indianer in Dakota Territory," 20 Oct. 1877. Menrath does refer to an account in *Amerika* but only an 1878 report reproduced in *St. Louis Der Wahrheitsfreund* and transcribed for SMAA. *See* Menrath, *Mission Sitting Bull*, pp. 144–48, 305n501.

Bull's influence" and convince other Lakotas to return to the United States. The government should leave Sitting Bull alone so as not to validate his hatred of the United States, Marty contended, and, like the British, should treat the Lakotas as "individuals" and "not war on the whole for the misdemeanors of one or a number of its members." What had been an observation in 1877 had become a template for his second expedition.[23]

What is known of this second encounter depends on a third-person report in the *Bismarck Tribune* that appeared after Marty's return. The anonymous author refers to Marty as the "Bishop," stating that he "knows Sitting Bull well," and describes the Lakota as "a passionate, obstinate and unreasonable Chief." Unlike the *Bismarck Tribune's* 1877 article, this report paints Marty in a superior light. The author claims that Marty met with Spotted Eagle, who had assumed leadership of the exiled Lakotas. At Marty's request, he assembled the other Lakota elders for a council, but "Sitting Bull was not invited by the Bishop personally . . . as he knew the Chief's stubbornness and he did not wish to show him any attention whatever." At the same time, Sitting Bull reportedly had no desire to attend, "not that he had any contempt for the Bishop, but he knew beforehand just what the Bishop wanted." The other Lakota leaders welcomed Marty and listened to his invitation to return to the American agencies before the Canadian buffalo herds disappeared. Nevertheless, even though they addressed Marty as "a good white man" who "speak[s] the truth," the leaders did not see any reason to leave since the numbers of bison still sufficed for their needs. Marty respected this decision and returned to the United States.[24]

If one accepts the basic contours of this record (despite its apparent bias), it confirms that two years' time had solidified Marty's resolve to

23. Sitting Bull's biographers fail to mention this meeting. One exception to scholarly oversight of this second meeting is Schelbert, "Conflicting Identities," pp. 206–7. However, Schebert claims that Marty arrived on 22 August 1879. Marty's letters and newspaper accounts do not corroborate this. In fact, he was still in Bismarck on this date. Neither Utley nor Manzione refer to this second encounter at all. For Marty's pre-departure interview, *see* "Father Martin and the Indians," *Jasper* (Ind.) *Weekly Courier*, 15 Aug. 1879. A transcription can be found in Box 8, Bishop Martin Marty Letters, vol. 3, pp. 552–59, Martin Marty Archival Historical Series, SMAA. The author claims the interview took place on 7 August.

24. "Counsel with the Sioux," *Bismarck Tribune*, 7 Nov. 1879. A transcription is in Box 8, Bishop Martin Marty Letters, 3:564, Martin Marty Archival Historical Series, SMAA.

encourage the individualization of the Lakotas. By not only isolating Sitting Bull but also snubbing his authority, Marty effectively waged a full-scale assault on the Lakota sense of kinship in the *tiospaye* while abandoning the familial imagination undergirding his original Benedictine vision.

Marty made his way back to Bismarck by November 1879 and reached Saint Meinrad just before Christmas. On 18 December, he formally resigned as abbot, and on 1 February 1880, he received episcopal consecration in the presence of Boniface Wimmer and other American Benedictine abbots. The new vicar apostolic departed for Dakota Territory just a week later and established Yankton, in the far southeastern corner of the territory, as the episcopal residence.[25]

After the second meeting with Sitting Bull, an emphasis on individuality can be seen in Marty's career as vicar apostolic and as bishop, one that informed the rest of his personal interaction with the famed Lakota leader. This philosophy seems to have had advantages in Marty's mind: the individual can, after all, change. In 1881, Sitting Bull finally surrendered to American officials at Fort Buford, and Marty negotiated his release from Fort Randall twenty months later, lauding him as good-natured, compassionate, and intelligent. Marty also claimed, prematurely, that Sitting Bull showed a willingness to convert to Catholicism. Various reports said that he endorsed the Catholic boarding schools and attended Catholic ceremonies at Standing Rock. There is even evidence that during a visit to Rome in 1885 Marty presented a buffalo hide to Pope Leo XIII on Sitting Bull's behalf. Nevertheless, monogamy, as well as other Lakota traditions and the importance of the *tiospaye*, seems to have been a sticking point. By the late 1880s, Marty despaired of any conversion. After Sitting Bull's tour with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, he became a severe critic of white culture and distanced himself from Marty. In the end, Marty's program of individualization arguably backfired with respect to the very man who had inspired it.[26]

25. Kleber, *History of St. Meinrad*, p. 321.

26. On Marty's advocacy, *see* Marty to O'Connor, 15 Aug. 1881, transcription in Box 8, Bishop Martin Marty Letters, 3:637, Martin Marty Archival Historical Series, SMAA (quoted in Kleber, *History of St. Meinrad*, p. 316). *See also* Dennis C. Pope, *Sitting Bull: Prisoner of War* (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2010), pp. 68–70. On Marty's announcement of an imminent conversion, *see* "Sitting Bull Becomes a Catholic," *New York Times*,

Meanwhile, Marty continued to distance himself from his original Benedictine vision for the Lakotas as he managed various South Dakota missions. He eventually turned to Franciscans and Jesuits—the very religious orders he had once critiqued—to staff new missions at the Pine Ridge and Rosebud agencies. Standing Rock became a government-funded industrial school instead of the home of the grand Benedictine monastery Marty once envisioned. The humble Immaculate Conception Indian Mission established on the Crow Creek Indian Reservation in 1887 marked Marty's last attempt to secure a distinctly Benedictine mission in South Dakota, yet he held little hope of its success after a cascade of complaints from Pius Boehm, its first leader, in the mission's early years.[27]

In 1889, the same year Rome promoted him to the rank of South Dakota's first Catholic bishop, Marty composed an article for the *Catholic World,* a prominent American periodical with a vast readership. In that piece, Marty endorsed the General Allotment (Dawes) Act of 1887, designed to break up tribal lands by mandating the allotment of parcels to individuals (contrary to the policy of the Catholic Bureau of Indian Missions), and insisted that Indian schoolchildren be separated from their intractable parents. At its conclusion, he made a startling claim:

---

13 Apr. 1883. The article states that Marty expects Sitting Bull to become Catholic; it does not confirm his actual baptism. There is no clear evidence that Sitting Bull converted to Christianity, let alone Catholicism. Shortly after the announcement of Marty's hopes for Sitting Bull's conversion in April 1883, a more pessimistic article followed: "Sitting Bull's Two Wives, His Entrance into the Church Delayed," *New York Times,* 7 Oct. 1883. Later, in 1886, Marty claimed that rumors of Sitting Bull's resistance were unfounded, that he had personally instructed Sitting Bull in the Catholic faith, and that he anticipated the Lakota leader's conversion during the summer. *See* "Sitting Bull's Preceptor," *Milwaukee Daily Journal*, 11 Feb. 1886. Nevertheless, James McLaughlin, the agent at Standing Rock, provided strong evidence that Sitting Bull ultimately rejected Christianity because he refused to alienate either wife. *See* Menrath, *Mission Sitting Bull*, pp. 238–39. On the buffalo-hide gift, *see* Colin Taylor, *Sitting Bull and the White Man's Religion: Early Missionaries in North America* (Wyk auf Foehr, Germany: Verlag für Amerikanistik, 2000), pp. 25–29, 50–52. A copy of the book can be found in Series 14-1, BCIM, MUA.

27. On the Rosebud and Pine Ridge missions, *see* Karl Markus Kreis, ed., *Lakotas, Black Robes, and Holy Women: German Reports from the Indian Missions in South Dakota, 1886–1900*, trans. Corinna Dally-Starna (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). For a record of Boehm's complaints in the early years of Immaculate Conception, *see* Series 1, Box 18, Folder 9: Correspondence, Dakota Territory, Crow Creek and Lower Brulé Agency, Immaculate Conception Mission, 1887, BCIM, MUA.

"There is no such thing as civilizing the Indian race as a wholesale operation, nor is their conversion to the true faith to be effected as an entire body. . . . The individuality of the Indian is as marked as that of the white man. . . . [T]he Indian must be treated and dealt with on the basis of his own individuality."[28] Missing is any reference to monastic stability or the Benedictine family—schools replace monasteries, prayer yields to work, and the individual triumphs over the *tiospaye*. The same year, Marty assumed an official government role on the Chippewa Commission in Minnesota, personally convincing the Ojibwe of the Red Lake region to embrace the Dawes Act and secure individual land allotments. Marty the Benedictine monk had become Marty the American missionary, with Sitting Bull as an undeniable starting point. For the first time, Marty saw the Lakotas as distinct individuals; he realized that his earlier vision of wholesale conversion and assimilation, gleaned from Romantic monastic histories, was fundamentally flawed. A personal encounter shattered prior assumptions.[29]

Marty's adoption of an "individualized" Indian policy clearly contradicts his original monastic vision of communal "prayer and work" and signifies a radical departure from his earlier Swiss-Benedictine principles of stability and family. Indeed, any reassessment of Martin Marty's legacy must account for the *timing* of his shift from a familial, monastic model. Although holding individual Lakotas accountable was indeed a British policy, coming face-to-face with the Lakota chief revealed its wisdom and necessity to Marty. At the crossroads of this transformation are the summers of 1877 and 1879.

The story does not end there, however. After Sitting Bull's death in 1890 and in the aftermath of the Wounded Knee Massacre, Marty prac-

28. "The Indian Problem and the Catholic Church," *Catholic World* 48 (Feb. 1889): 583–84.

29. For the BCIM's misgivings about the Dawes Act, *see* Joseph A. Stephan, Director, to Francis Craft, 10 July 1888, Series 1, Box 20, Folder 19: Correspondence, Dakota Territory, Standing Rock Agency, Fort Yates, 1888, BCIM, MUA. Stephan stated: "I must warn you in advance not to believe any statements that may be made, no matter by whom, to the effect that I am in favor of the Dawes Bill or recommended its passage, for neither of them is correct." Curiously, he asked Craft to destroy the letter. It is likely that Stephan and Marty (who had recently assumed a prominent leadership role at BCIM) strongly disagreed on this issue. For a record of Marty's participation in the Chippewa Commission of 1889, *see* "Chippewa Indians in Minnesota: Message from the President of the United States," H. Ex. Doc. 247, 51st Cong., 1st sess., 1890, Serial 2747.

tically ceased to speak of the Lakotas as "individuals" and rejected the Dawes Act. Instead, he shifted again, promoting annual Catholic "congresses" among the Sioux, gatherings designed to highlight communal identity in the face of aggressive American individualization. These congresses became unintentional safe havens for Lakota traditions.[30] Was Sitting Bull not only the beginning, but also the end of Marty's program of individualization? Whatever the answer to these questions, it is clear that Marty's monastic roots were utterly challenged by his first encounters of Sitting Bull.

30. Markowitz, *Converting the Rosebud*, pp. 51–59.