

CHAPTER SIX

Fortifying the Catholic Church

On July 12, 1845, the newly consecrated Bishop Francis Norbert Blanchet sailed for Europe to carry out a sensitive and unusual mission. Because the question of sovereignty over Oregon country remained unsettled at the time of his appointment, Blanchet had been named titular Bishop of Drasa, and Vicar Apostolic of Oregon City. The latter designation was reserved for bishops "in mission countries where the normal hierarchy is not established...."¹ While the Vicar Apostolic was travelling through Europe, however, the governments of the United States and Great Britain settled the long-disputed issue of dominion over Oregon country. On June 15, 1846, the two nations signed the Oregon Treaty, giving America sovereignty over the lands of the Pacific Northwest that lay below the forty-ninth parallel. In the eyes of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the most formidable impediment against establishing a normal hierarchy in Oregon Territory no longer existed. Word of this timely resolution gave F. N. Blanchet hope that his mission to Europe would be crowned with success.

Primarily, F. N. Blanchet had gone to Europe to present a document to the Holy See outlining the conditions and wants of his vicarate in Oregon country. Most importantly, Blanchet desired to convince the Holy See of the necessity and importance of reorganizing and fortifying the Catholic Church in Oregon country. The nucleus of a master plan had been conceived in 1842, when Fathers F. N. Blanchet, Modeste Demers, and Pierre DeSmet first deliberated on the future of the Catholic Church in Oregon. The central concerns of the early missionaries were first articulated by Father F. N. Blanchet, when he and his two colleagues met in council:

It is here Willamette that one day a successor of the Apostles will come from some part of the world to settle, and provide for the spiritual necessities of this vast region, which, moreover, promises such an abundant harvest. Here is the field of battle, where we must in the first place gain the victory.²

"After six years of efforts so disproportionate to the needs,"³ the Vicar Apostolic decided that remedial steps were in order. Following the lead of Pierre DeSmet, S.J., Blanchet decided to travel through Canada and Europe himself. There he hoped to recruit missionaries, and amass additional funding for the fledgling missions of the Oregon Territory.

Above all other concerns, Blanchet desired to emancipate his remote vicarate from the jurisdiction of the distant archbishops, whether in Quebec or Baltimore. When he arrived in Rome, Blanchet planned to present a proposal

to transfer full governance of the Catholic Church in Oregon to a resident bishop. In this way, the local Church would be headed by someone who understood the needs and conditions of the Church in the Pacific Northwest. Blanchet's fifty-nine page "Memorandum" contained a detailed plan for the immediate establishment of "a metropolitan see with many suffragan bishops,"⁴ a plan which he insisted was "absolutely necessary"⁵ for the development of the young Church in Oregon country.

At the time he wrote his "Memorandum," Blanchet was confident that the Methodists were under control in the Willamette Valley. As he surveyed the field of battle, Blanchet turned his attention to the Presbyterians' unchecked mission enterprise among the natives of the Oregon interior. There Blanchet hoped to secure a resident bishop to live and work among the Cayuse and Nez Percé Indians. In that way, the Catholic Church might foil the efforts of the Presbyterian missionaries, and convert the natives of the interior to Catholicism.

Citing concern over Protestantism as an external threat to Catholicism, and calling attention to the urgent need for Catholic schools and seminaries in the region, Blanchet outlined measures for "Christians to be instructed and fortified in the Faith, and Indians and Protestants to be converted."⁶ In Blanchet's mind, the success of the

Catholic Church in Oregon depended upon the appointment of one metropolitan archbishop with "special powers"⁷ over as many as ten suffragan bishops. In light of the pressing need for personnel, F. N. Blanchet conceded that the immediate erection of an ecclesiastical province with only two suffragan sees, one at Vancouver Island, the other at Walla Walla, would suffice for the present time.

The plan Blanchet bore was unusual, considering the sparse population and the remoteness of the region. Moreover, the method he chose to present it to the Holy See was even more irregular. To date, only one metropolitan see existed in the United States, i.e. the powerful Archdiocese of Baltimore. According to protocol, any request to establish a second ecclesiastical province in the United States should have been initiated by the Most Reverend Samuel Eccleston, the Archbishop of Baltimore, in concert with his own suffragan bishops. Perhaps Blanchet knew that his request to erect a metropolitan see in the sparsely populated Pacific Northwest would never have gained support from the American bishops. Therefore, F. N. Blanchet embarked on his unusual mission, presenting his "Memorandum" in person to the Holy See without the knowledge or blessings of the American hierarchy.

The dauntless Vicar Apostolic even presumed to suggest to the Holy See specific persons he felt were well qualified

for the offices of archbishop and bishop in the proposed sees of the Pacific Northwest. Regarding the pivotal position of Archbishop of Oregon City, F. N. Blanchet suggested that he would be best suited to continue in "the overall management of Oregon City,"⁸ in other words as archbishop of the prospective metropolitan see. Blanchet quickly tempered the bold suggestion by adding, "I do not at all insist upon this point...."⁹ For the bishopric at Vancouver Island, F. N. Blanchet suggested his long-time mission companion, Father Modeste Demers, stating, "his virtues, his knowledge, his zeal for the salvation of souls enabled him to work the greatest good."¹⁰ Realizing that the ministry at Vancouver Island would be largely devoted to the natives, Blanchet noted that Demers

seems to have received from God a particular gift for the study of languages; for aside from English ...he has been able in a few years to learn ten or twelve dialects of the Indians whom he evangelizes.¹¹

Finally, F. N. Blanchet recommended his own brother, Father Augustine Magloire Alexander Blanchet, priest of the Archdiocese of Quebec, for the office of Bishop of Walla Walla. Regarding the qualities of his brother, F. N. Blanchet described A. M. A. Blanchet as

a priest of remarkable regularity, of great doctrine and piety, very devoted to the Holy See...most eminently capable of occupying the post designated here for him...about forty-nine years old.¹²

To further recommend A. M. A. Blanchet for the episcopacy, the Vicar Apostolic alluded to his brother's experience as missionary in "the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Cape Breton Islands, and the Magdalen Islands."¹³ He also noted A. M. A. Blanchet's administrative acumen, adding that he was currently the canon of the cathedral in Quebec.

Having been received "several times by His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI,"¹⁴ and presenting his "Memorandum" to the cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda, F. N. Blanchet finally continued on his travels through continental Europe. During his thirty-one month absence from the Oregon Territory, F. N. Blanchet met with "Nuncios, archbishops, bishops, pastors of churches, and the highest authority of each state."¹⁵ Blanchet received audiences with the King and Queen of Belgium, the King of Bavaria, and the Archduke of Austria. The bishop was also received "three times by his majesty Louis Phillipe, King of France,"¹⁶ whose government donated 17,800 francs to the Catholic missions of Oregon. In addition to monetary gifts, the King of France ordered free passage for Blanchet along with his growing mission party, aboard the vessels of the royal navy. When unexpected circumstances forced Blanchet to decline the offer of transportation, other benefactors came to the missionaries' aid. The "Leopoldine Society of Vienna, the directors of the railroad in Belgium and France,

and the Messageries Royales"¹⁷ provided the bishop and his retinue of helpers both monetary donations and reduced rates for their transportation across the continent.

In each country, F. N. Blanchet made dramatic presentations about his mission diocese in Oregon. He spoke at novitiates, seminaries, and convents, in an effort to recruit personnel for his Vicarate Apostolic. While he was in Belgium, the bishop secured the services of seven more Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. (The first group had arrived in Oregon in 1844, accompanied by Jesuit Father Pierre DeSmet.) At Lyon, Blanchet spoke before three hundred students of the Grande Seminaire, telling them of his urgent need for priests to carry the gospel to the whites and Indians of Oregon. At the close of this presentation, Blanchet reported that three seminarians presented themselves to him for mission work in the remote Pacific Northwest. At all places, the Vicar Apostolic reported that those "who heard of his mission work became deeply interested in it."¹⁸ Upon completion of his speaking tour, which began in Liverpool, England, and ended in Brest, France, the bishop had recruited seven sisters, three Jesuit fathers, three lay brothers, five secular priests, two deacons, and one cleric, in all twenty-one assistants.

In August of 1846, Bishop F. N. Blanchet received word that his unusual request to erect an ecclesiastical province in Oregon had been approved by Pope Gregory XVI. In the

same brief, per Blanchet's request, the Pontiff agreed to establish two suffragan sees in the Pacific Northwest, one at Vancouver Island, and one at Walla Walla. To the delight of F. N. Blanchet, the Holy See had raised the Vicar Apostolic himself to the rank of metropolitan Archbishop of Oregon City. In addition he named Father Modeste Demers Bishop of Vancouver Island, and A. M. A. Blanchet the Bishop of Walla Walla. F. N. Blanchet could have asked for little more. F. N. Blanchet's goals of gathering personnel and money for the missions had produced the desperately needed resources. The bishop's more pressing task, i.e. petitioning the Holy See to establish an ecclesiastical province in Oregon had been approved with unexpected celerity. On August 19, 1847, after five months and twenty-three days at sea, the jubilant F. N. Blanchet and his twenty-one companions, entered the Oregon Territory via the mouth of the Columbia River. Blanchet returned as Archbishop of Oregon City, the second ecclesiastical province in the United States, with suffragan sees at Walla Walla and Vancouver Island.

While Archbishop F. N. Blanchet was still at sea, Augustine Magliore Alexander Blanchet, F. N. Blanchet's younger brother and now the bishop-elect of Walla Walla, reluctantly prepared for his own episcopal ordination. Ordained a priest on June 3, 1821, and serving as canon of

St. James Cathedral in Montreal at the time of his appointment, A. M. A. Blanchet was deeply shaken by word of the position that had come to him through his brother's influence. Having learned of the news in a letter from his brother, A. M. A. Blanchet confided to a friend, "I couldn't believe my eyes--I read and reread the portentous news... I told myself 'It isn't possible'."¹⁹ An Apostolic Bull, dated September 20, 1846, and approved by the newly elected Pope Pius IX, officially confirmed the tidings.

Greetings and Apostolic blessings to our beloved son...We have erected the new Walla Walla Episcopal See...and We appoint you to the position of Bishop over the see.²⁰

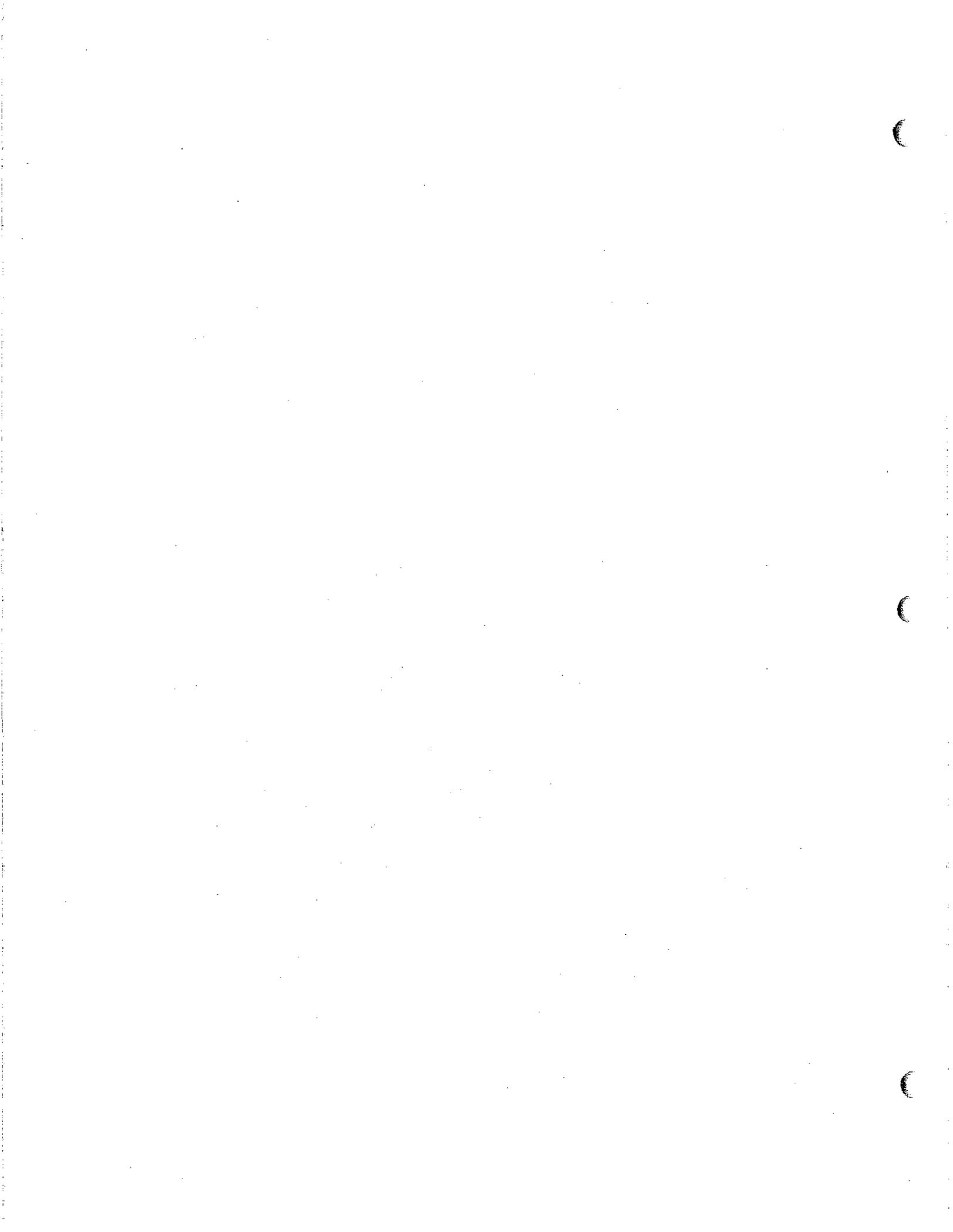
Still stunned by word of his appointment, the bishop-elect of Walla Walla retreated to the solitude of the Hospice of St. Joseph, in order to find "the will of God...and to receive the calmness of spirit which I had entirely lost...."²¹ A. M. A. Blanchet admitted that he would have gladly declined or evaded the unexpected appointment, reluctantly accepting it out of "dread of resisting the will of God."²² The bishop-elect compared himself to Isaac "as he received and carried the wood for the sacrifice."²³ By contrast, the third bishop of the Pacific Northwest, bishop-elect Modeste Demers, F. N. Blanchet's long-time companion, gladly accepted his appointment as Bishop of Vancouver Island. His episcopal consecration took place the following year on November 30, 1847, at St. Paul,

Oregon, "amidst the rejoicing of numerous clergy and a large number of faithful."²⁴

The day after his ordination A. M. A. Blanchet, Bishop of Walla Walla, sent a circular letter to all of the clergy and laity in the Quebec archdiocese, begging them for the funds and personnel to begin his own missionary diocese in Oregon country. A. M. A. Blanchet reported receiving "generous gifts from individuals"²⁵ in response to the appeals he made from parish pulpits. But the most pressing need--clergy and laity to assist the bishop in his mission work in Oregon--remained unmet. Planning to depart for Walla Walla in March of 1847, A. M. A. Blanchet lamented that even "days before the day fixed for my departure, I didn't have a priest to accompany me."²⁶ Finally, in February of 1848, when the mail boat arrived from Liverpool, England, Blanchet learned that the Order of Mary Immaculate, based in Marseille, had responded to his urgent appeal for clergy. At the prompting of the local superior of the Order of Mary Immaculate in Quebec, the Reverend Joseph Guiges, the superior of the order in Marseille, agreed to provide five men--four priests and one brother, to serve the people of the diocese of Walla Walla. At the eleventh hour, three more men, Father J. B. Brouillet, parish priest of the Archdiocese of Montreal, along with two seminarians, offered themselves for service in the Pacific Northwest.

Finally, the relieved Blanchet reported he could await "in peace the time fixed for the departure of the holy caravan."²⁷

On March 23, 1847, A. M. A. Blanchet and his companions departed for Oregon country. When he, his three missionaries, and their helpers arrived in St. Louis on April 16, 1847, they were astonished to find the members of the Order of Mary Immaculate already awaiting their arrival. Unexpectedly, the bishop's plans were complicated by the presence of five additional travelers, and their attendant expenses. On May 1, the missionary party of fourteen arrived at Kansas Landing (present-day Kansas City, Missouri), where the bishop hired a guide to accompany them over the Rocky Mountains. On August 5, when the oxen-drawn train arrived at Fort Hall, Bishop Blanchet decided to break away from the party and finish the balance of his journey on horseback. As he neared Fort Walla Walla, A. M. A. Blanchet pondered ways he might "extend more and more the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in this part of Oregon."²⁸ From the beginning of his episcopacy, Blanchet was troubled by the severe restrictions placed on him by a scarcity of missionaries in an expansive diocese. The new Bishop also expressed concern about Christianizing the Indians of the interior, who were said to be highly mobile, and spoke many different languages. Above all else, Blanchet was disturbed by the presence of Protestant ministers, who had worked



among the Indians for over a decade. Faced with these difficulties, Blanchet confided, "In the meantime, while they [the Indians] are neglected, it gives occasion to the Presbyterian ministers to introduce themselves into this field so well prepared for good seed."²⁹ Blanchet reviewed the work before him, writing, "It is a task which we have reason to regard as being greater than our strength...."³⁰

On Sunday, September 5, 1848, the bishop and his sole companion, Father Pascual Ricard, arrived at Fort Walla Walla. Father Pierre DeSmet, Jesuit missionary, once likened the environs of Fort Walla Walla to "a little Arabia...."³¹ According to DeSmet's travel journal, the region was little more than a desert of undulating lands, abounding in absinthium or wormwood, cactus, tufted green, and several species of such plants and herbs as are chiefly found in sterile soil...."³² Fort Walla Walla (originally called Fort Nez Percés), was owned and operated by the Hudson's Bay Company as their supply post for the southeast Columbia and Snake River districts. Built of sun-dried bricks, forty yards square, its walls rose thirteen feet above the desert floor.

The chief trader at Fort Walla Walla, Mr. William McBean, a Roman Catholic, received Bishop Blanchet and Father Pascual Ricard with great kindness. McBean's assistance proved to be an invaluable aid in the establishment of the Catholic Church in the Walla Walla diocese.

Geographically, A. M. A. Blanchet's newly established diocese was immense. In an early letter to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyon, to whom Blanchet turned for financial assistance, the bishop described the parameters of his diocese:

The Diocese of Walla Walla, with the regions of Colville and Fort Hall which have been annexed to it for a time, extends from 42° latitude to 50° latitude, and is bounded in the West by the Cascade Mountains, and in the east by the Rocky Mountains.³³

In sum, when the Diocese of Walla Walla was first established, it included all of the interior of Oregon Territory: from the present-day Canadian border on the north to California on the south; from the Rocky Mountains on the east to the Cascade Mountains on the West. During this period, however, diocesan lines were frequently blurred, and episcopal jurisdictions shifted as population growth waxed and waned. To be sure, A. M. A. Blanchet was overwhelmed as he contemplated the sheer physical size of his newly founded diocese. From the first day he surveyed the diocese, he felt compelled to procure more personnel in order to bring the gospel to the Indians and whites scattered throughout the region.

Long before Augustine Blanchet arrived in Oregon country, F. N. Blanchet had informed him that the Presbyterians were well established among the Cayuse, Flathead, and Nez Perce Indians of Oregon country. In 1847, when he

arrived at Fort Walla Walla, A. M. A. Blanchet learned that the central Presbyterian mission was located at Waillatpu, just twenty-five miles from Fort Walla Walla. This mission was headed by Dr. Marcus Whitman, a missionary-physician, and his wife Narcissa. The second mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was located at Clearwater (Lapwai), about eighty miles above Waillatpu. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Spalding resided there. Cushing Eells and Elkanah Walker supervised the third American Board mission at Tshimakain, near Colville, 180 miles from Fort Walla Walla. A mission substation, formerly a Methodist mission, had recently been opened at The Dalles. These Presbyterian missions in Oregon country were but a small segment of the American Board's concerted effort to propagate the Christian gospel among the "unevangelized nations and tribes."³⁴ The American Board was comprised of Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Dutch Reformed Churches. Doctor Whitman's own missionary class of 1836, forty-seven in number, demonstrated the global involvement of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The Board assigned its class of 1836 to its missions throughout the world, including Asia, Africa, Persia, India, the Sandwich Islands, and the Indian missions across North America.

The breadth of the Protestant mission effort in Oregon greatly concerned the new Catholic bishop. Upon learning of

the American Board's involvement in Oregon, a fellow bishop in Quebec prayed in Blanchet's behalf for "the grace of frustrating the insidious projects of the modern heretics who labor so ardently to pervert the people confided to our care."³⁵ Once again, Protestant and Catholic leaders were pitted against each other in a struggle for souls, each hoping to win the allegiance of natives and whites in the name of Christ.

From the Presbyterians' vantage point, the arrival of Catholic clergy in the interior of Oregon was a most unwelcomed event. For the past ten years, American Board missionaries preached and taught among the Indians of the interior without competition from resident Catholic clergy. While other problems had retarded the conversion of the natives, Catholic rivalry could only be regarded as a potential threat.

As early as 1840, shortly after Fathers F. N. Blanchet and Modeste Demers arrived in Oregon, Dr. Marcus Whitman advised the Prudential Committee of the American Board about the intermittent activities of Catholic priests near Walla Walla:

Papacy is now making its appearance, and the errors of that church are beginning to be diffused among this people. At this time the catholic priest is at Walla Walla, instructing the people, and the Indians are gathering together there to listen to the false doctrines which he inculcates.³⁶

In 1843, those still preparing to serve as missionaries for the American Board received regular admonitions "to gird on our armour, and contend earnestly"³⁷ against just such an event. The American Board warned its missionaries in no uncertain terms about the insidious work of "our great foe, the papal church:"³⁸

The strength of that church lies not in its temporal power, but in its antiquity, its numbers, its arrogant claims, its gorgeous rites, its appeals to the fancy and imagination, its easy methods of salvation, its peace-speaking doctrines for pride, worldliness and pleasure, and its actual hostility to the True gospel and the True church.³⁹

The 1843 issue of the Panoplist, official organ of the American Board, contained further warnings that the "Man of Sin"⁴⁰ was preparing to send his agents to every corner of the world. At the same time, the missionaries of the American Board consoled themselves with the belief that "Nothing can withstand popery, but the gospel, the truth which converts men to God, and which makes men feel that there is no salvation but through faith in Christ."⁴¹

In spite of the warnings, resident Catholic clergy did not appear until the autumn of 1847, when the first resident bishop of the Catholic Church arrived at Fort Walla Walla. Dr. Marcus Whitman and his confreres braced themselves for confrontation.

When the Catholic bishop and his missionaries finally arrived at Fort Walla Walla, they inquired about the

background and location of the American Board's missions in Oregon. Blanchet learned that the American Board had sent its first representatives to Oregon in 1835. The Reverend Samuel Parker had come "to ascertain as definitely as they can what is the number and situation of the Indians in that quarter, and in what manner the gospel can be most speedily and efficiently introduced among them...."⁴²

Like the Methodists of the Willamette Valley, the Presbyterian missionaries had built their missions at great personal expense. Their early months had been spent in manual labor, erecting rudimentary buildings and preparing plots of ground for spring planting. Yet, with the help of local Indians and with a steady stream of supplies from Fort Walla Walla, the Presbyterians advanced more rapidly than their Methodist counterparts on the Willamette River. By the close of their first year at Waililatpu, Whitman and his associates were already preaching and teaching among the natives of Oregon country. A letter from the Waililatpu Mission to the Prudential Committee of the American Board dated March 3, 1838, revealed that the Presbyterians were preaching and teaching Indians as early as autumn of 1837:

Our system of instruction is much as when I wrote in the fall. We have two meetings for Indians on the Sabbath, and in the evening what we call a Sabbath school for the children and youth. The attention to religious instruction is good and solemn.⁴³

At Colville, Henry and Mrs. Spalding indicated that the Indians had shown early interest in their mission work. Within his first year at Clearwater, Spalding reported instructing two Indian chiefs from the vicinity of Okanagan, along with several of their own people. Mr. Spalding was even completing "an alphabet in the Nez Percé language"⁴⁴ by the fall of 1837. Both ministers boasted "increasingly favorable prospects of our feeble undertakings"⁴⁵ in their report to the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. While personal differences and conflicts eventually divided the mission families, they remained united in their common cause to bring "the gift of eternal life"⁴⁶ to the Indians of Oregon country.

As months passed by, however, the zealous Presbyterian missionaries began to concede that their effort to Christianize the Indians of the Oregon interior was "uphill work."⁴⁷ By 1840, the ministers began to question the durability of the conversions that they had worked so hard to acquire. In 1839, Henry Spalding, missionary at Clearwater, reviewed the net results of his work among the Nez Percés: "Probably two thousand have made a public confession of their sins, and pledged themselves to live to (sic) God. But few of these, in all probability, have any just sense of sin or holiness."⁴⁸ As in the Willamette Valley, the unbridled optimism of the Presbyterians began to fade, and

the spirit of certitude that once characterized their correspondence, vanished. Mr. Walker, writing from Colville, reviewed the prospects of the American Board's Oregon mission in more somber terms than most: "I think there are some things to encourage, and many to discourage."⁴⁹ At this juncture, however, the missionaries remained steadfast in their belief that the gospel could transform even the most obdurate heart. Yet, escalating conflict among the mission families, and the difficulty of attaining native conversions, put the ministers' convictions to the test.

For better or for worse, the candor of the missionaries' reports and letters to the Prudential Committee in Boston had a chilling effect on the American Board. In 1842, after receiving a litany of letters concerning bitter tension among the missionaries, and disappointingly few conversions among the natives, the American Board called the viability of the Oregon missions into question. Like the board of directors of the Methodist-Episcopal Church, the American Board of Commissioners decided that swift action was necessary to make their Oregon enterprise more harmonious and productive. In a letter dated February 22, 1842,⁵⁰ the supervisor of the American Board, the Reverend David Green, informed the Oregon missionaries of the Board's decision to radically alter its Oregon missions. In short, the Board recalled Reverend and Mrs. Henry Spalding,

Mr. William Gray, and Reverend Asa B. Smith back to the United States. In the same resolution, they closed the missions at Lapwai and Wailatpu, and advised Dr. and Mrs. Whitman, and teacher Cornelius Rogers to take over the northern branch (Tshimakain) of the missions. Spalding was advised that the Committee was "pained and perplexed by the want of harmony and the despondency which seems to pervade your branch of the missions."⁵¹

Ironically, by the time the American Board acted to stabilize the missions in Oregon, the missionaries had already resolved many of the underlying differences on their own. Even Henry Spalding, who was frequently at the center of conflict among the missionary factions, resolved "to let everything pass and resolve to unite my efforts to labor for the common cause."⁵² Suddenly, upon receipt of the American Board's orders, the Presbyterian missionaries found themselves fighting for their existence. In 1843, Dr. Marcus Whitman, like Reverend Jason Lee, was dispatched to Boston to plea for a reversal of the Board's decision. Unlike Jason Lee, Dr. Whitman successfully convinced his Board that all three stations were necessary to convert the heathen, and to stem the growing threat of Catholicism in Oregon. Once again, the Presbyterian ministers, and the American Board of Commissioners were united in their cause.

From the beginning, the missionaries of the American Board set out to teach the "great truth that all are under

condemnation"⁵³ and in need of redemption through Christ. In order to inculcate the truths of Scripture and doctrine, the Calvinist missionaries planned to build schools and churches among the Indians, institutions akin to those they had known in New England. But when they arrived in Oregon, the ministers found that the Indians of the interior were highly itinerant food gatherers, absent from their villages for long periods of time. Thus the missionaries' plans to establish their churches and schools were confounded by the Indians. Writing from Tshimakain, Mr. Bells described the seasonal food gathering habits of one of the local tribes near Colville:

In April a large number meet in one plain to dig a root called popo. In May they...moved to a large camass [sic] plain. In June the men and boys were employed at the salmon, the women were digging and preparing the camass [sic] When they ceased to take the salmon, about the first of August, they returned to the camass ground where they remained till October....⁵⁴

From Mr. Bells perspective, the Indians' absence from their villages meant that his congregation "varied from thirty to one hundred; not more than one half of whom usually remained with us during the week."⁵⁵ The missionaries of the other two Presbyterian stations experienced a similar difficulty. From the ministers' vantage, the Indians' hunt for food meant that on one Sabbath, they may have a hundred families in attendance at their services, while on the next Sabbath, only five. Wrote Dr. Whitman, "these migrations

must occur every year, until they have more comfortable food and are inclined to more settled habits."⁵⁶ From the beginning, the missionaries resolved to teach the Indians of the interior "a more settled manner of life,"⁵⁷ as a prerequisite for Christian living.

At all three missions, the Presbyterians decided that a major item on the mission agenda was to supplant the hunting and gathering habits of the Indians with agriculture and husbandry. The missionaries acknowledged that they were embracing a difficult and long-term project:

It is vain to expect that the habits of these natives, to a great extent, will be suddenly changed. Agricultural pursuits should be encouraged, but years must elapse before they can become general.⁵⁸

Disturbed by the Indians' seasonal exodus from pew and classroom, the missionaries undertook the project as a necessity for gaining lasting conversions. Also disquieted by the Indians' idleness after they returned from their hunt, the Presbyterians further resolved to teach their converts the necessity of year round industry. None of the church's personnel doubted that farming, "industry and enterprise"⁵⁹ were far superior to the vicissitudes of the hunt.

Marcus Whitman cautioned that "...it is the gospel which we come to bring, and that our great business is with the mind and not the body."⁶⁰ But, in the mind of the missionaries, the Indians' protracted absence from the village

was a major impediment to the business of the gospel. For their part, the Indians were not entirely convinced of the value of agriculture. Even after they received six years of intense instruction in planting and husbandry, they continued to pursue their traditional hunt in wholesale fashion. In 1844, Dr. Whitman still complained to the Board in Boston that: "The congregation at Wailatpu varies with the season of the year and the pursuits of the Indians, from twenty or thirty to four hundred."⁶¹

The American Board's missionaries professed a common belief that all persons were fundamentally sinful, and in need of redemption through Christ. In the mind of the minister, the gospel was the panacea for humanity's moral depravity and sinful state. Convinced that they had come to bring the gospel of redemption to "benighted"⁶² Indians, the missionaries admonished the natives to confess their sins, to plead for God's mercy, and dedicate themselves "soul and body to God."⁶³ To this end, the American Board missionaries traditionally relied on preaching over "every other means of propagating the gospel."⁶⁴ The ministers regarded this ministry of preaching as "sending the truths of the gospel by the living voice from heart to the heart...God's method of converting souls."⁶⁵ However, a major obstacle stood between this living word and the Indians' hearts. The Indians could not understand the preachers' language,

nor could the preachers speak the native tongue. Dependent on preaching to propagate the gospel, the ministers were forced to rely upon interpreters to convey their scriptural notions respecting "The character of God, the fallen state of man, the doctrine of atonement, and regeneration, and the necessity of repentance and faith in Christ, to secure salvation."⁶⁶ Thus the ministers waged an all-out campaign to overcome the language barrier.

During their early years on the frontier, the Presbyterian missionaries attempted to use English as the principal "medium of communication."⁶⁷ However, by 1840, after repeated efforts to teach the natives "a correct knowledge of the English language," the missionaries concluded that the task was "absolutely impossible...."⁶⁸ Moreover, the missionaries became alarmed when they discovered that the languages spoken by the various Indian tribes were not as similar to each other as the missionaries had first believed. In 1839, Mr. Walker believed that "if the Bible should be translated into the language of any one tribe, all would understand it...."⁶⁹ A year later, the same minister concluded: "The Flat Head and Nez Percés languages are distinct. Their philosophical construction is wholly unlike. We have not been able to find any one word common to both languages."⁷⁰ Concerned that their own inability to speak the Indians' languages was rendering their ministry

"entirely useless,"⁷¹ the missionaries launched an ambitious campaign to learn the languages of the Indian tribes. Ultimately, the missionaries hoped to master not only the spoken word, but to transpose the natives' languages into written form. In this way, they might one day make the "words of eternal life,"⁷² the Bible, accessible to all of the natives of Oregon country.

During their first winter, while living at Waiilatpu, Mr. Eells and Mr. Walker hired their own language tutor. The missionaries hoped that the lessons would aid them as they prepared to establish their mission at Kamiah. In his attempt to acquire the Nez Percé language, Asa Smith nearly despaired over the enormity of the task, noting that "The number of words in the language is immense, and the variations are almost beyond description."⁷³ As he progressed in acquiring the Nez Percé language, Asa Smith devised a plan to reduce the Indians' language to written form. He did so with the hope of one day transposing the Bible into Nez Percé. By 1840, Mr. Rogers, a teacher at Kamiah station, superseded all others in his acquisition of the Nez Percé tongue. With the assistance of Asa Smith, Rogers printed an instructional manual, the second of its kind, "in language and orthography"⁷⁴ for his fellow missionaries. By 1840, Mr. Spalding conceded that the language was "better adapted to spiritual truths than I expected."⁷⁵ Yet even as the

missionaries became more skilled in speaking the Indians' languages, they still encountered indifference or resistance among the Indians to "the truths preached."⁷⁶

The Presbyterian missionaries reported to the American Board that the Oregon Indians were largely indifferent to their preaching. Asa Smith wrote to the Prudential Committee that the "novelty of having missionaries among them is now gone."⁷⁷ He told his superiors that even those who "were strict with regard to the worship...[were] like Pharisees of old. They do it to be seen of men, or as a work of merit."⁷⁸ Other Indians, wrote Smith, were highly selective in their adoption of their Presbyterian teachings. Smith reported to the American Board that their teaching, especially the Calvinistic notion "that all are under condemnation and exposed to the penalty of the law..." was "very offensive"⁷⁹ to their prospective converts. "We must work against the current...",⁸⁰ wrote Asa Smith, as he criticized the Indians for their resistance to the gospel of Christ. In 1840, Smith condemned the Indians for their lack of cooperation with the "plain truths of the gospel:"⁸¹ "They are self-righteous in the extreme, and labor hard to convince us of their goodness; but their hearts are enmity against God. They love not the truth when it condemns them."⁸² Nor was Smith alone in his opinion. Mr. Eells, writing from his post at Colville, shared his fellow

missionary's discouragement: "I am obliged to say as yet the words spoken appear to fall powerless, producing no deep and permanent effect upon the inward man."⁸³ While the ministers grew increasingly alarmed at the Indians' apparent indifference, Reverend H. H. Spalding and his fellow missionaries pondered new ways to reach the errant Indians with the Word of God. In 1840, Spalding and Cushing Eells wrote strikingly similar reports to the Prudential Committee, agreeing that "the great labor with us now, after preaching, should be in the schools, next to that translating."⁸⁴ To be sure, all of the missionaries turned their gaze toward the native children and youth, hoping that these candidates for conversion would salvage the failing missionary enterprise. The mission school quickly became the central locus of mission activity.

The general aim of the mission school was to teach the native children to read the Bible in their own language. The ministers hoped that these youngsters, unlike their parents, might be taught to believe the fundamental tenets they had come to preach--"the odious nature of sin...[and] the necessity of repentance and faith in Christ, to secure salvation."⁸⁵ None of the ministers contested the old axiom that "the one chief project of the old deluder Satan [was] to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures."⁸⁶ At all stations the clergy were relieved to find "no want of

ability to learn"⁸⁷ among their students. While the missionaries had been dealt a disappointing blow in their failure to secure adult converts, they found renewed hope in the mission schools. As he escalated his work among the children, Cushing Eells summed up the sentiments of his colleagues--"We hope with trembling."⁸⁸

During the winter of 1839-40, Narcissa Whitman taught ten students at the school at Wailatpu. During the same period, Mr. Eells and Mr. Walker boasted a regular attendance of eighty pupils at Tshmakain, while Mr. and Mrs. Spalding assisted by Mr. and Mrs. Griffin, taught "an animating school of 100-150"⁸⁹ at Clear Water. All of the teachers endeavored to teach their pupils to read the Bible. They believed that the power of the scriptures would transform the Indians into "new creatures in Jesus Christ."⁹⁰ Moreover, the teachers also hoped that, under their tutelage, the native children would begin to show "an upward tendency as to industry, enterprise, and an appreciation of the arts and usages of civilized life."⁹¹ By 1847, the ministers reported that they had hired two teachers to assist them in teaching an expanded curriculum, which included not only reading and scripture, but also agriculture, husbandry, and the domestic arts.

Lacking a knowledge of the natives' language, the mission teachers initially instructed the children in English. Progress was slow "till a better knowledge of the language

shall be obtained...."⁹² Lacking books, the teachers hand-printed the lessons on a blackboard, while the children recited the lessons aloud, many times over. Finally, those old enough to write were taught to transfer the scriptural lessons onto paper, while those showing the greatest improvement in writing and neatness were rewarded with a small prize. At Waiilatpu and Tshimakain, the American Board missionaries agreed that their foremost task was to gain a knowledge of the native tongue. At Clear Water, H. H. Spalding questioned the wisdom of his colleagues' decision:

I believe I can teach one of these children simply to read the English, three times as soon as the native language, owing either to the construction of the language, length of the words, orthography, or something else, which I have not yet discovered.⁹³

In spite of his protestations, Spalding soon conceded that it was more difficult than he had anticipated to teach the natives to speak and read English. Like the others, he proceeded in the monumental task of learning to speak and write the native language, eventually transposing portions of the Bible into written form.

Once again, progress in the classroom was retarded by the same obstacles that frustrated the missionaries' work among the adults. Classrooms were emptied by the hunt. The language was difficult to acquire, and even more difficult to write. And the parents seemed hopelessly attached to the

culture of their ancestors, countering the missionaries' Christian instruction in the classroom with "superstition," "mummery," and "jugglery."⁹⁴ Faced with almost insuperable obstacles in teaching the Indians to read the native language, the once optimistic Mr. Spalding wrote, "...that I almost despair even of the children."⁹⁵ At the same time, the same minister prayed for "a more perfect knowledge of this language, the habits of thought of this people, and the difficulties in the way of them becoming Christians."⁹⁶

Evidently, Spalding's resolve to learn the habits of thought of the Nez Percé, and the difficulties that prevented their conversion to Christianity, yielded high dividends. While the teachers at Tshimakain and Wailatpu spoke of paltry progress in the school, Spalding reported "encouraging progress, both in Christian knowledge and the improvement of their [Nez Percés] social condition."⁹⁷ The difference that set the Spalding school apart from the others was his involvement with adults. While the other ministers dismissed the adult natives as poor prospects for conversion, Spalding recruited eleven adult native catechists, and trained them in scripture and doctrine. The Indian teachers in turn taught the students in the mission school. Spalding reported that the people were "much pleased with his mode of instruction."⁹⁸ Moreover, Spalding welcomed adult students into the classroom and the church.

In 1846, the Prudential Committee learned, "At the other stations there is no information that any have been admitted to the church, or that the converting influences of the Spirit have been experienced."⁹⁹ The report contrasted sharply with the Spalding mission, where adults were involved in all activities:

the school at Clear Water is large, composed principally of adults, who manifest great earnestness and perseverance in learning to read and write....The congregation there on the Sabbath was uniformly large and attentive.¹⁰⁰

In 1844, while the missionaries continued in their efforts to Christianize the natives of Oregon country, a large band of white settlers headed for the Oregon Territory. The missionaries reported to the American Board that:

About one thousand persons, with two thousand horses and cattle and wagons and other facilities for a settlement, have just crossed the mountains to settle in the Oregon country. Others are expected to follow them next year.¹⁰¹

Dr. Whitman viewed this white emigration into Oregon as a potential blessing for the missions of the American Board. Indian conversions had been difficult to acquire, and more difficult to sustain. Since the Indians had failed to respond to the formal teachings of the ministers, Whitman hoped that they would be attracted to Christianity by the example of white Christians. Perhaps the new arrivals would "secure good influence for the Indians, and form a nucleus for religious institutions."¹⁰² However, Whitman feared

that the emigrants were largely "foreigners...[and] mostly papists."¹⁰³ The thought unnerved the Doctor, who, in 1844, expressed the fear that "the papists seem to be forming plans for fully occupying the country."¹⁰⁴

In 1845 and 1846, Dr. Whitman and the missionaries assisted increasing numbers of white emigrants en route to Oregon country. By the close of 1846, an estimated seven thousand emigrants¹⁰⁵ had entered the region, most of whom were destined to settle in the Willamette Valley. Over twenty-five hundred arrived in one year alone. In the minds of the ministers, the white settlers represented a new lease on life for the failing missions of the American Board. Dr. Whitman began to envision the day when an "Academy and College"¹⁰⁶ for whites might stand side by side by the little Indian school at Waillatpu. All of the missionaries were relieved to find emigrants "of intelligent and highly respectable character"¹⁰⁷ among the bands of travellers. Narcissa Whitman rejoiced that "pious people and professing Christians have found their way here...."¹⁰⁸ In the face of a rapidly declining Indian population, and an ever-increasing white population, the ministers were convinced, "the importance of the mission is manifest."¹⁰⁹

White a steady stream of white settlers poured into Oregon country, the American Board missionaries also reported, "Jealousy seems to be awakened among the Indians,

which may affect the mission unfavorably."¹¹⁰ The emigrants' incessant demands for food and supplies meant a decrease in available goods for the native population. And as white settlers fenced off large parcels of land for their private use, Henry Spalding noted the reaction among the Indians:

Another cause of excitement is their land--they are told by the enemies of the mission, that people in the civilized world purchase their land and water privileges. This touches a chord that vibrates through every part of the Indian soul--that insatiable desire for property.¹¹¹

The ministers could not understand the Indians' cultural attachment to their hunting grounds. Nor could they comprehend the natives' hostile reactions as they watched the land disappear and their supplies of goods diminish. Wrote Mr. Eells, we "labor to render them [the Indians] comfortable, do they vex and try us."¹¹²

At all stations, the ministers reported growing hostility, vandalism, and threats of violence against the mission families, who together agreed that "we have never before experienced so much trouble, or received so much abuse."¹¹³ Even the appointment of a U. S. Indian sub-agent for Oregon, who attempted to enforce a "simple code of laws"¹¹⁴ among the natives failed to abate the growing tension. From the Indian vantage, the arrival of white emigrants spelled a decline in their hunting ground, and a decrease in the supplies they had grown to depend upon. Moreover, the emigrants introduced fatal strains of disease

among the Indian people, exacerbating the tension between Indian and white to a dangerous level. The natives watched helplessly as their own people succumbed to measles and dysentery. While Whitman dispensed liberal amounts of medicine among the stricken Indians, some of the natives wondered if he was dispensing bad medicine among their people. Laboring day and night, the Doctor apparently forgot the relationship of the medicine man to his patient, a custom that Whitman's colleague, Reverend Samuel Parker, had noted a decade before: "The medicine man stands responsible for the life of his patient, and if his patient dies, not unfrequently, his own life is taken by some of the relatives of the deceased...."¹¹⁵

At every mission outpost, hostility between Indians and whites increased with each passing month. On August 31, 1846, Mr. Henry Spalding warned, "the Indians are getting worse every day for two or three years back; they are threatening to turn us out of these missions."¹¹⁶ The Prudential Committee of the American Board noted an uncharacteristic lapse in communications from its Oregon missionaries. Pressed to publish a current report about its missions in the Far West, the Board told its readers "Few communications" and "little information" had been received from the American Board missionaries in Oregon country. As if to comfort themselves in the face of this

silence, the Board members added, "Our brethren appear to be going forward, however, in the execution of their plans much as in former years."¹¹⁷ To be sure, the American Board was well aware that its missionaries in Oregon were undergoing trials and hardships in their work among the Indians of the Oregon interior. Yet none was prepared for the calamitous events that befell the mission families at Waiilatpu. On November 29, 1847, three months after Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet took possession of the Walla Walla diocese, a decade of tension between Indians and whites culminated in hostility and death. In a moment's notice, the American Board's mission effort in Oregon was brought to an abrupt close, while the fledgling Catholic missions of Oregon were forced to the "brink of their ruin."¹¹⁸

V. ENDNOTES

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