



Dissonant Worlds: Roger Vandersteene among the Cree

Earle H. Waugh

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How did a Belgian Oblate missionary who came to Canada to convert the aboriginals come to be buried as a Cree chief? In *Dissonant Worlds* Earle Waugh traces the remarkable career of Roger Vandersteene: his life as an Oblate missionary among the Cree, his intensive study of the Cree language and folkways, his status as a Cree medicine man, and the evolution of his views on the relationship between aboriginal traditions and the Roman Catholicism of the missionaries who worked among them. Above all, *Dissonant Worlds* traces Vandersteene's quest to build a new religious reality: a strong, spiritually powerful Cree church, a magnificent Cree formulation of Christian life.

In the wilderness of northern Canada Vandersteene found an aboriginal spirituality that inspired his own poetic and artistic nature and encouraged him to pursue a religious vision that united Cree tradition and Catholicism, one that constituted a dramatic revision of contemporary Catholic ritual. Through his paintings, poetry and liturgical modifications, Vandersteene attempted to recreate Cree reality and provide images grounded in Cree spirituality.

Dissonant Worlds, in telling the story of Vandersteene's struggle to integrate European Catholicism and aboriginal spirituality, raises the larger issue: Is there a place for missionary work in the modern church? It will be of interest to students of Native studies, the religious history of the Oblates, Canadian studies and Catholicism in the mid-twentieth century.

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