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**SYMBOL TALES:  
PATHS TOWARDS THE CREATION OF A SAINT**

**By  
PAULA ELIZABETH HOLMES, B.A., M.A.**

**A Thesis  
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
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**AUTHOR: Paula Elizabeth Holmes, B.A., M.A. (University of Calgary)**  
**SUPERVISOR: Dr. Ellen Badone**  
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## **Abstract**

In “Symbol Tales: Paths Towards the Creation of a Saint”, I discuss Catholic Pueblo women’s devotion to Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, a seventeenth century Mohawk convert turned folk saint. Between 1996 and 1998, I conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the Pueblos of New Mexico, including Isleta, Jemez, Laguna, Acoma, and San Juan, as well as in Mescalero, on the Navajo Nation, and in the urban center of Albuquerque. This book is interdisciplinary and uses the methodologies and new writing styles of interpretive and reflexive anthropology to focus on the populist dimensions of saint-making, the ethnotheology of sainthood, devotional narratives, inculturation, miracle discourses, and Native American identity within the post-conciliar Catholic Church. I argue that the “blankness” and silence of Kateri in the official hagiographic tradition allows for both popular theological creativity in the imaginative space of the devotional narratives, and the formation of new social and devotional groups such as local “Kateri Circles” and the multi-tribal national annual Tekakwitha Conference. Finally, I explore the emergence of a broad Catholic pan-Indianism centred around the symbolic figure of Kateri Tekakwitha.

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## *Symbol Tales: Paths Towards the Creation of a Saint*

### **Chapter I: Where Paths Begin**

#### **Prologue: A Vision, A Dream, and A Blessing**

It was a hot August day, 1996, the sky was at its best brilliant New Mexico blue. The oven hot air dried breath and memory instantly, and my skin prickled under the sunlight. I had come from Canada to New Mexico in quest of Kateri Tekakwitha, a seventeenth century Mohawk who is now venerated as a saint by diverse groups of Native American Roman Catholics. On this afternoon, I was sitting with Theresa<sup>1</sup> in her car in the parking lot of the University of New Mexico gymnasium. It was the final day of the 57th Annual Tekakwitha Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and we had arrived for the last evening's meal and powwow. We were talking about my interest in Kateri and about my hopes of returning to do more research in the Southwest. Theresa befriended me during my first visit to New Mexico and during my later visits, she became not only a key figure in my understanding of Kateri in the lives of Pueblo people, but also my "Indian

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<sup>1</sup> I have changed the names of many of the people I encountered and interviewed, as is usual practice in ethnographic writing. Many of Kateri's devotees requested anonymity for reasons I believe are unconnected to my research. Others I know would be willing to have their names used. However, rather than combining created and real names, for private citizens I uniformly used pseudonyms. For those whom I interviewed in the context of their public positions, such as the executive director of the Tekakwitha Conference, I have used real names. I hope that this creates minimal confusion and is respectful both of individuals' privacy and integrity.

"Theresa" became for me the type of person that anthropologists call a "key informant". Her home in Isleta with its "spirit room" full of saints, kachinas, stones, shawls, pictures and other treasures, each with its own story, became my home base during research. When I went to return her house key at the end of my fieldwork, she told me to keep it so that I would "always have a home here". I give her the name "Theresa" because of her immense love for Mother Teresa, the extraordinary humanitarian who worked with the poor, sick, and dying in Calcutta.

mother” who took me in, taught me, and told me stories. The first words of this book are hers -- her dream, her vision, her narrative of Kateri, and the blessing Theresa gave me to listen to these stories:

I read an article in the paper around the time of her [Kateri’s] beatification [1980] and became very interested. I never knew anything about her before. I asked my mother and she said that when she was a little girl, they used to talk about her; that’s all she told me. I decided to go and see. I put on my white buckskin moccasins and off I went to mass at St. Joseph’s in Albuquerque where the special mass for her beatification was being held. They had an altar there with native pottery and baskets and blankets, and every saint had a shawl on. That was the first time I ever saw an altar like that. Wow! They had a procession in with the drum and I thought, ‘God, this is beautiful’. There was the Laguna choir, and eagle dancers who carried in a loaf of Indian bread -- they were all dressed in Indian. That was the first time a loaf of Indian bread was given as communion. There was a procession of Indian people in our costume -- *mantas*<sup>2</sup> and everything. I had chills. I felt like crying, felt like a spirit was following them (in the procession), maybe Kateri’s spirit.

I knelt down to pray and found a little feather on the ground. When I did my painting of Kateri after that mass, I used that feather to write a message on the back. When I went home, I had Kateri in my mind. I really wanted to know more about her. I started to think about her. I never saw an image of her, but I made this painting; it’s my image of her. It just came to me.

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<sup>2</sup> Mantas are black wool sheaths that tie over one shoulder which Pueblo women wear for ceremonies and dancing at feast days.

Time passed. There was a Tekakwitha Conference in Albuquerque. I went to that Conference even though I wasn't a part of it. I went to the evening's open mike and there was a young Indian man talking about how they were losing their lake where they fish; he was crying and asking for prayers. The Kateri Circle from Mohawk country at that time presented the Conference with a brass figure of Kateri. I bought one of the three plaster copies of it at Fonda (New York) later and I thought, 'Oh! So that's what she looked like'.

Later at that first conference, people were going to Santa Domingo Pueblo. There was going to be a mass in the plaza for the first time in history. I brought my mother and my friend and I took that picture that I had painted in the procession. '*This is a saint to me*', I thought [emphasis mine]. Archbishop Sanchez blessed the picture in the name of Kateri and that picture sat all day long in the shrine with the other saints.

Time went on. I was getting a little bit more into Kateri, not really through the literature because there wasn't much. I got involved at Queen of Angels Indian Chapel [in Albuquerque]. The more I got involved, the more I would feel the spirit. The next Tekakwitha Conference was going to be in New York. I wasn't going to go -- too much work to do here at home and in my shop -- but other people encouraged me to go. Still, I wasn't going to go to New York, but instead, I would do something special for Kateri. I was going to make her a shrine out of fabric, like St. Francis, he worked with fabric.<sup>3</sup> I felt that something special was going on, but I couldn't identify it. But something was changing.

Then I had a dream of Blessed Kateri, just about the week before people

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<sup>3</sup> Theresa runs a drapery shop in Albuquerque.

were going to New York. I first dreamt about my father. He standing in our clan *kiva*<sup>4</sup> and he said, 'Yes, go'. I saw myself coming down from buses with a lot of people. There were dirt roads and we walked in, in a line. People were so happy, greeting us. The person in front was Blessed Kateri. She was four people in front of me. She had long black hair and was wearing this beautiful blue cape. I walked into this house; there were tables of food and white tablecloths. I followed the line; I was in the same line as Blessed Kateri. She sat at the head of the table and I sat directly across from her. The other people sat along the sides. She took this loaf of Indian bread and consecrated it, then she looked at me straight in the eyes and she said in Isleta, 'My daughter, all gifts come from the same God, the same mother'.

I woke up and I said, 'I'm going'. I called to make reservations but they had already been made for me. I just had to pay for the ticket. So we went to Syracuse (New York). It was so beautiful -- the people, the places where we went to visit. I went down to the stream where Kateri was baptized, got some twigs and made a cross. And I bought that statue of her there. We went to Kahnawake (Quebec) where Kateri is buried; with the buses and the tables and the happy people all there, it was just like my dream. My mouth got dry, I couldn't speak, I started to shake. It was like the dream all over again. I started to cry. I couldn't eat. I had no appetite. I wanted to go out somewhere all by myself and sit.

When we left her place, I felt that me, the person who went over there was transformed into Kateri's spirit. At that same moment, that star came. I had dreamed of that bright light and a woman at Kahnawake gave me that light in the form of a beautiful crystal. We were in the church and she called me into a back

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<sup>4</sup> Kivas are partially buried ceremonial houses used by Pueblo peoples.

alcove and reached into her shawl, just like she had in my dream, and took out this crystal and gave it to me. I washed the eyes of a blind woman from Laguna in the water of the St. Lawrence River there. I looked up and saw all the Indian people from our villages looking down on me. They asked me where I was from and they couldn't believe I was Isleta. They said I looked like an Oklahoma or something. At St. Regis (Akwesasne Mohawk reserve which straddles the U.S./Canada border in New York and Quebec) on that trip, someone asked me for a blessing. Then everyone got in a line and wanted a blessing. It was so beautiful; it was just like a transformation. I blessed them with this little crystal rock that Kateri gave me in a dream and I got from a woman in Kahnawake.

There is a whole story of this little star. This crystal had taken me up to see a great beautiful light, the holy light of God. I think that that star has a lot to do with Blessed Kateri, I really, really do. That healing part was for all people to come together believing in that same God. I promised Blessed Kateri that I would do her work -- the work that she never got to do -- she got sick and all those things happened to her and she died so young. I made that promise to her -- to help all those people who came.

I saw Kateri two times after that dream. In one, she was crying and saying, 'Tell them Theresa, tell them'. I woke up saying, 'Tell them what?' In another dream, she came and she was so beautiful; she had these white buckskin moccasins. I just hugged her and said 'I love your moccasins'. I just held her legs. She asked me where I wanted to start my work and I said, 'Let's go to Laguna', and I woke up. Kateri's work is to tell the Indian people that, 'Hey, its OK, you can be Indian, believe in God, its OK, its the same spirit'. We call her

our Mother [Theresa repeats the Isleta words that Kateri spoke to her]. ‘You can believe in God because God is the same spirit as our Mother’. That’s what she said. *Her message is unity* [emphasis mine].

Her [Kateri’s] people were doing a lot of atrocities; that’s why she left them. She couldn’t stand the fighting, adultery, drinking. She didn’t want to stay around. I think I’ve experienced a lot of things that she went through, like pain. She ran away from her people; she didn’t want to be with her people, but those were her last days too. God has our time set and probably God wanted her to be baptised, and who would have baptised her in Mohawk country? She wanted to be baptised most in her life. Kateri was loved when she was first born, but after that, with such an Indian way at that time, such a traditional people, it must have been very hard on her.

Blessed Kateri didn’t have anything to write on. What would she write her dreams on? Her prayers, or what she saw? She did her creative work in order to survive, but she could not write anything down. *She brought a lot of Indian communities to the Church. That’s a miracle itself - - to be able to do that in her name. She has not been canonized, but to us, she is already a saint* [emphasis mine].

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After Theresa finished her story, she asked me if I would like to see that crystal rock, the one she had been led to by Kateri. I answered, “Of course, yes please”. Theresa reached under the waistband of her skirt and removed a soft, tawny buckskin pouch. Tenderly, she unwrapped it. “It looks like a mother, don’t you think? See, here’s the curve of her head, her shawl, her eyes”. Theresa pointed out the features of the crystal

with a long, slim brown finger. She took this “Mother” rock, gently touched it to my forehead and chest and then placed it in my hands, enclosed hers over mine, bent her head close to mine and prayed, asking on my behalf for guidance and knowledge. “Let Kateri guide you to people who will tell her story. Let your work make the stories of her people known”. There was nothing for me to say but “Thank you”. I was overwhelmed, under prepared to respond, and from that parked car, I could see roads of research ahead of me. We promised to keep in touch. I told her that I would try to come back next summer and would definitely be back the following year to stay for awhile. “You may not get back here,” she said, “You never know”. I protested, promising, “Of course I’ll be back!” Theresa sat back in the driver’s seat, resting her head and replied, “Well, if we do not meet again, at least you will have one story for your book”.<sup>5</sup>

### **Preamble**

In this story, Theresa tacks back and forth between dream and experience, between the supernatural and the historical, weaving a narrative that communicates a relationship of faith, friendship, and wonder between Kateri and herself. I have chosen to begin with this

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<sup>5</sup> I did not tape this conversation, this initiatory experience. The story was unexpected; my tape recorder and pen were not ready, still tucked in my bag, and to reveal them at that moment would have been disruptive, even rude, breaking the connection between Theresa and myself. Fieldwork happens; it cannot be entirely scheduled and recorded. I found time and time again that people were much more open, revealing and articulate when the tape recorder was off. When it was on, many were concerned about giving the “right answers”, despite my efforts to encourage undirected conversation. Here, Theresa was conscious that she was “giving me a story for my book”, but to expose the trappings and equipment of an anthropologist would have severed or at least altered that communication. Thus my memory and recreation of this encounter are aided by notes that I scribbled in my coiled notebook later that evening, and also by transcripts of a taped interview conducted with Theresa in the summer of 1997 at her kitchen table in her old adobe house in Isleta Pueblo, when Theresa told me again of her first meeting with and dream of Kateri.



story and to reproduce it at length since I believe that it encapsulates many of the key themes in this dissertation. Theresa's narrative exemplifies a personalized ethnohistorical retelling of Kateri's life in particular, and an emergent Native Catholicism in general. In sharing her identification and conversations with Kateri, and her dreams and images, Theresa reveals the place of this proto-saint in her daily life. Theresa sketches an early experience of the incorporation of "Indian things" into the Church, tangibly in the form of Indian bread used for communion at the mass, and theologically in her rethinking of God, the Mother, as "the same spirit" worshipped by the Indian people. Theresa's story introduces the kinds of private and communal devotional activities that center around Kateri. Finally, we hear Theresa's perspective on the unifying "message" of Kateri, and the disjunction Theresa perceives between Kateri's saintliness and Rome's failure, to date, to complete the process of her canonization. As will be elaborated below, Theresa's views are shared by many and even formalized at Tekakwitha Conference meetings.

Perhaps most importantly, Theresa's story begins this dissertation with an articulation that is not my own, thus highlighting my effort to make this monograph a chorus of voices speaking about Kateri from differing perspectives. Multivocality and the orchestration of voices, as will be discussed in further detail below, are prominent issues in both ethnographic research and the writing processes. The narrative I have presented is Theresa's story, but it is shaped and clipped by my listening and inscribing. I have tried to write so that the reader will hear a multiplicity of sounds -- tones originating in contemporary New Mexico, colonial New France, the Vatican, reservation churches, urban chapels, kitchens, and hearts. As author, I am a conductor -- arranging, editing, organizing, prioritizing, deleting, silencing, enlarging, and schematizing. Here is what I have tried to do: the program for the concert, an introduction to the instruments, an overture

of stage, players, and audience.

### **Introduction and Scope**

This dissertation is an investigation of native Catholic devotion to Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk woman who lived from 1656 - 1680, was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1980, and is known throughout the Catholic world as the Iroquois Virgin. Contemporary devotion to Kateri among Catholic native peoples has spread all over North America. My research focusses specifically on New Mexico Pueblo women's devotion to Kateri, who is identified by these women as both Native American and Catholic.

New Mexico is home to fully one tenth of the North American Kateri "Circles", small Catholic grassroots devotional groups dedicated to Kateri Tekakwitha. In general, native devotees of Kateri can be found in disproportionately high numbers in the Southwestern United States (Tekakwitha Conference, map in headquarters office). Further, although the Pueblo people have a tradition of native Catholicism that predates devotion to Kateri, she is nevertheless singled out by many in the Pueblos as a representative and embodiment of what it means to be a Native Catholic.

This research can be set in the larger context of studies of popular religion. I use the term "popular religion" with caution, preferring not to see it as part of a two-tiered structure of orthodoxy and heterodoxy and one way filtration (cf. Badone 1990, Christian 1987, Redfield 1967). As anthropologists June Macklin and Luise Margolies suggest, "Comprising those beliefs, attitudes, symbols, actions, and social forms by which the common people, the folk, interpret and construct, reinterpret and reconstruct their experiences, popular religion is often contrasted with official religion" (Macklin and Margolies 1988:6). Further, anthropologist Ellen Badone defines popular religion as

“those informal, unofficial practices, beliefs, and styles of religious expression that lack the formal sanction of established church structures” (Badone 1990:6). While there appears to be an implicit opposition between popular and official, Badone argues that “it is more fruitful to focus on the dialectic character of their interrelationship” (Badone 1990:6). My study of Kateri explores both official and popular spheres, as well as in the not easily classified and sometimes overlapping areas of clergy and religious, and organizations such as the Tekakwitha Conference and Kateri Circles which are at once grassroots and directed by Church officials.

This dissertation will deal with three main theoretical issues. The first of these issues is the concept of sainthood and the relationships between saints and devotional communities. I am interested particularly in the popular dimension of saint-making and the ways in which narratives about a saint, which are often counterhagiographical, constitute what can be termed an “ethnotheology of sainthood”<sup>6</sup>. I use the term “ethnotheology of sainthood” to refer to the folk understandings about the lives, nature and function of saints. In employing this phrase, I hope to underline the populist dimensions of saint-making and the ways in which devotion to saints and the stories told about them shape saints’ characters.

By exploring the term “counterhagiography”, I seek to underline the multiple, changing and often contradictory discourses which tell a saint’s life. Hagiography here, becomes more than simply standardized stories about saints, but also stories about selves, both the official and the popular “selves” who transmit and translate Kateri’s narratives (cf. Orsi 1996). Such a notion of counterhagiography moves the story of a saint’s life away

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<sup>6</sup> I borrow the term “ethnotheology” from T.J. Steele who uses it ambiguously to refer to the relationships of New Mexican *santeras* to the *santos* they represented in art (Steele 1994).

from the traditional hagiographical practices which “do not manifest a Saint, [but rather]...mince him into spiritual lessons” (Woodward 1996:369, 370, cf. Noble and Head 1995). Thus, at a general level, this research is interested in the conversations (broadly defined) between Kateri Tekakwitha and her devotional communities, and in the multiple manifestations of Kateri as a saintly figure.

As Stephen Gudeman has suggested, saints are locally constructed and reconstructed (Gudeman 1988). Both devotion to and the naming of saints underscores the power of local construction. However, the “local” is itself an intersection of a variety of historical and cultural processes. The populist dimension of saint-making is different from, although interactive with the “official” canonization and hagiographical processes (Macklin 1988, Macklin and Margolies 1988). Thus saints and saint-making can be understood as folk commentaries on the Church which inevitably reflect and are products and processes of the syncretistic context of both the lives of saints and their various historical devotional communities. In the narratives told about saints’ lives, elements are added, edited out, underlined and obscured in confluence both with the canonization process and the needs of various devotional communities (Koppedraye 1993, Shoemaker 1995).

The second key issue that this research explores concerns the post-conciliar concept of inculturation (Angrosino 1994, Beaver 1973, Biernatzki 1991, Buckley 1991, Côté 1996, De La Cruz et al 1991, Hiebert 1984, Kozak 1994, Schreier 1985, Stewart and Shaw 1994, Tesfai 1995, Thorogood 1995, Verstraelen 1995, Yamamori and Taber 1975, and Zuern et al 1983). In the documents of Vatican II, particularly *Gaudium et Spes*, issues of diversity and localization emerge as central. Although the term originated in 1972 and did so within a Protestant context, “inculturation” has become a common element in the Catholic post-conciliar vocabulary, particularly within the field of missiology and

ecclesiology where issues of catholicity and locality are primary. In brief, inculturation involves the affirmation that the gospel is “never naked” and “foreign nowhere” (Tesfai 1995, United States Catholic Conference 1977). That is, Christianity is inevitably, and in its essence, always “clothed” in a cultural expression. Further, its cultural expressions are, and should be, diverse and specific to local contexts. Inculturation therefore assumes that the gospel is only given in a cultural context and thus can never be wholly extricated from it (Schreiter 1985).

In this dissertation, I argue that in contemporary devotion to Kateri Tekakwitha, she is herself seen as an example of inculturation, and the kind of Native Catholicism which she is said to inspire is itself an example of the construction of local theology (Kozak 1994, Peelman 1995, Schreiter 1985, Winter 1981). Further, Kateri is said to inspire inter-tribal unity within the Church. This formation of a pan-Indian identity centered around a historical or supernatural figure is comparable to the legacy of Black Elk (Brown 1953, Holler 1995, Neihardt 1932, Steimatz 1980) and also to devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe (Rodriguez 1994, Taylor 1987, Wolf 1958). This monograph explores the way in which the construction of local theology -- in this case, Catholic pan-Indianism centered around the saintly figure of Kateri Tekakwitha -- involves the creation of a kind of “hybrid authenticity”, a kind local resilience and invention (Clifford 1997:185). Clifford’s concept of “hybrid authenticity” is attentive to the ways in which articulations of authenticity and tradition -- in this case, “Indianism” -- are embedded in specific historical, political, and social conjunctures (Clifford 1997).

Finally, and more generally, this monograph seeks to be an “ethnography of a symbol”. Arguably, Kateri Tekakwitha can be seen as a connotative symbol -- a figure who implies, conveys, and suggests ideas, emotions, and associations. As a symbol, she

has the power to impel behaviour in her followers (Cohen 1974:24, Ingham 1986). As Orsi states in his study of the Madonna of 115th Street,

This is a social history of a religious symbol. It is an attempt to understand as intimately as possible why a particular religious symbol meant what it did and how it came to acquire this meaning. I was interested in the shaping power of religious symbols. A powerful relationship existed between the Madonna of 115th Street and the community surrounding her (Orsi 1985: xxii).

In a comparable way, the cultural component of the symbolic function of Kateri can be studied, and the overarching narratives and multiple discourses about her can be traced. Thus I am ultimately interested in what can be called “symbol tales” -- the multiple narratives that construct and reconstruct a symbol. For my purposes, Kateri is this symbol, and I seek to lay out the many paths that point and lead to the creation and negotiation of her identity as a saint.

### **Ethnographic and Historical Background**

Tekakwitha was born in 1656 to a Mohawk father and an Algonkian mother on the south bank of the Mohawk River, near what is now Auriesville, New York. When she was four years old, a smallpox epidemic claimed the lives of her parents and brother, and left Tekakwitha weak, scarred, and with damaged eyesight. After encountering Jesuit missionaries in 1674, she began to take religious instruction. In 1676, at the age of twenty, she was baptised and given the name Katherine, Kateri. One year later she moved to the Francis Xavier Mission (Kahnawake) near Montreal. There she made a formal vow of virginity and practiced extreme austerities and devotion such as flagellations, branding, exposure, and fasting. Kateri was at the mission just over two years before she died in

1680 at the age of twenty four (*Positio*). Kateri's pious existence did not end with her physical death and her biographies include numerous accounts of miracles, visions, and prophecies, all attributed to Kateri's intercession, which is said to continue to the present day. Kateri's holiness has been recognized by the Church. She was declared Venerable by Pope Pius XII in 1943, and was Beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1980.<sup>7</sup>

In the twentieth century, Kateri serves as the patroness of the Tekakwitha Conference National Center, a native organization which claims to be the "voice, presence and identity of Native American Catholics" and to represent "a growing unity within Native Catholic communities with the special protection of Blessed Kateri". The Tekakwitha Conference began in 1939 as an advisory group of priests to Bishop Aloysius Muench in Fargo, North Dakota and as a support group for missionaries working among the Plains Indians of the area. In 1977, the purpose of the conference was challenged and it opened its membership to all "Catholic Native Americans and those in ministry with them." The year 1980 marked not only Kateri's beatification, but the beginning of the national movement and the establishment of the National Center in Great Falls, Montana (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet n.d., Tekakwitha Conference Newsletter 1981, 1982, 1988).

The goals of the Tekakwitha Conference are to incorporate traditional elements of native spirituality into the Church; to unify Native American Catholics while respecting tribal differences; to pray for the canonization of Kateri; to share the story of her life; and to

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<sup>7</sup> There are three stages in the canonization process. First, a candidate's writings and life history are collected and the cause is presented to the Vatican. When these documents have been examined, and the candidate's virtues deemed extraordinary, she may be declared Venerable by the Pope. Authenticated miracles are necessary to move the candidate through the next steps. One miracle is needed for Beatification (the candidate is called Blessed), and one more for canonization (the Blessed becomes a Saint) (Woodward 1990). I will discuss the canonization process in detail in chapter six.

follow her example of holiness (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet n.d.). These goals are largely informed by the Second Vatican Council reforms promoting ecumenism and localization, and by subsequent processes of inculturation within the Church. Tekakwitha Conference members are admonished to see Kateri as a model, guide, inspiration, and example, and to express themselves and their beliefs not only in traditional “Catholic ways” but in “Native ways” as well. For the Tekakwitha Conference, Kateri serves as a symbol of the unity and strength of all Catholic Native Americans, and highlights their presence and importance in the larger Catholic Church. Tekakwitha Conference members aim, “without ceasing to be Christian, to live out our unique identity found in our individual and tribal Indianness” (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet n.d.).

### **Theoretical Background**

I begin with the premise that saints are their stories; that is, that saints exist in and through the narratives that are told about them (Woodward 1990 cf. Orsi 1996). Thus saint-making -- both in its official and populist dimensions, is a process whereby a life is transformed into a “text”, broadly defined. My study focusses on the devotional stories which are told about Kateri by Pueblo women as a kind of narrative theology in which both the divine and the self are revealed.

In interpreting these narratives, I seek to investigate the symbolic function of Kateri Tekakwitha, this seventeenth century Iroquois woman who has been transformed into a folk saint. Arguably, she is at once a symbol of seventeenth century Jesuit missionary success and a symbol of twentieth century native revitalization. As a symbol, Kateri incarnates many of the cultural and religious ideals of her devotional communities. This research explores the creation and adaptation of the symbolic figure of Kateri, and how she



serves as the embodiment of Native identity for Pueblo women within the Catholic Church. The issue of identity emerges as a key concept, since Kateri is claimed as their “own” by diverse native groups. Such ownership arguably involves the negotiation and creation of a new identity and place for Native Americans in the Church, centered around the saintly figure of Kateri Tekakwitha.

This research also aims to expand anthropological understandings of saints and relationships to their devotional communities. Briefly, saints can be seen as both edifying canonical statements from above -- the level of the institutional Church -- and reflections of history from below -- the level of the lay practitioners. This perspective stems from the assumption that all saints are culturally constructed in that they are remodelled in the collective representations which are made of them (Wilson 1983). In sum, saints emerge as multivocal and malleable symbols -- figures who are surrounded by a diversity of discourses, and in whom various groups of people in various historical periods perceive both “models of” and “models for” identity, sanctity, and community (Geertz 1973:108, Macklin 1988:70).

I further argue that Kateri has become a model for and a symbol of “Native Catholicism” -- a kind of “invented tradition” which involves a dual process of essentializing and hybridizing (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Kateri thus can be seen as an incarnation of the post-conciliar process of inculturation which emphasizes local theology and the incorporation of culturally diverse groups into the universal Church. Issues of ownership and identity converge in the notion of Catholic pan-Indianism which involves the assertion of inter-tribal unity within a Catholic framework. How and why this Catholic pan-Indianism has come to be centered around Kateri Tekakwitha, particularly among Pueblo women, is the focus of the present research.

The achievement of inter-tribal unity under the aegis of Catholicism is seen by many Kateri devotees as “miraculous”. This miracle discourse seems to imply that such unity could not have been accomplished without the figure of Kateri as a model. Kateri is described first and foremost as “Native American like us”. Her life is retold as one that manifests a message of unity to “her people” -- that is, all native peoples. For example, a play recounting Kateri’s life that was staged during the 1996 meeting of the Tekakwitha Conference ended with the miraculous resurrection of Kateri who appears to her grieving friends with the message to love Jesus, love each other, and “above all, unite.” Thus both her earthly life and her post-mortem existence are interpreted by contemporary devotees as embodying a divine message of Indian unity, a message which would be clarified, and a unity which would be cemented by her canonization.

The populist dimension of saint-making is in many ways in tension with the Vatican process. Tekakwitha Conference members arguably represent a “reflection of history from below” and have modelled, or remodelled Kateri as a collective representation of themselves perceived primarily in terms of their identity as Native Americans (Woodward 1990). But, as had been argued particularly by David Kozak, Kateri can also be seen as a figure meant to “edify from above”, that is as an embodied symbol of the official Church view of Native Americans and their place in the universal Church (Kozak 1994). In this view, the inter-tribal unity experienced by devotees is in fact Church-imposed homogeneity, and Catholic pan-Indianism becomes a kind of “imperialist nostalgia” which reintroduces previously persecuted beliefs thereby creating an avenue for the Church to mourn and in some way purify its actions of the past (Said 1993). According to Kozak, Kateri has emerged as a symbol of the Church hierarchy which has been invented, packaged, and promoted for American Indian consumption, and her “Indianness” is

nothing more than a composite of stereotypical characteristics of native peoples. Thus, Kozak argues, the historical diversity of Indian cultures is misrepresented and rendered invisible, and the “Kateri tradition”, seen as a missionary tool, is based on what *missionaries* think an Indian is, was, and continues to be (Kozak 1994).

To be sure, Kateri Tekakwitha emerged out of the colonial context. Her confessors wrote about her in the *Jesuit Relations* which were sent back to France to garner support for their mission work in the New World. For seventeenth century Frenchmen, Kateri, as the “exemplary savage saint”, was seen as “proof” of the missionaries’ success and therefore a justification for their presence in North America (Greer 1998, Koppedrayner 1993, Shoemaker 1995). The Tekakwitha Conference itself also began within a missionary context and it was only in 1977 that Native Americans were permitted to participate. Thus the researcher would be irresponsible to disregard the structures of domination and power within which Kateri and subsequent devotion to her originated. Nor should one underestimate the political dimension of saint-making and the purposes served by putting forth specific models of holiness in various historical periods (cf. Woodward 1990).

However, it is equally limiting to view Kateri primarily as a colonial invention and missionary tool. Contemporary post-colonial Native Catholicism can best be seen as a kind of “borderland” -- a zone of intersection where diverse histories and cultures meet (Rosaldo 1989). In this view, the Tekakwitha Conference, and devotion to Kateri generally, can be recognized as sites of “creative cultural production” in contradistinction to the understanding that indigenous “culture” and “tradition” decrease in direct proportion to the increase of Christianity among colonized or formerly colonized people (Rosaldo 1989). That is, in contrast to the argument put forth by Kozak, the “invention of tradition” which

has produced Catholic pan-Indianism can be seen as other than “inauthentic”. Kateri is not simply *marketed* by the Church as native “revitalization” (Kozak 1994), she is *experienced* as such. To assert that Kateri’s native devotees are more than passive recipients of a Church-invented, filtered down image of who they are as native peoples, one must take the grassroots discourse of “miraculous” Indian unity seriously. Thus Kateri is claimed, or perhaps reclaimed, as “own” by diverse native groups. Such ownership would seem to imply agency, and arguably involves the negotiation and creation of a new identity and place for Native Americans in the Catholic Church centered around the saintly figure of Kateri Tekakwitha.

### **Methodology**

My research in New Mexico employed qualitative ethnographic methods to access and understand the narratives that Pueblo women tell about Kateri Tekakwitha. Briefly, ethnographic fieldwork involves the direct observation of human actions and events in their natural setting. The key anthropological method of ethnographic fieldwork, participant-observation, requires direct participation in others’ daily lives in order to gain an intimate, insider’s or emic point of view in addition to an analytic or etic perspective (Bernard 1988, Geertz 1983, Peacock 1986, Sanjek 1990). Following Clifford’s reflections on ethnographic methodology, I hold that

‘Participant - observation’ serves as shorthand for a continuous tacking between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of events: on the one hand, grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts....Understood literally, participant - observation is a paradoxical, misleading formula, but it may be taken seriously if reformulated in

hermeneutic terms as a dialectic of experience and interpretation (Clifford 1988:34).

In this research, participant - observation has been supplemented by methods such as formal and informal interviewing and document analysis to increase analytic depth and test the validity of observer impressions. Ethnographic data is produced in the forms of field notes, journals, and interview transcriptions. This kind of qualitative data collection can offer a holistic view of social phenomena and a more nuanced portrait of complex human situations than quantitative social research. Ethnographies such as Robert Orsi's study of American Catholic women's devotion to St. Jude (1996) and Jeanette Rodriguez' research on the relationship between Our Lady of Guadalupe and Mexican-American women (1994) are based on this type of long-term involvement with saints' devotional communities.

With Orsi and Rodriguez, my own research and understanding of Kateri has been shaped primarily by the experiences and narratives of women. I did not set out to do "research on women", but several factors contributed to that outcome. First, quite simply, for the most part, devotion to Kateri is largely women's business. This is not to say that I did not meet or hear about men whose lives were radically changed by an encounter with her. However, those who attend Kateri Circle meetings regularly, plan and prepare for her feasts, tend, dress, adorn, and clean her statues, and tell her stories are primarily women (cf. Orsi 1996:xiii).

Moreover, the place that I came to hold in the communities of the Southwest centred on my own gender. It was "natural" for me to spend time talking to other women, and although I did speak to men, particularly priests, it was more difficult to arrange interviews with men. Men were less interested than women in talking to me, and there was an air of

potential inappropriateness around those encounters with men. Essentially, I associated with, lived with, cooked with, and talked with women and was invited and included in their networks.

**In Place, In Time: A Brief Introduction to Catholicism in the Native American Southwest**

This dissertation is a product of ten months of fieldwork between 1996 and 1998, during which I spent most of my time with the various Pueblo peoples, both on their reservations, particularly Isleta and Jemez, and in the urban center of Albuquerque.<sup>8</sup> I also interviewed people from the Mescalero Apache and Navajo reservations.<sup>9</sup> In many cases, the Kateri devotees whom I met were acquainted with each other through the regional and national Tekakwitha meetings. Many devotees also had family on various reservations and I followed these kinship lines wherever possible.

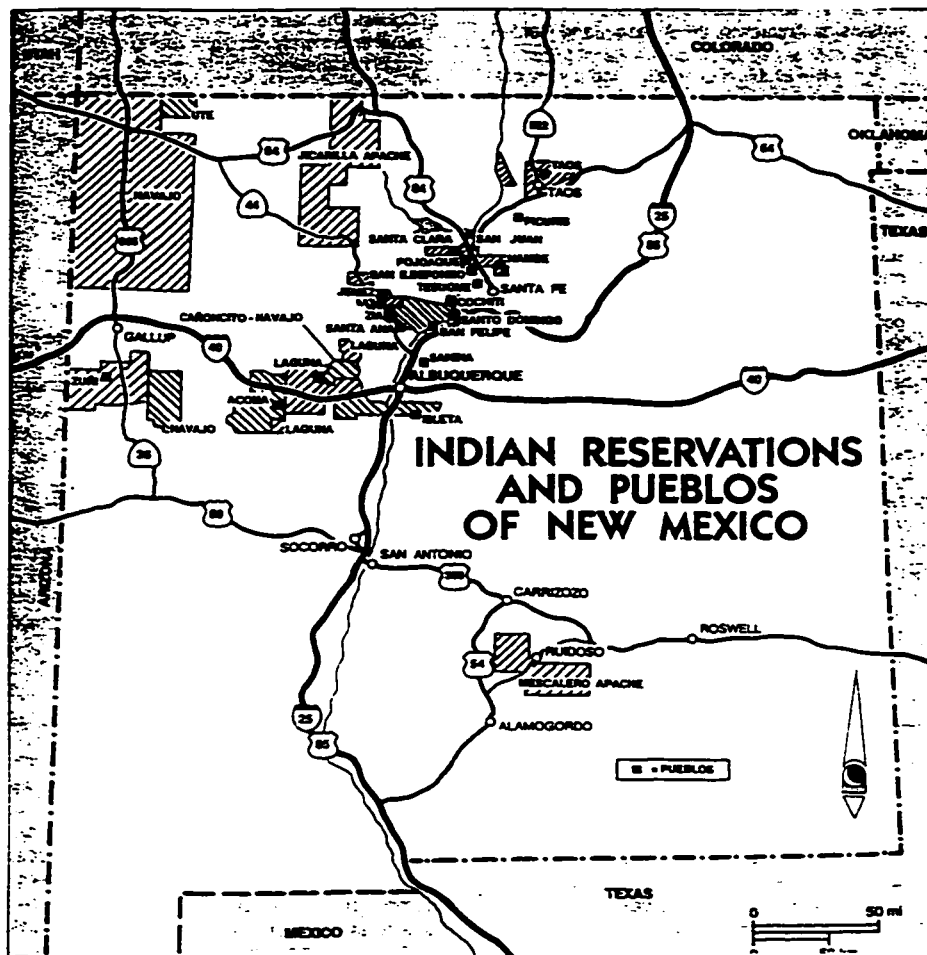
It is difficult and even undesirable to circumvent the area of one's research before arriving in the field. Before my extended fieldwork in New Mexico, I knew the kinds of places I wanted to go, the sorts of people I imagined interviewing, and I had a half a dozen good "contacts". But much of the forward motion and travelling in my research was prompted by an introduction or an invitation to another place or person. "Oh, you must go

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<sup>8</sup> There are nineteen Pueblos in New Mexico today, divided by language and geography. The Northern Pueblos are: Taos, Picuris, Nambe, Pojoaque, San Ildefonso, Tesuque, San Juan, and Santa Clara. Southern Pueblos include: Jemez, Cochiti, Sandia, San Felipe, Santa Ana, Santo Domingo, Zia, Isleta, Acoma, and Laguna. Finally, Zuni is located in western New Mexico and has its own administration. The Pueblos can also be classified by the language families: Tewa, Tiwa, Towa, and Keresan (Sando 1992: 6-7).

<sup>9</sup> I also conducted preliminary research and visited Kateri's shrines in Kahnawake, Quebec, and Auriesville and Fonda, New York.

see so and so who lives in such and such a place. She knows a lot about Kateri". And so I would travel, following links of friendship and family. Three weeks here, a month there, a few days here, and then back to where I had started. Geographically, my research stretched from north of Window Rock on the Navajo Nation, to just north of the Mexican border on the Mescalero Apache Reservation. I spent time in Laguna, Acoma, Jemez, Isleta, and San Juan Pueblos; Lukachukai and Fort Defiance, Arizona; Ruidoso and Mescalero; and Albuquerque, New Mexico.



(Metzger 1997:19)

A complete evocation of the historical, ecological and cultural background for devotion to Kateri in the American Southwest would require several volumes. Here, I have chosen to highlight a few issues particularly relevant to this work through the medium of two tellings of history, and then point the reader to the sources I have used.<sup>10</sup> In general, I am interested primarily in ethnohistory,

An approach [which] insists on taking seriously native theories of history as embedded in cosmology, in narratives, in rituals and ceremonies, and more generally, in native philosophy and worldviews. Implicit here is the assumption that events [and historical figures] may be recognized, defined, evaluated, and endowed with meaning differentially in different cultural traditions (Fogelson 1989:134, cf. Krech 1991:348-349).

In short, ethnohistory focusses on the perspectives of those who usually did not get to write the history books. What I look to highlight in this book are the pointed, personalized, and positioned retellings and memories of the past, including Kateri's life and the missionary encounter. For this reason, in sketching a landscape of the American Indian Southwest and providing some background on the people I encountered and the history of the Catholic Church among them, I seek to foreground multiple interpretations of historical events, rather than to gloss over their complexity through the presentation of a monological narrative.

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<sup>10</sup> I recommend in particular the works of Pueblo historian, Joe Sando. As he explains, his books are "an effort to fill a certain vacuum in Pueblo history. I feel also that the traditional Pueblo history should be revealed as the Pueblo Indians themselves know it" (Sando 1992:2). Dr. Sando also attends Queen of Angels Indian Chapel which houses the diocese's official shrine to Blessed Kateri. He plays the drum in the procession for Sunday masses at the Chapel.



New Mexico is a unique mix of Spanish, Native American, and “Anglo”<sup>11</sup> cultures. While there are certainly other active Christian denominations and other religious groups in the state<sup>12</sup>, both high Catholic baptismal rates and a kind of “cultural Catholicism” pervades most of the reservations. In short, Catholicism arrived with Columbus, and New Mexico has a five hundred year history of missionary and colonial experience. The Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, representing all nineteen Pueblos and operated under Pueblo Indian direction, is a large complex in Albuquerque. It houses a museum, gift shop, restaurant, exhibits, and has large grounds where the public can see various traditional Pueblo dances (Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 1988:4). In a book entitled, *Our Land, Our Culture, Our Story*, the author(s) claim that, “Here we are telling OUR story for the first time” (Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 1988:3). The Cultural Center recounts the story of “The Coming of the Foreigners” like this:

That the Spaniards were greedy for gold is unquestionable but, in addition to the quest for riches, the Spanish religious leaders sincerely believed it most important to convert and save the souls of our ancestors. In those days, people whose religion was not Christian were considered to be ‘heathen’. Hundreds were baptized during this period of conquest and conversion....The Spanish priests insisted that the Spanish government must ensure the well-being of all the Christianized Indians in New Mexico; colonization of the area was one way to provide this protection. So in 1598, Don Juan de Onate led an expedition to New

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<sup>11</sup> Most of the Native Americans I interviewed in the Southwest referred to Caucasian people as “Anglos”, emphasizing, I believe, the difference in language (i.e. not Spanish or indigenous language speakers), rather than skin colour.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Szasz et al (1997) for a detailed overview of the multiple religious communities and expressions in New Mexico.

Mexico to install a colony of Spaniards and establish permanent missions for the Christian Indian [sic].

During this time, our people suffered many wrongs.... The priests set up a system of overall religious control. If compliance to church rules was not forthcoming, our people were whipped or otherwise punished.... The rough treatment of the Pueblo peoples by the Spanish government and the Church lasted until 1680 when for the first time our people joined together against the foreigners. In 1692 Don Diego de Vargas led an expedition into New Mexico to see if reconquest was possible.... The main purpose of Vargas' reconquest was to establish a permanent colony in New Mexico for the Spanish Crown and to provide the 'Christian Indians' with priests to provide for what they felt were the spiritual needs" (Indian Pueblo Cultural Center 1988:15-19).

Joe Sando, a Pueblo historian from Jemez and active Catholic, explains the colonial encounter and its aftermath in the following terms:

In the Pueblo Indian world, the *conquistadors* thought that the discoveries of Columbus meant a perpetuation of traditions established during the medieval Crusades and during the reconquest of Spain from the Moors of North Africa. Such traditions included the practices of *encomienda* and *repartimiento*, which the Spaniards tried on the Pueblo Indians. These practices, along with the attempt to suppress native religious traditions, resulted in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, when the Spaniards were evicted from Pueblo country for twelve years.

When the Spaniards returned, their attitude had changed, the Pueblos were able to retain a major part of their religion and language due to increased tolerance. The other tribes of New Mexico, the Apaches and the Navajos, also benefitted -- a

fact revealed by census reports, which showed that the three tribes of New Mexico had retained their languages and their religion more completely than tribes from other states that had been settled by the English and French.

Another phenomenon that developed with the return of the Spaniards was the unity between the Pueblo Indians and the Spaniards; they formed an alliance to fight against other raiding Indian tribes.... Thus the Spanish eventually became compassionate *compadres*; and the shared culture of the Pueblos and Spanish ultimately became the basis for New Mexican culture as we know it today (Sando 1992: 165-166).

The year I conducted my most extensive research, 1998, marked the 400th anniversary, or Quatro Centennial of Catholicism in New Mexico. In a pastoral letter that bears the title of the Quatro Centennial theme, "Seeds of Struggle, Harvest of Faith", the Archbishop of Santa Fe, Michael Sheehan, tells the story this way:

If the Spaniards came to New Mexico thinking that they were going to introduce the native people to the divine, they were mistaken.... In all, their spirituality was a rich one, similar to the revelation given the people of Israel. The Indians' 'Old Testament' was waiting for fulfilment in the Redeemer of all humankind. Their hearts provided a receptive soil for the seeds of the Gospel.

An encounter between two vastly different people will inevitably result in bringing out the best and worst of both. This was true in New Mexico as the Spanish and Indians first faced each other four centuries ago. The Spanish felt that they had to make the Indians copies of themselves in order to make them good Christians. Naturally, the Indians resented this, and in their rejection of the 'Europeanization,' some rejected the evangelization efforts as well. This resulted in

a very sad chapter in New Mexico's history, as the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 pitted one group of God's children against another.

There was eventually a reconciliation in 1692. As the old Spanish proverb says, *No hay mal de que por bien no venga*. (There is no evil from which good cannot come.) This was true of the understanding reached between the two peoples after they agreed to peacefully coexist. The Spanish returned with a greater humility, still intent on preaching the Gospel, but seeking to do so in a way that respectfully took into account all that was good and holy in the native beliefs. The Indians, for their part, realized that they could not turn the clock back and that much of what the Spanish brought was beneficial, including the Catholic faith whose ritual and symbolism were similar to their beliefs and practices (Sheehan 1998).

There are still other interpretations of this historical encounter, characterized by other flavours and other meanings. The Cultural Center claims to tell "our story" as representative of all nineteen Pueblos. In this account, the Church and the Spanish are painted as colonizing foreigners with little religious tolerance. A highly respected scholar of Pueblo history, employee of the Cultural Center, and active in the local Catholic Church, Sando tells, he claims, "the Pueblo Indian side". His version is less harsh, and he asserts that the Pueblo people were "able to retain a major part of their religion and language" and the Spanish "eventually became compassionate *compadres*". The Archbishop's version gives "the Church side". The official version is clearly part of the post-Vatican II '*mea culpa*' discourse of missionization (cf. Shapiro 1987). It makes a concerted effort to apologize for the "sad chapters" and affirms the value of indigenous religion. But these accounts are not merely alternatives and the questions of history must necessarily be answered in the inclusive. I quote these passages at length to impress upon the reader that

even , or perhaps especially, that which seems locked and certain as “history” is itself fluid, diverse and open for interpretation (cf. Clifford 1997). Perhaps most importantly, I juxtapose these three accounts less to show their divergence than to suggest to the reader that the individuals I interviewed live in both worlds, in both histories -- the “Church’s” and the “people’s”. These histories, these truths, are not mutually exclusive, but rather they illustrate the multifaceted nature of belief and daily life for the people in this book.

### **“Oh the Places You’ll Go!”: Reflections on a Multi-Sited Ethnography**

Congratulations! Today is your day. You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away! You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You’re on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who’ll decide where to go. You’ll look up and down streets. Look them over with care. About some you will say, “I don’t choose to go there.” With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet, you’re too smart to go down any not-so-good street. And you may not find *any* you’ll want to go down. In that case, of course, you’ll head straight out of town.... Out there things can happen and frequently do to people as brainy and footsy as you. And when things start to happen, don’t worry. Don’t stew. Just go right along. *You’ll* start happening too. OH! THE PLACES YOU’LL GO! You’ll be on your way up! You’ll be seeing great sights! You’ll join the high fliers who soar to high heights.... Except when you *don’t*. Because sometimes you *won’t*. I’m sorry to say so but, sadly, it’s true that Bang-ups and Hang-ups *can* happen to you.... And when you’re in a Slump, you’re not in for much fun. Un-slumping yourself is not easily done.... You will come to a place where the streets are not marked. Some

windows are lighted. But mostly they're darked. A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin! Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?... You can get so confused that you'll start in to race, down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace, and grind on for mile across weirdish wild space, headed, I fear, toward a most useless place. The Waiting Place....NO! That's not for you! Somehow you'll escape all that waiting and staying. You'll find the bright places where Boom Bands are playing....Except when they don't. Because, sometimes, they won't. I'm afraid that *some* times you'll play lonely games too.....And when you're alone, there's a very good chance you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some, down the road between hither and yon, that can scare you so much you won't want to go on.... On and on you will hike and I know you'll hike far, and face up to your problems whatever they are.....You'll get mixed up, of course, as you already know. You'll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go....So...you're off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So...*get on your way!*" (Seuss 1990).

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Dr. Seuss takes his young readers on a wild ride -- through curiosity, loneliness, fear, frenzy, triumph, confusion, worry, and boredom. Similarly, all these emotions are integral parts of the fieldwork process. It is above all a journey, a roller coaster, full of ups and downs, adventures and disappointments. Through it all, Dr. Seuss's "you" is directing the journey, steering the motion in response to and recoil from what is happening around. But in my research, the field process, the methodology, the "how to" of anthropology, is not only characterized by motion, but also by multi-sitedness. Fieldwork took me, rhythmically, sporadically, suddenly, to *places*, not to a single "field", but to

multiple locations, time periods, sources, resources, and people. The following is an exploration of this journey, the literal ins and outs of the field, and its changing locations and borders.

### **Ins and Outs: Entrance and Exit Stories**

There is a long history in anthropology of recounting stories about entering and leaving the field (Firth 1936, Geertz 1973, Narayan 1989). Traditionally, the entrance stories tell of how the anthropologist was a confused, lost outsider until an event or encounter precipitated her sudden acceptance. Consider Geertz' account of his arrival in Bali, "malarial and diffident" (Geertz 1973:412). He and his wife move from being "gusts of wind", to become "covillagers". As Geertz describes it, "No longer invisible, we were suddenly the center of all attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and most especially, amusement" after attending an illegal cockfight and being chased off by policemen with the rest of the spectators (Geertz 1973: 415-416). Consider also Firth's early account of his arrival in "primitive Polynesia" to study the Tikopia. He moves from "wondering how such turbulent human material could ever be induced to submit to scientific study" to wading ashore "hand in hand with our hosts, like children at a party, exchanging smiles in lieu of anything more intelligible or tangible at the moment" (Firth 1936:1-2).

My own arrival was neither so stark, nor so alien; my acceptance by the people I knew in New Mexico was predetermined, or at least primed, by my prior visits. I had been to New Mexico on two previous occasions: first to attend the 57th Annual Tekakwitha Conference in Albuquerque in August, 1996; and then June, 1997, when I returned to walk to one hundred mile Pilgrimage for Vocations from Albuquerque to Chimayo with some of

the Pueblo women I had met the year before. During both of these preliminary trips, I made contacts, met people who knew others who I might interview, and looked into possibilities of places to stay and places to travel to. Between my visits, I kept in touch with my core group of women friends through letters and phone calls.

In January of 1998, my partner, Bill and I drove to New Mexico from southern Ontario to New Mexico. We took a week getting there, crossing the border in Detroit, and driving through Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas and into New Mexico at its northeast corner. I recount my own story to illustrate the complexity of getting “into the field”. This was no arrival on a lone desert island, duffel bag and recorder in hand, searching the beaches for the first informant. On this, my big research trip, I got stuck at the United States border, the fault of my own lack of preparation and naivete. I take the reader with me on this road trip, through the frustration and breakthroughs, so that we may arrive in New Mexico together:

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It was early evening and Bill and I had settled in a hotel on the Canadian side of the border. I had had a drink, dinner and a soak in the hot tub and was barely digesting the humiliation of the having been turned back from the American border. A white slip of paper in hand, with “Alien listed below, Paula E. Holmes” written at the top, and below my name it was stamped REJECTED, I had been denied entrance into the United States. My challenger that day was a leaning and dishevelled woman, surrounded by her surly and humourless coworkers in the U.S. immigration office. No smiles were cracked and there seemed to me to be not much room for reasoning or even a good story. I had said that I was bound for New Mexico to study devotional narratives concerning one Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. There was no recognition and what followed seemed like hours of mutual



incomprehension. “She only needs *one* more miracle to become the first Native American saint!” Bill had said urgently to the agent, his face as blanched and disbelieving and angry as mine. She furrowed her brow. She burrowed into our car, my keys, passport, drivers licence, birth certificate, letter from my home university in hand, looking for something. “Why don’t you just do your research in Canada?”, she suggested slyly. I felt caught. After all, I *had* insisted just a few minutes before that the research I wanted to conduct was voluntary. ‘No’, I had said, “I don’t *have* to do my doctoral dissertation on Kateri”.

I was deemed to be an illegal alien and sent back to Canada. As we crossed the border back into home, I was fighting back the tears. The officer waved us out of the gate, withholding my documents until my overloaded old car was pointing north. I was furious and frustrated, biting my tongue and biding my time until I got to the other side. When we reached the Canadian guard, I handed him my alien status note. “Don’t worry, Paula”, he said warmly. “You just pull on up into the Canadian customs, get the fax number from the boys in there, use the pay phone and get yourself all set up to try again”.

I called my dissertation supervisor. “It’ll be O.K.,” she reassured me, “I’ll fax you a letter saying that your proposal has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the university. Don’t worry. This will all end up in your reflexive chapter”. “That’s right!”, I thought. This story would end up in some chapter called “Border Crossings: The Making of an International Saint”. I would write something that combined my own adventures with Kateri’s “flight” to Canada as a place of freedom. Already, I was translating experience into text, fashioning a tale of arrival, denial, and success.

Next, I called the priests I had met the previous years and in whose parishes I planned to interview first. Fr. Peter from Albuquerque teased, “I don’t know Paula, should I claim you?” Fr. John from Jemez Pueblo commiserated with me. “Oh Paula, I

am *so* sorry. I can't believe those guards. They even hassled *me*. I apologize for them. Of course, I will send a letter to you right away. But I won't be able to fax it until tomorrow morning. The only fax machine in the Pueblo is at the school". They both promised to send faxes on official looking letterhead to the hotel the next morning stating that they knew my identity and my research plans.

The next morning, we tried to cross the border again. Again, we were asked to pull over and were ushered into the dingy immigration office where a range of people from some startled Hutterites to tough cowboys also awaited permission to be let into the country. The day had started with a laugh, contemplating the implications of a particular sentence the letter Fr. John had faxed to the hotel from the Pueblo's school. It read as follows.

This letter is to serve as an official notification that Ms. Paula Holmes, presently travelling with Mr. Bill Rodman (He made us sound like fugitives!), has been invited, and is most welcomed to come to Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico, U.S.A. for the expressed purpose of completing research work on Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. This research is to be used for the *copulation* of her doctoral dissertation. We are most excited about welcoming Ms. Paula Holmes to our community....

"Oh, *no!*", I gasped. I just simply *couldn't* have given that letter to the border guards. I folded the fax and hid it away in my purse. The other three letters the hotel received for me that morning would have to do.

There we were in the immigration office again, subject to what felt like more humiliation and interrogation. From across the room, one agent yelled out, "Hey! Aren't you the girl who tried to cross yesterday?!" "Yes", I whispered, looking down at my shoes. "That was me, but I have all the documentation now", I offered meekly. The agent

questioned Bill about any criminal past. “Not even a speeding ticket?” She asked about our relationship. “You live together, or married or what?” I watched my feet some more.

Finally, after a long examination of my passport and letters, an agent came up to me and said, “OK, we can let you in *this* time”. For a fee of six dollars (*American* money that is. A sign above the desk said, “U.S. Immigrations does not accept Canadian money”), she stamped my passport with a six month permit. I thanked her, so relieved, and chided myself for my lack of preparation. The permit was for several months less than I intended to stay, but I told myself that I would worry about that later. Said one particularly unfriendly woman, “I don’t see why you would need any more than that anyway to do *research*”.

Five days later and fifteen miles from the New Mexico state line, flat, windy and tumbleweedy Texas suddenly changed into New Mexico. The West turned into the Southwest, complete with red earth, mesas, and windswept sagebushes . The drawl disappeared. Only the wind crossed over. Just across the state line, we stopped at a New Mexico Welcome and Information Center. As we got out of the car, we were rocked by the wind and powdered in red dust. A friendly and diminutive woman with a soft furrowed face wearing a ribbon shirt native to Pueblo feast days handed us maps and brochures and warned us about the storm approaching the Four Corners area later today. As we left she called out, “Better put rocks in your pockets!”. “So we won’t blow away?”, I guessed. “That’s right!” she chuckled, “Enjoy your stay in New Mexico!”

This was just the first arrival. I had to gain entrance and acceptance in each of the Pueblos and reservations and groups I visited. I needed to form an identity. This happened sometimes when a woman I had interviewed would introduce me to a family member or friend who was also involved with Kateri. I was often introduced, “This is

Paula from Canada, and she is writing a book on Kateri". Other times, I gained an opportunity for an interview by trying to situate myself in the interviewees' social networks. To do this, I would recount my visits with friends, family members and priests whom I knew they would know. The first days anywhere were lonely, difficult, seemingly contrived as I "arranged interviews" in order to gain access to the stories people told about Kateri. I was turned down, postponed, put on hold, welcomed, and invited in, in no particular order.

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Leaving the field is another story. This transition is less often recounted and when it is, if the anthropologist has been "successful", fond farewells and the sadness and expectations of leaving home are the norm (Behar 1993, Narayan 1989). Promises and speeches of thanks and responsibility are made, and these are included in the writing to illustrate how well the anthropologist has completed her task. But more often in the last pages of a monograph, when the summing-up pronouncements and analyses are made, it is understood that these paragraphs constitute the end of the story. The anthropologist arrives, is accepted, collects data, develops relationships, and when the grant money or the school year runs out, she returns home, to her desk and computer, with only a few Christmas cards and promises to return on future research grants to connect her back to the field. Ethnographies, for the most part, end with analysis and not with an exit.

Nonetheless leaving is hard, and more importantly, it is relevant to the ethnographic endeavour. In my last few days in New Mexico, I at once found myself searching for those last experiences, sound bites, or memories that would sum up what my research had been about. At the same time, I was anxious to get home; I felt satiated and homesick. On my last day, New Mexico gave me one its sparkling blue mornings. That morning I

discovered that the man in whose home I was house-sitting while he travelled in Mexico had left Sarah Brightman's "Time to Say Goodbye" in his stereo. I put on track one, the title song, and with the earliest sunlight filtering through the windows, I couldn't keep the tears from forming in my eyes. These are some of the words I would play over and over in my car during the long drive home:

Time to say goodbye  
 Places that I've never seen or  
 experienced with you  
 now I shall  
 I'll sail with you  
 upon ships across the seas  
 seas that exist no more  
 I'll revive them with you

When you're far away  
 I dream of the horizon  
 and words fail me  
 and of course, I know that you're with me, with me

I was leaving with the knowledge of being forever changed by and connected with the people I had lived with during fieldwork. I knew that I would have a responsibility to revive, and recreate them with honesty and honour when I returned home and began to write. Knowing that words *would* fail me, would not do justice to those relationships and experiences; wanting to write without sentimentality, but with feeling and evoking emotion in my readers; wanting to co-author, give voice, as well as contribute brilliant analysis, and significant insights -- all these goals were located on the horizon just ahead of me in the journey home.

### **The Multi-Sited Field: Doing Research All Over the Place**

"Before ever [s]he attempts to say what a given religious system does or does not reflect, the anthropologist must soak [her]self thoroughly in the every day preoccupations

of the believers themselves” (Horton in Orsi 1985:xx-xxi). The anthropologist goes to “the field” to do this, this soaking. I have been discussing “the field” largely in the singular and in many ways, it was: New Mexico in general, and specific towns, cities, and reservations in particular. However, historical sources, library research, brochures published by Kateri’s shrines, interviews, the landscape, the interactions, the experiences, these are all components of the “field”, understood as the source and place of ethnographic research. “Indeed, as Clifford notes, in the contemporary world, with its complex political and historical relations, ‘ the field becomes more and more evidently an ideal construct’ (Clifford 1990:64)” (Dubisch 1995:7). It is exceedingly difficult to draw boundaries around “the field” (Dubisch 1995:7). This book, although stemming from fieldwork done at particular places, is less concerned with those places than with Kateri Tekakwitha, Native American Catholics, inculturation, Indian identity, and devotional narratives about a saint.

In the context of ethnography that is informed by postmodernism, it is useful to view “the field” as both a methodological ideal and a concrete place of professional activity (Clifford 1997:21). Writing about Karen McCarthy Brown’s study of a vodou priestess in Brooklyn, Clifford states,

Brown’s ethnography is situated less by a discrete place, a field she enters and inhabits for a time, than by an interpersonal relationship -- a mixture of observation, dialogue, apprenticeship, and friendship -- with Alourdes. With this relationship as its center, a cultural world of individuals, places, memories, and practices is evoked (Clifford 1997:56).

Multi-sitedness allows for evocation and tracking, tacking, travel, and transfer; it allows for the study of what Thomas Tweed calls “transtemporal and translocative symbols” (Tweed

1997:10). This approach also emphasizes that “the facts do not speak for themselves; they are emplotted rather than collected, produced in worldly relationships rather than observed in controlled environments” (Clifford 1997:67)

Marcus and Fisher were early proponents of this approach:

With the inclusion of the interpretive perspective on local and regional cultures, such studies might be moving in a more experimental direction that would operate on two levels simultaneously, one that would provide culturally motivated views of what goes on within connected locales, and one that would provide an account of the system which connects them. It should be noted that the realization of multilocal ethnographic texts, of even regional analysis as it now exists, may entail a novel kind of fieldwork. Rather than being situated in one, or perhaps two communities for the entire period of research, the fieldworker must be mobile, covering a network of sites that encompasses a process, which is in fact the object of the study (Marcus and Fisher 1986: 94).

This last sentence is key: *“a network of sites that encompass a process, which is...the object of study.”* In my own research it is the saint who is ultimately the object of study. I trace the circles and lines of meaning, migration, emotion, and experience drawn to and from Kateri. Travel, following routes, is essential to this process of multi-sited ethnography (cf. Clifford 1997).

Referring to Marcus and Fisher’s 1986 work, Clifford says that “innovative forms of multi-locale ethnography will be necessary to do justice to transnational political, economic, and cultural forces that traverse and constitute local or regional worlds” (Clifford 1997:27). He argues for an anthropology focused on shifting locations rather than bounded fields, and further, that this notion of shifting locations suggests that some taking

of distance and translating differences will be part of the research, analysis, and writing, some tacking between cultural spaces (Clifford 1997: 86).

Multi-sited fieldwork is not without its problems and critics. Although multi-locale ethnography (Marcus and Fisher, 1986) is increasingly familiar; multi-locale *fieldwork* is an oxymoron. How many sites can be studied intensively before criteria of “depth” are compromised” (Clifford 1997:57)? Understandably, there are methodological anxieties about multi-sited ethnographies. Does it attenuate the kinds of knowledge and competencies that are expected from fieldwork? Marcus replies that while “Indeed, something of the mystique and reality of conventional fieldwork is lost in the move toward multi-sited ethnography....., what is not lost but remains essential to multi-sited research is the function of translation from one cultural idiom or language to another” (Marcus 1995:99-100). Such translation, reimagination, and translocation are key to this study of Kateri.

Marcus (1995, 1998) has set out a map for what this emerging methodological trend of multi-sitedness might look like. His work

Surveys an emergent methodological trend in anthropological research that concerns the adaptation of long-standing modes of ethnographic practices to more complex objects of study. Ethnography moves from its conventional single-site location...to multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies such as the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ (Marcus 1995:95).

Further, this new approach

Moves out from single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space. This mode defines for itself an object of study that



cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focussed on a single site of intensive investigation. It develops instead a strategy or design of research that acknowledges macrotheoretical concepts and narratives of the world system but does not rely on them for the contextual architecture framing a set of subjects.... Empirically following the thread of cultural process itself impels the move toward multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus 1995:96, 97).

Similarly, Kateri is multiply located. She may be found in the documents, letters, and historical understandings of seventeenth century New France, in the Vatican’s boardrooms and the Pope’s private quarters. Kateri is encapsulated in statues in contemporary Pueblo churches, carried in pockets and purses and frozen on technicolour prayer cards. She lingers in experience, in narrative, in visions. She is generations old and last night’s dream. She is the miracle-maker of past, present, and expected future. Kateri migrates across space and time, leaving footsteps and memories. Although I have chosen to study her in several particular locations, I realize how fundamentally she moves beyond these.

How is this travel -- both mine and Kateri’s -- mapped out? How is ethnographic methodology constructed as soon as it is dislocated from one position? How does one track the chains, paths, threads, conjunctions and juxtapositions that orbit around the subject? Marcus suggests some possibilities, and I see my own research as a combination of such paths. Briefly, Marcus states that the researcher can “follow the people, the exchange or circulation of objects or the extension in space of particular cultural complexes such as ritual cycles and pilgrimages may be rationales for such ethnography”. Or one can “follow the thing, for example, intellectual property”; or “follow the metaphor. When the thing traced is within the realm of discourse and modes of thought, then the circulation of

signs, symbols, and metaphors guides the design of the ethnography”. In addition, one can “follow the plot, story, allegory, social memory -- there are stories or narratives....that might themselves serve as an heuristic for the fieldworker constructing multi-sited ethnographic research”. As well, one can “follow the life or biography, life history...the use of biographical narrative as a means of designing multi-sited research rarely has been considered”. Marcus’ last option is to have the ethnographer “follow the conflict” (Marcus 1995:106 - 110). All of these processes involve a kind of “translative mapping” (Marcus 1995:114), a cross-cultural and multi-sited framework of social phenomenon.

In this work, I have chosen to follow “Kateri’s people”, a group of Native Americans who define themselves as her followers. I also follow the creation and adaptation of Kateri as a symbol and metaphor for Indianness. I follow her story, its retelling, and the conflicts that ensue from this story. And finally, I follow her life, detailing her multiple biographies, and imagining with my informants her future in the Catholic Church. Kateri is in brief, a complex site of cultural production. She encapsulates, typifies, and crosses borders laid out between “Indian” and Catholic”. The missionary encounter, the making of a near-saint, her place in history: all these subjects can be seen as “cultural border zones” where translation, translocation, and transtemporality are definitive. These moments and events are no longer frozen for inspection, but always in motion, akin to travel, and demanding movement and multi-sitedness of the researcher (cf. Rosaldo 1989:217).

### **Format: Blueprint of an Orchestra**

*We lack the language to articulate what takes place when we are in fact at work. There seems to be a genre missing (Geertz 1995:44; Behar 1996:6-7).*

How can I write in a way that gives honour and is honest to the experiences I shared, the prayers I overheard, the conversations in which I participated, and the stories I was told? What is an appropriate genre for the representation of such complexity? What arrangement? What format? How does one clearly and appealingly articulate what in fact happens when an ethnographer is “at work”? In an effort to achieve that end, this dissertation is explicitly multi-vocal as well as multi-local. I have tried to create a polyphonic event, with myself as the inevitable conductor, orchestrating tone and tune. In many ways, this dissertation falls into the class of experimental ethnographies, together with those of Behar (1993), Dubisch (1995), Danforth (1989), and Narayan (1989). It is a mixed genre text, using different styles and tones of writing, from the academic treatise, to that of the personal journal. However, through all of these genres, the “I” of the anthropologist wanders freely throughout the ethnographic narrative (Dubisch 1995:5). Further, this work is positioned and seeks to highlight the ethnographic encounter, the conversations that happened in and out of the field (Dubisch 1995:5). Finally, this work is self-consciously crafted and fashioned. I have chosen to foreground the textuality and literary nature of the final product, rather than obscure it as seemingly “magical” (James, Hockey and Dawson 1997:10-11).

My research is presented as an eclectic collage, purposefully disjointed and indeterminate at points to evoke a complex whole rather than a simple summation of a subject (Dubisch 1995:4). With Rapport, I hold that “to adopt an eclecticism of narrational style... is to free one’s account from an obsessional ...combat between battling singularities. And only in such eclecticism -- the location of human behaviour in more than one frame of reference at once; locating such (often mutually exclusive) frames of reference in conversation with one another -- can one escape the notion that, ultimately, epistemic

diversity can and should be ‘resolved’” (Rapport in James, Hockey and Dawson 1997:183-184)

Like Danforth, “I have tried to construct a ‘mixed-genre text’ in which I move back and forth among several narrative voices” (Danforth 1989:8). These voices “form a kind of ethnographic collage that complicates even further the narrative structure of the text” (Danforth 1989:9). Yet “the purpose of my collage is not to blur, but rather to juxtapose, distinct forms of evocation and analysis. The method of collage asserts a relationship among heterogenous elements in a meaningful ensemble” (Clifford 1997:12).

I hope that I have been able to present a coherent overall picture, that I have woven a tapestry that is meaningful to a wide range of readers and scholars. Yet I also hope that this picture is not too coherent, nor that it lends itself too quickly to interpretation. As Behar says of her ethnographic life history of Esperenza, a Mexican peasant woman:

I hope I’ve made her life in this book too big for easy consumption....In my multiple roles as priest, interviewer, collector, transcriber, translator, analyst, academic connoisseur, editor and peddler of Esperenza’s words on this side of the border, I have had to cut, cut, and cut away at our talk to make it fit between the covers of a book, and even more important, to make it recognizable as a story....As I undid necklaces of words and restrung them, as I dressed up hours of rambling talk in elegant sentences and paragraphs of prose, as I snipped at the flow of talk, stopping it sometimes for dramatic emphasis long before it really had stopped, I no longer knew where I stood on the border between fiction and nonfiction” (Behar 1993:xii, 12, 16).

Like Behar, I can only hope that the cuts I have made are not wounds, and the fiction that I have created in this ethnography of Kateri and her people rings a faint recognition and truth

to those whose stories I have tried to tell.

I invite the reader to follow me as I move between the seventeenth century and today, along missionary trails, through a grandmother's generation, into churches, community centers, adobe homes and trailers in reservations and urban centres of the American Southwest. I ask that the reader comes with me as I trace the lines and curves of devotion and Catholic Pueblo life; and that she allows herself to be drawn into an account of a group of people I hope I have "thickly" evoked (cf. Geertz 1973).

### **Other Experimental Ethnographies; Precedents for This Approach**

In my experimentation with the format, presentation, and style of this work, I take my cues from a group of well known ethnographies, all of which deal explicitly with religious communities, practices and symbols. These include Tweed (1997), Orsi (1985, 1996), Rodriguez (1994), Narayan (1989), Danforth (1989), and Dubisch (1995). All of these ethnographies are the product of participant-observation in religious communities, and combine anthropological and historical approaches.

Thomas Tweed's *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (1997) deals with the formation of collective identity centred around a supernatural figure, specifically the Cuban Our Lady of Charity. He argues that "exiles struggle over the meaning of symbols, but almost all Cuban American visitors to the shrine in Miami see it as a place to express diasporic nationalism, to make sense of themselves as a displaced people" (Tweed 1997:10). Tweed explores both the contested and the shared meanings of translocative and transtemporal symbols, particularly as manifest in devotion to Our Lady writes with an awareness of himself as a positioned researcher (Tweed 1997:12).

Robert Orsi is a leading scholar in the area of folk Catholicism and popular devotion. His two main works, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (1985) and *Thank You St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (1996) each deal with a community's relationship to a saintly figure: the Virgin in the first case, and St. Jude in the second. As he explains, his earlier book is, "a study of religion in the streets", which tells the story of devotion to the Madonna of Mount Carmel on East 115th Street in New York City. This devotion flourished among Italian immigrants and their American born or raised children (Orsi 1985:xiii). Orsi is interested in the ways in which religious symbols and rituals take on many meanings in the dense contexts of immigrant neighbourhoods (Orsi 1985:xix). He seeks to contribute to the understanding of Catholicism, and also to create a social history of a religious symbol, the Madonna of 115th Street (Orsi 1985:xxi,xxii).

In his monograph on St. Jude, Orsi examines the prayers that American Catholic women make to the saint in situations they identify as hopeless. Again Orsi focusses on immigrant communities and their negotiations with a saint. It is Orsi's emphasis on narrative -- "stories within stories all organized around and oriented toward St. Jude" -- that I find most useful as a model for my own work on Kateri (Orsi 1997:xviii).

In *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (1994), Jeanette Rodriguez also focusses on the stories women tell about the Virgin and the formation of identity embedded in those tales. Through the women's stories, Rodriguez looks to redirect understandings of our Lady of Guadalupe from those that see Guadalupe as a Marian image to support and encourage passivity in women and thus an instrument of patriarchal oppression and control, to those that view her as a source of political activism and hence a source of empowerment (Rodriguez 1994:xviii,xxi). Like

Tweed and Orsi, Rodriguez organizes her research around the themes of identity, religious symbols, and narrative devotion.

Kirin Narayan's *Saints, Storytellers, and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching* (1989), explores folk narrative as a dominant medium for the expression of Hindu insights. The main "character" or case study in the ethnography is a holy man that Narayan generically names Swamiji. The book weaves together a sample of the stories Swamiji tells, his own comments on his storytelling, Narayan's accounts of fieldwork, and Swamiji's listeners' interpretations; combining these themes with contextual background on the networks of Indian narrative, the Hindu ascetic tradition, and the issue of narrative as a form of understanding (Narayan 1989: 5-6).

Methodologically, Narayan takes what she calls a "theoretical tool box approach" which avoids, she says, "flatness in presentation or a simplification of issues into a single theoretical cast" (Narayan 1989: 7). Among these "tools" is a firm positioning of the ethnographer in the research setting. Not only does Narayan present her own background as relevant to the study, and take into consideration everything from her physical characteristics, gender, dress, and family's reaction to her work, but she speaks to the wider issues of shifting identification and the Self/Other paradox. Another key "tool" Narayan uses is multivocality, and she clearly states her reluctance to blur single voices into a generalized one. Multivocality is manifest in several ways in her text, through the admission that her knowledge is partial and through her attempts to share interpretive authority with both Swamiji and his listeners. Narayan also comments on the difficulty of orchestrating polyphony and observes that while multivocality may function as an ideal, there remains a need to select and arrange the voices according to themes discerned by the ethnographer (Narayan 1989:5-6, cf. Geertz 1988)

In *Firewalking and Religious Healing: The Anastenaria of Greece and the American Firewalking Movement* (1989), Danforth sets out to interpret the Anastenaria -- a northern Greek ritual in which people who are possessed by St. Constantine walk on burning coals. Firewalking functions as ritual therapy, a process of transformation and empowerment through which people are metaphorically moved from a state of illness to a state of health.

Danforth also aims to integrate a reflexive understanding of himself with a more traditional type of ethnography. In the effort to create a multivocal text, Danforth incorporates the “voices” of his informants/subjects. One of the “characters” we meet is Danforth himself - “the anthropologist who didn’t believe”. He recounts his discomfort, his fear, his anger, his hopes, and his guilt. Not only is the reader told “what happened” to the observed, but also “what happened” to the observer, and the frustrations, biases, and shortcomings of fieldwork he experienced. This multivocality results in a complicated narrative structure which oscillates between interpretation and an ethnographic collage of stories, newspaper articles, dreams, advertising posters, publicity brochures, and photographs.

Jill Dubisch’s work on pilgrimage *In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender, and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine* (1995), has also been a model for my own text on Kateri. Dubisch writes explicitly about “self-conscious experimentation and necessary uncertainty” in dealing with new ethnographic forms. Highly aware of her position as a researcher, Dubisch uses the pilgrimage site that is the focus of her study to serve as a

Means for exploring a number of topics -- including religion, gender, performance, and the nature of Greekness - as well as a means of examining issues of anthropological fieldwork, reflexivity, the nature of anthropological writing, and



intimately connected to all of these, issues of being both a woman and an anthropologist (Dubisch 1995:8).

All of these ethnographies have had key methodological and thematic influence on my own work. Like the scholars who produced these texts, I am interested in religious symbols, devotional communities, popular religion, saints and other divine beings, identity formation and religious narrative. I also share their methodological concerns to foreground the ethnographic experience, writing process, and position of the researcher; and to incorporate experimental formats, reflexivity, and multivocality into ethnographic accounts. I seek to highlight these issues in the particular case of Kateri Tekakwitha and her Native American devotees in the American Southwest. However, I see my work as more than just an exploration of ethnographic methodology informed by postmodernism in a new test case. Kateri's situation is unique, and studying her, tracing her through time and space, inevitably leads to unique questions. In particular, I am interested in the saint-making process that occurs both at the "popular" and "official" levels and with the interaction between these levels. I focus on the concepts of embodied ethnohistory and narrative theology as "symbol tales". I emphasize the concept of "Indianness" as an identity at times both prescribed and proscribed by the Catholic Church. As well, I explore the issues of tradition, adaptation, and inculturation from mission history to contemporary religious identity. Finally, I highlight the nature of "miracle discourse" as it relates to the lives of Kateri and her people. While I am indebted to many models that have helped me to organize and express my ideas, I hope that this work is comprehensive, comprehensible and original.

### **Influences and Interests: The Making of the Anthropologist**

It is necessary to explore the impetuses for and arenas of this book. In short, I focus on the issues of saint-making, folk Catholicism, narrative devotion, and postconciliar theology within a broad framework of interpretive anthropology. In the preceding section, I have referred to some of the key ethnographies that influenced my work. In the following paragraphs, I provide background on each of the key interpretive frames I employ: partial and positioned truths, multivocality, reflexivity, the ethnographic encounter, the politics of representation, postmodernity, and narrative.

Briefly, interpretive anthropology understands “facts as percepts viewed through a frame of reference” (Peacock 1986: 67). Interpretive anthropology holds that “both anthropologist and native [sic] are seen as engaged in interpreting the meaning of everyday life. Problems of representation are central for both, and are the loci of cultural imagination” (Rabinow in Clifford and Marcus 1986:257). Moreover, interpretive anthropology “operates on two levels simultaneously: it provides accounts of other worlds from the inside, and reflects about the epistemological groundings of such accounts” (Marcus and Fischer 1986:26).

The interpretive turn in ethnography was given impetus by the work of Clifford Geertz (1973, 1983, 1988, 1995) but the movement was popularized by Clifford and Marcus’ *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986) and Marcus and Fischer’s *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (1986). These anthropologists and their colleagues encourage more innovative, “dialogic” (D. Tedlock 1979), reflexive, and experimental writing. Yet at the same time interpretive ethnographers seek to reflect a profound self-consciousness about the workings of power and the partialness of truth, both in ethnographic texts and in social interaction

(Behar and Gordon 1995:4).

The first premise of interpretive anthropology is that truths are both partial and positioned. One of the seminal scholars on this subject is social historian, James Clifford. In "Partial Truths" (1986), Clifford focuses on ethnography as a written text and claims that the contingencies of language, rhetoric, power, and history must now be openly confronted in the process of writing. He thereby undermines the traditional concept of ethnographer as authoritative and distanced observer, objectively translating meaning from one culture to another.

Clifford begins with the statement that participant-observation, the classic formula for ethnographic work, leaves little room for texts. He asserts that writing, the making of texts, is central to ethnography. Yet writing has been essentially ignored because of the persistence of the ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience. This focus on text-making, which is determined contextually, rhetorically, institutionally, generically, politically, and historically, highlights the constructed, artificial, "fictional" nature of cultural accounts. No longer can "facts" be kept separate from their means of communication. Fiction, however, does not denote falsehood. Rather, by labelling ethnographies as fictions, Clifford means that they are partial, constructed cultural and historical truths -- inherently systematic, committed, incomplete, and exclusive (Clifford 1986:1-7).

Fittingly, Clifford understands culture (and its writing) as "poetics" -- an interplay of voices and positioned utterances (cf. James, Hockey and Dawson 1997:4). If culture is polyphonic, then its representation must echo this diversity of voices. Writing such multivocality is neither easy nor obvious: "The staging of translated, edited 'voices' to produce a polyphonic ethnographic authority has never been an unproblematic exercise"

(Clifford 1997:167). Similarly, Danforth asks, “How...can [ethnographers] let other voices speak in the texts they write? How can the ethnographic monographs of their offices and libraries remain most faithful to the ethnographic dialogues of the field” (Danforth 1989:4-5)? In my own work on Kateri, I have chosen to use a pastiche of writing styles and include the voices of her devotees in order to try to work practically and productively with notions of multivocality, to enact heteroglossia (Clifford 1988:46).

Once it is understood that both the subject of study and the way that study is “written up” are multivocal, the specification of discourses is required to explore the questions of who speaks, who writes, when and where, with or to whom, and under what institutional and historical constraints (Clifford and Marcus 1986:13). These questions are relevant for both the seventeenth century French Jesuit telling of Kateri’s life as well as a contemporary Navajo woman’s version. Further, in exploring these various narratives, we must ask after the nature and function, limitations and intent of the author’s writing. Clearly, the most audible and visible voice in the present text is my own, although I have endeavoured to make generous room for the voices of Others. However, I myself use more than one tone: sometimes that of the academic analyst writing with jargon and big theories, and at other times, the more private, more revelatory, more emotional voice of the diarist. But ultimately, true multivocality or plural authorship is utopian, perhaps even impossible (Clifford 1988:51, cf. Geertz 1988). In the end, there is a clear “I” who is conductor and composer. Nevertheless, the awareness of many voices, and the acceptance that perhaps the final product is better, if not less “partially true” makes the effort to include these voices worthwhile, especially when the resulting text suggests and points more than it summarizes and pontificates.

Dialogical modes (D. Tedlock 1979b) are not, in principle, autobiographical; they

need not lead to hyper self-consciousness or self-absorption. The task for the anthropologist involves writing subjectivity into ethnography yet still maintaining that “the result is not intended as autobiography or confessional but rather as an elucidation of the relationship between the anthropologist and the field situation on the one hand, and the anthropologist’s relationship to the theory and practice of anthropology on the other” (Dubisch 1995:6, cf. Behar 1996:6).

As Behar explains, reflexivity

Doesn’t require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied. Efforts at self-revelation flop not because the personal voice has been used, but because it has been poorly used, leaving unscrutinized the connection, intellectual and emotional, between the observer and the observed (Behar 1996:13 -14).

Behar goes on to point out the ironic elements of reflexivity and the inclusion of the author’s voice.

In anthropology, which historically exists to “give voice” to others, there is no greater taboo than self-revelation. The impetus of our discipline, with its roots in Western fantasies about barbaric others, has been to focus primarily on “cultural” rather than “individual” realities. The irony is that anthropology has always been rooted in an “I” - understood as having a complex psychology and history -- observing a “we” that, until recently, was viewed as plural, ahistorical and nonindividuated (Behar 1996:26).

In all ethnographic writing, there is a “biography in the shadow” -- the story of how we come to research and write as anthropologists (Behar 1993:336). Quite simply, “what

happens within the observer must be made known if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood” (Behar 1996:6). And further, this biography is relevant insofar as it emphasizes that the ethnographic encounter between the researcher and her subjects is in fact an essential part of the subject of the book. Briefly, encounters or conversations make up the stuff of what we do in the field (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus 1986:104). We see, understand and interpret as a present yet partial individual. Even if “the ethnographer, a character in the fiction, is at center stage” (Clifford and Marcus 1986:14), the way in which she interacts with the other characters ultimately forms the plot and play of the ethnography.

Accordingly, in this work I emphasize the encounter and I emphasize the story, foregrounding narrative as an interpretive tool. As Clifford says, “signs of the times include a trend toward the use of the first person singular pronoun in accounts of fieldwork, presented as stories rather than as observations and interpretations” (Clifford 1997:68). I move between personal narrative and impersonal description and analysis (Pratt in Clifford and Marcus 1986:28, cf. B. Tedlock 1991), yet overall, I look to tell a story, a story of stories of stories, embedded and enmeshed, interpretations of interpretations, “turtles all the way down” (Geertz 1973).<sup>13</sup> I seek to draw attention to the narrative character of cultural representations, to the stories built into the representational process itself (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus 1986:100). By “narrative character”, I mean not just the stories I tell, the field experience that I translate into narrative text, but also I

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<sup>13</sup> In *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Geertz recounts this tale.

There is an Indian story -- at least I heard it as an Indian story -- about an Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked (perhaps he was an ethnographer; it is the way they behave), what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle. And that turtle? ‘Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down’ (Geertz 1973:29).

seek to foreground the stories people told me -- about Kateri, her miracles, their identity as Native American Catholics -- as meaning-making events in their own lives as well as in mine.

In *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993), Ruth Behar had some poignant remarks about the translation of stories she heard in the field into an ethnography. She was deep in a chapter discussing the feminist literature into which her research about Esperanza, a Mexican peasant woman, could fit. By this point in her book, Behar had travelled into the interior of academic categories and terminology, translating Esperanza's narratives into something scholarly. She catches herself and says,

*Ay, comadre*, so what does all this have to do with those conversations we had in the kitchen with the mint green walls? I imagine you laughing now, gazing at me in amusement, and saying, "Well, if this is what you need to do so they'll understand *en el otro lado* -- well, *ni modo*, it's up to you, but keep me out out of it' (Behar 1993:300).

This is key. We do translate our subjects, and snip them to fit the conformities of *el otro lado* -- the other side of ethnographic fieldwork which is academic writing. The key is to balance translation and recognition. Some of the people I befriended and interviewed *will* read my book, as many have expressed desire to do so, searching its pages for the stories they told me. I hope that I have *not* "kept them out of it," but rather that their tales are unobscured and that they can find them growing in between the pages of interpretive theory and postconciliar theology.

In sum, I place this work firmly in the camp of post-1986 experimental ethnographies which highlight the interpretive and narrative processes, foreground the ethnographic encounter, seek to be multivocal, acknowledge their own partiality, and are

cognizant of the politics of representation and the specification of discourses. Does this approach make me postmodern (cf. Pool 1991)? Perhaps, in so far as my work “reflects at least a degree of commitment to a self-conscious and critical perspective, which, among other things, questions the neutrality and objectivity of science (indeed of all forms of knowledge), the universality of reason and ‘truth’, the transparency of language, and the existence of a coherent stable self, as well as the rejection of ‘metanarratives’” (Dubisch 1995:8). If postmodernity is the new world order of mobility and rootless (or one might say, multiply rooted) histories, then yes again, both my subject and my representational style can be considered postmodern. I believe that the material I have chosen to study is postmodern in so far as I explore the roots and routes of symbols, of identities, of a saint and her people and in the multiple ways in and whys for which these are defined (cf. Clifford 1997).

### **Issues, Aims, and an Outline**

With the exception of some ethnohistorical studies (Greer 1998, Koppedrayner 1993, Shoemaker 1995, Vescey 1997), the anthropological literature on Kateri Tekakwitha is sparse.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the continuous rewriting and reprinting of her biography, attendance by thousands from diverse Native groups at the annual Tekakwitha Conference, and the prominence of her statue and presence in Native Catholic churches all testify to the need for further contemporary study of Kateri in Native Catholic communities.

This monograph contributes to the understanding of the relationships between saints and various historical devotional communities as well as documenting an example of

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<sup>14</sup> Anthropologists David Kozak (1994) and James Preston (1989) have written articles on the Tekakwitha Conference and Kateri’s healing cult respectively.



the populist dimension of saint-making and the expression of symbolic ethnicity centered around saints. I seek to broaden the concept of hagiography and incorporate anthropological understandings of multivocality and narrative, forwarding the idea of a “saintscape”, a portrait of a saint’s life, devotees, locations and histories. Finally, this research documents a concrete example of a Native Catholic understanding of inculturation and underlines the role of symbols in the construction of local theologies. With regard to symbols, I emphasize the concept of “symbol tales” – narratives that form, model, and evolve from and revolve around certain symbols, in this case, Kateri Tekakwitha. I aim to move from “ethnographic miniatures to wall-sized culturescapes” (Geertz 1973:21), fleshing out the image of Kateri among her people, yet simultaneously situating her in the larger context of the Catholic Church and Native American culture in general.

I seek to expand Geertz’ understanding of symbols as both descriptive and prescriptive (Geertz 1973:108), by emphasizing the movement and narrative tied to the creation, maintenance, and re-creation of symbols; hence the idea of saintscaapes and symbol tales. This goal is accomplished primarily through an “ethnography of the particular” (Abu-Lughod 1991:138, 149) but the “particular” in this case is not one “person” as such, but rather a saint who is a symbol. Nevertheless I employ Abu-Lughod’s tactic of “writing against culture”, that is against generalized, monolithic and hierarchical understandings of cultures and cultural phenomena (Abu-Lughod 1991:137, 138, 147). In the end, I turn my focus away from a description of seventeenth century France or twentieth century Pueblo life and toward narratives of a symbol that cuts and is carved through time and across space. Finally, with Abu-Lughod, I use the vehicle of narrative to highlight the constructed and reconstructed nature of symbols (Abu-Lughod 1991:153).

This introductory chapter ends with a brief outline of the chapters to follow. Chapter Two “Home and Native Lands: Travelling Saints from the Seventeenth Century and Beyond” gives an historical overview of Kateri’s life and the New France missionary context in which she lived. I discuss Kateri’s cause for canonization, skipping ahead three hundred years to describe the contemporary Kateri Circles and Tekakwitha Conferences at which her devotees meet. I then turn to filling in the lines of communication and transmission of Kateri’s life, highlighting the “placelessness of saints” (Orsi 1996:28). I am interested here in how my respondents heard about Kateri -- what was told, from whom, when, under what circumstances.

Chapter Three consists of a series of vignettes or ethnographic snapshots from the field. Having introduced the saint and her history, I now look to introduce her people and their place, taking the reader to the field where she can sense, in all meanings of the word, what happened to me and to my respondents during my time in New Mexico. This chapter takes the form of “flavour bites” and I hope the taste is rich. I look to evoke for the reader the range of landscape, people, emotions, and sounds in Kateri’s stories, and to recreate a sense of the movement and journeying which is key to my ethnographic experience and to the understanding of Kateri.

Chapter Four returns to a more academic voice, dealing specifically with Indianness and the Catholic Church and the innovation and invocation of tradition. I begin with an overview of how “culture” and “Church” have met, clashed, negotiated, and enveloped each other through time and in the Southwest in particular. I deal specifically with the issue of inculturation, the idea that the Church or the gospel is, as I suggest, “never naked and foreign nowhere”. I discuss the concept of local theology as a product and promise of Vatican II. Finally, I place Kateri in this context of inculturation and local theology,

describing the ways in which her devotees have created her as a symbol that mediates both the Church and culture or tradition.

Chapter Five is largely descriptive, and deals with the local construction of saints in general and Kateri in particular. I put forward the voices of her devotees as they describe Kateri's nature and function in their lives. I foreground the images of Kateri, physically on prayer cards and plaques, and more ethereally in dreams and visions, while commenting on the "Indianness" of these images and descriptions. I also present descriptions of the kinds of relationships that my respondents have with Kateri and locate this devotion within larger context of relationships to other saints or divine figures. I examine the essentialization of Kateri's story which results in a kind of miniaturization and mincing of a near-saint's life into series of easily digested highlights of Kateri's life. While this essentializing is perhaps a necessary part of the saint-making process, I believe that the impetus to read the lives of saints in minimalist forms in fact leaves to the devotees a vast expanse, a "blank space" (Orsi 1996), with room for creative and personalized theology,

Chapter Six, entitled "*Rumor Miraculorum*: 'A Saint to Me' and Other Necessary Miracles," picks up the questions raised in Chapter Five concerning the miniaturization, and in many ways essentialization of a saint. I argue that the "blankness" and silence of Kateri in the official hagiographic tradition allows for both popular theological creativity in the imaginative space of devotional narratives and the formation of new social and devotional groups such as local Kateri Circles and the multi-tribal national annual Tekakwitha Conference. This chapter looks at the saint-making process and highlights the fact that in the end, saints *are* their stories. I give a brief account of the canonization process followed by a closer look at the specific case Kateri. I deal with the fact that although Kateri is not yet a saint, she is treated as such by her devotees, generating a

tension between the Vatican and grassroots processes of saint-making. Finally, I interpret the use of the miracle discourse by Kateri's devotees as they discuss what "Kateri's final miracle" might be, thereby addressing the community acclamation of sainthood.

In the Conclusion, I summarize the key issues of the Kateri movement in terms of processes of both essentialization and emergence. I review the ways in which Kateri is both bordered by orthodoxy and moved beyond those boundaries, the means of her miniaturization and her creative expansion, the manners in which she is de-contextualized and re-contextualized, made generic and specific, removed and repatriated. By using these categories, I seek to move beyond the categories of "official" productions and "folk" responses, but rather I draw out the symbolic narratives told on all levels, and in the spaces between. In this final chapter, I also reflect on my own experience as a non-Catholic and a non-Native doing research among Native American Catholics, and emphasize the mutual interpretation that happens during fieldwork. In short, while I was trying to translate their devotion to Kateri, they were simultaneously trying to place me in that devotional world. Several devotees' responses to my invited talk at the 1998 Tekakwitha Conference illustrate the range of understandings -- and misunderstandings -- of my work on Kateri. I close the book with vignettes from the last days of my primary fieldwork at the 59th Annual Tekakwitha Conference in Memphis in 1998. I believe that these final episodes paint a broad saintscape which includes summary strokes, colours, and shaping that are outlined in the chapters that follow.

## II Home and Native Lands: Travelling Saints From the Seventeenth Century and Beyond

### The Historical Lives of Kateri Tekakwitha

*“Catherine Tekakwitha, who are you? Are you (1656-1680)? Is that enough? Are you the Iroquois Virgin? Are you the Lily of the Shores of the Mohawk River?... Do I have any right to come after you with my dusty mind full of the junk of maybe five thousand books?... Is it any wonder that an old scholar who never made much money wants to climb into your Technicolour postcard?”* Leonard Cohen, *Beautiful Losers* (1966:3-4)<sup>1</sup>

Apart from a few dozen biographies which are remarkably similar, there is only a small body of historical scholarship on Kateri (Koppedrayner 1993, Greer 1998, Vescey 1997). However, Kateri leads the researcher beyond the seventeenth century and historical documents and into later centuries and other fields of study. First of these is her life story as contained in numerous biographies written mostly by Catholic clergy for the edification and instruction of other believers. Insofar as her biography is written for such pious purposes, it can be considered hagiography, the writing and critical study of the lives of the saints. Although Kateri is not yet officially canonized, she was beatified in 1980 and her devotees consider her saintly and able to grant miracles through intercession (Hinnells 1984:280). For this reason, the body of research on saints, their biographies, and their biographers, as well as their role in the church proves useful in examining the symbolic

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* has a highly sexualized Kateri Tekakwitha as one of its main characters. In this novel, Kateri is ranked among the “historical losers”, which, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, she may be. On the other hand, I also argue, Kateri is both voiceless in and transcendent of her time and history. While fascinating and shocking -- especially when compared with everything else written on Kateri, both devotional and academic -- Cohen’s book is an anomaly, and I have not used it as a basis for my research.

function of Kateri (cf. Head 1990, Margolies 1988, Macklin 1988, Woodward 1990).

The seventeenth century Kateri can be understood against a background of Jesuit missions in the colonial period. In this research area, the issue of conversion -- its authenticity and motives -- is in the forefront of the minds of scholars. However, from a Catholic point of view, both Native and non-Native, seventeenth century and modern, Kateri is not understood as a "pagan" who "converted", but rather as a native person who "realized" her "true Christian nature" (cf. Axtell 1992, Bechard 1992, *Positio*). This difference proves crucial in the ethnohistorical reconstruction of the role of the Jesuits in seventeenth century "New France".

An examination of the "cult" of Kateri, both in the seventeenth century at Kahnawake (a Mohawk reserve just outside of Montreal, Quebec where Kateri lived for several years, died, and is buried) immediately following her death, and in its modern incarnation through the Tekakwitha Conference National Center and numerous Kateri Circles, provides an arena in which to explore the cultural values represented by Kateri as underscored by veneration. In following these lines of questions, the relationship between history and symbolic figures will be explored.

**Sources and Voices:** "*Catherine Tekakwitha, I Have Come to Rescue You from the Jesuits,*" (Cohen 1966:5)

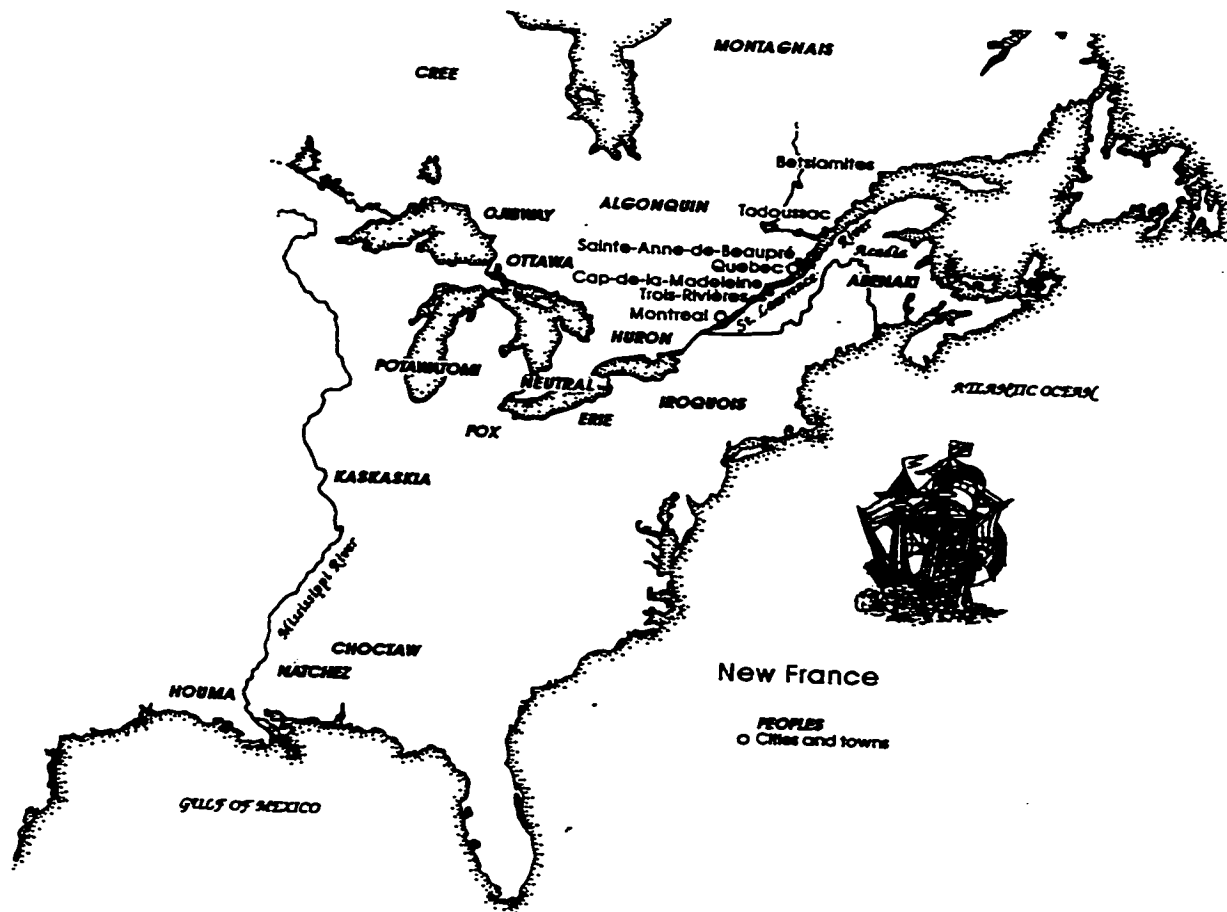
History can be seen as a conglomeration of a series of positioned testimonies recounted with a particular audience in mind (cf. Blanchard 1982, Clifford 1986, 1997, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). The notion of historical "truth" or "fact" is highly problematic in that it presumes that an event of the past had only one meaning, and moreover, that meaning can be accessed and transparently translated into modern terms

(cf. B  chard 1976, McGuire 1901). Arguably, ethnohistory can in part be understood as an effort to restore multivocality to what has largely been a univocal endeavour that has represented, in the case of colonial history, almost exclusively the European “voice” (cf. Axtell 1992, 1988, 1981, Batstone et al. 1997). Multivocality implies, as Fogelson suggests, “that events [and persons] may be recognized, defined, evaluated, and endowed with meaning differently in different cultural traditions” (Fogelson 1989:135). Multivocality applied to history also problematizes the perception of native peoples as passive victims of history, thereby restoring both agency and voice to those for whom these have hitherto been denied (cf. Axtell 1988, Blanchard 1982, Grant 1984, Jaenen 1986, Powers 1987) .

In researching the historical figure of Kateri Tekakwitha, the *Jesuit Relations* stand alone<sup>2</sup> as the record of the events and circumstances surrounding her life, death, and significance. The *Jesuit Relations* are the annual reports of the French mission to the “New World”, and incorporate the observations of all the missionaries. The *Relations* begin with the arrival of the Jesuits in the lands of the St. Lawrence River drainage in 1611 and cover a period of about two hundred years.

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<sup>2</sup> There are a few other sources such as the letters of Fr. Cholenec, Kateri’s confessor, published in “Lettres edificantes et curieuses   crites des missions   trang  res parquelques missionaries de la compagnie de Jesus”. Arguably, these sources share the same audience and purpose as the *Jesuit Relations*.



(Vescey 1997:2)

The greater part of the material describing Native life in New France is found in the reports from 1632 to 1673, when the *Relations* appeared annually (Spalding 1928:883, Vescey 1997:3-5). At the time of their publication, beyond their roles as missionary records for the order of Jesuits (Thwaites 1896-1901), the *Relations* were held to be of “great ethnologic value due to the fact that they are a collection of all the references made by a large number of intelligent men who lived for years among the people of whom they wrote.... They are told simply and there is no reason to question their accuracy” (McGuire 1901: 257). Joseph McGuire, a turn of the century anthropologist, presents the *Jesuit*



*Relations* as an “objective” source of information regarding native peoples (cf. Vescey 1997:8).

However, the *Jesuit Relations* were not without purpose and audience. They were intended for the edification and information of a general readership and were designed to obtain support for the Jesuit missions in New France. As historian Christopher Vescey says, “Designed for public consumption, the *Jesuit Relations* were a witness to catholic faith; they were devotional literature meant to edify readers for the glory of Church and God, and to raise funds for the missionary endeavour” (Vescey 1997:8). The *Relations* depict the process by which American Indians became imbued with Catholic culture and as such “were truthful propaganda, feeding the French curiosity about the Indians and the New World, and spurring pious zeal for the conversion of the Indians” (Wade 1988:25).

Historian Denis Lafrenière further argues that the *Jesuit Relations* presented a generic portrait of “the Indian” whose fixed traits included a readiness to accept baptism. Vescey agrees with this assessment and adds that “in their *Relations*, the Jesuits needed to represent the ‘savages’ as subjects worthy of missionizing; simultaneously, the Indians could be employed for the purpose of social commentary back home in France” (Vescey 1997:25). Such strategies of representation held much rhetorical force and served to establish the *Jesuit Relations* as a kind of colonial propaganda (Lafrenière 1991:26-35).

It is essential to note that Kateri comes to us primarily as a literary creation (Greer 1998:139; Koppedraye 1993). As Canadian historian Allan Greer comments, ‘Of the Jesuits who knew her well, two wrote about her extensively: Pierre Cholenec, her confessor, and Claude Chaucetière, who stood watch at her deathbed’ (Greer 1998:138).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Greer’s (1998) “Savage/Saint: The Lives of Kateri Tekakwitha” for an expert in depth analysis of these two sources.

Greer goes on to say that these book length accounts are the only sources about Kateri's life. Greer points out that, needless to say, "There is no Iroquois testimony on the subject that survives from that period" (Greer 1998:139). Perhaps most importantly, Cholenec's and Chaucetière's texts were all written in the hagiographic genre: "these are not simply biographies, they are *vitae sanctorum*, lives of a saint" (Greer 1998:139; cf. Koppedraye 1993).

Such are the "partial truths" of Kateri's history (Clifford 1986:1-11). It is a positioned and purposed history, set down by men with ink and paper and written language for a specific audience. Further, it was ultimately printed and bound historically as edifying records of the missionary endeavour. These records of Kateri's life can only be understood with reference to the contingencies of purpose, audience, rhetoric, and power.

### **Context of Kateri's Life: The Seventeenth Century Jesuit Missionaries in New France**

Kateri "grew to fruition as a saint" in the soil of the Jesuit mission at what is now, Kahnawake, Quebec, located fourteen kilometres south of Montréal. Kahnawake is the oldest of the Iroquois reserves in Canada. It started in 1667 as a Jesuit mission settlement composed primarily of Mohawk and Oneida. The community moved three times between 1676 and 1716. Its residents finally formed the settlement called by the French missionaries, Sault St. Louis, and by the Iroquois, Kahnawake after a Mohawk settlement in the Mohawk Valley (present day Fonda, New York) from which some of the settlers had originated (Morrison and Wilson 1986: 314).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See also Koppedraye (1993:285-286) and Vescey (1997:96-100) on Kahnawake's history. Blanchard discusses Mohawk motives for founding Kahnawake, namely trade interests, avoidance of the debilitating effects of alcohol, and the desire to

By many accounts a mission of remarkable vitality (Koppedrayer 1993: 286), Kahnawake was an example of a “praying village”. According to ethnohistorian James Axtell,

If the Jesuits could not convert a whole village within a reasonable period, they often encouraged their neophytes to move to a more conducive environment, one that could be carefully controlled by priests. The removal of converts and neophytes from the sins and temptations of “pagan” life was an important motive, but the Jesuits also wanted to institute a number of social and cultural changes that had more to do with European assumptions about “civilized” life than with Christian preparation for salvation (Axtell 1992:162-163).

Ideally then, praying villages were to be orderly Christian communities filled with model converts living and working under the watchful eye of the priest. As such, they served to prevent reversion and conserve mission manpower (Axtell and Ronda 1978:33).

Thus praying villages represented efforts in protective segregation. The missionaries’ establishment of Indian enclaves offered those who “were taking a chance with what the Jesuits offered” to be removed from the site of old loyalties. As Koppedrayer observes, “Spurred by the bitter factionalism of Christian and non-Christian suggested in Kateri’s biographies, Mohawks immigrated in considerable number to the missions, where they were segregated from both the encroaching white society and their native past” (Koppedrayer 1993: 295, cf. Axtell 1982:37, 1981:83).

Such factionalism is generally indicative of the state of post-contact cultural

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create a place where Catholic Mohawk could practice their religion yet still remain active in the affairs of the Mohawk Nation and the Iroquois Confederacy (Blanchard 1982:88-89).

liminality in which Kateri and her people found themselves.<sup>5</sup> Historian Daniel Richter underlines the specific appeal of such praying villages for women, whom he calls “socially dead” figures (Richter 1992: 124).<sup>6</sup> Richter claims that as a category, women were particularly prominent in Jesuit accounts of immigrants to the St. Lawrence missions: Despite the inherent patriarchal bias of the Christianity taught by seventeenth-century missionaries, Roman Catholicism, with its cult of the Virgin Mary, its veneration of female saints, and its sisterhood of nuns appealed strongly to the matrilineal principles of Iroquois culture. Especially at Kahnawake, priests consciously built on that appeal by organizing female sodalities, encouraging groups of adolescents to pledge themselves to lives of virginity, and preaching about the exemplary lives of native women [Kateri?] who had died on what seemed the path to sainthood (Richter 1992:125).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Morrison (1990:416) discusses how the Montagnais came to view baptism as offering a way of coping with historical crisis or of dealing with the “increasing pain of post contact life” as manifest in starvation, sickness and death. Kateri’s immigration to Kahnawake may well be seen against a similar background of such a “shaky world” (Morrison 1990:417, 420).

<sup>6</sup> Richter does not define what he means by “socially dead”. The phrase is put in quotation marks and refers to both women and adoptees. This kind of generalization cannot be used unproblematically. However, it provides an ingenious, although questionable argument for the prominence of women (and perhaps by extension, Kateri) at Kahnawake, and Kahnawake’s general “success”.

<sup>7</sup> This is the only comment I have discovered in the literature which claims that vows of virginity were encouraged by the priests at Kahnawake. All of the other biographies of Kateri with which I am familiar highlight the significance of Kateri’s vow of virginity by emphasizing that it was her own idea. Both the priests and Kateri’s fellow villagers are portrayed as cautioning her to think seriously before taking on such a serious commitment. Indeed her biographies often include accounts of how Kateri should have been married, according to Iroquois standards, but her “shyness and disfigurement” prevented her from doing so and made her realize that she wanted to dedicate her life to God. She is notably marked as the “first Iroquois virgin” (Koppedrayner 1993:287-288).

Richter goes on to say that “more than doctrine explains the prominence of women in the migrations to the new villages” (Richter 1992:126). He points to settlement patterns and kinship ties to explain the large number of immigrants. He claims that,

By contrast, other immigrants came to the missions because they lacked such broad webs of kin and friends....The Mohawk Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha is a prime example....Her [reclusive] habits combined with her lack of kin ties to give her a reputation as a misfit. Probably in search of companionship, she soon gravitated to the Jesuit missionaries (Richter 1992:127).

This kind of explanation for Kateri’s emigration in fact supports the hagiographical account of Kateri’s “flight from sin and temptations against her purity and her faith” to the “refuge” of Kahnawake (Bécharde 1980:19). In both accounts, Kateri is a lonely misfit who finds home and purpose in the praying village.

The image of the praying villages as an idyllic “Christian home and refuge” populated by “sincere” converts is greatly contested (Axtell 1974, Vescey 1997:87-95). The literature on praying villages is intimately tied to that on conversion and its authenticity and motives. The results of these discussions are then used to determine the “success” or “failure” of the mission settlements and Jesuit missionary activity among native peoples more generally. Axtell problematizes the question of what constitutes the “success” or “failure” of a missionary program (see also Vescey 1997:14-21). He claims that the study of native peoples’ responses has largely been subsumed by examination of the missionaries’ goals. For example, “if we ask whether the Indians, from their point of view, were successful or not in adopting or adapting Christianity, ...we arrive at a somewhat different measure of success” (Axtell 1982:35-36).

Vescey sets out the problem like this:

It is difficult to assess the depth of conversion among seventeenth-century Indians of New France, since all of the evidence derives from the French Jesuits; however, if the *Relations* are to be believed at all, some Indians embraced the beliefs and cultus of Catholicism with ardor.... Amidst resistance, syncretism and nativism, did the Jesuits make their share of Christian converts (Vescey 1997:38)?

The following brief survey of issues in native conversion seeks to address both “cultures in contact”.

The information on Jesuit methods of conversion is both extensive and varied (Vescey 1997:14-21). For example, ethnohistorian John Steckley argues that Jesuits used Iroquoian cultural models, namely those of the warrior and the matrilineage complexes, to communicate Christianity. Warrior images were used to demonstrate the power of the Christian spirit world as an ally to be sought and an enemy to be feared, and the matrilineage complex served as a model of closeness and alliance (Steckley 1992:478-509). Richter emphasizes that the perceived personal shamanic power of the priest, and not necessarily the message that he preached, initially impressed his audience (see also Vescey 1997:23). He offers this observation as an example of one of the diplomatic, political, or religious considerations on the basis of which Jesuits won much support from the Iroquois. Richter paints a picture of Jesuits capitalizing on the cultural and religious confusion resulting from European contact in order to persuade the Iroquois to become Christian (Richter 1985:4, 6, 8).

To a large extent, Jesuit conversion tactics included assimilation into European society; salvation was intimately linked to cultural change (Vescey 1997:23). Natives were to be “civilized” [i.e. Europeanized] first, before they could be converted to Christianity. The natives were perceived to be deficient in order, industry, and manners, and to convert

Indians meant “to replace native characters with European personae” (Axtell 1974:275, 1981:42, 46). For the most part, Jesuits are portrayed as insisting upon francization, yet there are scholars who argue that although Jesuits wanted to convert the native peoples, “they did not usually consider it necessary to assimilate Indians as well” (Miller 1991:34). Historian J.R. Miller further says that this non assimilationist approach made Christianity intelligible and attractive to the intended proselytes. “Moreover,” he continues,

Prolonged experience in New France persuaded the Jesuits that contact with Europeans often debased the Indians they wished to convert. Eventually they concluded, as a Jesuit historian put it in the 1740s, that ‘there was no longer any doubt that the best mode of Christianizing them, was to avoid Frenchifying them’ (Miller 1991:34).

Thus, in Miller’s representation, the Jesuits are much less aggressive and more accommodating than they are in Axtell’s account.

The Jesuits’ assimilationist attempts, however gentle or determined, simply “didn’t work” in some, if not many cases. As Axtell concludes, “... at the end of nearly two centuries of effort, both the French and the English were forced to admit that they had largely failed to convert Indians to Christianity and civilization” (Axtell 1974:281, cf. Vescey 1997:87). In his “autopsy” of the “the European failure to convert the Indians”, Axtell gives reasons for this “malfunction”. In addition to the usual explanations of disease, war, and alcohol which undermined the conversion process (“The dead make poor converts”, he says. [Axtell 1974:281]), he suggests that there were traits within Indian culture that also impeded the “civilizing” process and Christianity. These included: Lenten fasting at the end of winter scarcity (even though the Sorbonne had declared the beaver to be a fish for religious purposes); discriminating between people after death when

in life they had been equals; burying the dead facing east when the land of the dead lay west; pretending that Christians professed the one true faith when missionaries from many denominations hawked their spiritual wares; confining people to the “yoke of God” on the Sabbath when the struggle for life required a full week; being obsessed by death and the afterlife, especially by the palpable threat of eternal torture by fire -- all these practices and more seemed simply unreasonable to a people who had been raised in a religious tradition that was better adapted to the natural and social world in which they lived (Axtell 1974:287). However, foremost among these traits that impeded conversion was “the basic Indian toleration of other religions and the correspondent wish to pursue their own” (Axtell 1974:288). This “two roads” philosophy is often attributed to “Indian belief”: “They [Indians] argued that religious belief and rituals were culture bound and could not be exported to other cultures” (Axtell and Ronda 1978:44).

Native peoples’ disapproval of Christianity is not always cast in such a tolerant ecumenical light. Historian James Ronda, for example, argues that most Native Americans reaffirmed their traditional beliefs and strenuously resisted Christianity. Further, “they reacted emphatically against Christian theological ideas of sin, guilt, heaven, hell, and baptism.... Indians and Missionaries both saw each other as demons and sorcerers.... Indians also saw missionaries as conniving imperialists” (Ronda 1977:67-75). Still other scholars attribute the Jesuits’ lack of “success” to the mutual incomprehension between missionaries and Indians. Both Grant and Jaenen, historians of the encounter between missionaries and Native Americans, claim that the native peoples’ incomprehension of Catholic values and concepts stood in the way of conversion. Moreover, the Jesuits were limited by their view that the Indian mind was either a *tabula rasa*, upon which Christianity could be unproblematically transcribed, or a morass of savagery (Grant 1984:22, 34;



Jaenen 1976:72).

But some native peoples (Kateri among them) *did* adopt Christianity. Scholars have busied themselves trying to determine the motives of those natives who did convert. While acknowledging that motives are difficult to appraise (and indeed, the line between the circumstances and the motives that produced converts is unclear), Richter offers the following explanation which is echoed throughout much of the conversion literature:

Doubtless, however, the considerations that induced Iroquois to become Catholics were similar to those that influenced Indians elsewhere to turn Christian: social and ideological disorientation resulting from disease and other aspects of European contact led many to seek new religious answers; the evidently superior powers of the Christian God impelled some to abandon traditional deities; and material benefits -- food, clothing, tools, medicines - brought others into the missionaries' orbit. In addition, Jesuits, unlike Protestant missionaries, skilfully employed incense, bells, paintings, and spectacle in ceremonies that sometimes paralleled Indian religious practices and often reached potential converts through each of the physical senses (Richter 1985:8).<sup>8</sup>

The historian John Webster Grant also points to the color and ambiance of Catholic ritual as attractions for converts. In addition, Grant cites nonconformity -- "some individuals may have been looking for excuses not to participate in community rituals of sharing" -- and the impressiveness of the potency of the missionary *mana*, spiritual power, as motives for conversion (Grant 1984:41-42, cf. Vescey 1997:35). He argues that "conversion represented not so much a rejection of the old way as a conviction that

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<sup>8</sup> See also Axtell on the appeal for the Indians of "Catholicism's affective ceremonies which resembled native religious observances in color, drama, and participation" (Axtell 1974:280).

Christianity offered more powerful *mana* for a changed situation” (Grant 1984:44).

Christianity, in this view, represents something that offers “*comparatively better*” answers “to the urgent social and religious questions that the Indians were facing at that particular juncture in their cultural history” (Axtell 1982:36, emphasis mine).

This discussion of motives raises provocative questions about the “authenticity” of native peoples’ conversion. Jesuits apparently did what they could to ensure authenticity in that they postponed baptism (except deathbed) until they witnessed sufficient evidence of “Christian character” (Grant 1984:35). In Kateri’s biographies, it seems that even she was not granted baptism easily. It is said that she not only had to express her desire for baptism, but to “prove herself worthy” as well (Koppedraye 1993:284-285).

Nevertheless, many scholars argue that the religious sincerity of these seventeenth century native conversions to Christianity is questionable (Richter 1985:5). Assessing the “authenticity” of religious belief is a particularly nebulous endeavour. The only “proof” of conversion available to an outsider, be she historian, anthropologist, or missionary are self-profession and behaviour. The absence of criteria other than such “external evidence” lends itself to various interpretations. Specifically, scholars argue that behaviour such as the acceptance of baptism, change in clothing, and even relocation to a “praying village” are indicative only of outward acceptance of Christianity. Further, it is suggested that these “converts” have acquiesced for purely opportunistic and pragmatic reasons. As historian Olive Dickason states, “Amerindians were quite capable of feigning acceptance of Christianity if they thought it was in their best interests” (Dickason 1992:133). Blanchard also insists that the Mohawk at Kahnawake utilized the missionaries and Christianity more generally to native ends. He claims:

The Mohawk were not witless followers of the Jesuits. They used the Jesuits to

gain advantageous trade concessions from the French and had to give up something in return. What did they give? To the Jesuits' way of thinking, the Mohawk gave up their traditional religion and beliefs. In fact, the Mohawk modified their religious practices and developed a syncretistic system of ritual that yielded the desired effect, yet was compatible with Catholicism (Blanchard 1982:99).

This kind of transactional interpretation of conversion implies an element of subversiveness on the part of native actors. For example, Axtell claims that "the Indians' secret weapon in cultural combat" was obstinacy (inner disagreement) and acquiescence (outer agreement) (Axtell 1981:79, 83). Axtell depicts praying villages as "war camps" behind enemy lines in which Indians devised strategies to capitalize on "the invaders' cultures and religions for empowerment, knowledge and skills with which to sustain native identities and values in other guises.... The 'praying Indians' were forging survival tactics in the midst of the enemy" (Axtell 1992:116, 118).<sup>9</sup>

Another interpretation of apparently "sincere" conversion is that the converts were merely syncretizing Christian elements into their traditional belief system. For example, ethnohistorian John Steckley claims that "the limited evidence suggests that these Christian warrior spirit figures [which were being employed by the Jesuits to communicate Christianity to the Iroquois] became part of a syncretic Iroquoian/Christian world view" (Steckley 1992:488). Likewise, Blanchard describes the syncretic ascetic endeavours present at Kahnawake (Blanchard 1982:92, 96, 97). Vescey also comments on the

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<sup>9</sup> Axtell seems to have changed his mind on this matter at some point. In his 1988 book, he debunks the commonly held ideas (which he himself espouses elsewhere) of the tenacity of native traditions covered in only a thin veneer of Catholicism, and the gullibility of French missionaries. While he admits that "some of this is true", namely in the form of relapse, baptism for material gain, and indifference to doctrinal purity, he claims that the number of converts is actually higher than commonly thought, and that the extent of apostasy is exaggerated (Axtell 1988:102-108).

attractiveness of the efficacy and symbolic power of Christianity to the natives (Vescey 1997:36). Further, historian James Ronda suggests that native peoples in general did not just accept or reject Christianity. Rather, he says, they produced positive religious movements to counter Christianity. These “revitalization” movements were syncretistic in nature and often blended Indian and Christian theological elements around the central figure of an Indian prophet or saviour (Ronda 1977:79). Thus the modification of Catholicism to fit “traditional native” religious needs is a prominent theme in the conversion literature.<sup>10</sup>

Hence those who do appear to have embraced Christianity are most often determined by historians to have done so only to acquire protective coloration, or their Christianity is deemed to form a part of a larger syncretic religion. Almost grudgingly, a few scholars admit that “there were many sincere converts”, those who accepted Christianity in its theological, moral, spiritual and ritual fullness (cf. Richter 1992:111).<sup>11</sup> While sincerity is certainly hard to assess, it is conceivable that there were indeed some native people who responded positively to the Jesuits. Axtell gives four reasons to account for this possible “success” on the part of the missionaries and the good faith of their converts. First, at least the first two generations of missionaries were well qualified for the task of conversion: “They were definitely not easy to hoodwink or hornswaggle” (Axtell 1988:112). Second, the Jesuits were able to gather an audience by establishing respectful

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Axtell calls “syncretism” a “hobgoblin” to which sceptics who question the sincerity of conversion resort. He says (and is probably right) that syncretism is hard to prove. Indeed the issues of motives, sincerity and intention are all elusive “hobgoblins”, -- as is “sincere conversion”, I would add -- particularly unamendable to historical and anthropological investigation (Axtell 1988:116). Syncretism and its related concepts will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

<sup>11</sup> I find it interesting that so few scholars seem to allow for “authentic” conversion. Such discourse appears to have no place outside of confessional works (like Kateri’s biographies and the *Jesuit Relations*).

relationships and employing techniques that appealed to native sensibilities. Third, they held Indians to high standards for baptism and church admission. And finally, the missionaries continued to nourish their converts (Axtell 1988:111-116). By documenting these factors, Axtell shows that “authentic” conversion would have been a realistic possibility for the seventeenth century Iroquois.

Conversion implies an identity change, a reverse, in which one’s old character is radically disrupted and one’s former life, including (and especially) belief systems is rejected (Barker and Currie 1985:305). Arguably then, conversion is *not* the issue in Kateri’s case. According to Koppedraye,

Chaucetièrre and Cholenec never saw themselves as “converting” Kateri; she was always pure and they needed only to shelter her from corrupting influences.... In providing the Indians with a pure and virtuous environment [i.e. at the ‘praying villages’], they were only acting in accordance with divine will that had intended all along for Kateri to be the embodiment of purity that she was (Koppedraye 1993:291).

This idea of providing an environment in which Kateri could fulfil her “destiny” as an incarnation of virtue resonates with the hagiographical metanarrative of Kateri’s biographies (Buehrle [1954] especially) in which Kateri is metaphorically tilled and carefully prepared for the coming of the Jesuits who affirm, confirm, and name in Christianity that for which she had been cultivated all along.

### **The Life of a Saint-in-Waiting**

Biographies of Kateri, from the seventeenth century onwards, share distinct commonalities in that they are structured around a common set of “significant events”. Her

first biographers, as discussed above, were the early Jesuits. In their letters back to France, later to be compiled as the *Jesuit Relations*, Kateri is described by the missionaries as chaste, pious, and exemplary. Koppedrayer summarizes her early biographies:

In a letter dated 1 May, 1680, two weeks after her death, Father Pierre Cholenec called attention to her life. Here, his description of Kateri, her chastity, her practice of mortification, and her death is brief though reverent, and is set in a discussion of the pious life and extraordinary penances of several women of the mission. Father Cholenec went on to produce several biographies, dating from 1696 to 1717, the latter of which were written while he was head of the mission.... According to Father Cholenec, Kateri's repeated intercession on behalf of members of the colony, both Indian and French, and the miracles that resulted, gained her a veneration that was far reaching in Nouvelle France.... Father Claude Chaucetière, another missionary who had close contact with Kateri, rendered a portrait of her one year after her death and apparently compiled a brief biography about the same time (Koppedrayer 1993:280-281).

In the *Jesuit Relations*, Chaucetière writes in the year of Kateri's death about her exemplary life and that she died "in the odor of sanctity". She is described as a "treasure" whose "lifeless body serves as argument to the savages that faith is worthy of credence"(Thwaites 1896-1901:215-217, volume 63).

Kateri's most prominent modern biographer is H enri B echard. A Jesuit, B echard (1909-1990) had a lifelong interest in Kateri as her Vice-Postulator, the priest who is assigned local responsibility for a canonization cause (Woodward 1990:81).<sup>12</sup> Assigned to

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<sup>12</sup> In Kateri's case, there are two Vice-Postulators, one in Auriesville, New York (currently Fr. John Paret), and one in Kahnawake, Quebec (currently Fr. Jacques Bruyere). Overseeing Kateri's cause in Rome is Postulator General Fr. Paolo Molinari.

the parish of Kahnawake in 1946, B  chard wrote several biographies of Kateri as well as a history of the “Caughnawaga Indians” (1976). B  chard’s name also still appears on many of the “tracts” distributed by the contemporary Kateri Center at Kahnawake. In B  chard’s accounts, which draw primarily from Fathers Cholenec and Chauceiti  re, Kateri is the central force and figure for the events and individuals at Kahnawake. B  chard says, “The most widely known of Kahnawake’s inhabitants is Kateri who was acquainted with nearly all the men and women whose story is told in the following pages” (B  chard 1976:vi). B  chard’s Kateri, like that of the earlier Jesuits, leads an exemplary life, cures the sick, practices mortifications regularly, appears post-mortemly and prophetically in visions to help friends, and generally, helps others at the mission to advance in their spiritual lives. Thus,

...from the earliest accounts by Kateri’s confessors right up to the most recent publications, there has been little apparent interpolation; the story line, the individual episodes, the description, and even the terms used to characterize Kateri, her chastity and piety, have remained constant (Koppedrayer 1993:282).

The corpus of her biographies is remarkably homogenous.

Such consistency results from the fact that these biographies are organized around “main” or “significant” events in Kateri’s life.<sup>13</sup> These begin with her birth in 1656 on the south bank of the Mohawk River in what is now New York state, to a Mohawk father and an Algonquin mother. Her mother’s conversion to Christianity is much touted as the reason for Kateri’s “predisposition to the faith” and Kateri’s life is often told as a fulfilment of her mother’s last wish for Kateri’s conversion (Brunsman 1956:13-15, B  chard 1980:3-

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<sup>13</sup> What follows is a highly condensed version of Kateri’s life that amalgamates several biographies. See Koppedrayer (1993:282-289), and Greer (1998:140-150) for a more extensive account.

4). The “terrible circumstances of pagandom in which she began her life” are often referenced, likely in an effort to show how far Kateri had to progress to become pious and virtuous (Bécharde 1980). Yet at the same time, Kateri is pictured as “a happy Indian child” cheerfully passing her time with the activities “of her people” until the missionaries arrived (Bécharde 1980:3-8, Lovasik 1981:9).

Smallpox arrived with the colonists, and Kateri’s encounter with this disease marks the first “sign” of her uniqueness. Kateri survived, but both her parents and her younger brother were killed. Kateri herself was left weak, scarred, and with damaged eyesight. These disabilities, according to her biographers, marked Kateri as an “outcaste” of sorts, left without family or beauty.<sup>14</sup> An “orphan” (according to Euro-American paradigms of kinship), she went to live with an uncle and an assortment of aunts who mistreated and tormented her, attempted to prevent her from pursuing her interest in Christianity, and tried to force her to marry against her wishes. In the narrative, Kateri becomes a misfit, further and further distanced from and even at odds with her life among the Iroquois. At the same time, she is described as “courageous”, bearing the burden of the insults and cruelty of her people.

The Jesuits arrived like an answer to a prayer, providing a solution for all of Kateri’s problems. Her first encounter with Jesuit missionaries occurred in 1667 when Fathers Frémin, Bruyas, and Pierron visited her village and were hosted by her uncle. Kateri was assigned to the missionaries’ care during their stay, and her interest in

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<sup>14</sup> This outcaste status is based on Euro-American notions of beauty and the nuclear family. Buehrle claims that “Kateri’s life among the Iroquois would have been limited by her handicaps...She was disadvantaged in that she was scarred, was not pretty, had damaged eyesight and no mother to help her....If she had been pretty, things might have been very different [i.e. she would have married]” (Buehrle 1954:vii, ix). Significantly, her “beauty” is said to have been restored minutes after her death when the smallpox scars miraculously disappeared.



Christianity peaked (Vescey 1997:96-97). In 1674, Kateri met Father de Lamberville when he visited her home. She announced her desire for baptism and began to take religious instruction. On Easter Sunday in 1676, she was baptized and given the name Katherine (Kateri). Now a complete misfit among her “traditional Iroquois people”, and tormented and teased by them, Kateri *fled* her village, on the advice of Father de Lamberville, to live at Sault St. Louis, the St. Francis Xavier mission near Montréal. This interpretation of Kateri’s journey as flight to a “safe haven” is important. Kateri is described as “coming home to a place where she finally belongs”. As Greer says,

Space has a moral and spiritual meaning in all of the Jesuit *Vitae* of Tekakwitha.... Saints’ *Lives* since ancient times tend to be organized around movement between a ‘bad’ place and a ‘good’ place; the subject experiences adversity in one locality -- usually some version of a ‘desert’ or a wilderness -- and glorification in the other. Cholenec’s Kateri conforms to this pattern to a striking degree. The move from the ‘abominable country’ of her birth -- ‘another Egypt’ -- to the ‘promised land’ of Kahnawake is the primary spatial dynamic (Greer 1998:149).

Kateri lived at the mission for just over two years before she died. During this time, Kateri pronounced her vow of perpetual virginity, formally declared herself to be the “wife of Christ” and became, as the Jesuits called her, “the First Iroquois Virgin”. These events mark the beginning of Kateri’s “official” ascetic life. At the mission, it seems that “flagellations, branding, exposure, fasting, metal spiked belts, thorn-filled beds, and so on were Kateri’s practice of Christianity” (Koppedraye 1993:287). Yet Kateri did not practice these alone. Fr. Cholenec documented the zeal and asceticism in their biographies of Kateri.

The Mission of the Sault was at that time very fervent under the guidance of its holy

missionaries.... Several times a week some of them chastised their bodies until they bled; others, while gathering firewood, wore iron bands around their bodies for entire days.... The women, who always go to extremes, did all this and more (*Positio* 282-284).

Ethnohistorian David Blanchard also mentions that Kateri was the leader of a “band” – a confraternity of women devoted to an imitation of Kateri’s spirituality (Blanchard 1982:92-93). The Jesuit fathers understood this group of women to be imitating Montréal nuns. Fr. Chaucetière says, “Kateri Tekakwitha is known to have visited Montreal and the nuns with Father Pierre Cholenec and some other companions in 1676” (Chaucetière in Blanchard 1982:91).

By contrast, Blanchard argues that although Kateri was responsible for first proposing the formation of an association of virgins, she did this in order to “resurrect” the traditional Iroquois belief that virginity created great power in an individual. Traditionally, Blanchard continues, such Iroquois ‘convents’ were supported by the community until the arrival of the Europeans who “dishonoured the profession”. (Lafitau 1974 in Blanchard 1982:92)

The *Relations* suggest that there existed a small group of women who practiced extreme austerities, chose a life of virginity, that may have seen Kateri as a model (*Positio* 181-185, 262-273). At the very least, Kateri had at least one close “spiritual companion” at the mission, Onondoga Mary Teresa Tegaiaguenta, a woman who had lost her husband and children and ended up at Kahnawake. Fr. Cholenec tells us that the two women “resolved to unite themselves in order to do penance” and in fact practiced austerities in secret together (*Positio* 272). This relationship between Mary Teresa and Kateri is much elaborated in later biographies; they are described as being “best friends” (Brown 1958,

Litkowski 1989, Béchard 1994).

Greer and Vescey argue that it is possible that,

During her lifetime, Kateri was simply one member among thirteen of a group of pious and ascetic young women, and Chaucetiere's mission history accords much more attention to that collectivity. These women not only resisted overwhelming pressures to fornicate, they renounced marriage itself and, in some case, cut off their hair to discourage suitors (Greer 1998:141, cf. Vescey 1997:90).

Moreover, Greer continues,

Anyone familiar with Iroquoian cultural traditions will recognize the indigenous antecedents of the 'sisters' practices of female friendship, sharing, fasting, and self-torture, though of course the Jesuits chose always to depict these in the European language of Counter-Reformation piety (Greer 1998:142, cf. Vescey 1997:41, 42, 97, 98).

According to Chaucetière and Béchard, Kateri's "sisters" or "band" *followed* Kateri's exemplary influence "in the practice of the most Christian virtues" (i.e. they were not part of a group instituted or even encouraged by the Jesuits and Kateri was the group's initiator) (Béchard 1976:157, 1992:138-144, Thwaites 1896-1901:122, 124, volume 64, 175-177, volume 62). It appears then that Kateri was indeed part and perhaps leader of a group of women at the mission and that they participated in the ascetic fervour which marked Kateri's time at the Sault. It is provocative to imagine how and why Kateri was singled out by her priests and how her extreme practices were interpreted by the Jesuits who were writing her biography shortly after her death.

Further, it is significant that accounts of extreme asceticism are absent from or at least downplayed in later, post-seventeenth century, biographies of Kateri, notably in the

material published or distributed by the Tekakwitha Conference National Center and other devotional accounts (Brown 1959, Brunsman 1956, Buehrle 1954, Bunson 1992, Litkowski 1989, McCauley 1992). Given the remarkable homogeneity of Kateri's biographies, this variation is noteworthy. The omission may be connected to the fact that Kateri's penances were simultaneously regarded as praiseworthy and excessive. Such ambiguity is present in the *Jesuit Relations*. Kateri is said to have led a "good life" and set a "good example" for other "savages". Her penances are recounted with pride by the missionaries. Yet in 1681, Chaucetière writes that after Kateri's death, "a demon drove imitators of Catherine to excessive penance in order to render Christianity hateful [to other natives?] from the start" (Thwaites 1896-1901:143, 215-217, 241 volume 63). Thus, accounts of the severity of her penances, which may very well have contributed to her early death, are modified or softened in several of Kateri's biographies, most likely to avoid associating the Jesuits with such extreme asceticism (Richter 1992:128). To distance themselves from this association, the Jesuits recount how Kateri *herself* resolved to take upon herself the mortifications of Jesus Christ, and further, that this resolution was accompanied by a "healthy sorrow for sins" (Bécharde 1976:ix). In so doing, the Jesuit sources differentiate Kateri's austerities and sado-masochism. In fact, Father Choleneq claims that he was surprised by such practices and advised her to moderate her suffering (Choleneq 1715:69 in Koppedraye 1993:287). In these devotional biographies, Kateri is said to have "suffered greatly", and to have been subject to "unfortunate circumstances", but the cause of her suffering is only mentioned briefly as part of her "pious life" (Buehrle 1954, Lovasik 1981, *Positio*, Skanaieah n.d.).

Kateri's life of piety ended in 1680 with her death. At the age of twenty-four, having been sick and weak for months, Kateri uttered, "Jesus! Mary! I love you!" and

went “to be with her Lord”. She is said to have faced her imminent death with joy, secure in the knowledge that she was giving God what He had asked of her (Bécharde 1980:30). “Fifteen minutes after her death before the eyes of two Jesuits and all the Indians that could fit into the room, the ugly scars on her face suddenly disappeared” (Skanaieah n.d.:3). This “miracle”, which rendered Kateri “beautiful”, was at once taken as a sign of her saintly life. Other miracles and religious fervour at the mission are associated with her death, and veneration of her tomb and her memory began almost immediately.

The life of a saint (or a proto-saint) does not end with her death. Kateri’s biographies also include accounts of miracles, visions, and prophecies all attributed to Kateri’s intercession. As Chaucetière says, “Kateri served her mission by good example, but she served it more after her death” (Thwaites 1896-1901:215, volume 63). Similarly, Vescey concludes,

The record of her spiritual practices deepened the piety of the French Jesuit community in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, and in other realms worked by the Jesuits, her name came to symbolize the miraculous transformational efficacy of Catholicism among Indian peoples -- even though her asceticism [most likely] combined Iroquois and Catholic ideals (Vescey 1997:99).

Kateri’s life story, as reputation, also includes Pope Pius XII’s declaration of her as Venerable in 1943 and her beatification in 1980 by Pope John Paul II.

Such is the “signs and wonders” version of Kateri’s life (Daniel 4:2). Her biography is organized around “events” which demonstrate God’s action upon an individual’s life.<sup>15</sup> Smallpox, encounters with missionaries, baptism, and flight to the

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<sup>15</sup> This image of God as actor raises many complex questions about agency and response, to be dealt with below.

mission settlement are marked as “significant” by Kateri’s biographers. These become the “minimal units” of Kateri’s life, to be “described, analyzed, ordered, and interpreted” (Fogelson 1989:134). Such an “event”-focused life history not only masks the differential recognition and variable valorization of events (Fogelson 1989:142), but also tells us nothing about “the rest” of Kateri’s life. Yet biographies are, by their very nature, recounted “after the fact”, and in this way, they differ from other sources like diaries and letters. Significance is ascribed posthumously, and in this case by authors who, even at the time of her death, already saw Kateri as a pious exemplar of the Christian faith.

The structuring of Kateri’s life around “significant events” allows for the development of metanarratives. A metanarrative is an overarching theme to a story which underlines its purpose. Metanarratives are grand theories like Freudism, Marxism, structural functionalism, evolutionary biology, that are presumed to have great generality and to represent a final and apodeictic truth (Lyotard 1984, cf. Dubisch 1995:8). Throughout her various biographies, Kateri emerges as fertile, tilled soil for the planting of Jesuit seed.<sup>16</sup> Says Buehrle:

We find a girl not caring for the usual pleasures of women of her race, content with her needlework and the making of things for others, mature in her thinking, and one who certainly knew her own mind.... Can anyone say that the soil had not been properly prepared?... When Father de Lamberville came into contact with Kateri, he was aware that here was fertile ground. As for Kateri, the response was immediate and complete. A human being whose life, condemned by circumstances to loneliness, lovelessness, and unrest, had found at last that which she was so

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<sup>16</sup> The impregnation metaphor is tantalizing. Two asexual entities come together in a consummation of faith. The celibate priest and the Iroquois Virgin take comfort in each other in the colonial wilderness.

unconsciously seeking: One in whom she could find faith, One in whom she could find security, One whom she could love (Buehrle 1954:x-xi).

Thus emerges a portrait of a young woman becoming more and more distanced from her nascent environment, living in a liminal state until the arrival of the Jesuits. The Jesuits sow their Christian seed and the Lily of the Mohawks blooms.

In that Kateri's story is most often told as the unfolding of divine will in an individual's life that produces an extraordinary and exemplary person, her biographies closely resemble hagiography. Koppedrayer has convincingly shown how Kateri's life story "follows the structure of medieval hagiography, the widely circulated stories of saints lives that throughout church history informed popular piety, which in turn mirrored religious values and social concerns" (Koppedrayer 1993:289). Legends of saints constitute a "type" of literature and are characterized by a similar structure of events or themes. These include: trials and ordeals, "a call from on high", virulent asceticism (especially sexual restraint), remarkable virtue, and the charismatic effect of saints' spiritual perfection upon others (Dunney 1944 *passim*, Koppedrayer 1993:289-290, *Positio*, cf. Campbell 1968:49-237, Thompson 1955:M364.3.2; M63). Clearly these elements are present in the standard form of Kateri's life story. As Koppedrayer says, "By the end of the seventeenth century, her earliest biographers, Father Claude Chaucetière and Father Pierre Cholenec were applying descriptions reserved for saints to Kateri" (Koppedrayer 1993:297). Oppression and ostracism mark a saint.

### **Veneration: Kateri's Early and Modern Cults:**

Kateri has had a following or "cult" since the time of her death. Both Cholenec and Chaucetière recall in detail how both French Catholics and Indians alike flocked to her

tomb; Cholenec penned his memoir of her saintliness within two weeks of her death; and Kateri was said to have appeared to Chaucetière who painted the earliest known portrait of her which still hangs in Kahnawake today (Vescey 1997:99). Miracles resulting from her intercession and aided by “a bit of dust from the tomb, the recitation of a novena on her behalf, the use of one of her relics, and faith,” are documented in the conclusions of most of her biographies (Cholenec 1781 [1715]:96-98, Koppedraye 1993:288-289).

Nineteenth century historian, John Shea also includes accounts of Kateri’s miraculous intervention after her death. Writing in 1855, he states,

She was buried beside the church, and her grave became immediately the resort of those who wished to interest in their behalf a faithful servant of God. It became a pilgrimage where the prelate and the viceroy came alike to kneel and pay homage to exalted virtue.... This devotion was not unrewarded: miraculous cures attested that it was pleasing to Heaven, while they enkindled anew the devotion to this holiest of the children of the American forests (Shea 1855:307).

Shea also tells of how Kateri’s intercession protected three missionaries from a hurricane in 1683 which levelled the stone church in which they were praying: “The ruins came crashing around them, the bell even fell at the feet of one, yet two escaped with slight bruises, and the other entirely unhurt” (Shea 1855:307). Thus seventeenth century Kateri became protector, intercessor, and exemplar for both French and Iroquois.

Kahnawake today still houses Kateri’s tomb and pilgrims continue visit and venerate the remains that lie there. Father Bruyère, of the Kateri Center at Kahnawake writes in 1995, “You should have seen the 1400 Natives [from the Tekakwitha Conference] here in August.... As soon as they got off the bus, they rushed inside the shrine to Kateri’s tomb, kissing it, embracing it, singing and praying in a circle around it”



(personal communication 1995). But her body has a complicated and somewhat apocryphal history. Her bones were brought to Caugnawaga (now named Kahnawake) from an earlier resting place in 1720.<sup>17</sup> Later, “when a contingent of Caugnawaga families established the new Catholic community at St. Regis in 1755, they took with them half of her body for devotional purposes. A fire in 1762 destroyed that relic” (Vescey 1997:100). However, during my fieldwork at Kahnawake, I was told that a single perfect lily has grown every year on the site of the fire. As suggested above however, the tomb at Kahnawake is treated as though it housed Kateri’s complete body. Indeed, on several occasions after I had mentioned the history of the separation and destruction of part of Kateri’s body, respondents told me that “Indians wouldn’t like that; it’s very important to us to keep a whole body together” (various personal communications 1998).

Regardless of where her remains were or were not, Kateri’s cult flourished, and her life and death became central icons of Jesuit missiology in North America (Vescey 1997:99). Greer describes the evolution of her cult as such.

Pierre Cholenec’s published *Life of Tekakwitha* proved to be an instant success. Widely read in France, it was soon translated into Spanish and published in Mexico City (1724); German, Italian, and other versions followed, most of them products of the Jesuits’ international network. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a succession of European authors took up Cholenec’s story and adapted it to current needs. Meanwhile, a steady stream of aboriginal and

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<sup>17</sup> When I was conducting fieldwork in Kahnawake in 1996, Fr. Bruyere told me this story of Kateri’s remains. He suggested that Kateri’s remains were originally located at a site “just down the road” from the present day Kahnawake. I would refer the reader to H nri B chard’s, *The Original Caugnawaga Indians* (1976) or Christopher Vescey’s *The Paths of Kateri’s Kin* (1997) for a detailed history of the movement of the Caugnawaga community.

French-Canadian pilgrims continued to visit the grave of the Mohawk holy woman. This situation prevailed until the late nineteenth century, when concerted efforts aimed at securing Tekakwitha's canonization began in earnest (Greer 1998:151).

Greer tells us that what followed was "an explosive proliferation of hagiographic materials as an Americanized version of the Kateri industry took flight" (Greer 1998:151). He goes on to explain that Kateri's cause

...began with the United States Council of Catholic Bishops and its search for a genuine American saint. By virtue of her New York state birthplace, Tekakwitha seemed a likely candidate, and the Third Plenary Council of 1884 petitioned the Holy See to introduce her cause. In an age of nationalism, this figure who had once been seen as a spiritual exile in the pagan land of her birth now became, for American Catholics, 'our Katherine.' Such an appropriation naturally provoked a nationalist reaction on the part of the French-Canadian Church, which began its own campaign to stimulate the Tekakwitha cult and to promote the cause of her canonization. Soon there were two major shrines devoted to her memory, one at Auriesville, New York, near her birthplace, and one at Kahnawake where her body was interred. Moreover there were two parallel vice-postulators orchestrating the canonization campaign, one in the United States and one in Quebec (Greer 1998:151, cf. Vescey 1997:100).

Kateri's current American Vice-Postulator, Father John Paret was appointed to the cause in 1991 after the death of Fr. McBride, the previous Vice-Postulator. Previously, he had been a parish priest in Brooklyn and Manhattan, New York. Fr. Paret explains Kateri's two causes more simply.

The Vice-Postulator should be from the diocese where the person died. Therefore

Montréal would be responsible for the effort. But Kateri lived the greater part of her life in the Albany diocese so the Albany bishop took it. Montréal didn't want to let it get away but they couldn't take it back, so they just had two (Paret 1996).

In addition to the Jesuit-run shrine, tomb and church at Kahnawake, Kateri's official American shrine can be found in Fonda, New York, just six miles down the road from the Auriesville Shrine of the North American Martyrs, a several hundred acre expanse of gardens, museums and groves. Father Paret also works as the director of the Martyrs' shrine. As he explains, his daily work for Kateri's cause involves answering letters, writing the "Lily of the Mohawks" newsletter, preparing for the special mass on her feast day, receiving donations in thanksgiving, and following up on any "miracle leads" (Paret 1996).<sup>18</sup>

Such is Kateri's multi-pathed history, traversing countries, first on foot and then in stories; her life and cause spans borders of all sorts. The traces of her official presence and relics bring pilgrims and prayers, devotions and donations. The roads began to lead forth from Iroquois circles only in the 1930's and did so via missionary and priestly routes. "In 1932, Kateri was presented formally to the Vatican for consideration of sainthood and in 1943 Pope Pius XII declared her venerable at the recommendation of his curial Congregation of Rites" (Vescey 1997:100). Popular devotion started to grow in the late 1970's and then in 1980, Kateri Tekakwitha was beatified, entitled a "Blessed", by Pope John Paul II. It is to her contemporary devotion that we now turn.

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<sup>18</sup> The irony at the Martyrs' and Kateri's shrines seemed almost palpable to me as I wandered past placards describing the Martyrs' brutal deaths at the hands of the "savage Mohawks". On these signs and in the brochures from the shrine, the Martyrs' blood is said to have "fertilized the soil for the Lily of the Mohawks" (Curran 1985:4).

### **The Tekakwitha Conference: Devotion 300 Years Later**

While Kateri still resides among the priests and pilgrims at Kahnawake and in Auriesville and Fonda, she has also found a new home amidst supporters at the Tekakwitha Conference National Center whose headquarters are in Great Falls, Montana. The Tekakwitha Conference claims to represent “a growing unity within Native Catholic communities with the special protection of Blessed Kateri” (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet n.d.). The Tekakwitha Conference began in 1939 as an advisory group of non-native priests to Bishop Aloysius Muench in Fargo North Dakota. “However, by the mid-1970s, this conference of missionary priests decided that change was essential. In 1976, Native American Catholics were invited to the Conference, and its focus shifted to the interface between Native American religious traditions and Christianity.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Indian participation in the Tekakwitha Conference has grown” (Szasz et al 1997:5-6). This inclusion precipitated the 1977, “revitalization” when the Conference opened its membership fully to “Catholic Native Americans and those in ministry with them” (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet n.d.).

Vescey explains the “revitalization” as such:

In 1978 fifty Indians joined three times that number of non-natives. The following year in Yankton the Indians took over the meeting, evicting all but a few white priests.... The Indians demanded increased native participation in the conference and in the Church at large. They wanted to enact Vatican II theological impulses in explicit ways, conjoining Indian cultural expressions in Catholic liturgy. In short,

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<sup>19</sup> Vescey claims that this focus on the interface between Catholicism and Native traditions is “a topic fitting to post-Vatican II experimentation, but also suitable to Kateri’s syncretistic spirituality” (Vescey 1997:101). The post-conciliar approach to culture and syncretism will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

they called for an ‘encounter of accommodation’...between Indian and Catholic paths. The response of the Catholic authorities was to create a national organization, amply financed, whose purpose was to foster the spirit of Kateri Tekakwitha, first, by promoting the cause of her canonization, and secondly, by engaging in the project of liturgical, theological, and ecclesiological inculturation among American Indian Catholics (Vescey 1997:101-102).

I have had the privilege of getting to know some of the key figures in the contemporary Conference as well as some Native American participants who were at the first conferences in the late 1970s and who have attended since. In what follows, I present some of their voices and perspectives on the Conference’s beginnings.

Richard King was the director of the Tekakwitha Conference from 1994 - 1998. Chippewa and Assiniboine, King is a licensed chemical dependency specialist, and has worked at addiction treatment centres and the Native American Rehabilitation Association (NARA) in Washington and Oregon. In an interview in 1996, while I was exploring archives at the Conference headquarters in Great Falls, Montana, King explained the beginnings of the Conference.

*Richard:* In the beginning, the Tekakwitha Conference was actually started by the Church itself. The Archbishop of Fargo, North Dakota. The reason they started the conference was to train clerics who worked with Indian missions in the Great Plains area – that’s North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and even Nebraska and western Minnesota. That’s how they got the name. That’s the reason they started, but also the name, Kateri Tekakwitha, you know, is used in a lot of church instructions to Native peoples. The Church itself uses the story of Kateri Tekakwitha to illustrate whatever point the Church wants to. That’s the reason they

picked the name because she was a well known Indian at the time. The idea of it was to, the Tekakwitha Conference was to help people understand Native people. Meet once a year and they would have, ‘This is happening on this reservation in South Dakota. How do you handle it over in Lebrae and Ashley, Montana. How do you handle it in St. Paul’s and Hayes, Montana or Fort Defiance Indian reservation?’ That was kind of what this is about.

*Paula:* This was back in 1939?

*Richard:* 1939, a little before that. Its been around a long time.

*Paula:* I read that in 1977, it said that the purpose of the conference was challenged. Now does that refer to the Statement of the U.S. Bishops on American Indians?

*Richard:* Indian history at that point of time was happening in the country as a whole. The Indian country, the Indian people were virtually left out of textbooks from 1890 to... Basically from Wounded Knee to Wounded Knee. Basically from 1890 to 1972. The Wounded Knee Massacre over on the Pine Ridge reservation and then they had the Wounded Knee takeover or the takeover of the Wounded Knee Church and village back in 1973. That was kind of like, that point of time -- 1890’s to 1973, most of the Indians, Indians in general, were left out of textbooks and everything (King 1996).

Father Matthew, one of the original participants in the Tekakwitha Conference from its first meeting 1939 (initially called the “Missionary Conference”) remembers the 1979 revitalization of the Conference like this.

There was an old Indian lady there [at the annual meeting. Natives had been allowed to attend as observers up to this point]. She was nervous, wringing her

hands, trying to stir up her courage to do something. She wanted to say something to the bishop. She said, "Oh Bishop, I am so glad you are here. You say such nice things." The Bishop beamed and smiled. "But you always say the same things. We wonder whether these *Waicishus*, white people/priests could get out of this room and we Indian people could talk to you by ourselves." So all the white priests left. The Indians made no demands, just raised concerns and put these forward very straightforwardly and shockingly to the bishops. The bishops had never heard anything like this before. The Indian lady said, "Is it possible that you would send only healthy men and women [to our reserves] -- not the ones with problems and the ones who couldn't function anywhere else? Is it possible that our girls who are in the orders could come back to their own reservations? Is it possible that married men could be priests? Then we could have some of our own." *That's* how the Conference began to be revitalized (Fr. Matthew 1996).

Stephanie is a Jemez woman in her late seventies who has devoted her life in the past twenty years to making Kateri's cause known, through telling the saint's story, and never being without prayer cards in her embroidered apron pocket ready to give to anyone who Stephanie thinks "needs a little cheering up". On this February morning, we were sitting around Juana's kitchen table and waiting for the beans to cook. While their spicy aroma filled the room, Stephanie told me about her attendance at the 1980 Tekakwitha Conference.

We were introduced to the workshops, and began to have sunrise services. We got to meet people from different tribes. They have sweetgrass, we have commeal. All the Indian things were brought out. The bishops and the priests, we asked them to come to the Conference so that they can find out for themselves what our Indian

traditional way of prayer was. Because some of them didn't like our Indian way. In fact, right here in the Pueblo, they called us pagans, because they didn't understand our Indian religion. By the time of the second council, what do you call that? Vatican II. It was there that was decided after Kateri and her group had already brought it up, they decided it was ok. Some of the priests had already found out about our beautiful way of prayer -- our Indian language, our Indian way. That way the Catholic way and the Native American way can just build up. And that is what this young lady, Kateri wants (Stephanie 1998).

Victoria, an Isleta woman who claims to have been involved with Kateri for the last thirty-three years, describes her experience as one of the first Native Americans permitted to participate in the Conference:

*Victoria:* These conferences have been coming up how long?

*Paula:* Since 1939, I think. and then I heard they changed around 1977.

*Victoria:* That's when I went!! When they first let Indians in. I was the only one from Isleta to go. No one from the surrounding pueblos went. There were hardly any Indians there [she names a few]. The priest from the church chose *me* to go. We talked about so many things at the Conference. I have a book about it. After that is when they *really* started the Tekakwitha Conference, but I couldn't go for the next few years after that first time because my children were still small.... But that time, in 1977, I went with Father Diego from here and Vern.... He's gone now. I remember though that he had long hair.... It was *very* beautiful. That's when I first got to know what was going on. I really didn't know about it. I was *really lucky* to be chosen. I've tried to go every year, if I can, since (Victoria 1998).

Thus 1980 marked not only Kateri's beatification, and concomitant increase in



Native attendance at the Conference, but also the beginning of the national movement and the establishment of the National Center in Great Falls, Montana (Vescey 1997:102). As of 1999, the Tekakwitha Conference is governed by a board of directors comprised of both Native Americans and non-Native clergy and nuns. The Conference's goals are:

- \*To unify Native American Catholics while respecting tribal differences;
- \*To empower Native American Catholics to live in harmony with their Catholic and native spirituality;
- \*To promote and maintain on-going communication and involvement between tribes, the Tekakwitha Conference, and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in America;
- \*To pray for the canonization of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, to share the story of her life, and to follow her example of holiness;<sup>20</sup>
- \*To encourage the development of local Kateri Circles;
- \*To cooperate with local, regional, and national groups to realize this vision ("Tekakwitha Conference: Voice, Presence, Identity of Native American Catholics" 1995).

The Tekakwitha Conference National Center also oversees the development and certification of Kateri Circles. Kateri Circles are largely independent local gatherings of Native Catholic communities whose main focus is to follow Kateri's virtuous example and

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<sup>20</sup> Prayer for the Canonization of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha:

O God, who, among the many marvels of Your Grace in the New World, did cause to blossom on the banks of the Mohawk and of the St. Lawrence, the pure and tender Lily, Kateri Tekakwitha, grant we beseech You, the favor we beg through her intercession; that this Young Lover of Jesus and of His Cross may soon be counted among the Saints by Holy Mother Church, and that our hearts may be enkindled with a stronger desire to imitate her innocence and faith. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

to pray for her canonization. Guided by the interests and needs of the local parish or community, Kateri Circles also have a more pragmatic side. For example, a circle may pray for healing from cancer for one of its members, work to provide simple funerals without great expense or extravagance, or pray the rosary with a family whose loved one is ill or dying. As of 1999, there are 126 Kateri Circles registered with the Tekakwitha Conference, one in Saskatchewan, Canada, one in Barcelona, Spain, and the remainder in the United States.

The Tekakwitha Conference also organizes annual meetings of members. The location of the Conference rotates between the eastern, central, and western regions of the United States and is usually held at a university with capacity for the fifteen hundred or so people who come each year for the five day gathering. In order for a bid to host the Conference to be successful, there must be considerable interest and support from the local Native Americans. The “host tribe” is expected to give workshops about the local native culture, sponsor a “traditional meal”, and provide tours to any nearby reservations. Activities at the conference include daily masses, healing and reconciliation ceremonies, speeches, canonization updates, informal prayer groups, educational workshops, a powwow on the last night, and for the first time in 1999, an evening talent show. The workshops seek to educate the participants in a wide range of subjects from “Native spirituality” to alcoholism and family matters. In 1999, sessions included: Native American urban ministry, health and healing through traditional medicine and herbs, Alcoholics Anonymous, higher education for the holistic development of Native Americans, inculturation in liturgy, healing emotional wounds from the residential school experience, and affirming gospel values in traditional storytelling.

Significantly, the Tekakwitha Conference claims to be the “voice, presence, and

identity of Native American Catholics". Using phrases like "the reality of the Native Catholic Church", and "affirming the gifts of the Native people as Church", members are admonished to see Kateri as a model, guide, inspiration, and example, and to express themselves and their beliefs not only in traditional Roman Catholic ways, but in "Native ways" as well. Such discourse implies a kind of unity among all Catholic Native peoples.

For the Tekakwitha Conference, Kateri serves as a symbol of this unity. In a promotional booklet for the Conference, the unnamed author states that "Kateri stands before us as a symbol of the best of the heritage that is yours as North American Indians." On the importance of Kateri's canonization, a Tekakwitha Conference administrator told me, "When Kateri is canonized, the whole world will see Native Americans in a different light... It will improve Native standing in the Catholic Church... Natives will be right up there with the rest of them" (phone conversation 1995). Thus for the Tekakwitha Conference, Kateri symbolizes the unity and strength of all Catholic American Native peoples, and highlights their presence and importance in the larger Catholic Church.

What then do people get out of the Conference, enough to attend year after year as the majority of members do? Why have so many continued to attend, raising funds in bake sales, selling fry bread after church on Sundays like the Isleta Kateri Circle, or gathering together to make stacks of tamales to sell every second Saturday like the Mescalero Apache Kateri ladies do? Significantly, for many older women, attending the Tekakwitha Conference is often the only time throughout the year when they leave the reservation and immediate surrounding area. Many plan and save all year for these Conferences. In answer to these questions, most of my respondents emphasized the knowledge they gained about different tribes and the fellowship and unity they experienced as the key reasons for their own commitment to attend annually. Many also appreciated the opportunity to

participate in daily masses and prayer meetings. More than simply the regularity of these regular spiritual gatherings, women feel especially blessed to be able to attend these services in the presence of so many other Native Americans. People also emphasized the leisure and vacation aspects of the trips, which, as I will discuss more fully below, constitute a subject of great controversy and criticism.

Here then are some representative thoughts about the pleasures and benefits that the Tekakwitha Conference brings.

Aunt Grace, an Acoma woman living in Albuquerque who had been attending the Conferences for about fifteen years values the friendships made at and maintained through the Conference. Without children of her own, she is known by many as Aunt Grace. In 1997, I walked the hundred mile pilgrimage with Aunt Grace and her niece, June. Although in her seventies, Aunt Grace kept pace with us in the water truck and served us dixie cups filled with water and orange slices every few miles on our journey. When we arrived at our destination, Chimayo, New Mexico, Aunt Grace held me as I cried from relief and exhaustion, and whispered in my ear, "You are my child now." From then on, I have been her adoptive niece and she has been "Aunt Grace" to me. Aunt Grace is often lonely in her single trailer in the east end of Albuquerque. When we were talking about the Conference one cold January day in 1998, she told me, "I've met lots of people [at the Conference] – old people again; it's like a reunion at the Conference. I meet old friends, and make new friends" (Grace 1998).

Similarly, Marian, a self-proclaimed "urban Indian" who attends Sunday mass and is involved in the Kateri Circle at Queen of Angels Indian Chapel in Albuquerque, and also lives alone, values the friendships forged at the Conference.

I like the fellowship. You see friends that you may have seen last year. I even met

a lady from Alaska. Every year you meet the same people. You learn about them - sit with them and eat with them during lunch hour, breakfast and supper, you just get acquainted. It's nice to break bread with them and get acquainted and learn about their different tribes and stuff like that (Marian 1998).

Stephanie, from Jemez, the first of the Pueblos to enshrine -- a kind of official spiritual "set up" of a saint in the church -- Blessed Kateri, also revelled in the differences and similarities between the various tribes who attend the Conference. "We learn about all the different Indian religions. The Pueblos are entirely different from the Plains Indians. The Mohawks are different; they have their own sacred place where they worship. But Kateri is loved by everyone" (Stephanie 1998).

Dawn, an active Kateri Circle member in Isleta Pueblo told me about the richness of community she experiences at the Conferences.

The best thing about the Tekakwitha Conferences is just being together as Native Americans. We share ideas and I like the healing services they have. You meet people there and they have their own way of worshipping Kateri and they have their own ways they describe Kateri. They have Native American speakers and clergy too, as well as something for the younger generation. I would like to see more people from the village going -- not just those who go to church but everyone is welcome. That's the only way you can learn about her. I know that some of the people who stay and stray away from the Church feel awkward going back and it shouldn't be that way. When you meet someone, like at the Conference, you never go away with nothing (Dawn 1998).

Finally, a group of three Navajo women including a nun I spoke with in Fort Defiance, Arizona. expressed to me their joy of both the journey to the Conference and the

intimate community they find there.

We started going in 1984. We've always gone with the Laguna [Pueblo] group. They go as a pilgrimage -- singing, hymns, prayers on the bus; it's just beautiful. The first time we went out of curiosity. It was just beautiful, very inspirational to learn how others praise Kateri. We were most surprised at, well, the Navajos and Pueblos carry pouches with corn pollen. I thought we were the only ones. We were surprised to see that the Mohawks and other tribes carry pouches too, some with tobacco though. At the Tekakwitha Conference, we learn about other tribes, how they pray to Kateri, how she was raised and how she followed Jesus. When I pray, I always say, "You're one of our native peoples, an Indian" (Sr. Jean, Leslie, and Christine 1998).

There are echoes of anthropologist Victor Turner's idea of *communitas* in these descriptions of the events, travel, and friendship which characterize the Conference for many women. Writing on pilgrimage, to which the Conference is likened by many participants, Turner describes *communitas* as a "likeness of lot and intention" experienced by pilgrims (Turner and Turner 1978:13). More specifically, *communitas* is defined by Turner as "a relational quality of full, unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arise spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances. It is a liminal phenomenon which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship" (Turner and Turner 1978:250). Turner goes on to say that pilgrimage poses "unity and homogeneity against the disunity and heterogeneity of ethnicities, cultures, classes, and professions in the mundane sphere... [It presents] an alternative mode of social being, a world where *communitas*, rather than bureaucratic social structure is preeminent: (Turner and Turner

1978:39). Clearly many Conference participants experience this kind of heightened spirituality, and intense social bonding across tribal groupings and geographical distance of which Turner writes. Further, outside their reservations and local Circles, members also feel a kind homogeneity and union with delegates from other tribes as they unite under the mantle of Kateri as part of a larger group of “Native Catholics”.

Yet Turner’s theory about pilgrimage has been challenged by later theorists who criticized his emphasis on unanimity and unity of pilgrims. Sociologist John Eade and anthropologist Michael Sallnow, both British, understand pilgrimages more as arenas for contestation rather than consensus (Eade and Sallnow 1991:2, 5). Briefly, Eade and Sallnow suggest that “pilgrimage is above all an arena for competing religious and secular discourses,... for conflict between orthodoxies, sects, confessional groups, for drives towards consensus and *communitas*, and for counter-movements towards separateness and division” (Eade and Sallnow 1991:1-4). As we shall see below, the Conference is not unified in terms of activities, intentions, and the values placed on these.

While Kateri is seen as figurehead and role model for spiritual unity and fellowship, the intertribal “breaking of bread”, some people also criticize the more secular pursuits that happen in tandem with the Conferences. Comments from participants range from highly negative through neutral to a more positive outlook on this issue of extracurricular activities. Carol (Oneida) and Jim (Isleta) who just celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary and were long time participants in the Conference told me from their Albuquerque home,

The Tekakwitha Conference is more like a vacation, a good time. Everyone goes shopping at KMart for souvenirs instead of attending the general assemblies and workshops. The really truly spiritual people – it’s not happening. They just go to

a few sessions, take a bus trip here or there; it's not the same anymore (Carol and Jim 1998).

The same group of Navajo women mentioned above told me, "At the Conference, others shop; but we just stay around and go to all the workshops and try to learn more about Kateri" (Sr. Jean, Leslie, Christine 1998).

Prior to the 1998 Conference which was held in Memphis, Tennessee, many people asked humorously whether there would be trips to Graceland included in the Conference schedule. There were many jokes about Elvis at the planning meetings I attended, jokes that expressed a sort of nervous awareness of the perilously close line between the sacred and the secular at these meetings. In fact, side trips to Graceland were included in the Conference program, a feature which alienated some Kateri devotees. As Joan, an Isleta woman in her fifties told me, "I haven't decided if I'll go to the Conference in Memphis this year. People might be too distracted. I would rather go to Graceland after the Conference and not try to mix it in together" (Joan 1998). Similarly, Carmen, a Mescalero Apache grandmother worried about the focus of the upcoming Conference. "People go just to shop, or like this year, to see Graceland. But we're going to see Kateri, not Elvis" (Carmen 1998). Theresa, my adoptive "mother" from Isleta and I jokingly suggested one evening around her kitchen table that we could make millions by printing T-shirts with pictures of Kateri and Elvis on them to sell at the Memphis Conference. In all seriousness, Theresa chose not to attend the 1998 Conference because of her concern about secular distractions at the meeting. Despite the obvious difficulties of housing and feeding several thousand people in anything but a large urban centre, Theresa believes that the Conference should be held in more retreat-like settings.

Others claim that fun, relaxation, visiting and even souvenir hunting (primarily for



religious items purchased from the gift shop set up at the site of each Conference<sup>21</sup>) form part of the core of the Conference experience: “When we first went to the Conference in 1987 in Phoenix when the Pope came, we didn’t know really what it was about. We were mostly interested in souvenirs -- T-shirts, mugs, books on Kateri and so on, because the Pope was there” (Colleen 1998). Carmen, the Mescalero woman concerned that the Memphis Conference focus on Kateri and not Elvis told me proudly, that

Every Tekakwitha Conference I go to, I get a mug. I have one from every state we’ve been to! Last year, I was looking at them and there was this man on his knees looking for one too. I thought he was a priest but it turns out he was a bishop! We got to talking and he ended up buying me that mug! I’ve also got a mug from Phoenix with a picture of the Pope on it (Carmen 1998).

Sr. Rachel, a non-Native nun working in Mescalero, reminded me that, “For most of these ladies, the Tekakwitha Conference is the only travel or vacation they do”. Then with a smile on her face, she continued, “They sure do buy alot of souvenirs and T-shirts though!” (Sr. Rachel 1998). The importance of the souvenirs obtained cannot be underestimated however. Margaret, a Navajo and Choctaw woman living in Albuquerque explained her shopping for religious items at the Conference, “My grand daughter’s name is Kateri. I brought her a little statue from the Tekakwitha Conference once. And I bring souvenirs home from the Tekakwitha Conference for the family -- little medals, rosaries, and so on. And then I tell my family about the Conference when I get back” (Margaret 1998). Thus for many, the souvenirs brought home from the Conference serve not only as tangible memories, but also as links to and teaching mechanisms for other family members

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<sup>21</sup> This emphasis on collecting the material culture associated with a saint will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Five.

who could not make the trip.

Just as participants express contradictory views about the leisure activities that accompany Conference attendance, so too the Conference as a whole forms a focus of contestation (cf. Eade and Sallnow 1991, Graburn 1984, Morinis 1992). During the early 1990s at several consecutive annual Conferences, delegates were divided following the lines of a disagreement about the extent of native participation. The movement as a whole continues to feel wounded from these events and some prominent Native Catholics have left the official Tekakwitha Conference movement because of this conflict. Here, I have chosen only to recognize these problems and allow some of the participants to comment on them, rather than to try to work out the intimate details of the arguments or to single out responsible individuals. No discussion of the Tekakwitha Conference would be complete without an acknowledgement of these difficulties, yet I have not made them the focus of this chapter largely out of respect for the wishes of Conference participants. Also, I choose not to dwell on these issues because I recognize that the Conference has started a “new life”, and I hope, with the participants, for its successful future. However, it is necessary to point out that the Tekakwitha Conference, from its inception, has not been an untroubled or always unified movement, and that many people were hurt by the events of the early 1990s which caused Conference participation to decline for several years.

Mike Valdo, an Acoma resident of Albuquerque and executive director of the Tekakwitha Conference between 1996-1998, told me this about the conflict; his opinion is shared by most of the people with whom I spoke.

The Tekakwitha Conference has had its ups and downs. It sort of hit bottom in Maine [1990/1991]. There was a lot of resentment between some of the Native people who were leaders at the time -- and the fact that the native tradition was

never really preached at that time. I never went, so I never really saw this. Healing has taken place and I think that we are on the right path. There were a lot of people who were hurt. But we've tried to get the message across that that was in the past. It's time for healing. Why dwell on whatever occurred (Valdo 1998)?

Many respondents were uncertain about exactly what happened or who was involved in these conflicts, but were nevertheless injured and disappointed by the disunity and departure of some participants. A Navajo nun summed it up by saying, "There was a lot of misunderstanding and tension between the legalistic and intuitive sides" (Sr. Jean 1998). Stephanie from Jemez told me sadly, "And then some priests stopped coming and some bishops and somewhere along the way, it got mixed up or something. The priests or someone didn't like the Indian way. It used to be the kind of meeting where we all went and everybody had a chance to share. It's like that again now though" (Stephanie 1998). Fr. John, a non-Native Franciscan told me that "With all the inner fighting that took place, the Conference kind of destroyed itself. But it kind of cleansed it too. It's kind of non-political now. I think it was politicized before, but not now" (Fr. John 1998). Fr. Peter from the Indian Chapel in Albuquerque recalls the events this way:

There was a period of real high tension in the Tekakwitha Conference. It was centred around here [Albuquerque] since a lot of the principals were here. It was a tension about 'This is Indian; let's get the white man out of this', a kind of tension in leadership. Now it's more, 'This is an Indian spirituality within the Church'. It's really a celebration of Indians in the Church. It's not just isolation. The Tekakwitha Conference still is meant to be for Indians and not just some place where people come and learn about Indians. It's for sharing a spirituality. Here are the Indians coming together and talking about their Christianity, their own life in

God. But the tone of the Church in those early days was that everything was kind of regulated (Fr. Peter 1998).

The current shape of the Tekakwitha Conference has been deeply structured by these kinds of divisions and disagreements, from its inception in 1939 to the early 1990s. The question of “Who’s show is this” is pervasive?<sup>22</sup> For the most part, from my own observations, non-Native priests and Native clergy and lay people appear to work cooperatively at the Conferences in the late 1990s. There are no explicit arguments about the position of Native Americans or non-Natives in the Conference but rather, shared purposes of inculturation and intertribal learning are voiced, and an emphasis is placed on the expression and creation of a Native American Church.

### **Kateri Circles: A Grassroots Saint**

While many individuals and communities plan and attend the annual Tekakwitha Conference, devotees also meet monthly in local devotional groups called Kateri Circles. During my fieldwork, I attended many of these meetings and became aware of several common themes and issues of interest. First, the Kateri Circles exist to prepare for and enact what happens at the annual Conference. Fundraising is a key issue, as many participants are elderly and on fixed incomes, and find the yearly travel to be financially challenging. Bake sales, bread sales, enchilada sales, bingo, and the other activities are held throughout the year to raise money for travel to the Conference. As well, the tribe is often asked for financial support which is provided in some cases. Second, Kateri Circles pray in unison for the canonization of Blessed Kateri. On several reservations, a large

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<sup>22</sup> This issue of the nature of Native Catholicism will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Four.

statue of Kateri circulates between the members' homes, spending a month at each (cf. Behar in Badone 1990:101-102). Third, the Circle discusses its role in the community and considers its responsibilities on the reservation, and its spiritual and social functions as local members of the national Conference. Fourth, the Circles often try to attract new members largely through the vehicle of the Church by witnessing to and announcing events concerning Kateri before or after the local Sunday mass. The priority given to these ventures varies from group to group and is often a discussion of conflictual conversation.

Members receive direction from the national Conference headquarters in Great Falls, Montana, in the form of suggestions for activities in the *Cross and Feather News*, as well as from the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions in a monthly mailing to the president of each Kateri Circle. In this way unity is sought, yet at the same time, it is recognized that each Circle exists to minister to, respond to and evolve from the surrounding local community.

The way in which my presence affected the course of meetings is difficult to assess. I was an acknowledged presence on the occasions that I attended, but it was also made clear to and by various members that I was the woman "writing the book about Kateri" and that I was there to study as well to make contacts for further interviews. What follows is what happened at one Kateri Circle meeting I attended in 1998.

Early one chilly February evening, I arrived at the mission house and priests' residence for the Pueblo's monthly Kateri Circle meeting. There were twelve women present – all over the age of fifty, except for one woman in her thirties. Father John, the local priest for this and three surrounding communities, was also present, having just returned pink cheeked from a day of skiing in time for the meeting. Father had told the ladies that I was coming and Stephanie, who I had met before, greeted me with recognition

and a hug. Late into the two hour meeting, Stephanie, one of the first Pueblo women to be involved with Kateri and clearly a leader in this Circle, spoke about her views on the direction of the Circle:

We should be doing all sorts of lay ministry work under Kateri's name. We need to go and do Christian work. Since 1980, I've been working for Kateri. I have my candle lighted day and night in front of her statue in my home. She's already a saint, but she needs to be recognized by the Church. She's an Indian woman, an Indian girl. I'm very proud of her -- the first Indian girl that the Lord has taken. And Juan Diego<sup>23</sup> -- he should be canonized too. Then we'll have our Indian boy and our Indian girl (Stephanie 1998).

Victoria, the young Pueblo woman who is the director of religious education for the parish, contributed softly that in her view the members of the Kateri Circle would be the "perfect ladies to do lay ministry", such as praying the rosary with families of the deceased when the priest can't be there; visiting the sick, and getting involved with education for the children. Victoria continued, "In this way, the Kateri Circle could become more known in the Pueblo; we could show our love for Kateri in this way". These suggestions were followed by nods, murmurs of "good idea" and general assent.

"Is there any more business?", the Circle's president asked. More discussion followed about transportation to the upcoming Memphis Conference. Should they rent a van or go by the buses that a local leader had arranged? Someone promised to look into the cost. The date of the next meeting one month later was set. The meeting was clearly winding down when one of the women said to me, "So do you want to give us your

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<sup>23</sup> Blessed Juan Diego is the sixteenth century Mexican peasant to whom Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared.

number or take ours or what?" I was taken aback since I had not participated in the meeting up to this point. I was also happy that I haven't been forgotten, and I gave my number to a few women who jotted it down, and passed around my notebook which everyone signed with their name and number. As the meeting broke up, most of the women said goodbye to me and told me to call them. Stephanie asked me if I was driving and I told her that I drove here from Canada. She giggled and said, "I'm hitchhiking". I took the hint and asked, "Oh! would you like a ride home?" With a big grin she replied, "Yes, please". I drove her back to her house at the entrance to the Pueblo just off the highway.

### **Travelling Saints: Filling in the Lines of Communication**

In his seminal work on American Catholic devotion to St. Jude, Robert Orsi claims that "Place did not matter much to Jude's devout or to the promotion of his cult. Jude was an oddly unencumbered, even disassociated, figure when he made his first appearance in American Catholic culture.... So St. Jude was not only an unknown saint, but a placeless one, too" (Orsi 1996:28). Like Jude, Kateri is not rooted in a particular, local setting. This section will deal with the placelessness of Kateri as a proto-saint. I track the movement and transmission of the stories of her life and miracles, the devotions to her, and even her image along missionary lines, from Quebec and upstate New York across the continent into the Southwest. In so doing, I explore the various ways in which her devotees first heard about her and came to be involved with her cause.

In brief, devotion to Kateri is largely a word of mouth phenomenon, with spoken or printed narratives about her life and miracles being the key precedent for involvement with her. Second, local priests, nuns, and catechism classes both in the Catholic boarding schools and on the reservations served to transmit the image of Kateri and stories about her

as early as the 1930s when the first stirrings of her cause were coming to the surface. Others discovered Kateri by attending an annual Tekakwitha Conference with a friend or relative, by reading a pamphlet or book published by the Conference, or through attendance at a Kateri Circle meeting when recruited by a prominent member of the local Church community. I argue that in devotion to Kateri, place both matters very much and not at all; that Kateri is at once a deeply historically situated figure and a placeless, transcendent, transmitted one.

Kateri is transmitted along kinship and parish lines, by oral account, printed story, and colourful image. Aunt Grace, an Acoma in her seventies, recalled the first time she heard about Kateri.

I remember that at a church in Acomita [part of the Acoma reservation], there's a picture of her on the wall. I always wondered who she was, that Indian lady. I don't remember how old I was when I first saw that picture. I just wanted to know who she was. I had an aunt in Acoma and once when she was saying the rosary, I walked in and said 'Hello Grandma'. 'Oh Grace! I was just praying for you to Blessed Kateri'. 'Who's that?' I didn't know her. My Grandma had probably heard from the Father in the church (Grace 1998).

Margaret, a Navajo and Choctaw semi-retired nurse who leads the Albuquerque Kateri Circle, recounted this story about how her family came to know Kateri.

My cousin's mother knew about Kateri way out in Navajo [Nation] in the thirties or forties. She didn't know exactly the person's [Kateri's] name, but she talked about this Indian woman up from the New York area who was a holy woman. People from here may have gone up north to visit and found out about Kateri (Margaret 1998).



Later in the interview, Margaret told me that she herself first really heard about Kateri, and became involved with the saint, through her sister, Sr. Jean who participates in hospital and prison ministry in the Navajo Nation.

Sr. Jean was involved from the very beginning in the Tekakwitha Conference, but she never really told us directly about Kateri. When they had the Conference in Tuscon, Arizona, I went for the first time and participated in workshops and so on. It was so neat, when the Pope was in Phoenix in 1987, I went. There were a lot of people from the various Kateri Circles that were there and I thought, ‘Hey! This is neat!’” (Margaret 1998).

Annette, the Navajo cousin of Sr. Jean and Margaret, later told me that she first heard about Kateri through her mother who,

... heard about her from St. Joseph’s boarding school where I went. Mom used to call her ‘the Girl of the Woods’ and I had an old picture of her that Mother gave me of her wrapped in fur, but she didn’t have a wooden cross. Mom gave me a medal of hers too. My mother told me the story of Kateri but she didn’t push it on me (Annette 1998).

The use of images to transmit Kateri’s story is significant and will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five. Marian, a Chippewa living in Albuquerque said,

I first heard about Kateri through my mother and her sisters from Wisconsin. She used to send me holy cards and literature about her life -- a lot of pictures. I didn’t think too much about it then; that must have been forty years ago or so. Over the years, I guess my mother used to pray to her. I didn’t know very much about her until about ten years ago. I met a group of Indians from my little church, Queen of Angels, and decided to go to my first Conference; that’s the way I learned. That

time we happened to go to New York, at Fonda where she was born and raised. They had a play about Kateri and how she grew up and her family and what a hard life she lived. I was really impressed, and after that I became a fan and started going to the Tekakwitha Conferences every year” (Marian 1998).

The formative effect of even a simple image or story of Kateri is also important.

Sr. Ann, a Mescalero Apache nun told me,

I first heard about Kateri as a postulate in 1950, when I was going to be given my religious name. I asked for Kateri. The Reverend Mother had given me a picture of her. There wasn't much to know about her at that time, but I knew that she was Native American and very holy, and that she was the first Native American to live a vowed life. I didn't get her name though, I guess because she was only a Venerable at that time (Sr. Ann 1998).

One cannot underestimate the role and efficacy of the mission schools in transmitting and retelling the life of Kateri to Native American youth, even as early as the 1930s: “We first heard about Kateri through the old folks. They must have heard about it from the missionaries. Before that we had heard about her vaguely at school” (Carol and Jim 1998).

Heather, an elderly Jemez woman, and I had this conversation about Kateri.

*Paula:* How did you first learn about Kateri?

*Heather:* I first learned about Kateri from the mission school here at the Pueblo. There was a Mohawk Indian kind of play. That was maybe in the seventh grade, back in the thirties. So I knew about her already. It must have come through the nuns. I think that's why we got interested in the Tekakwitha Conference right away, because we already knew about Kateri.

*Paula:* What were you taught about Kateri at school?

*Heather:* Oh, that she was an Indian woman who died of smallpox of the time. And the scars. In front of the bishops and the priests, when she had been lying there for fifteen minutes, they disappeared! She was just like the Blessed Virgin. I guess that's how they knew she was going to be beautified, beatified. And they said that the Native Americans have to help. They asked for our help to make her the first saint. They said, 'You must gather people from all different places and start having conferences' (Heather 1998).

Similarly, Miranda, an Assiniboine woman in her forties who married to a Mescalero Apache man recounted that,

She was really popular at my school back home in Montana. Everyone chose the name Catherine for their confirmation and would carry wooden crosses like her, wanting to suffer and be like her. We all wanted long braids like her. When I went back home a few years ago, my nephew's daughter in the fourth grade had a picture of her from school and she was telling us all about her (Miranda 1998).

One aspect of note in these narratives concerns the lapse in time, sometimes as much as several decades, between the devotee's first childhood exposure to Kateri and active devotion to Kateri in older adulthood. In many cases was a matter of available time to spend in religious pursuits. For example, retired or unemployed individuals have more time to spend in Church related activities than those who work, either inside or outside of the home. For many as well, participating in a Kateri Circle is just one of many Catholic endeavours they pursue including cursillo (literally, a "little course" where adults learn more about their faith in retreat-like settings), pilgrimage, catechism, and assorted services to the local church. In other cases, devotees sought Kateri's company in response to a

particular need or trauma such as the death of a family member. Clearly, Kateri has spanned generations, surviving in tales and technicolour prayer cards, travelling across decades and state and country lines. She takes her borders with her (cf. Behar 1993), reenacting them as a “Mohawk Maid” and resisting them as the everywoman’s “Indian girl”.

But why has Kateri settled in the Southwest? Why is her home there so entrenched? Why does she “fit” so well in New Mexico and Arizona, as many of her devotees feel? Some of my respondents offered possible explanations. Fr. Matthew, a non-Native priest from the Northern Plains who has been involved with the Tekakwitha Conference from its beginning claimed that “The Spanish speaking people in the Southwest have all these saints and each Pueblo has its own saint. We don’t have such a ‘cultural religion’ up in the north” (Fr. Matthew 1998). June, the Acoma niece of Aunt Grace, told me,

The people love her here in the Southwest because she’s Native American; they consider her one of their own. Even though she’s not the same tribe, they welcome her, take to her like a long lost relative. She’s just one of us. We’re all different kinds only by name. We live in different areas because that’s where our ancestors lived, but we’re all connected, one and the same (June 1998).

Cindy, the wife of Mike Valdo, the past executive director of the Tekakwitha Conference, had this to say about the basis for Kateri’s popularity in the Southwest:

The Southwest Indians, regardless of which tribe, we have recognized land, reservations, tribes. I think we have deeper roots also. A lot of the Eastern and Plains tribes don’t really have reservations any more. They are mixed in with metropolitan cities. We’re really unique because we’re so deeply rooted in our

culture. We're allowed to practice and keep our culture -- whether it's in our way of worship or participating in our kivas, carrying out sacred ceremonies which are closed to non Native Americans. We seem to tie our Catholic faith with our culture. There's a more deeper blending. I think in the Southwest, Native people tie the Catholic faith with our cultural -- more and more of a deeper blend. Yes, we are Native Americans and we are able to participate deeply, privately in our kivas, praying, dances. Maybe some other tribes aren't deep rooted into their culture. Also, speaking our language on a daily basis -- especially in our area, we tend to talk our language as a first language. Our parents, when they were in boarding school, they were not allowed to speak our native tongue. Plus the population of Native Americans who live in New Mexico and Arizona; most of us all know where we come from, know our clans especially, which designates where specifically we come from. There's even an order with clans and all our tribes. That might have something to do with it (Valdo 1998).

In brief, Kateri's ability to catch the imagination of Pueblo, Navajo and Apache Catholics has much to do with the Franciscan tradition and cult of saints already set in place by missionaries (Sr. Jean, Leslie, Christine 1998). Ultimately, however, there *is* something else, some sense of connection between Kateri and the Southwest that I do not fully understand. She is enshrined in every Pueblo, Apache, and Navajo church I visited; she is visible, revered, and prayed to in literally hundreds of Southwest Native American homes. New Mexico sends the largest contingent of delegates every year to the Tekakwitha Conference; two hundred of the total twelve hundred participants in the 1999 Conference in Spokane, Washington were from New Mexico -- that's one sixth of the total Conference population! Clearly, Kateri is deeply entrenched in the Southwest.

Perhaps it is the case that no one is a prophet in her own land: Kateri simply does not enjoy the same popularity among her 'original' people as she does in the Southwest. There are likely other reasons for this situation, the full discussion of which is far beyond the scope of this dissertation. Possibly, the Mohawk communities are more politically divided than those in the Southwest over the general subject of missionaries and the Church (Beauvais, Bruyère 1996). While there certainly are active Kateri Circles, committed Conference participants, and passionate devotees among the Mohawks and other tribes, the entrenchment of the Catholic Church in the Southwest is a great contributing factor in the proliferation of devotion to and the universal appeal of Kateri there.

But what do the majority of contemporary Mohawks feel about Kateri, the Church, and her history among Native Americans? It is worth at least a brief look at some views of Kateri from outside the Southwest. Father Bruyere, Kateri's Canadian vice-postulator and local priest at Kahnawake made the following observation about Kateri's place in her 'home town'. "It is difficult to appreciate the devotion to Kateri here because they're [the local Native American Catholics] scared of being judged by the other Indians who have left the Church and become 'traditionalists' who say Kateri was a traitor or became a French Christian" (Bruyère 1996, cf. Koppedraye 1993).

In 1996, I discussed the recent exodus from the Catholic Church and return to the Longhouse tradition by many Mohawks with Troy, the leader of an independent 'traditionalist' Mohawk community in the Mohawk River valley of New York. Troy's community places a high value on retaining the Mohawk language, living off the reservation and off the land in original Mohawk territory, and rejecting the Church and missionary "white" history. Troy explained, "My world is so different from the Christian world; it's like oil and water. You can't mix it, and it's not even in my scope of thinking to

try it. I'm a Longhouse person from my core to the very center of my being" (Troy 1996). Troy went on to say that Kateri "is non-threatening, different. It's stylish to have something that's not been had before, such as the first Native saint. She's like a conversation piece.... None of those people in the *Jesuit Relations* ever really sat down with a Mohawk guy and had a conversation" (Troy 1996).

Lewis, another member of this traditionalist Mohawk community told me that, To the traditional Mohawk, Kateri is a romanticized heroine, fictionalized like Disneyland. Kateri doesn't touch me. To me, she was just a good Mohawk woman, confused like everybody else with European dogma and lies and promises that were never meant. They'll take your land and kill you too. I don't put any faith in any documents that the Europeans write; they always have a motive. I don't believe that Kateri is 'one of our own' as the Church says. I'm awed at how people [from Kahnawake] are taken by her shrine and so on. It's manufactured by the Church (Lewis 1996).

Similarly, but perhaps more diplomatically, Wendell Beauvais, the director of the Kahnawake Cultural Center, which is part of the local Mohawk 'traditionalist' movement, described the contemporary religious atmosphere in Kahnawake: "The Longhouse is people who adhere to the traditional ways as much as possible" (Beauvais 1996). Implicitly, this means a rejection of the Church; the two are seen, from both sides, as antithetical.<sup>24</sup> Beauvais goes on to say, "The role of the Church here [in Kahnawake] has never been truly understood. They never really had the grasp they wanted to either. They didn't have full influence over us. If they had, traditionalism wouldn't have this resurgence. The

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<sup>24</sup> The relationship between the "traditional" and the Church will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four.

attempt to combine Catholicism with traditionalism is all a Church effort. It's an effort to retain the flock" (Beauvais 1996). Referring to H  nri B  chard, the previous Canadian vice-postulator and most famous biographer and historian of Kateri and Kahnawake, Beauvais claims that, "B  chard's book is not a history of the community. It's only a history of the Church in the community. The Church was packed on Sundays when I was a kid; there was standing room only. Now there's only one or two cars in the parking lot. Now the Longhouse is packed and the Church is empty; the congregation has changed buildings" (Beauvais 1996). Beauvais characterizes Kateri as "a perfect example of how we bought into Christianity" (Beauvais 1996).

Back in the Southwest, I interviewed Isabelle, an Acoma woman in her forties, and John, her Mohawk husband, both of whom are committed Catholics and Kateri devotees. John explains the Mohawks' apparent hard edge of anger and resentment toward the Church and all it stands for in this way:

The [Jesuit] priests used to be really mean to us and treated us like we were dirt. And when you're treated like that and told to forget about your traditions -- that's where the anger comes from. That's why there's a lot of traditional people who will never forgive the Church for the past.... Down here [in the Southwest], they [the missionaries] just worked in the traditions. That's a big difference -- how the Catholic religion treated us (Isabelle and John 1998).

Isabelle sums up the situation in Kahnawake and other Mohawk communities:

Isn't that funny though, like we said earlier. Blessed Kateri is from that area [Mohawk territory] and they're having so many problems. Like Ireland, the Protestant and the Catholics. And in the Mohawks, you have the traditionalists against the Catholics, and yet Kateri is from that area. Maybe she needs to be



known, maybe once she becomes a saint, she might help them in that way. Like today, there's a certain Catholic group [among the Mohawks] that honours her and prays to her and goes to the Conferences. But it's just that little group [of Mohawks] that knows her. They have a very heavy cross to carry to spread the word among the other people who are also Mohawk (Isabelle and John 1998).

Margaret, a Navajo and Choctaw woman living in Albuquerque, gives the following comment about the weak support for Kateri among the Mohawks and the proto-saint's "success" in the Southwest:

Among her own people, there was a little disparity among the Mohawks. Some of them really didn't believe in Kateri. Maybe one of the reasons why she's well loved down here in the Southwest is because the people here stay close to their cultural traditions, and with their belief in their own religion and their belief in the unity of our life. Our lives aren't in a square, and then, say, go to church on Sunday. Our life is more like a circle, everything in it. Your day starts and ends with prayer. During the day, be hospitable, kind, pray for and help people. In most Indian homes, they feed you and welcome you. Because Kateri was like that. I think that's why they really honoured her more, because of maintaining their culture. And she fits into that (Margaret 1998).

It seems paradoxical that the reason Kateri is rejected by a large number of Mohawks is because she is *not* traditional, while the reason she is loved in the Southwest is that she *is* traditional. I discuss Kateri as a "traditional" Indian fully in Chapter Four.

In exploring the roots and routes of Kateri, it becomes apparent that she was dislodged from her homeland and set in motion as a missionary tool as early as the seventeenth century when the Jesuits sent reports of her back to France (cf. Clifford

1997:3). The contemporary Kateri is both placeless and situated. In fact, she is multi-sited, multiply recited, cross-purposefully invoked and a woman of many paths, historical and contemporary. Kateri has grown into her sainthood as the centuries pass, becoming what perhaps even her contemporaries believed was her destiny. She has followed missionary and kinship routes, across tribal and national boundaries, bordered by her historical circumstances, expanded by imagination and expectation, trapped in Technicolour image, and freed by narrative. Transmission and travel, manifold retold history, and complex ownership and citizenship -- all these are key concepts in understanding contemporary devotion to Kateri.

### **Travelling Through History, Taking Our Borders With Us**

Kateri is a translated woman (Behar 1993), borne across boundaries, found intertextually and intermittingly, and intertwined in the lives of the Native Catholics she represents. She has been translated, largely through narrative, from Mohawk to Pueblo to Indian, from the seventeenth century to the twentieth and into the new millennium, from obedient convert to powerful intercessor to representative saint. She is translated through and by the stories told of her. But as Behar says, "we cross borders, but we don't erase them; we take our borders with us" (Behar 1993:320). Kateri is at once dislodged from and deeply embedded in history and community. She takes her borders with her, and they are softly shaped and harshly cut in each retelling of her life.

Kateri is best viewed from a processual perspective in which change rather than structure, and time rather than space form a symbol's enduring state (Rosaldo 1989:103). While Kateri *is* structured, or rather continually restructured, and *is* entrenched in space, or rather continually re-placed, above all she can be seen as a saint in motion. Conversations about her embody conflict and change as well as stability and endurance (Rosaldo

1989:104, 208, 209). She exists in a “border zone” (cf. Rosaldo 1989), within and between communities, always in motion, not frozen for inspection. Kateri is not an autonomous internally coherent symbol, but rather her historical perseverance is found in movement, travel, and translation (cf. Rosaldo 1989:217).

### **III Vignettes from the Field: Ethnographic Snapshots of the Native American Southwest**

*“I do not apologize for what may seem, in this special discourse, so scandalously a personal note. That is where everyone begins, even those who deny most vociferously that they do so. There is no other way to ‘do’ history and anthropology than by participant observation, than by blending a foreign and a familiar experience into something new. There is no past that I describe that is not joined to my present; there is no other that I describe that is not joined to myself. I have not made my knowledge less certain for that, or more relative. Its persuasiveness aside, my knowledge has all those certainties of being human and being cultured” (Denning 1992:223).*

*“Fieldwork gave me experiences I felt I did not deserve” (Clifford 1997:91).*

*“And someday I will sing the landscape that carried me away” (Dar Williams “Travelling Again”).*

In the previous chapters, I have sketched an outline of a saint and her history. Now I seek to fill in the people and places of the Native American Southwest. In this chapter, I attempt in many ways to take reader to the field, since I believe that the one must be fully immersed in the land and communities of a saint before she can visualize a saintscape. I seek to recreate the ethnographic encounter, and highlight the conversations and experiences I had with Kateri’s devotees that led to conclusions I have drawn (cf. Behar 1993, Narayan 1989, Ridington 1988). With Dennis Tedlock, anthropologist and

innovator of the dialogical approach, I believe that,

The anthropological dialogue creates a world, or an understanding of the *differences between* two worlds, that exists between persons who were indeterminately far apart, in all sorts of different ways, when they started out on their conversation. This *betweenness* of the world of the dialogue is something I want to keep before us, or between us, all the way through this talk (D. Tedlock 1983:323, emphasis in original, cf. D. Tedlock 1979).

Similarly, Barbara Tedlock suggests that anthropologists focus on “the observation of participation” in which, “Ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others’ coparticipation within the ethnographic encounter” (B. Tedlock 1991:69).

These ethnographic vignettes are small flavour bites from the field, full of sound and emotion, signifying the places and times where and when I learned the most about the Southwest. As well, these narratives evoke my experiences as a lone anthropologist, passing and encountering in a foreign yet becoming familiar world. Vignettes capitalize on the intensity and realism of narrative in effort to recreate episodes for readers. These stories offer a range of landscape, people, neighbours, tastes, sounds, feelings, fears, uncertainties, and realities. Through vignettes, I look to recreate the sense of voyage, travel, and journey that is so key to the study of Kateri. And so I switch now to the narrative voice, inviting the reader to the space and time of these ethnographic encounters, to the moments when betweenness was forged.

*Woodsmoke Sunrise and Acoma Moonlight: The Governor’s Feast Weekend at Sky City*

Acoma is often called “the city in the sky”, and the several dozen adobe brick layered homes and the towering church with piercing white crosses perched almost four

hundred feet above the roadrunner cartoon landscape do indeed look like they fell from the sky. Acoma is built on barren rock and covered with camel coloured sand which blows through beaten screen doors and collects in the beds of dirty pickup trucks in the icy wind. Not many people live here full time anymore. The living is hard -- no running water, electricity, or heat -- and no trees for wood or wells for water are found on the mesa. Supplies must be driven or carried up the carnival ride steep road or the precipitous stone stairs that lead up to the top of the mesa. Yet on feast days, the homes are filled with families spanning generations: striped blankets cover gray hair pinned in beaded clips and buns; cowboy boots, hats and jeans dress the men; tight sweatshirts, permed black hair and turquoise jewellery clothe the young women; oversize Nike jackets, baggy jeans and gelled hair bedeck the youth who often must be reminded to go kiss grandma and auntie hello. The air smells of woodsmoke and chilis. Acoma tastes red and green and hot like posole and tamales, and dry and white like the crumbly Indian bread that fills baskets in the kitchen, and sweet and chocolaty like the cakes someone has brought, and pale green and wilted, like the lettuce of a salad set out from a fridge too long, and greasy and orange like pumpkin frybread, and diluted and sandy like the coffee that fills the styrofoam cups at every gathering.

I drove from Albuquerque west to Aunt Grace's house in Acoma with her niece, June, on a Saturday morning in early February to help fill the house with family and food in celebration of a nephew who has just been elected a tribal councilman.<sup>1</sup> The women of

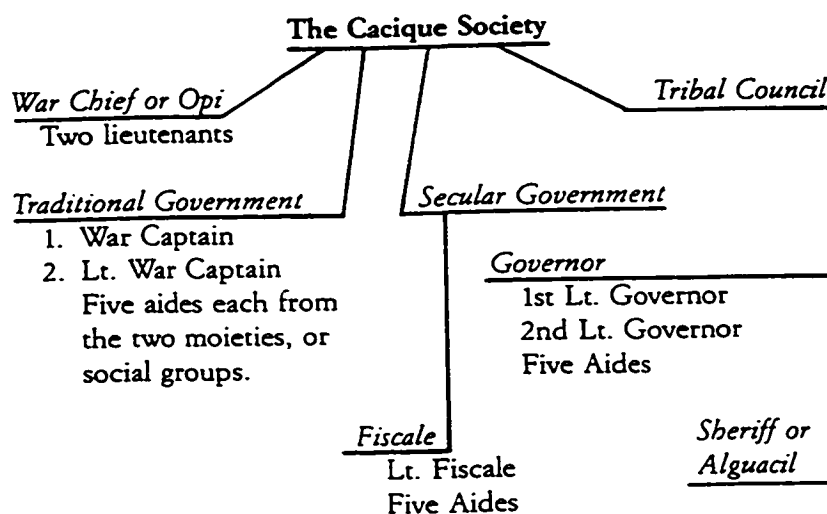
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<sup>1</sup> Pueblo historian, Joe Sando, Jemez, states that, The Pueblo tribes today operate under a form of government that is at once native and European, the European form of government having been introduced by the Spaniards in colonial times.... The titular head of the traditional pueblo is the *cacique*, together with his staff, the cacique being the theocratic leader 'from the time of the emergence from the underworld,' as the people say (Sando 1992:13). Pueblo government is also made up of a war chief, a war captain, a governor and his

his clan hosted him and all his relations with feasting and giveaways for two days. Dancers jingled and drummed in the crowded plaza to the songs of the shuffling men's choir that circled the sandy streets. Folding chairs packed the plaza to watch the dancing and catch goodies from the "throws". Weaving between the dancers, family and friends of the newly elected governor and councilmen tossed small bags of potato chips, cereal, paper towels, wooden spoons, candies, cookies, oranges, apples, and packaged noodles into the reaching masses from laundry baskets cradled in arms. People laughed and ducked as oranges bounced off the rooftops where more agile people had gathered to watch the festivities. Kids called, "Over here! Over here!", waved frantic hands and happily tore wrappers off lollipops, while the elders closest to the inner plaza waited more patiently, knowing that they would be gently handed a choice treat by the throwers when they passed. The food was blessed before it was given away, and Grace's oldest brother and

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councilmen, fiscales, and a sheriff. Sando show how these positions fit together. See Sando (1992:13-18) and Fox in Ortiz (1984:71-85) for a full description of the various roles of leaders in the Pueblos. See also Parsons (1939:590-599) for turn of the century examples of ceremonies where various Pueblos' tribal leaders are installed in their positions.



(Sando 1992:15)

the new councilman spoke in Tewa in a wood heated room filled with overflowing baskets about how we were to throw with a smile and how we would be given in return one hundredfold. His speech, translated for me by Aunt Grace, was an acknowledgement of the support, the donation, the presence of his friends and family gathered there that weekend.

A supper prayer: Grace, her sister, Elizabeth, June and I held hands across the heaped table. Grace began the prayer and asked each of us to speak in turn. I offered up thanksgiving for the hospitality, friendship, and warmth that blessed me that night and then my voice choked as I heard myself say, "Lord, as you know, I've been lonely here in New Mexico. I'm not so lonely with these women here tonight and I am very grateful for them." When the prayer ended, we giggled in embarrassment at the riches of food and grabbed our bowls to serve ourselves some stew from the stove. Grace stirred it gently, turned to me and said softly, "What you said tonight, Paula. We are all alone here [like June and Elizabeth, she is a widow]. When we come together, we comfort each other". I thanked her again for inviting me, gave her a quick hug and returned to the table.

In the evening, the Coleman lanterns were lit as daylight faded away. Two year old Annie played on my knees, while we waited for the dancers to make their rounds to the honouring houses. As the dancers crowded into the main room with drums and bells, they were gifted with cookies and crackers thrown into open pillowcases. Aunt Grace called me outside, "Come and see the Acoma moonlight". It was so bright, there was no need for a flashlight and one could clearly see the cold way to the portable toilets. "Look how bright the stars are", Grace said proudly, as if they shined especially for her family. By eleven o'clock, I was nestled into a sinking bed piled with faded quilts and sheets peppered with the day's sand. My watch told me it was 3:10 a.m. when I heard scuffly footsteps and the



creak of the stove door as more logs were put in. A knock awoke us just after five a.m.. Relatives of the male dancers who had been in the kiva<sup>2</sup> since long before dawn had come to eat. Aunt Grace and Elizabeth fed them in the kitchen while June and I dozed on until six in the main room.

The sun rose and I jolted out the door to the church yard on the east cliff and watched for a brief moment. My eyes filled with oranges and fire, I scurried back to the warming house as the drums began. With empty stomachs we bundled out to the plaza by 7:00 a.m. to watch a dance. Aunt Grace instructed me, "You must not write about this part. Just say that you were here with us. It is a blessing just to watch."

The dances continued the second day, but I was busy in the kitchen, clearing and washing and serving for the fifty or so people who pushed into the house. Hugs, greetings and introductions were accompanied by talk of new babies and deaths in the family. Grace introduced me with her family: "This is our friend from Canada. She walked the one hundred mile pilgrimage with us last year."<sup>3</sup> . The sky was darkening when it was our house's turn to throw. The rain began to fall as we pelted the sky with lollipops and animal

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<sup>2</sup> A kiva is a ceremonial chamber, sometimes partially underground, entered through the roof by a ladder. There are several kivas at each Pueblo, each of which houses a clan, a social grouping named for a natural phenomenon, eg. the Corn Clan (Terrell 1973:xviii, D. Tedlock 1972:63).

<sup>3</sup> I walked with a group of women from Albuquerque in the week long, one hundred mile 1997 Pilgrimage for Vocations to Chimayo, New Mexico. The pilgrimage has been held annually for the last twenty-six years by New Mexican Catholics, mostly Hispanic and Native American, in attempt to increase vocations among the young. There are five groups who walk, two women's and three men's. Each comes from a different direction and they all converge at Chimayo on the morning of the seventh day. See my article entitled "'They Told What Happened On the Road': Narrative and the Construction of Experiential Knowledge on the Pilgrimage to Chimayo, New Mexico", prepared for publication in *Centres in Motion: Anthropological Perspectives on Pilgrimage and Tourism*, Sharon Roseman and Ellen Badone (editors), forthcoming.

crackers, and with emptied baskets returned to the home. "Eat some more before you leave", Aunt Grace told June and I, and with full stomachs, and windshield wipers chasing away the raindrops, we drove east back into Albuquerque.

### *Native/Catholic*

It was cold and wet Sunday morning in Albuquerque. The heavy snow that fell from the April sky had surprised everyone. I was on my way to mass at the Queen of Angels Indian Chapel. Since I was a few minutes early, I stopped at the only place open in the area, a hamburger joint, and had some coffee. An outgoing Native man sat in the corner booth and passed by my table three times with comments on the weather, the casinos, and good luck charms. "It's a casino day!" he announced, looking out at the plops of snow on the window. On his third pass, he held out a string of bear claws and said, "This brings me luck at the casino. The bear is for strength and wisdom". Then, reaching into his shirt and pulling out a hologram medal of Our Lady of Fatima, he added, "But, *this* is what *really* brings me luck. I brought it from Portugal. I'm a Roman Catholic, you know."

### *Manifesting Saints*

Sometimes I wondered if Kateri herself was leading me through this tumble of saint chasing. I drove into the main village of Jemez for my 10 a.m. interview with Lisa, an elderly participant in the local Kateri Circle. The only directions that she had given me were that her house was north of the church and that a red truck would be parked outside. Winding through the unmarked dust roads, I found a house which I thought must be it. I knocked on the door and a man opened it a crack while trying to keep a puppy from

escaping and said hello. I asked if this was the home of Lisa and he said “No, but come in”. I had driven too far north as he eventually explained. But it turned out that I had happened upon the home of Elsa and John, daughter and son-in-law of Stephanie, a key promoter and devotee of Kateri in Jemez. I had hoped to be able to meet them, but knew that they were soon leaving for an art show in Phoenix. Elsa was in the process of gluing hands on her Indian Maiden statues and proudly showed me the three foot high statue of Kateri that she had made, asking, “My mom told you about this, right?”. We exchanged phone numbers and made plans to come back to talk when they returned. I apologized again for intruding and Elsa said, “Oh no! We were hoping to meet you!” They seemed just as surprised to find “the girl who is writing the book on Kateri” on their doorstep as I was to be there.

I finally made it to Lisa’s old adobe home with outside oven and a red truck parked in front. She seemed nervous and looked askance when I took out my notebook (so I put it back in my purse). Lisa had very little to say about Kateri – the kind of silence that happens when a saint has been hanging around for two decades and has become a taken-for-granted part of daily life. We talked about the pottery Lisa made to sell on the plaza in Santa Fe.<sup>4</sup> She carefully unwrapped pieces from a paper towel bed and told me about the colours and the symbols on them, where she finds the clay, and how they are made. She told me that she fires them outside on an open fire in a kiln made from an old red children’s wagon and some tin roofing. I gave her a Canada pin. She breathed in its blessing as I’d

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<sup>4</sup> Pueblo Indians have sold pottery and jewellery on the Plaza of the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe for hundreds of years. Built in 1609-10, the Palace of the Governors is the United States’ oldest state capitol, even though New Mexico didn’t become a state until 1913. There are strict rules about the quality of and materials used in making the items for sale on the Plaza. Not only must the items be “all natural”, but they must be sold either directly by the artist or by a close family member (tourist information at Plaza).

seen done before, pinned it on her wallet, and gave me a clay angel for my Christmas tree. I asked if I might be able to buy some pieces of her pottery to give as gifts to my family back home in Canada and she seemed very pleased at this prospect. Later, as I was leaving and paying for my little pots, she also took the blessing of the money in with her breath.

Lisa served coffee and in struggling English told me a story of the saint, San Diego, who had saved the Pueblo people from the Spanish.

I don't know when this happened. Long, long ago. It's what I've always understood to have happened. When I was little, we used to climb up to the mesa with candles in November to see where his image was left on the red rock. What happened was the Spanish and the Indians were fighting and a lot of the Indians got pushed or had to jump off the cliff. As they were falling, San Diego appeared. Some fell and died, but some just stood there. It must have taken them along time to get to the ground and then when they landed, they scattered. Some settled up north, some over there to the east. And then we all spoke our different languages. Now, no one can understand us, but before it was all one language. Would you like to go see where that mesa is?

Intrigued by the story which seemed to imply that the Southwest Native Americans were unified before the coming of the Spanish who disbanded and dispersed them, I eagerly agreed to the tour.<sup>5</sup> We drove north on the highway, circling back after about

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<sup>5</sup> Sando does not find the inclusion of the Spanish in Pueblo "creation myths" odd. He claims,

That the traditional history survives is shown in the many additions made through time, as events have shaped and altered the lives of the people. Thus it is that the Spaniards appear in the ritual narratives of today. It is not beyond expectation that, in their own time, the impact of the Anglos upon Pueblo life will also be incorporated into Pueblo dance and mime, as the people continue persistently to retain their cultural and their arts (Sando 1992:21).

Sando clearly sees these kinds of hybrid myths as essential to and a natural part of cultural

twenty miles when Lisa was sure she had found the right mesa. We pulled off onto the shoulder and she pointed the saint out to me: "See, there's his black hair, and his robes like a priest wears, and he's carrying something." I could see a sketchy human outline etched high up into the rocks, but I could not see with the memory that Lisa did.

### *Tortillas and Beans*

One cold lonely February morning in my borrowed adobe house just outside of Jemez, the phone rang. In my slippers, I skidded across the polished brick floor, designed to keep the house warm in the winter and cool in the summer, to snatch up the receiver on its fourth ring. It was Stephanie, from the old house at the entrance to the village; she had called to chat. Stephanie told me about the wedding in Jemez this past Saturday and the christening at San Ildefonso on Sunday. Both were "so beautiful". Then she had run down to Albuquerque on Sunday to attend a baby shower for her husband Steven's niece who is expecting twins. "We ate so much chili this weekend! Steven, my husband, asked me to make some beans for him so I just put some on the wood stove. I made them the old fashioned way. Other than that, I'm doing some embroidery and I might make some tortillas. Just killing time. What are you doing? Why don't you come visit?" "Sure!" I replied excitedly, "I'd like that. Maybe you can show me how to make tortillas?!"

We set a time for 11:30 a.m. and I ended up staying for five hours. When I knocked on the door, Stephanie greeted me with a hug, "Oh my girl is here! Now we can

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survival.

See also The Indian Pueblo Cultural Center (1988:5-25), Sando (1992:21-30), for other versions of a general Pueblo creation myth, as well as early migration and the arrival of the Spanish (Schroeder in Ortiz 1984:41-46). Finally, see D. Tedlock (1972) and B. Tedlock (1992) for extended examples of oral myth-telling among the Zuni, and Brockway (1993:1-38), and Campbell (1973:49-245) for examples of widespread features of creation myths.

go. We'll go visit my best neighbour now. And her daughter and granddaughter. Kateri healed the baby, you know." She got on the phone first to alert her neighbour to our arrival; "My girlfriend from Canada is here. She's with Kateri. We're coming over now." So off we went through a rickety screen door, across the hardened dust and down a crooked street to the home of Marian, her daughter Rachel, and her toddler grand daughter, Josephine. The women were making tortillas already. "Oh look, they've got their dough already made!" exclaimed Stephanie adding, "Well, we'll get busy soon". I sat down at a table covered in plastic lace, un-fired pottery wedding vases, and a basket of still sizzling tortillas. "Here, eat one," offered Marian, pushing a napkin, a tub of margarine and some jam towards me. It was hot, greasy, and delicious. She continued to fry tortillas on her wood stove and her daughter rolled out the balled dough. Both were large women with black hair permed and tied back, not much distance between the generations. A heavy teenager came in and out of the kitchen only long enough to make some cheese tortillas, wrap them in a paper towel and head back to school with a can of Pepsi. Little Josephine played shyly with a Barbie push car and flowered stroller behind the curtains separating the rooms, happily slurping away on a cherry popsicle. "She can't hear in one ear", Stephanie told me, "so we're still praying real hard to Kateri for that one. But the other baby, she's not here right now, Kateri helped her to walk."

Stephanie was wearing the Canada pin I gave her and pointed this out to me. "Everyone is asking me where I got it. I tell them it's my Kateri friend from Canada!" She gestured to a house a few hundred yards away. "That's where I grew up... and over there, that's where my auntie lived... and there, my son used to live there and he built onto it. But back there, where I grew up, see that step? That used to be a place to sit. I sat there with Steven when he asked me to marry him."

Back at her house, Stephanie stoked up the wood stove, told me to stir the beans and showed me how to make them. “When they’re almost cooked, you take some beans and smash them up against the side of the pot with a spoon. You add some grease and make a little gravy for the beans this way.” After we had tended the beans, we sat and drank tea and her husband, who had been up on the flat roof, “making it comfortable for the sparrows is about all”, joined us. Steven heated up one of the muffins I had brought with me and pronounced it yummy, “Canadian muffins, eh?” he teased me, “Good!” Easy chat passed an hour. Then Steven told us that, “You ladies better get busy making tortillas,” and he headed off to town to take a cousin for a job interview.

Stephanie showed me the recipe for tortillas that she had learned from her great-grandmother. We mixed heaping handfuls of flour with smaller pinches of baking powder, salt and “grease” (vegetable shortening, since she and Steven are diabetic and watching their diets and such health concerns are not compatible with large quantities of lard). The entire process was done by hand. We felt, weighed, evaluated the consistency of the dough, added a little more milk, and measured the consistency with our fingers again. I was given a hand embroidered apron like the one she was wearing as she taught me to roll out the dough. Her tortillas were perfect circles, as if cookie cut, and mine, in contrast were lopsided. Stephanie joked about how many years it takes to get them perfect, and confided that she is known for her fussiness about tortilla making. She recounted that her daughters, when they were young, were teased by their brothers for making lopsided tortillas. “What is this, a map of America?? No, wait, I know, it’s supposed to be Alaska!” Stephanie’s sons taunted their sisters about the funny shaped dough. We cooked the tortillas on the top of the wood stove “cleaned with grease” and heated by a coaxed and scolded fire. Stephanie goaded the flames: “What? You let me make beans but you don’t

want me to make tortillas now?!”

As we were rolling out the last few tortillas, Stephanie said (unprompted), “My great grandmother made a prediction that I was going to serve the Lord. Way back then. I guess that’s why I do the work for Kateri. I love her so much and she’s always here with me.” When the last tortilla was bubbled to a golden brown, Stephanie directed, “Well, now we eat.” I got some bowls and served the beans which, with a little chili, were really delicious. Stephanie broke a tortilla and handed me a piece and instructed me to, “Feed the spirits. Here. Take a tiny piece off the bread. Take in its blessing (she inhaled near it) and psheww! (she threw it on the ground)”. I did the same and Stephanie looked on approvingly.

A fierce wind storm was whipping the tarp covering my wood when I arrived home. I rushed to weight it down and scurry inside before I was blown away with the dust.

### *Curing Women*

Father John and I arrived at Beth’s house, just up the road from the massive church in Jemez. Father had brought me here to introduce me to Beth whose son, Michael, had had visions of Kateri. Beth and her sister, women in their fifties or sixties, were just finishing off a huge batch of baking that left the long table heaped in sweet smelling round loaves. Both women were friendly and warm and seemed to be very glad to see Father and me. Father introduced me as “the woman who was writing about Kateri”. Beth’s eyes lit up with recognition. She had heard of me too. After all, I had been conducting interviews in the Pueblo for several weeks.

Turning to Father, Beth lowered her head and began to tell him, update him really,



about the state of her daughter Sandra's health. "She's having the MRI tonight and I guess they'll do surgery after." Turning to me, she explained that Sandra has a bad disk in her lower back and would probably have to have surgery on it. She was clearly so worried and her brow was knotted. Father made comforting noises.

*Paula:* "Actually, I had something like that a few years ago, a back surgery."

*Beth:* "You *did*?", Beth marvelled at me standing tall.

*Paula:* "Yes, and I recovered so quickly after the surgery. Does Sandra have good doctors? I know that it's such a worry. Just before my surgery, I thought I was in terrible shape too. And then after my surgery, I cried and cried because I couldn't feel my legs for a few days afterwards. But I'm almost completely better now. I even walked the hundred mile pilgrimage to Chimayo last year."

*Beth:* Beth seemed amazed, and checked again, "You can walk?" Beth looked at me like I was Lazarus himself. Then her face faded, she began to cry and hugged me tightly. I held her, tears formed in my own eyes.

*Paula:* I know how hard it was for my mom to watch me go through all that. I know that it is so hard for you too.

*Beth:* She cried more, "Oh my family has been through so much. And my daughter is so afraid." I just hugged her back some more, told her that she would be amazed at how fast her daughter recovered and that I would keep her in my prayers for a complete healing.

Beth dried her eyes, still holding my hand and said, "She's having the surgery, but we're doing our way, our Indian way too. A curing ceremony.<sup>6</sup> On Friday. Maybe you could

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<sup>6</sup> There is very little information available about Pueblo healing rituals, the roles of medicine men, or anything else considered to be "traditional religion". At first I thought that people were just not telling me, as an outsider. But later I came to understand, through priests, nuns, and participants in the traditional "doings" as they are obtusely called, that only those directly involved know, and that is on a "need to know" basis. For example,

come and talk to her? Sit with her? Tell her what you went through and give her some courage. Just talk to her. Some hope. Someone who has been there.” I glanced at Father who had been watching this plotless drama unfold; he faintly nodded. I said that of course I would come. I would be so happy to meet her. “Just talk to her. Tell her not to be afraid,” Beth asked.

*Paula:* “Yes, I’ll come on Friday. What time? In the evening?”

*Beth:* “Oh no! That night, because of the curing, no one can be out after dark. It will be very scary. Just the medicine men are out.” She turned to Father, “You have to be inside too, by about 9:00 p.m., no lights, O.K.?” He nodded; this made sense to him.

*Paula:* “I have to be in town in the afternoon on Friday, but I could come in the morning, around 10:30?”

*Beth:* “Yes, yes, good. You’re a godsend”, proclaimed Beth.

*Paula:* “Oh, no, I don’t... It’s just that I’ve had back surgery too...”, I stammered.

*Fr. John:* “Yes, Kateri brought you two together”, claimed Father, interrupting my negotiations. Beth nodded, moist eyed, smiling. Beth hugged Father and I again and gave us each a gift of bread to take home. We left, scattering dogs and dust just outside the door.

On Friday morning, I stopped to pick up Stephanie on my way to Sandra’s curing. Her husband, Steven, answered the door, invited me in, and told me,

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there was one night in May when I had planned to stay at Theresa’s house in Isleta. That afternoon, when we talked, she told me that she had just found out that there was a “doing” that night in the Pueblo and thus no outsiders were allowed to be in the village. Many Pueblo people also claim that this secretiveness has allowed the traditional “ways” to have survived colonial times and the continual influx of “foreigners” See Sando (1992: 30-32) for a surprisingly short treatment of “Pueblo religion”, and Harvey in Ortiz (1984:199) concerning “the defensive stance of Pueblo religion”. Harvey concludes by saying, “I want to emphasize secrecy as a problem for the ethical anthropologist” (Harvey in Ortiz 1984:213, 214, 216). The encounter with Beth and her daughter Sandra, recounted in full here, was the most information I was ever given about a curing, medicine men, or any other “traditional” religious ceremony.

Grandma has already gone down. I took her down earlier. She's there with all those women, cooking, cooking, cooking (Steven shook his head, seemingly confused by the women's ways). It's a curing you know. Everyone brings food, flour, blankets, something to donate, to pay the medicine men who will work tonight. That tradition has been going on for years and years. It's our way. You know, we all pray to one god, Indian, Catholic, it's all the same.

I wondered what had provoked this discourse. Was it an explanation for me, personally, or maybe in my role as a researcher? He told me to come by the next day and visit. "Ask Grandma when you see her today and she'll tell you when to come."

The dust lot by Beth's house was packed with new cars and old pickups. I found a place across some bumps and headed in the back door. Stephanie saw me across a porch packed with groceries and trays of bread dough and a kitchen crowded with cooks and eaters and waved high and fast. "Hi!" she called out. I was the only non-Native person there, except for Father John who would arrive later, eat, pat some children's heads and fall asleep sitting up on the couch to the amusement of several old ladies. Long tables were crammed with food, mounds of uncut bread loaves, heaps of Walmart bags and laundry baskets full of gifts for the medicine men. There must have been about seventy people there, mostly women dressed alike in flowered cotton dresses tied with embroidered aprons. Some young men were there too. Their job seemed to be to move furniture and carry bending trays of dough outside to the round ovens and baked bread back into the kitchen. Just outside the kitchen door, several huge black kettles of oil bubbled over roaring fires. These were used for making fry bread (patties of dough deep fried in oil) and a few dozen women had pulled up lawn chairs and wood stumps to fish out the cooked bread with a long stick. Beside the vats of hot oil were a few more fires with crude grills

for making tortillas. Mounds of bread were stacked on trays outside the house as well as inside on tables. I wondered how on earth even the many people here would eat all that bread.

Inside, I hugged Stephanie and was immediately asked to sit and eat. I had learned long ago that “No thanks, I just had breakfast,” was not an acceptable answer. Upon entering a Pueblo home on an occasion, you should sit and eat if invited, or risk insulting your host. I had brought two Kateri prayer cards sent by Father Bruyere in Kahnawake. I gave one to Stephanie who put it in her apron pocket, and one to Sandra who was seated gingerly at the head of the table. I gave a tinfoil package of muffins to Beth and she unwrapped them and gave one to Sandra, making sure she knew that I had made it. Later she gave one to her twentysomething year old son Michael, of Kateri vision fame, again, pointing out to him that it was from me.

I talked to Michael briefly when he put down his plate and took a seat on the bench beside me. He told me about his truck driving job and asked me what I did. I briefly explained that I was doing research in New Mexico with Native American devotees of Kateri. I got the impression that he had heard an account of Father’s and my visit to his mother and knew that I had been invited. Michael was quite shy and I felt very uncomfortable about asking him about his experience with Kateri. We were also sitting in a busy room, and he told me that he had to leave for work shortly, so it was clear to me that he didn’t have the time or maybe inclination to talk further with me. At one point in the conversation, he did mention that the meeting where he “talked” was hard for him, but he gave no specifics of the vision. I didn’t mention that half a dozen people had told me about his vision, and his tearful telling of it, but my guess was that he knew, and was perhaps embarrassed. When his chili bowl was empty, he fed the spirits, put on his baseball cap,

and excused himself from the table.

I had heard Michael's story several times, recounted in full and in part by Kateri Circle members who had been present at that regional Tekakwitha meeting in a northern Pueblo where Michael told the New Mexico Kateri devotees about his vision. Clearly, it functioned as a local miracle story and almost everyone I talked to in the Pueblo mentioned Michael to me. Klara, an elderly woman who had heard Michael speak, told me about his experience just the week before I was invited to Sandra's curing.

I thought it was great. Several months ago, there was this young boy from one of the Pueblos who shared with us at the meeting how Kateri appeared to him. The boy didn't even know who Kateri was until after. But he could describe her. At first he was frightened by her coming to him. He broke down and cried at the meeting. He didn't know what to make of it. At first he just kept it to himself and eventually her told his mother. She had won a statue of Kateri in a raffle and when she brought it home, it was just like he had described to her. It was the same lady who had come to him in his dreams.

That boy, he was involved in powwows, but he was having a hard time composing songs.<sup>7</sup> They just weren't coming to him. Through his vision of Kateri, the songs he came up with just fell into place. After she appeared to him, it was like the words in Indian just came forth. Before, he couldn't write anything anymore. But you see this boy didn't even know who Kateri was. But now he

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<sup>7</sup> Powwows are inter-tribal gatherings of song and dance. They are not "native" to any tribe, but many young men from the Pueblos and reservations of New Mexico were involved in singing and drumming. The largest powwow in North America is called "The Gathering of Nations" and is held each April in Albuquerque. I attended it in 1998. Powwows often contain Christian and patriotic elements. There are prayers said, crosses used, and tributes to veterans made. The Tekakwitha Conference holds a powwow on the last night of its annual meetings.

knows. You could tell that he was really overcome by the whole thing. When he told us at our meeting, he just broke down. We all believed that she appeared to him, just the way he described it, the way he told his story.

This story came to mind as Stephanie introduced me to Beth's family and neighbours. I recognized a few women that I had interviewed and we exchanged hugs. Beth told me how glad she was that I had come and seated me purposefully beside Sandra. Sandra and I talked at the table for a while and when we finished eating, Sandra led me into the living room looking for a softer chair.

Sandra was in her early thirties, had a short haircut much different from the long braids and buns of most of the women there. She was heavy, but her apparent awkwardness in her skin stemmed from her back pain, I would guess. She seemed to know why I was there, about the conversation that transpired between her mother and me on Wednesday, and that I had had back surgery. Looking away from me she said softly, "I guess you were heaven sent. My mom was so worried." She told me the story of her pain, starting with a fall in the sixth grade, several hip surgeries, and how she came to find out that she had a bad disk. In detail, she told me about a dream she had of seeing a beautiful house but not being allowed to go in. She recounted how she was led away by two children whose faces she couldn't see. Sandra offered her mother's interpretation of that dream: "Do not be afraid. God is showing you where you will live when your time comes, but it's not your time yet. Those children are your kids, your eleven year old daughter and two year old son. They need you here. God will not take you."

We talked for almost two hours. Sandra motioned to the busy crowds in her mother's house. "These are all my family. Every one. They just decided to have the curing for me last week". We talked about our mutual feelings that accompanied chronic

back pain: helplessness, worry, guilt for causing worry to others, self-pity, dependence, impatience, frustration, sadness, loss. People darted in and out of our conversation to hug Sandra, say a few words, and grasp her hand. I told her that I would call and talk to her before her surgery and that I knew she would do well. I went to say goodbye to Beth. “Your daughter has a lot of courage, Beth. She will be strong again.” This made Beth’s eyes tear although I had tried not to be too sentimental. “Thank you for coming,” she whispered through her tears. I certainly didn’t feel “heaven sent”, but I did feel as though I had something, as a woman with a similar physical problem, to offer Sandra and her mother. Sometimes in the field, it seemed to me that all I was doing was taking from other people -- taking time, taking food, taking stories, taking experiences. At these preparations for Sandra’s curing ceremony, I felt that I had “given back something”, if only an attentive ear and a bit of comfort. I emerged from Beth’s house that February afternoon feeling connected to “my informants” in a way I hadn’t before this encounter.

### *Chasing a Saint to the Four Corners*

It took me five and a half hours to get to Lukachukai, Arizona that April day. I drove from Isleta Pueblo, south of Albuquerque, to a little village in the middle of the Navajo Nation. I had had blue sky and clear sailing for most of the drive, with the exception of a brief rain shower after I had turned onto an unmarked reservation road. From Isleta, I travelled west to Gallup and then north to Window Rock, and up on into Lukachukai. At the Nation’s boundary, cars turned into pick up trucks, center lines disappeared from the bumpier roads, signs were missing letters, and the magnificent red rocks, tall as giant brick bed sheets, dwarfed my candy apple car. The rock formations towered, shaped by sand and wind, placed precariously on a sage landscape by a god with

an artful sense of humour and a big box of brilliant crayons. Skinny ribbed expectant dogs sniffed at my knees when I stopped for directions at the local store. High school kids with inner city attitudes and handshakes, swarmed around the doors, slugging back Pepsi and dipping their hands in bags of chips. Further north, sheep, cows, and horses crowded the road, the pinons grew tall and the red rocks added pine black to their ridges, faded into the distance and reemerged as the Chuska Mountains which ring the village of Lukachukai.

Annette met me at a rusty and windblown gas station just off the main road. She squealed and waved frantically when she saw me, jumped out of her rusted oversized once-blue sedan and gave me a big hug. Linking a shaky arm around my waist, she proudly took me into the ThriftWay and said, "This is our store". I followed her to her house a few miles down a rougher road where the pavement ended like an afterthought, onto a hard packed salmon coloured dirt road, scattering a few sheep and goats and up to her house. I parked beside her and through our car windows I saw a great big grin on her face while she looked at me and then at her home. Her home was a mostly red painted shack with a few wood stove heated rooms, sage in the yard, old wooden doors which she locked at night with padlocks, and a huge black shiny cat named Victor. A two foot high Kateri statue sat on her bedside table, and Jesus and other saintly figures adorned the clapboard walls. She seemed delighted to have me for the next few days and promised to show me around more tomorrow. We spent the late afternoon sitting outside on lawn chairs in the last bit of the warm day's shade. From her yard I could see two hogans<sup>8</sup>, traditional circular Navajo

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<sup>8</sup> A hogan is the traditional Navajo family dwelling, which is itself a sacred place as it is considered to be a microcosm of the Navajo homeland. I was told by Annette's son James that "traditional" hogan were six-sided structures made with a dirt floor, a place for a fire in the center, walls of interlocking logs, and a roof made of earth. James was in the process of building a traditional hogan, mainly for ceremonial purposes since he and his family already were living in a small and much added-on to house. He and Annette pointed out what they called "modern" hogans which were made of fibreboard, tin, and other more



dwellings, and a few herds of sheep, two tall water towers, a few trailer homes and, earlier, two school busses kicking up dust. “You see that hogan over there?” Annette asked,

That belonged to my aunt but she left it after her husband got sick. She says it’s haunted. I guess there is a tiny crack in the roof and she kept having dreams about being pulled through the crack, like someone was trying to get here. It’s a shame no one lives there; it’s a nice one with two little rooms, but now all the windows are broken and someone kicked in the door. Too bad, really. She has family who could live there but they won’t go near it now.

The next morning, I awoke around six a.m. to Victor’s meows for food after a deep sleep nestled in my sleeping bag and church issue coarse wool blanket. I dozed until about seven when I smelled coffee in the old mustard coloured percolator and felt the chilly night air recede from the newly stoked pot belly stove. I warmed myself by the fire before having a bath. Annette had only had running water for five years and her son, James, still didn’t, and hauled buckets from his mom’s house. Annette slowly rebraided her long black hair with shaky hands as she leaned against her bed and told me, “All the [Navajo] reservation used to be Catholic and now there are other churches here, like the Pentecost, that make you give up your culture. But not me”.

Her son James arrived with his dogs about eight thirty and they decided to take me on a tour of the school in the next community where James did a lot of volunteer work (and

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readily available materials. See also Kluckhohn and Leighton (1962:87-91) and Hirschfelder and Molin (1992:121) for a description of hogans.

where his three children attend) and also of the nearby Canyon de Chelly.<sup>9</sup> James and Annette gave me a fast paced tour of the school but after a few minutes, Annette, puffing to keep up with James' long legged lope and fast talking, retreated to the couch in the staff room. We popped in and out of classrooms and I was proudly introduced to their principal who happened to be from Sarnia, Ontario. James opened the door to one room and said, "This is our culture". Inside some preteen girls were learning how to weave with popsicle sticks and kelly green and black polyester yarn. "Spider Woman taught us that. You'll see her rock when we go to the Canyon," James told me.

James was the only man in Lukachukai involved in the Kateri Circle and had become committed two years previously when the group was on a membership drive. His mother, Annette recruited him but James told me that he was thinking of dropping out. He declared, "I believe in Kateri and all. I mean, she's already a saint. But in the Circle, there's so much fighting and there's no spirit or God there. It's supposed to be spiritual so I don't know, I might drop out after this year's Conference."

We were off to the Canyon with its endless miles of sliced red rock sculpted by wind and rain and history. Annette pointed out the Anasazi ruins, lush canyon valley where faint tour tracks could be seen, and told me tales of the mummies and the massacres of the place. Curious tourists tried to peer over the ears and shoulders of Annette and me as we walked to the half dozen outlooks. Taking my elbow to field the uneven rocks that lead to the overlooks, Annette bent down occasionally, picked off bits of plants and trees, and told me what they were used for. Annette picked up some cedar pods, showed me

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<sup>9</sup> "The Canyon de Chelly National Monument, just over the border into Arizona, are some of the best preserved Anasazi ruins in the Southwest, including pit houses from A.D. 500 and cliff dwelling from 1100-1300, as well as Navajo hogans. Access to the 26-mile-long canyon is provided by hiking trails, horseback, and jeep tours" (Metzger 1997:68).

where the animals had eaten the nut out of them, and gave me a handful to make a string of cedar beads “for protection”. James mostly stayed back at the car, heckling the Californians and smoking Winstons, but chatted with us amiably while we drove between lookouts. He pointed out people’s land, sheep, homes and hogans as we drove. Annette piped in, “If there’s no hogan outside, then they’re born again Christians”

### *Desert Rain*

There are two rises of brick red cliff that bank the interstate as you approach Laguna Pueblo. I had just crossed through them when the first drop of rain landed on my windshield. Ahead, I could see that the sky was dark, but the clouds looked far away and I expected only a sprinkling. Within minutes, I was trapped in the most frightening storm of all my driving years. It was late day and the wall of water, road, and scenery became a continuous smoke grey. I couldn’t see the cars or the road or the center line or the side line. My wipers could not clear away the sheets fast enough, but in one swipe, I saw that I was then straddling the broken white line. I veered to the right, peering anxiously to find the side of the road so I could pull over. My right front wheel went down and I knew that it was safe to stop the car. Flashers and lights on, I waited. Fifteen minutes of dishwasher water blindness and then it began to clear. I could see that other cars were huddled in front and behind me, and one by one we shuddered back on to the interstate. On the other side of the storm were bright green desert plants and washed red rock. The two to three inches of water that I swore had covered the landscape only minutes ago was gone, sucked into the desert as fast as a rattlesnake strike.

*Mother Teresa's Hug*

On a warm May morning, Theresa told me the story of the photograph of her and Mother Teresa hugging, reproductions of which hang in her home and her shop in Albuquerque.<sup>10</sup> Mother Teresa had come to Gallup in 1988 and Theresa knew she just *had* to see her. Theresa drove her aging mother the four hours west of Isleta and arrived three hours early at the church. She had brought a loaf of Indian bread.

I wanted to give it to her, share my bread with her, just like Kateri had shared with me in the dream I had of her, when she broke a loaf of Indian bread, consecrated it, and said, in my language, 'There is only one God, my child. We all come from the same mother.' Mother Teresa walked in, down the aisle. She was so beautiful! Like a little brown bird. She kneeled and prayed at the front of the church and at that moment I felt my spirit move me. I got up and walked towards her, saying 'Excuse me, excuse me' to all the arm-banded guards that surrounded her. My spirit just walked for me right up to her. I said 'Mother Teresa, I have a gift for you.' Immediately she looked up, stretched out her hands and then her arms. I bent down to hug her. She was so fragile in my arms. Mother Teresa left a stain

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<sup>10</sup> Woodward claims that, "to millions of people", Theresa from Isleta included, Mother Teresa is a 'living saint' for her unselfish service to the diseased, the dying, the wretched, the homeless, the outcast. The order of religious women she founded in 1949, the Missionaries of Charity, is now a worldwide network of three thousand members, with shelters, clinics, and convents in India, Africa, Asia, North and South America, Western and Eastern Europe -- eighty-seven countries in all (Woodward 1990:15).

Born in Albania in 1910 and died in Calcutta in 1997, Mother Teresa often found herself at the center of controversies surrounding care of the dying, the disabled, and the unborn. Her ultra-conservative, Vatican-approved values, political connectedness, insistence on austere poverty, and minimalist approach to health care have earned her both tremendous support internationally and some criticism (largely from other aid organizations). See Sebba's (1997) *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image* for a balanced account of the nun's difficulties and successes.

right here (Theresa touched her heart). Now when I hug people, I hug them with the hug Mother Teresa gave me, and with her love.

It turned out that an Albuquerque Journal photographer had taken a picture of the encounter and it ended up on the front page the next day. Mother Teresa's face is clear and sweetened by the warmest look I have ever seen on a human being. Of Theresa, you can only see her hair, her brown hand and brilliant turquoise bracelet, and the corner and fringes of her mother's shawl, "Mother Teresa's rosary beads got all tangled up in its fringes. So I had a few more moments with her while I got my rosary free."

#### *An Introduction to the Sun*

I was finishing up my last email message one April morning, about to pack my computer away and get ready for the move from Theresa's house in Isleta to the Mescalero Apache reservation. Theresa was praying at the other end of the spirit room as she did every morning. Suddenly, I heard a "Come here" from behind me, a soft command to not even finish the sentence I was writing but to join her in *media res*. She gave me a blessing, rubbing corn pollen in my hair and down my back, arms, and into my open palms. Taking one of my just-blessed hands, she lead me into the main room where the governor's and the medicine canes hang.<sup>11</sup> Theresa continued to pray in Isleta, running her long brown

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<sup>11</sup> While Theresa's brother held prominent religious and governmental positions several years ago in Isleta, Theresa kept and "cared for" (with corn meal and prayers) the canes symbolizing "justice and leadership" (Sando 1992:243). These canes are silver crowned and have been presented to the various Pueblos during their encounters with foreigners throughout colonial times. Sando tells us that,

Following the institution of the Spanish form of government, each governor received a silver crowned cane of office. A Christian cross is engraved on the head of the cane, indicating that the cane had the blessing of the catholic Church, and its owner had the support of the Spanish Crown. The Franciscan priests apparently originated the giving of canes, taking as their watchword, 'The cane and the staff to be their comfort and strength, and their token against all enemies,' from Exodus 4

hands down the length of each cane, and then in a closed cupped hand, depositing the blessings of the canes on my head, heart, back, and arms. "Come outside," were the next English words she spoke. Out the screen door, standing on the hardened earth, she turned my face to the sun and I closed my eyes. She prayed again, and when she was finished, she told me to take in the blessing of the sun by inhaling it through my folded hands. Back inside, she took my hand again and from her hidden palm placed a small bundle in mine. It was a two by one by one half an inch package of white buckskin filled with what Theresa called "sacred herb" and "all the prayers of my heart". It was tied with a strip of white buckskin and a tiny piece of turquoise. Theresa covered my hands again with hers, both of us touching the gift, and prayed in English for courage and wisdom for me in my journey. "May you bring peace wherever you go", Theresa whispered. She invoked Blessed Kateri, Jesus, The Virgin, the sun, the earth, and all the powers that reside in the medicine canes she hosted in her house. Theresa instructed me,

From now on you must say 'herikem' (thank you, to an elder) to the sun every morning, because he will recognize you now. I introduced you. You keep that bundle always and never untie it or the prayers will fly away.

As I hugged her, tears came to my eyes, and I thanked her again for taking care of me here in New Mexico, and for welcoming me like a daughter in her home. She answered softly, "I know your heart now, so I could make you a prayer bundle. I knew what to put in

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and Numbers 17. But several versions exist of the origin of the Spanish canes (Sando 1992:243).

Each Pueblo also possesses an Abraham Lincoln cane, "which was presented to each Pueblo governor in recognition of his authority under the United States Government (Sando 1992:243 -244). There are also various "medicine canes" which appear to be transferred among religious leaders as well. See also Parsons (1939:1021-22) about Pueblo canes or "sticks of office".

it.”<sup>12</sup>

*Women in the Mescalero Mountains*

Kay had told me that her house in Mescalero was three miles from the tribal store and across the street from a widening in the road and two grey mailboxes. There were three brown and cream double wide trailers among the four dwellings up that dirt, rock, and pothole road not meant for my low to the ground ten year old Honda. I knocked on each one, found no one home, until, at last, one a little girl with popsicle stains, skinned knees and glasses pressed her dirty face against the screen door until her mom pushed it open from behind her. Kay, dressed in shorts and a bright pink t-shirt walked onto the porch rather than inviting me in. She suggested, “Let’s talk out here. It’s so hot in the house.” I asked if we could talk at a picnic table I could see up further up the hill in the trees. We walked over with Jeannie, Kay’s seven year old little girl who was skipping behind us and holding a baby doll who was clothed in an oversized pink sleeper.

Kay was a large woman, and when her slim twenty-two year old daughter joined us later that afternoon, Kay looked even bigger. Kay’s hair was tightly permed, cut short on top, and reached her collar in the back. She had glasses with a bright turquoise and

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<sup>12</sup> Prayer bundles are not unique to Pueblo people. Almost everyone I spoke with in New Mexico carried some kind of leather pouch with corn meal or tobacco, both used in saying prayers, in it. I had heard much discussion at Tekakwitha Conferences about prayer bundles and pouches. They were spoken of as if they were indigenous to many Native American groups. They seem to be given on occasions of separation such as the beginning of a trip, and contain a wide range of substances. I wasn’t sure whether it would be appropriate for me to ask Theresa what she had put in my bundle. She was vague in her answer and told me that she had placed “our sacred herb” and “other sacred things” in it, and that it had been cut from a larger piece of white buckskin she keeps for the purpose of making these bundles. She also told me about a bundle she had made for her non-Native friend years ago and how she was surprised to see that she still had it the other day, and joked about how ratty it looked and how worn the leather was. Theresa was clearly pleased that her friend had kept the gift for so long.

jewellery frame with lenses that darkened when the sun came out from behind the tallest trees. Kay was born and lived all her life further back in the woods, “Way back”, she gestured. “I was born in that house and so was my daughter”. Twenty four years ago, she had had the old house moved closer to the road and bought a trailer to go beside it to accommodate the family.

Kay had heard about Kateri through her aunt and through her kids who had taken catechism class down the road at the St. Joseph’s Apache Mission. Her proof of Kateri’s efficacy came in the form of an answered prayer for parole for her son. At seventeen, her son had stabbed a man and spent the next six years of his life in jail.

I could never get enough money to go visit him there [in the first prison where he was sent], and so after he was moved [to a prison closer to Mescalero], that’s when I started praying to Kateri. I prayed to Kateri and she helped me a lot. My son was in prison. He got drunk and stabbed someone and he was charged. He was underage. I prayed to Kateri, and asked her please, to at least make it so that he could come home on parole on weekends. A few weeks after I started praying, my son called to say that he had made parole. I also prayed to Mary and Joseph before, but one day after this happened [her son was still imprisoned], I saw Kateri’s statue while I was walking through the church at St. Joseph’s. Everyone had talked about her, how good she was and how she had strength. I thought that I should try her because, well, she’s Native American. So I did. I lit a candle and prayed three Sundays in a row. And then my son called with his news about parole!

As we were talking, Kay’s son emerged from the trailer, slamming the screen door behind him, and hopped into a pick up truck with a young non-Native man. “That white



boy”, Kay told me, after she had finished her story about her own son,

He’s only twelve or thirteen, but his momma can’t keep control over him. She’s always in Arizona at a farm or something. But my son, when he got out of prison, he told me he was going to help his friends, tell them about things, what prison was like, how they would be treated there. He’s been talking to that boy and well, I think that he’s not in trouble so much lately. I used to hear his name on the [police] scanner almost every weekend, stealing something, breaking in, drinking, but now I haven’t heard his name for a while.

When I asked her about participation in the annual Tekakwitha Conferences, she looked at me as if I had asked if she had been to the moon. “No, there was never any money to go.... and this year, we’re getting ready for my niece’s feast for when she becomes a woman<sup>13</sup> and we’re planning a surprise blessing for my father on his birthday. We’ve been collecting stuff for that.”

Her answer was not quieted by embarrassment, there was no shuffling feet ashamed of poverty and isolation. Rather, what I saw was surprise, as if I were quite foolish to have expected her to have ventured very far beyond this forested hill. Jeannie hugged my leg as we walked away from the picnic table, me to my car parked on a

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<sup>13</sup> A Mescalero Apache tourist information brochure advises the reader that, The Puberty Ritual Ceremony, also called the Coming of Age Ceremony, is a solemn and serious time in life when a girl ends the years of her girlhood and prepares for the years of womanhood ahead. The Apache for many ages have observed this time in the life of their maidens with fitting solemnity. They still observe it as much today as they did in the older days when life was harsher in many ways, but simpler in others. The Coming of Age Ceremony now is held each year in the week of the Fourth of July. It extends through four full days and into the morning of a fifth day, with time out for rest and other events, including Indian dances and rodeo. Preparations for the events take even longer. See anthropologist Claire Farrer’s (1994) *Thunder Rides a Black Horse: Mescalero Apaches and the Mythic Present*, for a book length description of the Mescalero Apache girls’ puberty ceremonial.

precarious slant, and her to her tilted house propped up by ceremonial teepee poles, a small satellite dish, and an old fridge.

### *Faraway Ghosts*

My Sunday evening interview with Sister Ann, a Mescalero Apache working on her home reservation, ended after an hour or so by a phone call. It rang between our voices and over the drama of an old western movie that Sister's ninety year old mother was watching in the next room. It was the Mescalero hospital on the line, "a clinic really", Sister Ann sighed. After the call, Sister came back into the kitchen and told me, "Another woman has been brought in all beaten up. I go and see them when they come in to the hospital, just for a little support". Sister sat back down at the table where we had been talking. She needed to wait a few minutes for her niece to arrive before she could go. "Mother needs someone to watch over her in case I'm gone for awhile." We talked briefly, tenderly, about her work here in Mescalero at the "Human Services" department. Since about 1992, she had been the one called in to deal with the "epidemic" (her word) domestic violence on the reservation, 95% of which is related to alcohol, she further explained. Sister Ann was Mescalero herself, and after spending years teaching at assorted Catholic schools in midwest, she felt herself called, inspired by Kateri, to return to her people and "minister here."

She went on, "Domestic violence is exacerbated in Mescalero by limited housing -- where is a woman to go if she does decide to leave? -- and limited police -- the man just takes off and, well, we have a pretty small force for such alot of land". There are also a myriad of other handicaps.

The only battered women's shelter we have is in Alamogordo which is thirty miles

away. What about her kids? What if she works here on the reservation? The only housing we can often find that won't place her back directly in harm's way is a place in a nearby town, off the reserve, and away from her people. She has to be exiled.

Sister handled the call with such serenity and unruffledness that I wondered if it hadn't just been a friend ringing in to say hello. But when she told me about the topic of her conversation, I could physically feel myself sinking and welling up simultaneously. As I left, I took her hand and heard myself say, "I will keep that woman in my prayers tonight."

### *Interviewing Kateri Ladies*

Lana met me at the towering white adobe church in the center of Isleta driving a car too big for her tiny pastel clad self. We drove to her house in the village not far away but down too many twisted unnamed streets for me to find on my own. Just inside her front door, we walked past mounted deer heads bejewelled with turquoise necklaces, past grandchildren's bright plastic toys, and past an altar with several Virgin Mary statues, a two foot high Kateri in painted buckskin and a hologram of the Last Supper. All these images were displayed on a makeshift altar bedecked with plastic flowers in plastic pots and backgrounded by crowded photos of family. Lana and I sat at her kitchen table covered with a faded flowered cloth which over the course of the interview would become littered with smaller saints' statues, prayer cards, and photocopies of brochures and articles about Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Theresa had already introduced me to the "Kateri ladies" at the Isleta Kateri Circle meeting a few weeks ago, so Lana knew that I was interested in the near-saint. I asked her

if I could tape record our discussion. There was a long pause. "Or I could just take notes?", I suggested. This request was followed by what seemed like a longer pause while she considered her answer. "You could take notes if you like," she conceded, and just minutes into our talk, she seemed to have forgotten about my notebook and became lost in her stories. Our conversation was at times almost drowned out by the sound of the wind whistling and bumping, a spring storm that had brewed since I returned from an early morning walk. It was the kind of wind that left your teeth gritty and your eyes squinting.

Lana mourned the loss of Kateri's young life: "Kateri died so young. And the other kids made fun of her because of her pox". Lana touched her own face, made clumps with her hands and pointed out Kateri's imagined scars. We talked about Our Lady of Guadalupe and the pilgrimage Lana had made to Mexico City last year for the December twelfth feast day of Guadalupe. "And I have Our Lady of Fatima that my niece brought me back from Rome a few years ago." Lana got up from the table and retrieved the statue of Our Lady of Fatima from the altar in the living room. She sat back down in the kitchen and placed the statue on the table next to Kateri, who she had brought into the kitchen earlier in our conversation. The figure of the Iroquois Virgin was five times the size of the Virgin from Fatima. Lana looked up at the Kateri statue, stroked the proto-saint's plaster skirt and said to Kateri, "I'm sorry Kateri, we're supposed to be talking about you, aren't we?"

After several hours, I made motions to leave. "Oh no!" Lana insisted, "I have enjoyed the visit." A moment passed and we chatted about the storm outside. Quietly, Lana looked back at the Kateri statue and shyly said to me, "I hope you learned something from talking to me." I assured her that I had indeed learned much from our conversation. "It is a blessing for me to meet all the people who love Kateri," I added. Lana grinned and reached out to lovingly pat the painted moccasins on Kateri's plaster feet.

Lana offered to drive me home and as we backed out of her packed dirt yard, she suggested a tour, "If you are not in a hurry, I could show you the house where I was raised." As we drove through the other little villages on the Isleta reservation, Lana pointed out her sister's house, her grandson's farm, her horses, their alfalfa fields, the old adobe crumbly house where she and four siblings were raised, and the road she used to walk down to school. She talked about how she was glad that she had lived through the "hard times". "Now, I appreciate things more. My family used to raise corn and chili. My sister and I got scratches on our arms from shucking the corn. We made dolls out of corn and towels. I never had any toys really but I remember one Christmas I got a ball with ABC's on it and my brother got a top. I'll never forget that Christmas."

*"If It Wasn't For Kateri, I Don't Know Where My Daughter Would Be"*

"There's one more story about Kateri I want to share with you," Joan, a middle aged Isleta woman offered me. Joan had spoke that morning with sentences punctuated with phrases such as, "according to Jesus", "God's plan", and "God's will". I was eager to hear any story about Kateri, and Joan had told me when I arrived that my visit was a "blessing" that would allow her to "share her stories". Both the teller and the listener, brought together by a third woman from the local Kateri Circle, had enjoyed the company and the tales told that early spring morning.

It started a couple of years ago when my daughter, Marie, who is now in her final year of high school, started to go the wrong way. She got involved with this ex-gang member boyfriend. She started drinking, doing drugs, and she got picked up by the police for DWI [Driving While Impaired]. Eventually she left home and spent eight months living in Los Eros with a friend and her mother. I went to that

house once to talk to the mother and I noticed all kinds of religious objects in the house. I went home and prayed that that woman would take good care of my daughter. All I did was pray to Kateri. During that time, I got really strong with Kateri. She ran away from that house too and her father and I decided to take the car away from her because of the DWI charge. It was the hardest thing I had to do. She begged us not to take it, but we just couldn't let her have it if she was drinking like that. I prayed and prayed to Kateri to help me find the right words, the right thing to do with my daughter.

Joan started to cry as she recalled this battle with her daughter and the hard decisions she had to make. I reached out from my place beside her on the long couch and stroked her shoulder and back. Her tears dried and she went on with her story.

“When I was going through all that, I called my friend [and neighbouring Pueblo priest] Father John, and he came down to help.” Joan took my hands and held them together, palms cupped and opened up. She raised them up towards the ceiling and held them there for several minutes while she explained what Father John had told her to do.

Father showed me how to give up Marie to Kateri. He told me to say, ‘Kateri, I give you my daughter. I put her life in your hands. Please take care of her and keep her safe.’ And I repeated it over and over, lifting my hands like this up to heaven. Then I heard that Marie got a job at the Gaming Palace.<sup>14</sup> I used to go

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<sup>14</sup> Many of New Mexico's Indian reservations have large casinos on their land. These contribute significantly to the tribe's finances in the form of money spent by gamblers and employment for locals. Many Pueblos, such as Isleta, have improved roads, built a community center and set up new housing with revenues from the casinos. The casinos however are controversial. Some say the temptation to gamble for locals with fixed income is too high. Others resent the huge tour buses that circle through New Mexico. Physically, the casinos are impressive. They can often be seen off the main highways even if the rest of the populated areas on the reservation are hidden behind hills. The immense buildings with neon palm trees, and signs flashing, “ATM Here!” and “All You Can Eat

there and watch her work from far away, just to see that she was O.K. Then Marie called home one day, and then she called a few times. And then on Good Friday, she agreed to go with me and my two other daughters on a pilgrimage with Father John. We all went and I was talking about Kateri the whole way, just telling my girls who were all together all about her. That day at the church after the pilgrimage, I gave Marie up to Kateri again. Six days later, Marie arrived home and announced that she was back for good. She has since moved out to Albuquerque because she wanted to be on her own. She has a good roommate who is a college student and a good influence on her. Marie is doing so well and our relationship has improved a lot. I brought her a statue of Kateri for her apartment. She keeps it on her dresser with some little angels. I always tell her they are all watching over her. Marie is a miracle herself. *If it wasn't for Kateri, I don't know where my daughter would be.* That's a miracle in itself. She was ready to go off the deep end when Kateri saved her.

#### *Aunt Deborah and the Nineteen Saints*

Ninety year old Aunt Deborah was waiting for us, or at least she hoped it would be us, at 6:30 p.m. when Theresa and I knocked on the old screen door of an older adobe house. At Sunday night dinner in her Isleta home, Theresa had suggested that we go and visit her Aunt Deborah after we finished eating. We had been to see Theresa's Aunt Martha after mass earlier and, Theresa told me, "Well... the two sisters *talk*, you see." Theresa explained that Martha would have surely called her sister Deborah by now and informed

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Buffet!" are both eyesores on the New Mexico landscape, and symbols of prosperity and independence (cf. Gabriel 1996).

her that her niece had dropped by with a visitor from Canada to see *her*. Aunt Deborah ushered Theresa and I into a tiny room with a wood stove heater, several Bibles, and a single bed covered with a red and white striped blanket, and seated us on crochet covered chairs. “Oh, yes,” Deborah smiled, “I heard that you went to see Martha. I am *so* glad you came.” On our way home, Theresa told me that she would have never heard the end of it if she had taken me to see one aunt and not the other. “And besides”, Theresa told me, “They are both old Tekakwitha people”.

Aunt Deborah leaned back against a crocheted pillow and began to tell us about Kateri “in the old days”.

I was with the Kateri Circle here in Isleta when it first started, back in the 70s, or maybe earlier, or maybe the 80s, I don’t remember. We used to have big bake sales at the church to raise money to go to the Conference. But we had enough only to send three ladies. They were the chosen ones. Only three from Isleta went to see the Pope in 1987 when he came to Phoenix. I’ve been to New York though, when the Conference was there, and Quebec. How I *loved* to see where Kateri *actually lived*. I never stopped praying to her after that trip. I have loved Kateri even more since I saw her in her homeland.

Aunt Deborah paused and got up out of her raised chair. With a steady hand, leaving the walker unused beside her chair, she crossed the small room to retrieve an old folded piece of pink paper out of her bookshelf. She gave it to Theresa who unfolded it and placed the fallen apart pieces on her lap and began to read. It was an old prayer to Kateri, similar to many I had heard already, typed out for Aunt Deborah by a priest almost twenty years ago. She couldn’t remember who the priest was, but she had kept this sheet and prayed it every day. As Theresa read to her audience of two, Aunt Deborah prayed



along half out loud, entirely memorized, with a broken voice under a wet breath.

After the prayer, Aunt Deborah led us down a narrow dark hall, through a thick adobe doorway into an unlit living room. One dim light flipped on to reveal an adobe mantle peopled by nineteen statues of saints. There were about half a dozen images of Our Lady in her many manifestations, and statues of Jesus ranging between one inch and several feet in height, each showing a different aspect of Our Lord. There were two Kateri figurines, an older one where Kateri was fashioned out of unpainted red clay, and another, larger, newer one, likely purchased from one of the Conference or shrine venues, cast in a plaster mold and painted with shiny plaster brown buckskin. On the far end of the mantle, Deborah had placed a *santo*, an old wooden carved statue of St. Michael.<sup>15</sup> The paint was peeling, worn off in many areas, but his eyes were still a bright black.

Maybe that St. Michael is about 150 years old. My mother, who died at 102, had it when she was young. See those scales that St. Michael is holding? My mom said that good was on one side and bad was on the other. She used to say that if we were bad, we would see the scales tip. She used to tell us that (giggles). And that thing, under his feet, that's the devil (no giggles).

Deborah went on to tell us short histories of some of the other statues. "That one is from the nuns on my first communion. That one came in a box from my auntie's house after she

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<sup>15</sup> *Santos*, carved and painted figures of saints, Mary and Jesus, are part of the tradition of religious folk art of Hispanic New Mexico (Steele 1994). More than just paintings and statues, these images are meant to function as devotional tools, "in a different range of experience from the aesthetic" (Steele 1994:1). Like the Orthodox Christian use of icons, *santos* are themselves considered to be holy and,

Depict the Word who became incarnate for our sake, all his godly works and sufferings for us, all his miracles and mysteries, as well as the most holy form of his ever-virgin mother, the shape of his saints, and everything that the gospel narratives and other divine scriptures propose (Steele 1994:3, cf. Dubisch 1995:65-75).

died. That one (a Blessed Mother in a shakeable glass ball that would snow) was a Christmas gift from long ago....."

The snow was swirling outside for real when we left, armed with cheek kisses, a baggie of pumpkin cookies, and a chorus of "Thank you"s and "Come again"s. Theresa giggled in the car, clearly pleased with the visit, "I bet you that she calls Aunt Martha back right now!"

### *Image-ing Kateri*

I pulled into Theresa's sandy yard exactly at six p.m. She met me at the door with a quick hug and said that we had better get going while the light was still good so that I could take pictures. We were off to the tree at the home of her cousin, Elaine, where an image of Kateri had miraculously appeared almost two years ago.<sup>16</sup> The story was just getting out now. Theresa had just found out from her uncle this past May during the time that I was back in Canada, and the first time I called her upon my return, she excitedly told

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<sup>16</sup> There is a long history of holy figures manifesting themselves on earth. Often apparitions are visible to only a select few individuals, sometimes children as in the case of Mary's appearances. Sainly figures appear both in natural mediums such as rocks and trees, and on the sides of highrise buildings (eg. the Virgin appeared on a building in Clearwater, Florida in 1996) and other manmade constructions (eg. an image of Mary appeared in a subway station in Mexico City) (Christian 1992, Zimdars-Swartz 1991, Rodriguez 1994, Newsweek 1997:52). Similarly, in 1998, people flocked to see the "face of Christ" which was said to have appeared on the side of a donut store in Nova Scotia (Calgary Herald 1998).

Some appearances are understood as serious theological or political events, such as the manifestation of Our Lady at Fatima and Medjugorje. The interpretations of these apparitions are areas of contestation and explanations range from the madness of the seer, to a millennial message of the end of the world. Other appearances are understood more lightly. In 1996, Mother Theresa was said to have appeared in a cinnamon bun at a coffee shop in Nashville, Tennessee. The news was published with a grainy black and white picture of what the journalist called, "The muppet-like image of Mother Teresa". The coffee shop was said to be profiting from the celebrity pastry, selling t-shirts, prayer cards and advertizing the bun's website (Calgary Sun 1996).

me that we *had* to go see this. She had already been once and had some enlargements of the pictorial bark on her bedside table.

Theresa missed the turn to her cousin's farm in the vast fields just across the river. While the main village in Isleta (and many other Pueblos) is made of sand layered thick upon solid rock, the other bank is lush green farmland. On our way, I asked in what sort of tree Kateri appeared. I wondered if it was a local one, like a cottonwood that grows like a cactus in the sandy desert, or was it a less "native" one, that needed to be carefully tended and irrigated? It was the latter, Theresa informed me. Kateri had appeared in a fruitless mulberry, tall, full, lush, shady and very green, a beauty even without a saint's grace in New Mexico's dry, hot landscape.

When we finally did find the right tiny, windy, unmarked road that led to Elaine's house, she was at the front door step waiting for us. The yard was a sand, cement, and adobe mix, guarded by a tiny dachshund who was herself protected from the rattlesnakes in the nearby field by sheets of plastic woven through the wire fence. The tree was the only green thing in the yard and it stood about three feet away from her kitchen window. Theresa and I stood outside with Elaine and her teenage daughter, talking and looking at that tree for close to forty minutes.

Theresa had shown me her photographs of the tree prior to this trip, so I knew where to look for Kateri's face. But it wasn't hard to see. Anyone with a few minutes of focussing would definitely be able to see a long face, a narrow nose, high cheekbones and forehead, a small mouth, and a wonderful sweep outlining long hair or perhaps a shawl. Theresa and Elaine agreed that the face was unmistakably "Indian", unmistakably "Mohawk", and with some prompting on Theresa's part, unmistakably Kateri. From what I could see, the image had "naturally" occurred in the bark and was clearly not carved. It

could best be seen from about six feet away, and the closer I got to see if I could trace her features with my hand, the more she disappeared back into the lines and grooves of the bark.<sup>17</sup>

Elaine told us that she first saw the image about two years ago. She had been washing dishes at the kitchen sink and felt like “a lady was watching me”. She looked out and saw the image, “I wasn’t frightened though; it’s not a scary face”. Elaine was a church-going woman had heard about Kateri Tekakwitha from other women in Isleta. However she was not a devotee, nor did she immediately associate the image with Kateri. Elaine explained, “I thought it might be Jesus at first -- you know, with the long hair and the long face.” Her daughter Pam offered with a giggle, “I thought it was like Grandmother Willow. You know, like in the movie “Pocahantas”.<sup>18</sup> She appeared in our tree right after that movie came out”. But now, Pam and her mother, with the help of some prompting and prayer cards with pictures of Kateri from a few family members, were positive that it was indeed the Iroquois Virgin who graced their tree.

Theresa introduced me to Elaine and her daughter as “a friend from Canada who

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<sup>17</sup> This reminds me of a line in the article about Jesus’ face appearing on the side of a donut shop. A woman, who had made the pilgrimage to see the face of Christ, told reporters, “It’s just amazing,” she proclaimed, adding that she approached the building to touch the spot where it appeared. “It’s blurry up close, but when you move back, you can see the Lord” (Calgary Herald 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Pocahantas was a seventeenth century Powhatan Indian in Virginia who “rescued” Englishman Captain John Smith, converted to Christianity, married Englishman John Rolfe, travelled to England as an “Indian princess” (Tilton 1994:7-8). Historian Robert S. Tilton claims that “The Pocahantas narrative provided literary and visual artists with a flexible discourse that came to be used to address a number of racial, political, and gender-related issues” (Tilton 1994:1). In 1996, Disney produced an animated movie of Pocahantas’ life up to and including her encounter with John Smith. The film was very successful at the box office, but has come under criticism for its stereotypical portrayal of Native Americans.

was writing a book on Kateri". Elaine seemed to think that I was (or should be) an expert on the matter of these sorts of apparitions. Elaine, while quite certain that it was Kateri's face there on the tree, didn't appear to know very much about Kateri's life story. Theresa had planned to bring her a pamphlet explaining a bit more about her, but had forgotten it at home. Elaine looked at me for more information. I told the few women gathered in that yard stories about Kateri, the story of how she got smallpox as a child and how her pock marks disappeared fifteen minutes after her death, leaving her skin smooth and beautiful. I also recounted the tale of how Kateri is said to have carved a cross in a tree during winter camp in Kahnawake and spend hours there in prayer, so many hours that others in her village thought she must be sneaking off to meet some man in the woods. She was accused of "sinful relations" with another woman's husband, I explained, and her plea of innocence to the village priest in fact prompted her unprecedented vow of virginity.

However Elaine seemed more interested in the numbers that she could see clearly above Kateri's face, and had spent more time wondering about their meaning more than she has about the image's. "See," Elaine pointed out, "There's a six up there, and a seven and a nine, and a plus sign, or maybe it's a cross, and then a four and a sideways eight, and there's a twenty, and a fifty-two." She asked me again and again what I thought the meaning of those numbers might be. I confessed that I really had no idea, and then told her the dates of Kateri's birth, her death, her conversion, but there were no immediate add-ups. "There's a psychic on 'Montel Williams' show sometimes," said Elaine, "I think she's from New York. I've thought of sending the numbers into her and seeing what meaning she could make of them." I counselled her gently that while indeed this television psychic may be able to make something of these numbers, that if she did send in her request, she might very well be bombarded with media. Theresa had told me that Elaine

was worried about media coverage of her tree and that this explained Elaine's silence and selective telling of the miracle.

And Elaine *did* think it was a miracle, and certainly so did Theresa. Theresa was clearly excited by the opportunity to see the image in person again, and joked about how Elaine and her family might just find her sitting there under the tree one morning, just to be in Kateri's presence. "I always *knew* this is what Kateri looked like!" Theresa exclaimed. "Isn't she just *beautiful*! Kateri *did* spend her time with trees. She just looks so *Indian*! It's a sad face, with a message. I just couldn't get tired of looking at it!" Her voice was a mix of elation, awe, and excitement. Theresa told me that she planned to send in a picture to one of the Vice-Postulators of Kateri's cause, "Just so they can see! It's a miracle!" Pam joined in, caught in Theresa's fervour, "It even kind of looks like there are tears running down her face". The young girl drew closer to the tree to show us. Theresa agreed excitedly, "Yes! Even the mailman at my shop said that when I showed him the picture!"

Elaine was more curious than replete with devotion.

I look at it every day. I open my curtains first thing in the morning and I wonder, why this tree? Why here? What does it mean? What so those numbers mean?

They must mean *something*. And we've lived here ten years. There's no way we could have missed it, and yet I only saw it for the first time about two years ago.

It's even like she's on that side of the tree so she can be seen from the house.

There's a reason for the angle of her face. It just gives me a warm feeling, calm, and sort of like I want to cry. Your emotions come out.

*“I Would Have to Say that This Girl Walked! “*

Theresa told me this story one hot June evening in 1997 while we were sitting around her kitchen table in her cool adobe house. As my research progressed, I realized just what an expansive reputation Theresa had for facilitating healings and blessings, all invoked through Kateri, among other Southwest devotees. Many credited her for getting themselves involved in a Kateri Circle or with the national Conference. More significantly, I heard rumours of Theresa’s close communication and connection with Kateri and her subsequent ability to heal in her name. That night, Theresa told me about one such case.

This happened about ten years ago. A group of us were praying at Queen of Angels chapel in Albuquerque one evening when a line of people came in. Stephanie, having driven with her wheelchair bound granddaughter from Jemez, an hour and a half northwest of Albuquerque, walked in and stood in front of us. She said to me, ‘I had a dream. The dream told me to come to this church. I was supposed to be helped by someone in this church.’ Stephanie looked right at me, we didn’t know each other before then, and said, “You, could you lay hands on my granddaughter?’ Shawna, her granddaughter, maybe she was eight or ten years old, had no feeling from the waist down. She was hiding herself in the closet. It was really sad. I couldn’t say no.

I could really feel the presence of Jesus and I asked for help. I prayed in my Indian way and then the Our Father. I told everyone to pray the Our Father and pray and pray and pray, don’t stop. I started to massage Shawna’s legs, to feel her and pray for her. I could feel a spirit on the altar. She had braces on her legs and I told her to take them off. I was like, in a trance. I left to get some things from my house, an old Indian remedy and a rock. In this rock, I saw Blessed Kateri, so I

bought it from a rock show in Scottsdale, Arizona many years ago.

I came back to the church and really started to pray to Kateri for healing. Everyone was still there; we were working together. I put some of this medicine on her and then I said, 'I'm going to lend you this rock. I want you to rub your legs with it and pray to Blessed Kateri.'<sup>19</sup> I never lend that rock like that! Shawna said to her Grandma, 'I feel a tingle on my foot.' I felt really good but I didn't say anything.

A few months later, Stephanie invited me to their feast at Jemez. We were sitting in their house and all of a sudden, Shawna just got up and started walking. Like this. (Theresa got up from her chair and with her arms outstretched, took a few shuffling steps across the kitchen linoleum.). She had never walked. She was walking! God, that was good! Later that day, when the men went to go hunting for a deer, a message came to me. 'Tell John, Shawna's father, not to go hunting this year.' It's hard to tell a warrior not to go hunting. 'Let the deer run for Shawna', the message said, and I told him that. And then Shawna started walking again. That summer, Shawna went to visit her sister in Florida and she swam the whole summer. It was all that prayer to Kateri and her Grandma's dream.

But her doctors felt like they wanted to interfere with that healing. They

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<sup>19</sup> Using a rock for healing is neither a traditional Pueblo or Catholic practice, although both religions use "natural" substances in ritual. For example, water, oil, wine, and bread are used in the Catholic Church, and corn meal, cedar, water, among other substances can be found in Pueblo ceremonies. Theresa had many natural objects that she considered sacred and useful for private ritual. These include the crystal that she described as "Our Mother" to me in our discussion recorded at the beginning of Chapter One, and also the "Kateri rock" mentioned in this story of Shawna's healing. When I stayed with Theresa in her Isleta home, she placed the "Kateri rock" on my bedside table so that I could be nearer to the proto-saint.



decided to do something else with her and now she's having a hard time. The last I heard, an infection had set into her foot. The doctors, in doing their processes, ruined that, interfered with Kateri's healing process. *But I have to say that this girl walked!!* The doctors should have credited Blessed Kateri, but they didn't. I know that story because I was there.

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The sketches above are not so much ethnographic "facts" about Pueblo or Navajo or Apache life, rural or urban, Catholic or otherwise, but rather they are windows into the cultural space where I encountered and was taught, by experience and explicit lesson, about those lives. The recounting of these tales is inevitably an interpretive activity (Geertz 1973:9). As Ridington says, "Narrative ethnographic writing provides a genre in which to communicate another culture's metaphors, philosophy, and style of discourse" (Ridington 1988:xiii). These are my takes on dialogues I participated in and stories I was told.

These stories were largely written in the field, shortly after the experience, and trace my movement in several Pueblos, the urban center of Albuquerque, and the Mescalero and Navajo Nation reservations. While many of these sketches center around women's experiences of Kateri, I have also sought to draw out basic elements of domesticity, the rounds of feasts and the gatherings of generations that ensue, family structure, history of the area, community concerns, weather, food, landscape, and the general flavour of cultural Catholicism that pervades the Native American Southwest.

The stories I include in this chapter have to do with the lives of a specific group of women in each of the Pueblos and reservations I visited. While focussing on these people, I hope to evoke the broader communities in which they live their lives. It is my impression

that the “Kateri ladies” are well respected in their communities by both the practising Catholics and by those less involved in the local Church. These women often form the backbone of the local church community, dividing their time between catechism, fund raising, and eucharistic ministry. They envision that part of their calling as Christians and as “Kateri’s people” is to encourage other community members to attend mass regularly and become more active in the life of the local church. Kateri’s devotees also participate in what they term the “traditional” activities of Native American life -- feasts, dances, and curings for example. Embedded in the narratives in this chapter are specific weavings and workings out of the “traditional” and the “Catholic”. The relationship between these two concepts will be dealt with more fully in the following chapter, but suffice it to say that the two “modes” operate both alternatively and simultaneously in the lives and communities of those people who I interviewed.

Further, these snapshots serve as a guide to my movement among indigenous groups in the Southwest. I have recounted my own journeying as well as the kind of links -- a promised interview, a devoted people -- that prompted travel. I recall some of my discomfort at being shunned and my elation at being accepted, as well as the gamut of daily frustrations, disappointments, acceptances, and triumphs that characterized each moment in the field. I also recount moments of reciprocity -- the gifts and information that were given and received and the occasions during which these exchanges took place. Time and time again, I was overwhelmed by the generosity, warmth, welcoming and openness I received from those whom I encountered.

Finally, intertwined in these stories are accounts of the negotiation of my identity in the field. Sometimes I was “the girl from Canada who is writing the book on Kateri”. At other times, I was a former pilgrim, quasi-journalist, academic resource, stranger, friend,

niece, and daughter. As Stephanie said to her friend, describing me, “She’s with Kateri”, a phrase that still strikes me as humorous, a bit like barging one’s way into a crowded nightclub, assuring the bouncer that one is “with the band”. I was the woman “with the saint”, and my interest in Kateri was the key forum for the working out of my identity. My exact relationship with Kateri in the eyes of my respondents was frequently a topic of discussion in the field, more often brought up by my interviewees than myself. While people’s interpretations and expectations of me will be discussed in detail in the final chapter, it is important to note at this point that I was perceived as having a deep interest and expertise in matters concerning Kateri, often despite my protestations that I was there to learn.

These narratives tack between the foreign, familiar, and familial. Still now, one year later, I feel that I “did not deserve” many of the experiences, both in the positive and negative senses. The “collection” of ethnographic “data” is nothing if not a deeply human endeavour, characterized by encounter, negotiation, and expectation. These narratives are background colours for the portraits of Kateri I now try to draw. My epistemology is based on experience and relationship, a particular standpoint that I occupied as visitor, writer, and guest in another world (Denzin 1997:554-55). It is my intention that these narratives serve as a kind of descriptive interlude, previewing, retelling, and backgrounding, and that they give density and shading to the saintscape sketched in the other chapters.

#### **IV The Innovation and Invocation of Catholic Indianness**

##### **Dreaming Native Catholicism: The Gathering of Nations and the Dispersal of the Church**

For many of Kateri's devotees in the Southwest, the question of the relationship between what they perceive to be traditional religion and Catholicism is one that works itself out in the life and person of Kateri. On several occasions, most notably in Theresa's dream recounted at the beginning of Chapter One, Native American Catholics told me that they believe that Kateri had given them a message of unity, unity between the "Indian" and the "Catholic" ways, and among Native Americans. On that February afternoon in Jemez when Stephanie and I sat at her kitchen table while the beans cooked, she recounted an experience at a Tekakwitha Conference almost twenty years earlier where she was struck by the penultimate message from Kateri.

There was this group of old Mohawk women and they were having this get together, all sitting in a circle. I said, "Am I welcome?" and the ladies said, "Sure". There was this one Mohawk lady who was ninety-three. She talked about how Kateri died and how her grandmother saw her and knew her way back. She said that when Kateri died, she was made a saint. The Lord had really purified her. When Kateri was little, she lost her mom and dad. You probably heard about that. Anyway, this old lady said that Kateri said this on her dying bed to her people and the priest. "I want my Indian traditional way and my, your way, combined together because they both lead us back to the One that gave it to us. It was given to us by just One, the Father Spirit. And to my Indian people," she said, "When I

put my foot down on that sacred ground of the Lord's, I want to do it on behalf of you, my Indian people. You are going to grow beautifully in his way," Kateri said. She also said, "When I go, you're going to have to talk to me. You're going to have to let me know what you need and I will help you". That really impressed me so much, what that old Mohawk lady was talking about. There was another old lady that was sitting across from her in the circle and she said, "Yes! That's what my uncle told me too. He was saying the same thing". That means that Kateri was a Catholic Mohawk Indian girl. This was back in 1980. Oh, it was *beautiful!*

Similarly, Isabelle, an Acoma woman married to a St. Regis Mohawk man, told me about her dream of Kateri, and the message the proto-saint gave to her. I had driven through the desert rain that evening to their double wide trailer in a little village on the Acoma reservation. Isabelle and her husband John and I had been talking about Kateri both in the Southwest and among the Mohawks. Isabelle told me this story late in the evening, revealing it like a jewel, her most precious encounter with Kateri, leaning forward on the couch with an intensity of emotion and gentle fondness of memory.

I had this beautiful dream and I saw Blessed Kateri in the sky and in this big, big circle, there were all of the Native people who go to the [Tekakwitha] Conferences. I guess that's what it resembled, all different in their Native outfits. And right in the middle there was this face and it was slowly turning, turning and it was coming around and it turned towards me and it was Blessed Kateri like in that picture. All the time that she was turning she was saying to me 'It's all the same'. She just kept saying those words. I never had that kind of dream before. They say that when you have visions, and that's from God, it's completely different from the dreams you have nightly. This one was so pretty, really pretty and it was in the sky and I

was like laying in Albuquerque and I saw that. You see back then I was having a hard time because originally I'm a traditionalist myself and my family is traditionalist. Like down here we believe in both the Indian and the Catholic tradition and nobody shuts you out. My grandfather used to tell me -- it goes back to what it says in the Bible, what God teaches, what the Blessed Mother teaches. You're going down this road and you're going down this straight path and you take the Indian and the Catholic. And I always had this question, like, 'What is it? Where is it? Show me where it is the same. Where do I bring this together? How can I do it?' She was the one, that was the answer that I got in that dream. [Kateri was the one to show you?, I asked.] Yeah, just in that little instant, and she turned and she just kept repeating those words, 'It's all the same'. And that's what my grandfather had always taught me. That's my answer and I went from there.

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This vision of unity and coherence and duality expressed by Theresa, Stephanie and Isabelle encapsulates the generally agreed upon relationship between the Church and "tradition" by Kateri's devotees in the Southwest. Such consensus of Church and Native American culture and the fluidity with which believers move between and engage in both traditions is thought not only to be desirable but also theologically, ecclesiologically, and historically possible.

But there are other views. The relationship between Christianity and culture is a long-standing and often problematic issue for the Church in general and for the missionaries and the missionized in particular. This chapter will deal with the intersection of Christianity, particularly Catholicism, and indigenous traditions. I deal with both "folk" and "official" views, as well as the interaction and mutual interpretation between them (cf.

Badone 1990:3-9). By this I mean that I will include in my discussion statements from the recognized leaders and institutions and writings of the Catholic Church such as the Pope, the Council of U.S. Bishops, and the documents of the Second Vatican Council, smaller recognized bodies such as the Tekakwitha Conference, as well as the experiences and interpretations, such as those set out at the beginning of this chapter, of specific Native American Catholics. I am not interested here in issues of orthodoxy and heresy regarding the matter of the relationship between Church and culture. Rather, I examine the many faceted metaphors, descriptions and embodiments of that encounter, particularly as these refer to Kateri Tekakwitha. Like my exploration of Kateri's life story in a previous chapter, I sketch the intersection between Catholicism and Native American traditions beyond the frame of a colonial narrative of imposition and victimization, and beyond a simple dialectic of assimilation and rejection, or of dominance and resistance (Axtell 1992, Tinker 1993). I seek to problematize these concepts, and in the end, I suggest that the concepts of "innovation" and "invocation" are the best general theoretical tools for understanding this encounter between the Church and Native Americans (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:160).

### **Official Views on Native Americans and the Church: The Pope and the American Bishops in the Late Twentieth Century**

*I derive something like hope from unexpected news -- for example, accounts of the Pope's visits to New Guinea and Africa. The Catholic faithful, bare-chested in traditional regalia, perform tribal dances to greet the costumed white man. What historical changes have brought John Paul II, of all people, to preach the value of indigenous culture? Where are these forces leading us, separately and together?*

*What are we to make of the fact that Russian Orthodoxy, among Aleuts, Koniags, and Yup'ik Eskimos, had become a mark of native identity? What has been lost? What has survived? What is being reinvented in the ordered disorder of contemporary 'culture' (Clifford 1997:342, emphasis in original)?*

*Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on American Indians*

*United States Catholic Conference May 4, 1977*

As American Catholics, we have learned only gradually and with difficulty that the building of one community can only be authentic if it is based upon respect for the distinctive traditions, customs, institutions, and ways of life of its peoples. Indeed, we are only now beginning to understand that unity which grows through dialogue and respect for diversity is far stronger and deeper than conformity forged by dominance.... Christ's gospel of love and redemption, addressed to all people, transcends national boundaries, cultural differences, and divisions among peoples. It cannot be considered foreign anywhere on earth; nor can it be considered identical with any particular culture or heritage. It is the common blessing of all..... Faith finds expression in and through the particular values, customs, and institutions of the people who hear it. It seeks to take flesh within each culture, within each nation, within each race, while remaining the prisoner of none.... Drawing on the two themes of faith and culture, and the Church and justice, and working with all others of good will, we hope to fashion a renewed commitment to serve Indian peoples.



*The Pope Speaks to the American Church: Meeting with the Native Americans in 1984 and 1987*

The early encounter was harsh and painful, but it did bring you the Gospel and the equality of all men and women.... We are called to learn from the mistakes of the past to work for reconciliation..... I encourage you to keep alive your cultures, languages, values and customs.... Your gifts can be expressed more fully in the Christian way of life..... The best known witness of Christian holiness among the Native people is Kateri Tekakwitha.... The Gospel does not destroy what is best; it enriches from within.... The time has come to have a new life in Christ (Pope John Paul II, Phoenix, September 14, 1987).

“The gospel so purifies culture that we can now say that Christ, in the members of his body, is Indian “ (Pope John Paul II, Canada, September 15, 1984, September 20, 1987).

These official statements constitute a positive evaluation of cultures and traditions as gifts. They claim that the gospel enriches and purifies these cultural gifts, and recognize the harshness of the early colonial encounter. Simultaneously, they affirm that the gospel is at home in every culture and that it is never in contrast with what is “noble and pure” in any nation. Kateri is singled out by the Pope as “the best known witness of Christian holiness among the Native people”. The implied message, as will be discussed in more detail below, seems to be that she is both a model of and a model for Native Catholic life (cf. Geertz 1973). The deeper texture of these papal statements is an admission of and admonition to inculturation, a much debated concept regarding the relationship between the Church and multiple cultures to which I will now turn.

### **Inculturation: Never Naked and Foreign Nowhere**

Pope John Paul II's encouragement of native people to keep alive their traditions, repeated in his 1987 visit to Phoenix, has had deep effects on many Native American Catholics. Many of Kateri's Southwest devotees, including Theresa and her elderly mother, made the trip to hear the Pope speak. Eleven years later, a group of Navajo women recounted to me the impact the Pope's words had had on them.

The Pope in 1987, he said it was O.K. He told us to hang on to our traditional beliefs. It was very inspiring. Until then I didn't know much about my own tradition. But after the Pope said that, I started seeking out information about how we are to live in harmony and all that... Me too. I didn't really know anything about my traditional ways until the Pope said it was O.K.... Since our Pope told us about our traditional ways, we started to get into it (Leslie and Christina interview 1998).

These women now sing in a Navajo choir at their local Catholic church where prayers, hymns, and parts of the mass are said in Navajo. Clearly the Pope's message was interpreted as a licence to retrieve or resurrect their traditional ways, represented here primarily as the use of the Navajo language, and incorporate them with Catholic practices. As we shall see below, the impact of the Pope's words, articulating many of the major changes in the Church since the Second Vatican Council, go beyond that of religious practice and have transformed the very structure of religious belief for many Native American Catholics.

Specifically, the Pope's 1984 and 1987 statements that "Christ is... Indian" has been considered revolutionary by many involved with the Church in Native communities (cf. Peelman 1995). In 1995, at the beginning of my research on Kateri, I spoke with Eva

Solomon C.S.J., an Ojibway Catholic nun who works in the Native Pastoral Ministry for the Diocese of Thunder Bay in northern Ontario. She is the director of the Ontario Native Kateri Conference, which reaches out through meetings and publications to clergy and religious, both Native American and those ministering to them, with the message of inculturation. The Ontario Kateri Conference is not so much a devotional lay group like the Tekakwitha Conference, although Sr. Solomon has attended the latter's large meetings, but rather looks specifically at ways to combine Native spirituality and Catholicism in ministry and catechism.

Sr. Solomon wrote a poem on inculturation, a concept that she uses to define her work, and included it in a package of information she sent me about herself and her work. In a 1995 phone conversation, an excerpt of which follows the poem below, Sr. Solomon explained to me what she meant by the term inculturation. While Kateri is not mentioned in either of these texts, in adopting the proto-saint's name for her organization, like the Tekakwitha Conference, Sr. Solomon is putting her inculturative efforts under the historical and theological umbrella of Kateri Tekakwitha defined as "Native Catholic". What she and others at the Tekakwitha Conference mean by this designation and invocation of Kateri and the use of the term inculturation will be fleshed out below.

*Inculturation*

*Go Slowly  
Listen to the Elders  
Search the Symbol  
Understand its meaning  
Experience its power  
Recreate our people*

*Taste the Healing Medicines  
Experience the Power of the Symbol  
Discern the spirits  
Walk only with the Good Ones  
Hear the call of the drum*

*Celebrate our gifts  
Dance the Pow-wow  
Recreate all our people  
(Solomon 1989)*

First, draw a circle with a stick person inside it. That stick person is me. Next, draw some arrows inside the circle pointing towards me. Then draw some arrows outside the circle pointing towards the stick person. The circle represents me and my world and the arrows inside the circle are all the forces of my traditional culture that make me who I am. This is *enculturation*. The outside arrows represent forces of *acculturation* -- those things that change one's world about which one has no choice. I grew up in a small village. When I was young we got a new road and then a telephone and then I had to go to high school in Sudbury [in northern Ontario]. These are all forces of acculturation. And the missionaries too, when they came to our land. They wanted to acculturate us and we had no choice. Now draw a loop starting and ending at the stick person that encompasses some arrows from both within and outside the circle. This is *inculturation*, which means I can go outside my tradition and learn about other faiths and bring parts of it back into my world. I have choice about what elements I include.... This is what I mean by inculturation, this choice of elements. Inculturation is a Church word. With inculturation, we rediscover our spiritual traditions and our roots. Before Vatican II, all our traditions were condemned as pagan. In order to be Christian, we had to set aside all our traditions, all the teachings of our elders. But our traditions are like our Old Testament. The Vatican [II] documents have allowed for this rediscovery. And the Pope -- Pope John Paul -- he said in 1987 that Christ is himself an Indian. We need to find this Indian Jesus; we are Native Catholics (Solomon 1995).

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This section will explore what has been termed a recent “shift in perspective” in the Catholic Church which rethinks the relationship between theology and its concrete socio-cultural context. This shift involves a construction of the body of Christ as heterogeneous, or open to many cultures, an increased valuation of cultures as gifts, an admission of the problematic nature of the colonial context of much missionary work, and an approach which is interdisciplinary and ecumenical (Schreiter 1985:ix, xii, 1). In the documents of Vatican II, particularly *Gaudium et Spes*, these issues of diversity and localization emerge as central. Although the term originated only in 1972 and did so within a Protestant context, “inculturation” has become a common part of the Catholic post-conciliar vocabulary, particularly within the field of missiology and ecclesiology where the issues of universality and locality are primary. In brief, inculturation involves the affirmation that the gospel is “never naked” and “foreign nowhere” (Tesfai 1995:11, United States Catholic Conference 1977:2). That is, Christianity is inevitably, and in its essence, always “clothed” in a cultural expression. Further, its cultural expressions are, and should be, diverse and specific to local contexts. Inculturation assumes that the gospel is only given in a cultural context and thus can never be wholly extricated from it (Schreiter 1985:ix).

I will begin with a brief history of the term inculturation and its related concepts, particularly syncretism. An examination of the key metaphors which have been used to describe inculturation (core/clothing, seed/soil, marriage, and incarnation) filters out the changing assumptions about Christianity and culture and the relationship between them. Some of the interrelated issues which are linked to the concept of inculturation are the emergence of local Christian identities predicated on a (re)definition of tradition; discernment and evaluation of both culture and the gospel; the enactment of power

structures through the workings of inculturation; and a dual process of essentializing.

### **A Brief History of “Inculturation”**

Theologian and Church historian Robert Schreier claims that,

There has been an important shift in perspective in theology in recent years. While the basic purpose of theological reflection has remained the same -- namely, the reflection of Christians upon the gospel in light of their own circumstances -- much more attention is now being paid to how those circumstances shape the response to the gospel. This focus is being expressed with terms like ‘localization’, ‘contextualization’, ‘indigenization’, and ‘inculturation’ of theology (Schreier 1985:1).

While historically always a concern in the Catholic Church<sup>1</sup>, the need to adapt theological reflection to local circumstances began receiving official support with Vatican Council II.<sup>2</sup> Called in 1959 by Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) had as its primary concerns ecumenical dialogue and the unity of the body of Christ, including Protestant and Orthodox Christians, universal human rights, and social justice (Abbott 1966:xv-xix, McManners 1992:373, 417, 446, O’Brien and Shannon 1996:163).

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular the eighteenth century Chinese Rites Controversy. As Vescey explains, “In China the Jesuits’ accommodation to ancestor veneration and other rites earned the opprobrium of other missionary orders, particularly the Franciscans and Dominicans. These rivals accused the Jesuits of heresy and in 1742 the papacy ruled decisively -- at least for two centuries -- against the thoroughgoing policy of missionary accommodationism” (Vescey 1997:27).

<sup>2</sup> While the issue of the adaptation and relevance of the gospel to culture is certainly nothing new in the history of Christianity, it has been argued that a significant shift in approach to the issues is apparent since the Second Vatican Council (Buckley 1991:252).

Just prior to the Council, papal encyclicals on social teachings were starting to be concerned with the adaptation of the Church to the new conditions of the 1960's world. One of the explicit mandates of Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra: Christianity and Social Progress* (*MM* 1961) and *Pacem in Terris : Peace on Earth* (*PT* 1963) is the re-addressing of social questions in light of changing times (*MM* 28, 46-50, 122). The attention to historical circumstance in these documents is accompanied by a burgeoning recognition of diversity; a heightened awareness of the colonial context of interdependency between individuals, groups, and nations; and a call to rethink local cultures as possessing "sacred heritages" and specific "ethnic traits" (*MM* 169, 170, 171, 172, 181, 205, O'Brien and Shannon 1992:82, 83). Particularly in *Pacem in Terris*, matters of authority are generally problematized by the need to consider the "ethnic characteristics" of various human groups, racism, treatment of minority groups, and relations with non-Catholics (*PT* 55, 63, 87, 88, 94-97, 125, 157). In these transitional documents, one can discern that issues of diversity and locality are emerging as central (Thorogood 1995:409).

The ecumenical spirit characteristic of Vatican II is expressed specifically in the incarnationalist theology and dialogical approach of many of the Council's documents, particularly *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*GS* 1965).<sup>3</sup> To begin, *Gaudium et Spes* is concerned to ensure that the Church is relevant and open to the contemporary situations of real people in concrete circumstances. The

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that *Gaudium et Spes* is referenced more often in discussion of inculturation than any other conciliar documents, including *Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and *Ad Gentes: Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*, although the term inculturation itself is present in none of them. If particular Vatican II documents are referenced at all, *Gaudium et Spes* is the prime choice (see Geffre 1995: 18, Cote 1996:83). Most literature on inculturation refers more generally to Vatican II as the impetus for inculturation (Beaver 1972:24, Schreiter 1985:6, Takagi 1993, United States Catholic Conference 1977:2, Kozak 1994:92, Angrosino 1994:825, Stewart and Shaw 1994:85).

Church, it claims, has always had the duty of scrutinizing the “signs of the times” and interpreting them in light of the gospel. Further, the Church has had, and continues to have answers to the important questions of human existence, and claims to have a universal message for Catholics and non-Catholics alike (*GS* 2, 3, 4, 10, 18, 91).

Closely related to the issue of relevance is the use of incarnationalist language, that which metaphorically refers to God having embodied Himself in the person of Jesus. The Church, *Gaudium et Spes* says, is to be brought into the heart of human life. Jesus speaks “according to the culture proper to different ages” and the Church

... Is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, nor to any particular way of life or any customary pattern of living, ancient or recent. Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with various cultural modes, to her own enrichment and theirs too (*GS* 58).

The document goes on to claim that the Church must contribute to the development of culture which will harmonize with Christian teaching, and admit forms of art which are in keeping with the characteristics of various nations and regions into the sanctuary so that “in this way, the knowledge of God can be better revealed” (*GS* 62). Moreover, the broad understanding of culture in *Gaudium et Spes* as “all those factors by which man refines and unfolds his manifold spiritual and bodily qualities” is almost uniformly adopted by inculturationists (*GS* 53).

Further, *Gaudium et Spes* places a strong emphasis on mutual understanding and dialogue between the church and the world, among individual human beings, and among cultures (*GS* 23, 28, 44, 56). In this document, the Church is engaging in a frank conversation that excludes no one, based on the premise that the Church can learn from the



world and that its indirect mission is to evaluate what the world has to offer (O'Brien and Shannon 1992:164-165). As we shall see, this dual emphasis on dialogue and evaluation emerges as central in inculturationist discourse.

In sum, *Gaudium et Spes* represents an important shift away from universal principles apparent to all, characteristic of natural law language, to an emphasis on dialogue between a plurality of cultures and questions of the social and cultural embodiment of the gospel. Universal abstract principles are seen as no longer tenable and, through the use of incarnation language, Christ emerges as a universal symbol of humankind. Such discourse clearly opened the way for the Pope to make statements such as "Christ, in the members of his body, is Indian" (1984, 1987) which are key to the Tekakwitha Conference. The incarnational approach to cultural dialogue thus finds its roots in *Gaudium et Spes*. In brief, inculturation, following the impulse of *Gaudium et Spes*, can be characterized by ontological universalism and epistemological humility.

In addition to the Vatican II documents and related encyclicals, the Catholic Bishops' conference in Medellin in 1968 and the 1973 English publication of Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* brought to the forefront the attempt to find a Christian response to circumstances quite different from those commonly known in Europe and North America. As Gutierrez claims in the introduction to the revised edition of his seminal work, "all theology [is a] dialogue with the prevailing culture" and,

In every place it [theology] must display the inflections given it by those who formulate it and those to whom it is directed....Just as Jesus' accent betrayed him (Matt. 26:73), our theological language is subject to the same rule; it takes its colouring from our peoples, cultures, and racial groupings, and yet we use it in an

attempt to proclaim the universality of God's love (Gutierrez 1988:xxxv).

As well, issues of gender, class, and race emerged in Gutierrez's work as important aspects which had been perceived to be obscured in traditional theology. In brief, Vatican II paved the way for different theologies that were emerging in the southern hemispheres and among marginalized peoples of Europe and North America. These theologies asked new questions, questioned old answers, and sought to forge new kinds of Christian identities sensitive to context, procedure, and history (Schreier 1985:2-3).

One facet of this shift in perspective has been the recognition that since the 1960's, the majority of Christians live in the non-Western world (Geffre 1995:23). Involved in this realization of vast diversity is the rethinking of western monoculturalism which had hitherto been regarded as normative for Christians everywhere. Until recently, Schreier claims, it was taken for granted "that the theology of the Western churches was supraregional and was, precisely in its Western form, universal and therefore directly accessible for persons from other cultures" (Schreier 1985:ix). This so called "birth of the world church" as essentially polycentric involves difficult labour and painful pangs as the universal Church deals explicitly with the issues of locality and universality (Tesfai 1995:7, 10, 12).

This emphasis on locality and diversity is also expressed through the explicit positive evaluation of indigenous cultures as "gifts from God". The variety of cultures in the world is compared to the diversity of colours that results when a clear light passes through a prism (Zuern 1983:1, 8). The diverse cultures of the mission countries are thus perceived to be refractions of a clear light, and are no longer seen as distortions of or deviations from a western Christian monoculture. Inculturation thus involves a new awareness of the intrinsic necessity, validity, and value of the myriad of human cultures through which Christianity is to become incarnate, contemporary, relevant, and catholic

(Beaver 1973:32).

Another aspect of this shift in perspective is the study of colonialism in its relationship to missionary activity (Tesfai 1995:14). This new perspective detects continuous and consistent colonialism and paternalism on the part of the western churches, and in response, calls for analysis of relationships of power and injustice. This analysis is predicated on the realization that all theologies have contexts, interests, relationships of power and special concerns (Schreiter 1985:4, 5).

All these issues are contained within the framework of tension between specific cultural contexts and unlimited catholicity. To this end, unity and uniformity are differentiated; the first is possible and a sign of God's church, and the latter impossible, as well as undesirable (Cote 1985:102, Geffre 1995:28). Cultural pluralism is said to highlight the catholicity of the Church rather than detract from it (Buckley 1991:252). Further, catholicity is not equated to one monolithic structure, but rather can be better seen as the universal communion of local churches. In sum, Vatican II "urged the Church to move more generously toward the concrete realization of cultural catholicity in all forms of Christian life" (Beaver 1973:23, 38).

The concept of inculturation thus has its roots in the ferment of Vatican II. However, Protestant missionary G. Linwood Barney is credited for coining the actual term in 1972. He writes, "The supracultural components should neither be lost nor distorted but rather secured and interpreted clearly through the guidance of the Holy Spirit in 'inculturating' them into this new culture" (Beaver 1973:51). Barney puts "inculturating" in quotations and in an explanatory footnote says, "Inculturate should not be confused with the term enculturate which is employed by social sciences to refer to a culture's process of orienting a person to the culture. 'Inculturate' is coined here to refer to that process or state

in which a new principle has been culturally ‘clothed’ in meaningful forms in a culture” (Beaver 1973:57).

Coté explains the introduction and adoption of inculturation in Catholic circles as follows:

It was introduced by the Jesuit superior-general at the synod of bishops in Rome in 1977 and further clarified by French Dominican theologian Yves Congar, who, in a note to Monsignor Coffy, described it as follows: ‘Inculturation means that Christianity, the faith, must be sown like a seed in...a certain socio-cultural human space, wherein it must find its own proper expression from the culture itself’. The word was used for the first time in a papal document by John Paul II in 1979. Since then it has become one of the most pivotal points of discussion among scholars in mission study. It has, in effect, become central to the grammar of the postconciliar church to describe the interdependence and proper relation between faith and cultures (Coté 1996:37).

Inculturation thus implies that the church must be both true to its traditions and conscious of its universal mission. The term suggests encounters whose outcome is a convergence that does not replace either of the cultures from which inculturation arose. Both parties to the inculturative exchange undergo internal transformation, but neither loses its autonomous identity. In the notion of inculturation, the message of the gospel is understood to be “knowledge of a transcendental, timeless, and transcultural truth that is not tied to a particular human language or cultural form, but is adaptable into local idioms and symbolic repertoires” (Stewart and Shaw 1994:11).

The concept of inculturation is clearly related to the ideas of indigenization, adaptation, accommodation, and contextualization; all are concerned with rooting or

cloaking Christianity in indigenous cultural forms and making the Church relevant to contemporary society (Angrosino 1994:825). It further draws on the anthropological concept of acculturation and a theological understanding of incarnation (Coté 1996:68, Geffre 1995:24, Stewart and Shaw 1994:6, Yamamori and Taber 1974:14, 28). As Schreiter states, inculturation is essentially “a combination of the theological principle of incarnation with the social-science concept of acculturation (adapting oneself to a culture)” (Schreiter 1985:5).

It is widely recognized that the incarnation is at the theological basis for inculturation (Angrosino 1994:825, Buckley 1991:251, Geffre 1993:24, Takagi 1993:246, Yamamori and Taber 1974:11, 14, 15, 28). As the Word became flesh, so, in a certain sense, God has assumed, and continues to assume in the affirmation of the risen Christ, race, culture, country, and history (Geffre 1995:21). As Tippett says,

The mission of God was achieved by the incarnation of his Son, culture-bound as a Jew, and a Jew of Galilee, and a speaker of probably of Galilean Aramaic, and by occupation a carpenter in the tradition of his earthly father, and he in turn said ‘As the Father hath sent me into the world so I send you into the world’, thereby giving us a model for mission (Yamamori and Taber 1974:15).

Similarly, Vatican II makes reference to the “cultural body” of Christ when it states that “by his incarnation, the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man” (*GS* 22) and the whole of humanity to himself (Coté 1996:83).

Thus it seems reasonable that “the incarnation terminology remains the best -- indeed the only adequate terminology with which to develop a theology of inculturation” (Coté 1996:68). The incarnation becomes a model for this notion of the gospel becoming embodied in culture, or taking its flesh from culture (Coté 1996:66, Oleska 1996:387,

Takagi 1993:267). To its credit, this view sees culture as other than a mere accessory. Rather, in the incarnation model, the body or humanity of Christ is more than simply “a decorative trophy”, and inculturation becomes more significant than merely an ecclesial exercise with little or no gospel imperative behind it (Cote 1996:71, 72). Further, this understanding guards against the fear of dilution or loss of the gospel as it becomes incarnate; just as God did not “forget himself” in the incarnation, neither is the gospel diminished by taking on fleshly forms. Finally, the incarnation metaphor allows for the transformative element inherent in inculturation<sup>4</sup> to be expressed as “redemption” rather than the more pejorative “selection” or “purification”. As Coté says, “the process of inculturation, like the mystery of the incarnation itself on which it is grafted, is inherently redemptive and should not be viewed simply as a pastoral strategy in view of better adapting the gospel message to a people’s culture” (Coté 1996:72).

Thus on a theoretical and theological level, the incarnation serves as the basis for inculturation. On a pragmatic level, a symbolic understanding of both Christ and culture proves most useful in describing how religious synthesis takes place. Recent inculturation theory borrows heavily from anthropological understandings of semiotics and draws upon a symbolic conception of culture which holds, following Geertz (1973), that culture is a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures -- webs of significance that “man himself has spun” (Biernatzki 1991:157, Coté 1996:91-92, Schreiter 1985:53). In brief, culture is seen as a system of symbols and meanings held in common (Biernatzki 1991:7, De La Cruz Aymes 1991:x, 73). The focus is on the structures of meaning themselves rather than the surface expressions of that meaning. One of the tasks of inculturation then, is to discover a

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<sup>4</sup> The transformative or evaluative element of inculturation will be discussed in detail below.

culture's principal values, needs, interests, directions, and symbols which are to be found in the "deepest layers" of culture (Biernatzki 1991:28, 151, Schreiter 1985:28).

In a semiotic understanding, the gospel is dislocated from any specific cultural context; "there is no Christian culture as such" (Beaver 1973:34, 52). This dislocation translates the gospel into a system of principles and symbols which can then be connected, largely by means of metaphor, to symbols discerned to be present in the host culture. Metaphor is seen as a device whereby two distinct worlds of meaning are linked together (Schreiter 1985:54, 69). Symbols are understood to be building blocks of both gospel and culture, and inculturation is a process of matching and metaphor (Biernatzki 1991:146, De La Cruz Aymes 1991:x, 51-53).

### **The Tekakwitha Conference's Mandate of Inculturation**

There are (at least) four interrelated impetuses in this symbolic understanding of inculturation: the forging of identity and the concomitant (re)definition of tradition; a process of discernment, evaluation or transformation of both the gospel and culture; an awareness of the differential power structures enacted through inculturation; and finally, underscoring these issues of tradition, selection, and power are impulses towards essentialization and hybridization.

I illustrate these issues by returning to our discussion of the Tekakwitha Conference, a Native Catholic organization whose explicit mandate is inculturation. In the case of the Tekakwitha Conference, I argue that essentializing entails discerning "spirits" or essences of "Native traditions" in order to integrate them into a larger Catholicism. The "larger Catholicism" is itself seen as a cultural tradition from which the "good spirits" (i.e. the core of the faith) can be separated from the "problematic" colonial framework of the

first missionary encounters. Thus in many ways, both “traditional Native culture” and “Catholicism” are seen as examples of a free-floating “ethos” from which essences can be distilled (Angrosino 1994:827). These essences are then recombined in a process of hybridization to produce the emergent entity and identity of Native Catholicism. For the Tekakwitha Conference, the issue of inculturation is focused around the concepts of tradition, symbol, discernment, and identity. In this focus, hybridity emerges both as descriptive and prescriptive.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the goals of the Tekakwitha Conference are to incorporate traditional elements of Native spirituality (broadly defined) into the Church; to unify Native American Catholics while respecting tribal differences; to pray for the canonization of Kateri; to share the story of her life; and to follow her example of holiness (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet n.d.). Tekakwitha Conference members are admonished to express themselves and their beliefs not only in traditional “Catholic ways” but in “Native ways” as well. As Aunt Grace once told me, “The church and my culture go together. I found that out through the Tekakwitha Conference; it’s bringing that Indian and Catholic together” (Grace 1998). For its participants, the Tekakwitha Conference, and indeed Kateri herself, serve as symbols of the unity and strength of all Catholic Native Americans, and highlight their presence and importance in the larger Catholic Church. Tekakwitha Conference members aim, “without ceasing to be Christian, to live out our unique identity found in our individual and tribal Indianness” (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet n.d.). Inculturation is the expressed way of manifesting Native voice, presence, and identity.

Inculturation within the Tekakwitha Conference, then, begins with a process of essentializing. To begin, inculturation involves creating a kind of “list” of elements which



are inherently or essentially “Native”. Indeed the phrase “native peoples” gets homogenized and capitalized into “Native” (no quotation marks). Thus Native Catholics speak of their “traditional spiritual gifts; [a] deep sense of the spirit, [a] closeness to creation in their respect and love for nature, [a] remarkable hospitality, [a] love of family, of children and the aged, and [a] high regard for community” (Solomon 1992:3.10, Tekakwitha Conference workshops 1996, 1998, 1999). Natives are said to have a “natural way” and a “natural” or “inherent” “spirituality” symbolized by items such as the medicine wheel, sweet grass, sweat lodge, and sacred pipe (Solomon 1992:4.5, 4.7, 4.8; Solomon 1993:4, 7-13, 21, 22, 27, Tekakwitha Conference workshops 1996, 1998, 1999).

These understandings of Native American culture on which the process of inculturation is predicated are closely linked to the larger, non-Catholic Pan-Indian movement. While the roots of the Pan-Indian movement are largely political, I am interested here in the contemporary cultural and symbolic expressions of Pan-Indian identity.<sup>5</sup> Historically, as former director of the Tekakwitha Conference Richard King explained, Pan-Indianism developed “from Wounded Knee to Wounded Knee” (King 1996). King’s first reference to Wounded Knee recalls the 1890 massacre of 350 unarmed Native Americans on the Pine Ridge Reservation. As Native American scholar Jace Weaver explains,

The Wounded Knee Massacre was precipitated by the spread of the Ghost Dance, a syncretic religious movement, throughout the tribes of the western United States.

The new religion had begun with Paiute Wovoka’s mystical vision of the Messiah.

It was an eschatological vision of Christ’s parousia, a coming that would wipe

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<sup>5</sup> The history of the Pan-Indian movement is complex. What I provide here is but a brief sketch of some of the key events. I would refer the interested reader to the works of Weaver (1997), Deloria (1994), and Bordewich (1996).

Amer-Europeans off the face of the North American continent. After his righteous judgement, the buffalo would return, dead ancestors would be raised up, and all creation would be renewed. The movement had direct antecedents in the Ghost Dance of 1870 and in the Prophet Dance of Smohalla. Amer-European misunderstanding and fear of the movement as a locus of political resistance pointed the road to Wounded Knee (Weaver 1997:86).

The second Wounded Knee incident occurred in 1973 on the site of the 1890 massacre when Native Americans and federal agents met in armed conflict again. Weaver traces the events and social forces that led up to the 1973 confrontation.

Cut off from rural and reservation tribal communities, [dislocated Native Americans] began to seek one another out, crossing tribal lines and gathering together in urban Indian centers. A new 'Indianness' was fostered in these local institutions and at the same time national organizations like the National Congress of America Indians and the new, more radical National Indian Youth Council promoted Native unity for common, political action..... In November 1969,... a group of natives calling itself Indians of All Tribes occupied the former federal penitentiary on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, citing the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty as legal grounds for taking over unused federal property originally belonging to Natives. Other protests followed. In July 1970, in a message to Congress, President Nixon renounced termination and relocation and established tribal 'self-determination' as official policy..... During the fall of 1969, urban Natives in Minneapolis founded the American Indian Movement (AIM) modelled on the Black Panthers, in an effort to 'police the police' and monitor civil rights abuses against Natives. The new organization used the publicity generated by the

Alcatraz seizure to launch a recruiting effort and begin chapters in several cities. On the eve of the 1972 presidential election, it organized a caravan called the "Trail of Broken Treaties" to Washington. Anger and confusion at the march's end led to the takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building; the Natives held the building for almost a week. A few weeks later, AIM activities on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where AIM leaders had come to aid traditional Oglala Lakotas opposed to the federally supported tribal government, sparked a seventy-one day armed confrontation at Wounded Knee, site of the 1890 massacre (Weaver 1997:122).

In the time and space between the two Wounded Knee incidents, we see the chaotic and turbulent genesis of Pan-Indianism, both as a political and social movement (Deloria 1994:4-24). Long considered to be symbolic of the American government's religious, cultural, social and economic suppression of Native Americans, the Wounded Knee incidents are said to have both embodied and engendered unity among members from diverse tribes (Tinker 1993:5-8, cf. Deloria 1994:1).

In the Pan-Indian movement, community is proclaimed, difference is signified, and uniqueness is asserted in the face of the colonial Other. Clifford's comments about Balinese culture, suggesting the same is true for all cultures, may equally be applied to Pan-Indianism. Culture, Clifford says, "is a multiply authored invention, a historical formation, an enactment, a political construct, a shifting paradox, an ongoing translation, an emblem, a trademark, a non-consensual negotiation of contrastive identity and more" (Clifford 1997:24). Created from a blend of ethnohistory, ethnostalgia (Weaver 1997: 8, 164), narrative and memory, Indianness, Catholic and otherwise, is a kind of collective identity (Tweed 1997:5, 18, 85). It is an identity negotiated in the space and face of difference, embodying at once antiquated and innovated "tradition" (Tweed 1997:23, 29,

44).

Culturally, this Pan-Indian unity is expressed largely with translocative and transtemporal symbols (Tweed 1997:10, 87, 128). Items of material culture, such as eagle wings, moccasins, and drums, as well as socio-religious practices such as powwows and sweat lodges, “originally” specific to one certain tribe or group of tribes, become emblematic of those things Native Americans hold in common with each other. As in Sr. Solomon’s poetic call to inculturation within the Catholic Church, Pan-Indianism encourages diverse groups of Native Americans to “Hear the call of the drum”, “Dance the Pow-wow” and “Recreate all our people” (Solomon 1989). For Solomon, drums and powwows are symbolic of the re-creation and unity of all Native Americans. While the larger Pan-Indian movement is explicitly non-Christian and in fact centres its identity around “traditions” which are understood to be antithetical to Christianity (cf. Tinker 1993), inculturationists within the Tekakwitha movement use the same symbols of an inter-tribal Native identity to represent their Indianness within the Catholic Church.

With inculturation, Nativeness is similarly distilled down to its essences which are then transformed into symbolic forms. As Sr. Solomon advises in her poem on inculturation, Native Catholics are to “Search the symbol”, “Understand its meaning”, and “Experience the Power of the Symbol” (Solomon 1989). For the Tekakwitha movement, as for Pan-Indianism, images such as circles, the colours red, black, white and yellow, eagle feathers, and fringed buckskin become symbols of Native identity (artwork in Solomon 1992 and 1993, Tekakwitha Conference logo, newsletters, and annual meeting programs). These Native symbols are then “attached” both figuratively and literally to Christian symbols such as the cross. For example, the logo of the Tekakwitha Conference is a cross with three eagle feathers hanging from its center. Inculturation, in the case of the

Tekakwitha Conference, is thus linked to the forging of nationhood out of diverse peoples and the creation of supratribal identities and loyalties which are then set in the context of the Catholic Church (Deloria 1994:24, 53, Powers 1987:147-153, Schreiter 1985:13).

Clearly, there are processes of evaluation and selection of elements in Native traditions at work in inculturation and in Pan-Indianism more generally. As Sr. Solomon's poem explains, inculturation means that one must "Discern the spirits" and "Walk only with the Good Ones" (Solomon 1989). The Tekakwitha Conference explicitly draws on the statements about the gospel "enriching culture" made in *Gaudium et Spes* (58). In fact, Tekakwitha Conference members address "the fear of confronting a culture" as a clear hindrance to inculturation. Native culture, even in its genericized form, is not to be thought of in idealistic terms.

For [some] everything in a Native culture is good and should not be critiqued....

The fact is that if we are to be serious about inculturation we need to understand that culture is as we find it, not as we would like it to be. Many non-Natives who come to work with Native people are disappointed because their idea of a perfect Native society is the one portrayed in [the movie] *Dances with Wolves*. As they enter into the inculturation process, they attempt to recapture this idealized notion of Native life. Missionary personnel and Native leaders cannot afford to have an idealized notion of any Native culture....Moreover, it is important to understand that Christianity is counter-cultural. Every culture has elements that are good and elements that are bad. When the gospel comes in contact with any culture, Jesus judges that culture....The Risen Lord, through baptized Native people, takes the good and discards the bad (*Cross and Feather News* 1995:19, 1996:17).

Inculturation thus "purifies and strengthens culture....Each of our cultures needs to be

changed when it meets the face of Jesus” (Tekakwitha Conference Newsletter 1988:6, 7).

This element of discernment also applies to the history of the Church as well. Within the framework of inculturation, Nativeness in the past (pre-Vatican II) was seen as a polar opposite to Catholicism, especially in its colonial incarnation. The relationship between the Native and the Catholic was viewed as inherently antithetical and necessitated supplantation: “All our traditions were condemned as pagan. In order to be Christian, we had to set aside all our traditions” (Solomon 1996). Thus the contemporary phenomenon of inculturation also involves a distillation of Catholicism so as to purge it of colonial elements. In so doing, one arrives at the seeds or core of Catholicism (e.g. Jesus, sacraments, saints) all of which are then identified with or coloured by some elements of “Nativeness”. Arguably, the antithetical nature of colonial Catholicism was bound up in its colonialism and not its Catholicism. Native Catholic inculturationists thus make efforts to discern the “good spirits” of Catholicism -- to determine (or perhaps salvage) those elements which are “essentially Catholic”. Vatican II is seen as the catalyst that opened this possibility for distillation of the “core Gospel” and its synthesis with “local cultural elements” (Angrosino 1994:824; Solomon 1992:3.4, 3.11; Solomon 1993:15, 18).

In this purging of Catholicism of paternalism and colonial elements, healing and reconciliation are sought. Inculturationist discourse within the Tekakwitha Conference involves a frank discussion of “past misconceptions and hurts resulting from conformist styles of evangelization used by most missionaries” and a recognition that “in the past, native religion and its practices were too easily identified as evil, devil worship, witchcraft, and superstition” (*Cross and Feather News* 1995:19). Inculturation is thus seen as a kind of “healing dialogue”, a beginning of a “new era”, and a “rebirth” (Hoffman 1982:1,

Tekakwitha Conference Newsletter 1988:8).<sup>6</sup>

Inculturation also entails hybridity, both as a process and a product. As a process or a method of inculturation, hybridization can be defined as “dynamic equivalence”. According to anthropologist Michael Angrosino, “*dynamic equivalence* involves the replacement of an element of the Roman form with something in local culture that has equal meaning or value” (Angrosino 1994:825). Or perhaps more accurately, hybridization involves drawing metaphorical parallels between essences of both “Native traditions” and “Catholicism” which are represented in symbolic form. Thus Native Catholics engage in a kind of “matching” or determining of symbolic parallels between “Native” and “Catholic” elements. This equivalence-making is done both on theoretical and pragmatic levels. For example, Sr. Solomon says, “The Church needs to understand that our ceremonies are just as sacred as our Church rituals; our medicines just as ‘holy’ as our sacramentals” (Solomon 1993:15).

Symbolic expressions of this mutuality and equivalence for Native American Catholics in the Southwest are very important. Sr. Rachel, a non-Native nun working with the Mescalero Apache described the impact that was felt in the community when some of the traditional dancers performed in the local Catholic Church.

A few people see conflicts between the Church and the traditions. I’ve heard that the two religions should not be mixed. But the old people, if they know both, they

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<sup>6</sup> An interesting interpretation of the marriage metaphor of inculturation is used to describe this reconciliation.

We can liken our relationship [between the gospel and Native cultures] to that of a marriage that has been going on for awhile. Like a lot of marriages in the old days, all were not necessarily of mutual consent... As in any relationship where there is no mutual consent, it takes a while for the two people to grow in love.... Well guess who’s pregnant?... We are about to give birth to a new creation, a new child, to be born of a renewed couple that has come a long way (Tekakwitha Conference Newsletter 1981:3).

know that there is nothing contradictory. There have been missionaries in the past who have called their ceremonies pagan and such. But even way back, the Crown Dancers<sup>7</sup> danced in the church when it was being built. There have been a few priests who have been encouraging of native traditions (Sr. Rachel 1998).

Carmen, an elderly Mescalero Apache and active Catholic, continued about the building of the same local church.

Like when the bishop wanted to make that video about Apache Catholics living out their faith.... We got Crown Dancers and they were just waiting to go into the church, to bless it and be blessed by it. When we come to church, we don't leave part of ourselves at the door. We bring our whole selves in. We can bring our songs, dances, dress, art, all in. And we've had the church here blessed by medicine people and then in turn, they have been blessed by Father. The Tekakwitha Conference has encouraged this (Carmen 1998).

This kind of mutual acceptance, as symbolized for many Apaches by the Crown dancers performing in the Church, blessing it and being blessed by it, is a cause for marvel and celebration. Recalling the Pope's visit to Phoenix in 1987, Joan, a middle aged Isleta woman excitedly recounted what was for her the key moment of the event for her.

There were so many people there, but I managed to get up to the front just behind the gates and he walked right past me when he came in. And then, the Holy Father blessed me. I couldn't believe it! It was so moving, very spiritual. And the

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<sup>7</sup> Crown or Mountain God dancers dance at the four day ceremonial celebration of the transition in a woman's life from a child to an adult. The dancers are not only important religious actors in Apache ceremonial life, but they also are key symbols for Mescalero Apaches (Farrer 1994:57-59). Pictures of Crown dancers are found on billboards marking the boundaries of the reservation, miniature Crown dancer figurines are for sale in the tribal gift shop, and the image is used repeatedly at the Inn of the Mountain Gods, the large and successful resort hotel and casino run by the tribe.



Indian religious leaders blessed him. The moment was turned around. They had the smoke, the eagle feathers, the four directions, all the Native things all over the altar. He blessed us Indians, and then we blessed him. It was so wonderful (Joan 1998)!

More specifically, and perhaps more systematically, in the Tekakwitha Conference, parallels are drawn between Native ancestors and Catholic saints; Native medicines and Catholic sacraments; the Native “sacred cedar tree” and the Catholic cross; and Native naming ceremonies and Catholic baptism (Solomon 1993: 15, 18, 22). One woman reflected on such parallels at the 1992 Ontario Native Kateri Conference:

As I watched them (the Bishop and a Native leader) both with their own traditional garb, I saw several symbolic parallels: the mitre and the headdress, both symbols of leadership and responsibility; the crozier and the eagle staff, both symbols of certain authority; the incense and the sweetgrass, symbols of prayer and purification. I felt the parallel symbolism could help Catholics to appreciate their own symbols more (Solomon 1992:4.1).

Thus the process of dynamic equivalence is predicated on a “both/and” rather than “either/or” approach to Native and Catholic “essential” elements; inculturation is inherently syncretical rather than antithetical.

This process of hybridization produces a new entity or “tradition” within the larger Church termed the “Native Church”; its members are “Native Catholics”, and Kateri is its figurehead (Solomon 1992:2.1, 2.2, 3.10, 3.13, 4.3; Solomon 1993:26, Tekakwitha Conference workshops 1996, 1998, 1999). Further, just as the contemporary understanding of Kateri as a Native Catholic demands a rethinking of her life history, Native Catholicism as a “new” tradition represents a more general challenge to the views

historically held about North American Native peoples. During the colonial period, the legitimating narrative of discovery and civilization informed missionary activity in the “New World”. The indigenous populations of this previously “undiscovered” territory essentially had two options for religious identity: an entirely *acculturated* Europeanized Christian in whom all traces of “Nativity” were submerged and all elements of “Native spirituality” eradicated and proscribed; or a “stubbornly” *enculturated* “pagan and superstitious savage Indian” who represented a threat and antithesis to all European efforts of civilization (cf. Axtell). The contemporary “inculturated” Native Catholic, by contrast, can be seen as a concretization of a (postmodern and postcolonial) incredulity towards particular metanarratives including those of imposed identities (i.e. savage/civilized) necessary to maintain the European vision of progress.

Thus inculturation insofar as it involves the production of a new hybrid identity results in what could be termed a “metanarrative of hybridity”. I suggest that the impulses of essentializing and synthesizing, characteristic of inculturation, create, in effect, a new “metanarrative of hybridity”. Inculturation is *meta* because it is predicated on discerning essences or the “inherentness” of the two (albeit reified) cultural systems involved; it is a *narrative* because it functions to place individuals within a larger meaningful situation (e.g. postcolonialism); and it is *hybrid* because it is a pastiche of hitherto incongruous elements. If “syncretism can be a locally recognized form of agency” and hybridity be “invented from below”, then there is the possibility for a “hybrid authenticity” (Clifford 1995:110-112). This “hybrid authenticity” can be seen as a metanarrative in so far as individuals perceive their identity in relationship to it as “essential”, or in the case of Native Catholicism, as “true” and “holy”. While the idea of a “metanarrative of hybridity” appears to be inherently paradoxical, the potentially contradictory impulses of essentializing and hybridizing,

characteristic of inculturation, can arguably be reconciled and defined through the concept of a metanarrative of hybridity.

### **Fleshing Out Inculturation: Church and Culture in New Mexico**

Despite the widespread and official embracing of inculturation by Tekakwitha Conference members, the transition to an inculturated local theology is not entirely unproblematic. In some cases, this transition is not even desirable. Many Native Catholics whom I met in the Southwest actually reminisced about the Latin mass of their childhood, recalling how “real” and “beautiful” that was. Yet at the same time, these individuals are the leaders in bringing “Indian things” such as drums, eagle feathers and smudging into the Church. They now see themselves as being avid traditionalists *and* Catholics at once, an identity which was not perceived to be possible before Vatican II.

In brief, in the late 1990’s, there is greater freedom for lay participation than existed in the 1960’s, or even in the 1970’s, as the innovations of Vatican II took time to filter into the reservation mission churches and urban Indian chapels of the Southwest. June, Aunt Grace’s niece from Acoma, sees the change particularly in the language of the mass as revitalizing for the Church.

Vatican II. It’s more meaningful to the people. It has brought the people closer to the Church. Before when it was only in Latin, it didn’t make that much difference. Like we saw at Laguna -- all the singing, it is very touching. Once we had a meeting at Laguna and everything was in Laguna, the readings, the Father had learned the language. I was really touched to sit there and understand the whole mass to be spoken in your own language. I always think, “Gee, if I feel this way, and I’m not even Laguna and yet I understood what Father was saying”. To hear

the readings from Genesis, the governor read that in Laguna. Like I was telling Aunt Grace, if the church hadn't been so packed with all these other non-Indians, I probably would have sat there and cried. It was just beautiful. It didn't used to be that way. It was in Latin and nobody really understood. I think that more people, because they are allowed to bring in, not everything, but some of their cultural ways, that more people go to church -- not only the older ones, but the younger generations (June 1998).

However, while the cultural implications of Vatican II are embraced by a large number of Native Catholics and their clergy and religious in the Southwest, in the actual construction and constitution of local Native Catholic theologies and church communities, in the working out of what an inculturated Church will look like, some members prefer the more conservative and universal elements of the preconciliar Church. Fr. Victor, a non-Native priest on the Navajo Nation had this to say about his experience with his parish.

A lot of the Pueblos thought, how can you do this? How can you change anything at all? But here [on the Navajo Nation] when the mass changed from Latin to Navajo, it didn't make that much of a difference. The Latin mass was much more in harmony with what the Navajo medicine men does than a ceremony with all kinds of participation. Not too many priests speak Navajo. [Fr. Victor does.] You could count them on one hand. A lot of elders don't speak English, but they didn't understand Latin either (Fr. Victor 1998).

Similarly, Fr. Andrew, a non-Native priest from Laguna Pueblo told me that, "there are many elders who still prefer the Church pre-Vatican II. There were a lot more rituals in the Church then that were similar to their own traditional rituals" (Fr. Andrew 1998). As Angrosino argues, in the Church's eagerness for inculturation, it has sometimes mistakenly

assumed that people automatically prefer indigenous to foreign expressions. He goes on to explain that the Roman forms may seem more like the “real thing” to believers (Angrosino 1994:827).

Pueblo historian Joe Sando explained to me this lingering preference by many Pueblo people for Roman forms in the mass and more generally, Pueblo responses to the wider “openness” that Vatican II has encouraged.

Those changes [of Vatican II] were not really accepted by the Pueblos. Because in our Pueblo religion, we have different religious societies which have artifacts that they alone can touch or handle. When I was a kid, we couldn't touch the chalice. Today, anybody can do that. In our Indian ways, only the initiated do those things. I think the Pueblos were kind of disappointed when they went from the Latin mass to the open mass. The Latin mass had an element of mystery. Today it's open, wide open. There are just a few things left that only a priest can do, like marry someone. But now judges can do that too. Our Indian ways are still exclusive, to be done by those initiated ones (Joe Sando 1997).

For Sando, the nature of the indigenous “cultural ways”, in this case exclusivity in performing certain religious functions, actually contradicts the “openness” of the postconciliar Church.

Yet at other times, in the working out of local theology and practice, simply the “tones” of the postconciliar Church can get “a bit off”. Witness the situation that Fr. Peter, a non-Native priest in Albuquerque humorously describes.

The tone of the Church in the early days was that everything was kind of regulated. Vatican II opened the Church to be more whole. Some of the real tension in the beginning was the fact that soon after Vatican II -- some of the things that were

done, there were people who thought, “Oh, we shouldn’t do this”. Once, somebody took all kinds of bread -- Indian bread, piki [a Native American blue corn meal paper thin tortilla] and consecrated it. And then they had all this leftover bread, and you can’t very well make sandwiches out of it after. It was one of those tones that kind of got a little off (Fr. Peter 1998).

But inculturation is not entirely an either /or situation, either for the individuals discussed above nor the Catholic communities they represent. Joe Sando also plays the Indian drum for the “high” mass every Sunday at the Albuquerque Queen of Angels Indian Chapel where Fr. Peter says mass in English and lay eucharistic ministers serve the sacraments -- wine in a Pueblo pottery chalice and traditional communion wafers, not Indian bread, from a clay bowl similarly painted in traditional Pueblo designs. At Queen of Angels, the wall behind the altar is painted with a brilliant sunburst flanked by sheaves of green corn. The steps to the altar display various large Pueblo pots, baskets and boughs of cedar. The walls of the church have a brown and black Pueblo print border which carries onto the curtains. The wall design and matching drapes were created by Theresa in her drapery store. Although Theresa regularly attends mass in her home village of Isleta, she is also involved in the urban Indian Chapel and Kateri’s shrine there. Finally, at Queen of Angels, a series of high shelves ring the church on which are placed a statue of the patron saint of each of the Pueblos as well as of the Navajo and the Apache. Each saint, ranging from eight inches to one foot in height, is dressed in the usual plaster robes. Yet each saint is accessorised with an item representing Indianness, a tiny painted drum, a shawl, a bit of buckskin, a tiny string of turquoise beads, or a few feathers.

Catholic Native Americans in the Southwest, as those who attend Queen of Angels, may be seen as embodying the “essence” of inculturation, which I have argued is itself a

hybrid tradition. Languages, customs, and symbols from both Catholicism and native traditions are blended in many cases. Dual belief systems are held in tandem and in balance by believers, practiced simultaneously and together, distinct, yet entwined as a total religious identity. Victoria, a young Jemez woman involved with catechism for youth in the community, described the relationship between Church and traditional Pueblo culture.

Usually the governors talk to us after mass. It's also the same as preaching in Towa, our Indian language. Because we also say that we are very fortunate because we have two ways we can worship God. God gave everyone a language of their own and God gave us Towa. How we take our own traditions and worship God in that way [sic]. So we can both be Christian and traditional, but they are only one, only one God. We're only talking to one God. We say God in English and then we say the same thing in Towa. When the governors are in church, the people are there too and vice versa. Most of the time, they give us news or business at the tribal office. In the kiva when the men go, the women aren't there sometimes, but they're at mass. When I look around at church on Sundays, I see a lot of traditional men who spend a lot of time in the kivas also. Whatever they preach in the kiva, it's exactly the same thing they preach in the church. They talk about God being Creator, all the animals, we name them, we have names for everything. It's like it's right from the Bible. Whatever they preach in Towa, it seems like it's right out of the Bible... naming the animals, around here our environment, we name them, even the littlest bug. If you're appointed governor, you need to go to mass that one year, even if you never go again or before (Victoria laughs). We have the twelve councilmen, like the twelve apostles. There's a lot of parallels. Even though Christianity came later in our lives here (Victoria 1998).

A key metaphor that Victoria and other New Mexican Native Catholics use to describe the relationship between native tradition and the Church is that the traditions are really “ways”, one “Indian” and the other “Catholic”. Further, these two ways, modes of access if you will, are fundamentally the same, two paths leading to the same goal and oriented toward the same God. Theresa’s elderly Isleta aunts described their religious life this way. “We believe in two ways, but the Indian and the white are really the same religion; one God. In our tradition we have the same thing as the ten commandments” (Deborah and Martha 1998). Deborah and Martha, like Victoria above, draw out the parallels or symbolic equivalents between native and Catholic traditions.

This unity and oneness of God was also affirmed by Betty, an Isleta woman in her sixties. “Others say that we’re supposed to believe in only one God, not our traditions. But a long time ago, old people told stories about how our heavenly Father and our God of the Indian way worked together to create everything. They both worked together to have all this creation going on. There is no separation of any kind. But a lot of people don’t understand that” (Betty 1998). The messages of the two traditions are understood to be complementary if not identical, and the simultaneous existence of the two is said to be a most fortunate circumstance for the believer. Several women told me, “We are very lucky. We have two religions, the Indian and the Catholic” (Lana, Betty 1998).

I often asked my respondents whether they had ever seen conflict between the traditional and Catholic ways. Mike Valdo, former director of the Tekakwitha Conference, answered “No”, again pointing out the parallels between the two traditions and the good fortune the Pueblo people enjoyed for having these two ways.

That’s probably what’s unique about our people. We’re not forced to choose and I’ve said this before, I think we’re fortunate to have two worlds -- our Christian



faith and then our traditional ways. There's a strong influence to participate in our Native ways. But I don't think that any of our leaders, the *casiques* [religious leaders] or the officers that are appointed each year.... I don't think that any of them have come down and said that you are not to practice your Catholic faith. We still practice both and as my wife said a little while ago, it's so close, the way we practice our Catholic faith and our traditional ways. It's been passed on for years and years that there is a power greater than us and we've always prayed to that Spirit. There's a lot of resemblance in the way we do our Indian practices and it's so very close to the Christian teachings and the Catholic ways. Even the persons, you know, the twelve apostles, Mary, and you can see that in our Native ways (Valdo 1998).

If there ever were problems between the two ways, they are understood to be now solved. Margaret, the Navajo and Choctaw leader of an Albuquerque Kateri Circle told me that

There used to be problems, years ago. The Church wouldn't think of bringing the drum or the sage into the Church. It was, "Learn my religion and do away with yours, because yours is not good". All the religions that came over here didn't understand the Native American religion. They didn't take the time to learn, is why, until just recently, within the last thirty years. They decided that our way of life, our religion is not so bad after all. They say, "A lot is similar to our ways so why should we be thinking that you're pagans, following pagan ways?" Now they've incorporated (Margaret 1998).

When I asked Victoria about conflict between the two traditions, she replied, "Hmm, not really. I've never really seen any problems". Then she continued her answer

with a story of an elderly man in her village who realized from Victoria's own example a way in which the two traditions could fit together.

One year, I was a catechist and one elder come to the house one Sunday morning and I was on my way out the door to go to mass. I asked him, "Are you on your way to mass now?" He said, "I don't need to go to church. I already prayed with cornmeal."<sup>8</sup> And I told him (laughing at her disrespectfulness), "Yeah, the cornmeal that you did was personal. The mass that I'm going to, that I'm inviting you to is community." He looked at me like, "Who do you think you are?" He just looked at me and smiled. The following Sunday, he approached me at mass and said, "I really thought about what you told me last week. Here I am. I want to be community." The following year, he told the priest that he was interested in hosting the baby Jesus.<sup>9</sup> I don't think he was involved in the church before. He was very traditional; cornmeal was his way of life. Ever since then, his family is really strong in both, Christianity and traditional. He told me, "If you can be,

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<sup>8</sup> Cornmeal or corn pollen is a key medium used for prayer by Pueblo people (cf. Parsons 1939). I observed many people, including Theresa as recounted in the previous chapter, praying while holding a pinch of corn meal taken from a pouch or bowl, and then releasing the corn meal to the wind and ground, sending their prayers for dispersal with the grains. The use of cornmeal for prayer is one of those "traditional" native cultural elements that has been incorporated into local churches in the Southwest. In many Pueblo churches, a pottery bowl containing cornmeal sits next to a statue of a saint, Kateri in many cases, and individuals sprinkle the cornmeal on the statue when they pause in front of it to pray.

<sup>9</sup> Each year at Christmas time, a family is chosen in the village to "host" the statue of the infant Jesus and other figures from the Christian manger scene in their home. The statues are displayed, cleaned, and cared for by its hosts and visited by other Catholics in the village.

then I can be too.” All my family is in the medicine.<sup>10</sup> I’m strong in that area too.

I guess you have to practice what you preach (Victoria 1998).

In this story, Victoria models for the village elder the way in which she envisions the two “ways” or “traditions”, here symbolically represented by cornmeal and the mass, can be combined in an individual’s and a community’s religious life.

### **Embodying Inculturation: Kateri as Symbolic Figurehead of Native Catholicism**

Many involved in the Tekakwitha movement understand Kateri to be the symbolic figurehead of Native Catholicism. She is seen as both a model of and a model for an inculturated identity that is at once and essentially, in both senses of the word – at its core and necessarily so – Indian and Catholic. Recall my earlier description of the inculturated liturgy that takes place at the symbolically Native-decorated Queen of Angels Indian Chapel in Albuquerque. And at the end of each Sunday service there, a litany and song praising Kateri, as justification, exemplar, and embodiment of these post-conciliar innovations of Native Catholicism, are sung.<sup>11</sup> I will discuss Kateri’s Indian identity in detail in the next chapter, suffice it to say at this point that she is perceived by her devotees as having lived a life which was both completely Catholic and “authentically” Native. Akin to the theological discourse about Jesus as fully human and fully divine in his incarnation, Kateri is understood to embody, even incarnate the essences of both Catholicism and Indianness,

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<sup>10</sup> By being “in the medicine”, Victoria meant that she and her family participate in the ceremonies of traditional healings, lead by medicine men, necessary when illness strikes the community.

<sup>11</sup> Kateri’s litany and song can be found in Chapter Five.

thereby modelling for the devout a way in which they might live their lives as Native Catholics.

Kateri's embodiment of inculturationist impulses is further expressed in the message of unity she is said to have given to her devotees. Theresa was inspired to do "Kateri's work" after the proto-saint appeared to Theresa in a dream telling her that, "My daughter, all gifts come from the same God, the same mother", and, "It's OK, you can be Indian, believe in God, it's OK, it's the same spirit" (Theresa 1996, 1997). Similarly, as recounted at the beginning of this chapter, Stephanie was told by an elderly Mohawk woman who said that Kateri's dying words "to her people and the priest" were, "I want my Indian traditional way and my, your way, combined together because they both lead us back to the One that gave it to us" (Stephanie 1998). And again, in Isabelle's dream, Kateri told her, "It's all the same", encouraging Isabelle to "take the Indian and the Catholic" (Isabelle 1998). In Kateri's "own" words, she encourages her devotees to live an inculturated life as Native Americans and as Catholics.

Moreover, Kateri addresses her messages to all "her people" at inter-tribal groups of Native American Catholics from diverse backgrounds and nations. Theresa and Isabelle received their communications from Kateri in a dream setting of the Tekakwitha Conference where there were "all of the Native people who go to the Conferences. I guess that's what it resembled, all different in their Native outfits" (Isabelle 1998 cf. Theresa 1996, 1997). More explicitly, in the story that Stephanie recounts of a tale that an old Mohawk woman told her, Kateri addresses those at her side while she is dying as "my Indian people" (Stephanie 1998). Again, Kateri's message is one of unity and it is proclaimed to a unified group of diverse Native Americans.

This understanding of Kateri as symbolic figurehead for and embodiment of

inculturation demands creative retelling and reconceptualizing of her life story. Whether in her lifetime Kateri actually did consciously integrate the “two ways” is a historical uncertainty. As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, Kateri’s devotees believe that the Iroquois convert never abandoned her “tradition” and followed God as both an Indian and a Catholic. Indeed Kateri’s contemporary devotees would deny both assertions that ethnohistorians have made that Kateri and other early Native American converts feigned Christianity for economic gain, practicing their traditional ways in subterfuge resistance (Axtell 174, 1992, Blanchard 1982, Jaenen 1976, Richter 1985), and the statements of the early Jesuit writers who said that Kateri travelled a great distance, both geographically and spiritually from her original dark and pagan traditions, finally rejecting them when she became a Christian (*Positio*, Béchard 1992). To her devotees, Kateri was and is both archetypally Indian and archetypally Catholic. The organizations which bear her name -- the national Tekakwitha Conference, the Ontario Kateri Conference, and the many local Kateri Circles -- understand their inculturative efforts to fall under the embrace of Kateri’s mantle.

The precise *way* in which Kateri modelled inculturation in her seventeenth century life, thereby anticipating the Church’s late twentieth century attitude toward culture, was never made explicit to me. No one was ever able to tell me exactly *how* Kateri managed to be fully Indian and fully Catholic at the same time, or what this would have looked like in her devotional life. What *was* affirmed at the annual Tekakwitha Conference meetings, in their newsletters and publications, at local Kateri Circles, and in my many discussions with Kateri’s devotees was that the proto-saint both in her life and since her death represents and encapsulates what being a Native American Catholic is all about. Much like the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus as fully human and fully divine, what matters to Kateri’s devotees

is really a matter of faith. Because Kateri was and is Indian and Catholic, so, say her devotees, can we be. This understanding of Kateri's hybrid identity points the way to the development of a Native Church, its genesis centred on a symbolic historical figure.

The concept of the formation of religious and ethnic identity focussed on historical personages is found elsewhere. At this point I will turn to look briefly at three "parallels" to Kateri's case, Black Elk, Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Apache Christ. In these figures, as with Kateri, we see a convergence of history, peoplehood, nationhood and symbolic function. In all these cases, there is a working out of an understanding of what it means to be an indigenous Catholic.

Black Elk was a Lakota Catholic catechist who lived at the turn of the twentieth century. Ethnologist John Neihardt's 1932 classic, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*, which has in many ways become "a bible of all tribes" is certainly a source of Native identity and an affirmation of traditional ways of life. This record of the life and community of one Lakota man has become a measure of things "truly Indian" and a major resource for the Pan-Indian movement (Arnold 1999:85, 89, Deloria in Neihardt 1932:xi, xiii). Together with Joseph Epes Brown's *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, Niehardt documents cultural crisis, visions, battles, callings, dreams and the death of these dreams (Brown 1953:xiii, xv, xvii, 34, 54, Neihardt 1932:xvii, 2, 19, 31, 108, 138, 160,172, 180, 201, 231, 245, 270). Both works are self consciously traditional and entirely devoid of Catholic content (Brown 1953: 76, 138). Where accounts of Black Elk's life entirely elide aspects of Catholicism, the records we have of Kateri's life are devoid of any mention of her "traditional" life except to say that she left those "pagan ways" to become a true Christian.

Yet Black Elk, like Kateri for many of her devotees in the Southwest, has become

for many a symbol of what it means to be a “Catholic traditionalist”. Philosopher of religion Clyde Holler argues that Black Elk was a creative religious thinker, both a sincere traditionalist and a committed Catholic, rather than a victim of acculturation or a nostalgic passive source of information about his people’s past (Holler 1995:37). Holler suggests that although Black Elk is claimed by both Catholics as a pioneer of authentic Lakota Christianity, and by traditionalists as a contemporary revivalist of traditional religions, he is better understood as a dual religious participant. Holler sees Black Elk’s religious statements as symbolic, as two modalities of the sacred (Arnold 1999:87, Holler 1995:4, 223). Holler claims that writers on Black Elk’s Catholicism have assumed that either his traditionalism or his Catholicism was insincere, and that one or the other was espoused either opportunistically or from practical necessity (Holler 1995:6). This question of sincerity is the wrong one, Holler argues, and the issue is really one of symbolic dualism rather than competing religious claims or functions (Arnold 1999:107, Holler 1995:205).

Much like Koppedrayer’s and Greer’s suggestions that Kateri is largely a “creation” of her early biographers, Holler sees Black Elk as a literary portrait, known in many ways only like Socrates or Jesus, through narrative (Holler 1995:2, Arnold 1999:86, 91, 92, 104). He who employs symbolic discourse to discuss and in many ways recreate his people’s history and rites becomes himself a kind of symbolic currency, traded and evaluated by many sides, reinterpreted, reclaimed, owned and rejected by diverse groups throughout history, his self and his name becoming symbols for multiple groups of people and nations (Holler 1995:140, 215, 221). As Holler says, “cultural identity is one thing; cultural identity self-consciously maintained in the face of an external threat is another.... In the reservation period, what had been Lakota culture became ‘traditional culture’” (Holler 1996:181). Echoing Clifford’s understanding of culture as “a non-consensual

negotiation of contrastive identity” recounted in my discussion of Pan-Indianism above, for Holler, ethnicity is strategy, emerging only when at least two groups interact primarily on the basis of their perceived cultural differences (Clifford 1997:24). Holler claims that in this strategic fashion, Indian identity is consciously and actively pursued by many contemporary Native Americans (Holler 1995:187-191).

Clearly, Black Elk, like Kateri, has become a cultural broker of sorts (Rodman and Counts 1983:13, Weaver 1997:104), tacking between religious and cultural worlds, finding a balance between them in his own life, conscious of identity and tradition at least in the wake of the “Waisichus” (white people), particularly of his biographers and historians. Identities meet in him, in what he has come to symbolize. Again, similar to Kateri, Black Elk is multiply claimed and reclaimed, made a Catholic, made a traditionalist, said to reject and symbolize both. He is lost in the literature, in the narrative he told of himself, his people and history. He is found embedded in these stories as well, in symbolic tales of past and future, emerging as a character where diverse histories, of humankind and the divine, meet.

Like Black Elk, Our Lady of Guadalupe is a nexus of indigenous and Catholic identity. She is a dark skinned version of the Virgin Mary found throughout Mexican and Southwest culture: emblazoned on nineteenth century revolutionary army banners, and glued onto contemporary fridge magnets in the New Mexican homes of Hispanic and Native American Catholics. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe can be seen even today on the *túlma* (a rough fabric cloak) of Juan Diego, the christianized Indian to whom she is said to have appeared in 1531.

Her green eyes are cast down, her hair is black, and her skin olive. Her humility and coloring, along with the stars and gold rays of the sun [that surround her], the



turquoise colour of her mantle, and the moon on which she stands -- all signs of Aztec divinity -- convinced the native Mexicans that the Mother of God had chosen to be a *mestiza*, one of them, not their conquerors (Cunneen 1996: plate 22 caption).

The basic story of Our Lady of Guadalupe is as follows. On December 9, 1531, Juan Diego, a Christian Indian of middle age, was walking to mass when he heard music and a soft voice calling his name. At the top of a hill he saw a lady glowing with beauty and compassion. She said, 'Juanito, the smallest of my children, where are you going?' She then made her will known to Juan which was to have a temple built on that spot 'because I am your loving mother'. She instructed him to go to the bishop with this request. He was not heard and returned the next day to the hill where he begged Our Lady to choose someone else for this mission. Our Lady insisted, but when he returned to bishop, the bishop did not believe him and demanded that a sign be given. Juan Diego went back to the hill and Our Lady told him to gather roses in a usually barren spot. He found and gathered the roses and then returned again to the hill where Our Lady arranged them in his cloak or *tilma*. He returned to the bishop on December 12 and when he dropped his *tilma* open and the roses fell to the floor, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared. The bishop saw the sign and believed Juan Diego's story and honoured Our Lady's request. Unchanged by four hundred years, the *tilma* hangs in a huge church and pilgrimage site in Mexico City (Cunneen 1996:219-221, Rodriguez 1994:31-36).

Anthropologist Eric Wolf's classic 1958 article on the Virgin of Guadalupe as a Mexican national symbol and collective representation argues that segments of Mexican colonial society encountered in Our Lady of Guadalupe cultural forms through which they could express parallel interests and longings. Wolf claims that an apparition of Mary to an

Indian commoner represents on one level a return of the Aztec goddess Tonanztin, and on the other hand a Spanish defeat of old gods. He suggests that Our Lady of Guadalupe can largely be seen as a unified symbol for indigenous Mexicans representing for them both supernatural salvation and freedom from oppression.

Ethnologist William Taylor similarly explores the social history of Marian devotion in New Spain looking specifically at devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe from 1519 to 1821. Taylor argues that the view of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a syncretic goddess obscures the fact that originally Mary was introduced by the Spanish as their own patroness and as a symbol of Spanish power. Taylor problematizes Wolf's argument and sees a paradox in the symbol of Our Lady of Guadalupe as both a liberator (a critique of the existing social order, rejection of Spanish values, and guide to action), and a mediator (a model for acceptance of colonial authority and legitimator of Spanish rule). In the end, Taylor argues that Our Lady of Guadalupe is a multivocal symbol, and not simply the Virgin of the conquered Indians (Taylor 1987).

Theologian and sociologist Jeanette Rodriguez has written about contemporary Mexican American women's devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. She sees Our Lady of Guadalupe as a symbol of Indian Catholicism rather than as representative of the foreign Catholicism of the conquerors. According to Rodriguez, Our Lady of Guadalupe is identified as their "own" by Mexican American women; "she is ours, *los latinos*". For them, Guadalupe is a consoler, mother, healer, intercessor, and woman: she has known suffering and is strong. Most importantly, like the relationship between Kateri and Native American Catholics, Rodriguez argues that Our Lady of Guadalupe stands among Mexican American women and reflects their identity. Guadalupe does not symbolize servility and suffering but rather, for Rodriguez and the women she studied, Our Lady is a model of

liberation and empowerment (Rodriguez 1994, cf. Cunneen 1996:22).

Rodriguez argues that the significance of the story of the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe is twofold. First, it provided the foundation for Mexican Christianity, and second, it provided a connection between the indigenous and the Spanish (Rodriguez 1994:45). As Rodriguez explains, Juan Diego was poor and marginalized, “the least of my children”, and yet he perceived Our Lady of Guadalupe as a member of his own race; there was familial respect between the two figures (Rodriguez 1994:52). At a time when the Aztec nation found itself in situation of subordination, alienation, suffering, and oppression, the symbol of Our Lady of Guadalupe affirmed the humanness of the indigenous populations and provided a symbolic means of forging a new culture and polity out of Spanish and Indian elements (Rodriguez 1994:4647, Tweed 1997:32,66). For Mexicans, other Latin Americans, Mexican Americans, Our Lady of Guadalupe is a symbol of both cultural and religious identity. Given the widespread devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe in the American Southwest among Kateri devotees, I would suggest that Guadalupe symbolizes indigenous Catholicism for many Native Americans as well.

Wolf, Taylor, and Rodriguez all understand Our Lady of Guadalupe to be a potent and contested symbol, intimately linked to ethnic and cultural identity and history. She bridges cultures and affirms indigenous identity within the Church. For Native North and South Americans, Guadalupe “looks like them”, is “one of them” (Rodriguez 1994:151) and therefore, like Kateri, is the very incarnation of inculturation, the embodiment of the Catholic missionary message in the New World.

One final example of an indigenous Christian symbolic figure will suffice. Recall my discussion earlier in this chapter about the impact of the Pope’s 1984/1987 statement that “Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself Indian”. As we saw with Sr.

Solomon's work, Native Americans have seen this as an encouragement and invitation to build a truly Native Church and uncover and develop that Native American Christ. And further, the Pope's vision is, as Peelman has argued, christological, not just ecclesiological; Christ himself is a multivalent symbol (Peelman 1995:13). The Apache Christ is one such working out of the Pope's new christological vision.

A six foot high painting of Jesus as an Apache hangs over the altar at St. Joseph's Mission church in Mescalero, New Mexico. This Apache Christ is another key example of how history, both cultural and ecclesiological are retold and embodied in symbolic figures. The following text is found on a pamphlet available at the back of the church and explains the Apache Christ. I quote it in its entirety in order to emphasize the key points of "fulfilment theology" (Weaver 1997:30), multiple ethnohistories, and inculturation:

No people in North American history have suffered as much from stereotypes as have the Apaches. A proud, monotheistic people of the desert and mountains, their religion and their history are strikingly similar to those of the ancient Jews. They, too, were enslaved, to produce wealth for Spain and Mexico. Many of them were carried off by the United States army to the swamps of Florida and Alabama, as prisoners of war. Their crime had been defending their land -- a land they considered holy -- from invaders who respected neither their culture nor their faith. They live today on reservations hidden away in what is left to them of their sacred mountains.

This icon [of the Apache Christ] celebrates the beauty of Apache culture -- specifically the culture of the Mescalero Apaches of New Mexico. Christ is depicted as a Mescalero holy man, greeting the sun on the fourth morning of the women's puberty rites. These are the most sacred of the Apache ceremonies,

celebrating the sanctity of the gift of producing new life. A sun symbol is painted on his left palm, and he holds a deer hoof rattle in his right hand. A basket at his feet holds an eagle feather, a grass brush, and bags of tobacco and cattail pollen -- items used in the rites. He stands atop 12,000 foot Sierra Blanca, the sacred mountain of the Mescaleros. Behind him flies an eagle, the guide who first lead the Apaches to *their* 'promised land'! The inscription at the bottom of the icon is Apache for "Giver of Life", one of their names for God. The letters in Christ's halo are the Greek version of that name. The Greek letters in the upper corners of the icon are abbreviations for 'Jesus Christ'.

Christians find truth in what they call the Old Testament. They call the ancient Jews who fought slavery and defended their land religious heroes and prophets. When Apaches did the same things during the last four centuries, however, Christians called *them* bloodthirsty savages and did their best to destroy them as a race. The Apaches have somehow survived four centuries of Christian genocide and continue to tell the stories of their heros and prophets. Can modern Christians go beyond inherited stereotypes and find the sacred where they do not expect it? Apache prophets have much to say for those with ears to listen" (Bridge Building 1990:1 emphasis in original).

The Apache Christ represents an effort to reclaim and reinterpret otherwise harshly negative symbols, a kind of christological translation that is encouraged in the postconciliar Church. As we saw in Sr. Solomon's description of the relationship between the Church and her people's traditions, here, the pre-Christian history of the Apaches is depicted as being equivalent to the Old Testament, godly and holy, but not yet fulfilled in the person of Christ (Peelman 1995:128). Culture is "fulfilled" by Christ. So in response to Jesus'

question, “Who do people say that I am?” (Mark 8:29), Native American Catholics respond with the contextualized, incarnated and inculturated answer that He is one of them (Peelman 1995:225). In the Apache Christ, as well as in our Lady of Guadalupe and also to a certain extent in Kateri, we see the divine reflected and indeed embodied and incarnated in indigenous flesh.

Kateri, Black Elk, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the Apache Christ are historical / religious figures around which have become centred efforts in defining indigenous Christian identity. Each has united a diverse group of Native peoples through narratives, apparitions or images, and in the case of Kateri, all three. Wrapped up in these identities are impulses both toward essentializing and toward hybridity. While anthropologists have long been warned against “essentializing” cultures, and indeed contemporary theorists emphasize the contested, temporal and emergent nature of culture (Clifford 1986:19, cf. Abu-Lughod 1991, Clifford 1997, Geertz 1973, Jackson 1998, Keesing 1994, Rosaldo 1989), what I have dealt with in this chapter are indigenous understandings of Church and culture which *are* essentialized and largely symbolic. So while I may say that, for example, Pan-Indianism is largely an innovated identity, carved out in the face of political opponents and shaped by social winds, indeed historically linked and emergent, that inter-tribal unity is perceived differently by its participants. One needs to be cautious of intellectual imperialism here. As Clifford suggests, just as the pronouncement, “You are the Igbo” can be seen as an expression of the colonial power to categorize people into essentialized “tribal” entities with fixed boundaries, so can the proclamation that “Your tradition is invented” be understood as a symbol of anthropological or missionary hegemony which entails taking apart practices and identities which are phenomenological realities for those who use them (Clifford in Stewart and Shaw 1994:23).

Encouraged by post-conciliar changes in the Church, Native Catholics creatively recombine what they perceive to be the essentials of both Christianity and their indigenous traditions, spinning out a metanarrative of hybridity where the symbolic joinings and metaphoric connections between the “two ways” are understood to be the highest realization of both. For her devotees, Kateri stands above and within this innovative process of inculturation, admonishing in her messages and modelling in her life what Native Catholicism at its best might be. Kateri is invoked by the devout as the exemplar of what it means to be both Catholic and Indian.

**V In Sight of an Almost-Saint Today**

*"Tewanaton Ne Kateri" ("We Sing of One Named Kateri")*

written by Peg Bova, Mohawk

*We sing of one named Kateri,  
A holy maiden of Mohawk tribe.  
Her one true love was Jesus the Lord,  
And chosen was she to be His bride.*

*O lovely lily sweet and pure,  
Most wondrous flower of Indian race.  
The likeness of our Kateri,  
Lured by His love the Cross to embrace.*

*Forbidden by her tribal friends,  
To follow Christ, her Beloved One.  
When urged to wed, she heard His call,  
And vowed her love to God's own Son.*

*One day she fled from Mohawk shores,  
To Kahnawake was her flight.  
And there she felt the warmth of her Christ,  
And cared for the needy day and night.*



*Still very young was Kateri,  
When pain and weakness ended her life.  
"I love you, Jesus" were her words,  
As heaven replaced her earthly strife.*

*Upon her deathbed came a great light,  
Her pock-marked face was clean and bright.  
Amazed and awed were all who were there,  
And knew they saw a Maiden of prayer*

*Today we ask this friend of the Lord's  
To listen to our need as we sing.  
And peace the fruit of orderliness,  
Our Tekakwitha to us will bring.*

(Queen of Angels addition to hymnal, also, promotional pamphlet n.d.)

This song is sung to Kateri every Sunday at the Queen of Angels Indian Chapel in Albuquerque, and elsewhere during masses and other religious meetings devoted to the near-saint. With its simple tune and its background beat of an Indian drum, this hymn provides a partial telling of Kateri's story, in which persecution is translated merely as "forbidden by her tribal friends", and her death from extreme asceticism described as only "when pain and weakness ended her life". Kateri here is sweet, pure, young, lovely, God-loving, modest, innocent and holy.

In this song as well, Kateri is described as, "the most wondrous flower of Indian

race". As a proto-saint, she alone is Indian, and this identity has been greatly emphasized, sometimes contested, often edited out, lost by the seventeenth century Jesuits and found by Kateri's contemporary devotees. How Kateri fits into and embodies "Indianness" is a prominent subtheme in this chapter. Second, it is believed by her devotees that Kateri suffered greatly in her life. Perhaps more than the martyrdom, opposition, and difficult life that arguably all saints experience, Kateri's pain, in losing her sight (partially) and parents, leaving her homeland, and the self-inflicted ascetic practices, are important, even precious, to her devotees. As we draw out the recurrent images of Kateri in the this chapter, we shall see that they conform to a small set of standard descriptions.

What emerges is a simple and in many ways even essentialized view of Kateri, a distilled plot of her life. I suggest that this miniaturization of a saint's life results in a kind of "silence" or "blankness" (cf. Orsi 1991, 1996). As we shall see in this chapter, the historical and theological "space" left when a saint's story is reduced to its bare bones, lends itself to elaboration. While on the one hand, devotees affirm and propagate the simple images of and stories about Kateri, they also work creatively in the narrative space between the heavy lines and bold summaries of her life. As we shall see in this chapter and especially in the next, this minimal plot of Kateri's life story generates a large scope of imagination and creativity by her devotees. Her life is minced into spiritual lessons in her *Positio*, at many of her shrines, on the back of her prayer cards, and in the lyrics of her songs. Yet Kateri's devotees also engage in intensely personal and innovative conversations and interactions with the near-saint, drawing outside and between the lines that "officially" define Kateri. Kateri's story, a fuller and inclusive one which I aim to present, is both essentialized and emergent.

### **Saintly Essentials: Sketching a Description of Kateri**

And so we come to the essence of Kateri, those fundamentals which first blossomed from her *Positio* and were then pressed between the pages of her biographies, pamphlets, song leaflets, litany folders and prayer cards. Kateri was young, innocent, loved God, humble, modest, obedient, close to “nature”, close to “her cultural ways”, had a strong desire for Christian sacraments and prayer, she cared for the needy, was strong, perhaps stubborn, perhaps even rebellious for God. She was scarred, hurt, persecuted, marked by loss, not interested in marriage, and perhaps most importantly, as an Indian, she was uncommon – “a lily among thorns”, “a flower among weeds”, and “a saint among heathens”. Kateri’s Indian identity has become both more novel and more central as her post-mortem existence continues.

At this point it is important to plot out the core information that is known and transmitted about Kateri by those who venerate her. In brief, it is this simple list of characteristics and a few key events in her life which are sufficient to spark an interest in her and inspire devotion to this near-saint. For most of her devotees, that transmitted core of information is very small, often contained in a simple song. The Akwesasne Mohawk song quoted at the beginning of the chapter is well known across the Native American Southwest. There is also a popular Laguna song about Kateri which was written by the one-time governor of the pueblo in the Laguna language. I have seen the song performed both at the church in Laguna and at various Tekakwitha Conference meetings. There are set movements to the lyrics and when I asked Ramona, a Laguna woman in her sixties who works in Albuquerque about the movements and the lyrics, she told me, doing the motions as she explained:

It’s plants growing. We’re asking Kateri for blessings along with growth. Growth

in life. So the youth will grow. We mention Laguna and all the people. Blessed Kateri, give us all your blessings. The next phase [in the song] is be happy. Speak out. Give advice. All good things. Praise people. We get blessings from Kateri and then we bless all the people. The other song the governor wrote is about Kateri carrying a basket and going to heaven where all the kachinas<sup>1</sup> go when they die. With this basket, we carry all the songs that have been given to us. You stand at your Maker's feet with your cornmeal and do your songs (Ramona 1998).

In addition to songs, the core of information known by the majority of her devotees is focused on images, a memory of an old statue in a Catholic boarding school or mission church, a short biography, a quickly read pamphlet, a flipped over prayer card, or a repetitive litany of elementary characteristics recited in church one Sunday after mass. These are the minimal units of her life necessary for prayer and at least trial devotion.

*Litany to Kateri*

Blessed Kateri, pray for us.

Lily of the Mohawks,

Favoured child of God,

Heroic in love of God and neighbour,

Bride of Christ,

Co-victim with Jesus in His Sacrifice,

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<sup>1</sup> Kachinas are masked supernaturals who bridge the world of humankind and gods. When the visits from real kachinas stopped in mythological times, people were instructed to make masks with which to impersonate them. Through the power of the masks which are considered to be both dangerous and miraculous, spirits of the kachinas return via the dancers to bring messages and blessings largely concerned with harvest (Schfaasma 1994, cf. Parsons 1939:730-790, Ortiz 1972:197-216, Hirschfelder and Molin 1992:141-143).

Model of frequent communicants,  
Fervent adorer of the Eucharistic Savior,  
Loving child of the Mother of God,  
Obedient to the will of God,  
Example of prayerfulness,  
Zealous in striving for holiness,  
Martyr of self-denial,  
Model of a penitential life,  
Lover of Jesus Crucified,  
Childlike in simplicity,  
Angel of kindness,  
Lily of Purity,  
Treasure of innocence,  
Inspiration for youth,  
Protector of the young,  
Helper of those in need,  
Consolation of the afflicted,  
Friend of the poor and sick,  
Bright flower of the Indian People,  
New Star of the New World, pray for us.  
Patroness of the United States and Canada.

(Queen of Angels Chapel in Albuquerque, promotional pamphlet and insert in hymnal)

Let us pray: O God, in your loving kindness you filled Blessed Kateri with wonderful virtues. We give her honour because she gives us good example. Please help us imitate that example. Thank you, Father, for giving us Blessed Kateri as our Sister and our Friend. With her, we want to give you all glory and praise, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!

Blessed Kateri, favoured child of God, Lily of the Mohawks and God's gift to America, we thank you for your example of love of God and love of neighbour. Thank you for teaching us faith, humility, patience, purity of heart, gentleness, joy and the spirit of sacrifice. Blessed Kateri, you were a woman of great prayer, we desire prayer to be the foundation of our life too. Pray to God for us and help us to be strong, to have courage when things are difficult for us. Pray that we may cheerfully bear our daily crosses for the glory of God and to trust in God's will for our life. We pray that through your wonder-working miracles you will receive the honour of Canonization.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be...

(prayers to Kateri on the back of official prayer cards)

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The virtues and characteristics of Kateri enumerated in these prayers emerged repeatedly in my discussions with her devotees. She is predominantly and almost always first described as Indian. "Tell me about Kateri", I would ask. Almost invariably one of the first parts of the answer would include the phrase, "Well, she was an Indian lady". Typically, as Aunt Grace said to me once, Kateri's Indianness is key. "It's beautiful", Aunt Grace explained, "There are so many saints, white saints. This is something that's an Indian. We need an Indian saint. She's the one. That's touched a lot of Indians (Grace

1998). The second part of the majority of the answers I received asking the respondent to define Kateri would focus on how hard the proto-saint's life had been, how many difficulties and challenges she faced, and what a source of wonder and inspiration these hardships were for her devotees. Aside from the minimal units of her life mentioned above which are related consistently as well, these aspects -- her Indianness and the "hardness" of her life -- are the two main elements in the construction of Kateri's image by contemporary Native devotees.

### **Kateri as Indian: "She is Ours"**

The processes of cultural ownership and identification with a divine figure are powerful ones. According to Rodriguez, Mexican-American women have strongly identified with Our Lady of Guadalupe, claiming that, "She is ours, *los latinos*" (Rodriguez 1994:106). Vescey witnessed a very tangible expression of this identification between a devotee and a divine symbolic image at the 1995 Tekakwitha Conference in Potsdam, New York. He writes,

At a recent Tekakwitha Conference... a woman stood before a banner of Kateri, touching the picture's face tenderly and repeatedly with her hand, and then applying the same hand to her own facial features, thus identifying herself with the Mohawk maiden's characteristics (Vescey 1997:105).

During my interviews, I inquired into this identification -- Kateri's and the devotees'. However, I never specifically asked about Kateri's native heritage. Rather, comments about her Indian identity came in response to requests I had made for descriptions of Kateri. Sometimes, if the devotee looked puzzled, I added, "How would you tell someone else about Kateri? What would you tell them?" Below, I present some of

the answers I received. I have included a few of my questions and comments during the interview process in this section to provide more context for these responses. In most cases, to evoke the totality of conversations, I have left in all the comments an individual made about key elements in Kateri's identity and life. Many of these remarks overlap and pick up themes such as the relationship between the Church and traditional culture discussed in earlier chapters. Other quotes include only a snippet, or a phrase that I heard repeated often. What follows are some voices from the Southwest reflecting on Kateri's identity as an Indian.

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I was sitting with Lorraine, her boyfriend Jack, and his brother Raymond, all Laguna and active in their local Kateri Circle, in the coffee shop and grocery store at the border of the Acoma and Laguna reservations. We had squeezed into a small booth and were drinking coffee this warm April morning. I asked the group, "What about Kateri here in the Southwest? Why is she so popular? What makes her so special?" The three responded, cutting in on and finishing each other's sentences. It was clear to me they had thought a lot about Kateri's uniqueness.

She's Native for one... and cultural beliefs; she brings the church and the culture together as one and the same. My grandfather told us to believe in both. He said that one day the cross of the Catholic Church and the cultural beliefs will be together more strongly. And it has in Kateri. For example, with the religious doings, now people are doing both instead of just going to Church. Kateri is bringing people back to the Church. We're just trying to live up to the way she was -- caring for her people, even her enemies too. Like they were stoning her one day. Don't be afraid to do your own thing. I've seen even very sick people and others



come out of crisis with Kateri” (Lorraine, Jack, Raymond 1998).

Similarly, Marian, an active member of the Queen of Angels Kateri Circle, began her answer to my question of why she is drawn to Kateri with, “I think the fact that she was a true Indian...” (Marian 1998). Margaret, the leader of the same Circle in which Marian participates told me, “That is one of the things I could relate to, relate with the Indianness of Kateri, our own Indianness. That’s why we feel a lot of closeness with Kateri, because she is Indian and she knows alot about what’s in our hearts” (Margaret 1998). Roseanne, a middle aged Jemez woman shares a similar understanding about why Kateri is so appealing to many. “The fact that Kateri is Native; that’s what interests most of the people” (Roseanne 1998).

When I asked Kateri’s devotees to describe the object of their veneration, her Indian identity emerged as primary at the very beginning of their answers. Betty, an active Kateri Circle member in Isleta told me with tremendous emotion, “She’s a beautiful Indian, beautiful. She was probably just like us at one time. Now she’s with our Lord and I know whatever we ask her, I know she’s fulfilling it. She’s just a beautiful person; to me, she’s beautiful. Just looking at her, I imagine a beautiful Indian lady (Betty 1998). Fr. John told me this about Kateri’s identity, “Just that this woman was completely Indian and that somehow she embodied what it means to be Catholic and Indian” (Fr. John 1998).

Kateri’s contemporary devotees often learned first about her Indianness when they were initially told about the proto-saint. Emma, an elderly Isleta lady, recounted to me:

My grandmother used to go clean the church. I’d go over there to help, even to be in the way. That’s how I got involved with Tekakwitha too, because she’s an Indian, you know. Even though she’s Mohawk. To me, even if you say you are a different tribe...to God, we’re just one big family. Even if you’re white or a

coloured man, or Spanish. Kateri is Indian and I learned about her from my grandmother (Emma 1998).

Thus it was often from family members that devotees learned about Kateri. Laura from Jemez recalled when she first learned about Kateri. “My mom believed in Kateri. She told me, ‘She’s [Kateri] an Indian lady too’.” (Laura 1998). Similarly, Carmen, a Mescalero Apache woman, recounted how the first story she heard about Kateri from an elderly aunt had sparked Carmen’s interest in the proto-saint. “I guess I was interested in Kateri because she was a Native. You don’t hear of Indian women really getting involved, coming out like she did. It really hit me, her being so young and all. From then [when I heard her story] on, I really got into her” (Carmen 1998). Kateri’s Indianness emerges as primary in all of these first lessons.

When the first source of information about Kateri was through missionary or other Catholic school, again, her Native identity stuck with the young students as the key feature of Kateri.

“What were you taught in school about Kateri?”, I asked Heather, an elderly Jemez woman. She answered,

Oh, that she was an Indian woman who died of smallpox of the time. And the scars. In the front of the bishops and the priests, when she had been lying there for fifteen minutes, they disappeared! She was just like the Blessed Virgin. I guess that’s how they knew she was going to be beautified, beatified (Heather 1998).

June, another student of the Catholic Indian school system responded this way to my question.

All these saints, they were so far away, like a dream. But Kateri was an Indian; she was chosen to be one of God’s special people. It made me feel close, like part of

the Church. *It's really encouraging to know there's an Indian among the saints.*

It's becoming more real to me. I went to a Catholic school for years, but I was never really close to the Church until Kateri (June 1998 emphasis mine).

When I asked the women I interviewed what they would tell others about Kateri, almost all began by emphasizing Kateri's Indian identity. Jolene, a woman in her thirties from Jemez stated succinctly, "She's Native and she's Blessed and we're praying for her to be canonized. Mostly I would tell them that she's Native. There's no other Indian saint. We're trying so hard to have her canonized, but maybe they don't want to" (Jolene 1998). Similarly, Miranda, an Assiniboine married to an Apache and living at Mescalero, told me that she would tell this about Kateri to others.

First of all, she's an Indian, a Native American. Then I would tell the story of her small pox first and then what a beautiful person she became -- very quiet, prayerful, and devoted. Maybe she was tall, slim (Miranda laughs and pats her own stomach), and long braids (Giggles from both of us. Miranda is looking up, mock-imagining Kateri, making light of what she might have looked like). When we were young, everyone wanted long braids like her...someone to look up to, I guess (returning to a more serious tone) (Miranda 1998).

Kateri's Native identity is clearly of paramount importance to her devotees. Her Indianness allows Kateri's devout to identify with her as Native Americans. When asked what the most important thing about Kateri was, Dawn, an Isletan Catholic replied, "The Native part is really important to me. You know, she's going to be the first Native American saint. I guess if you're Native American, you want to feel a part of that" (Dawn 1998). Sr. Jean from the Navajo Nation also identifies with Kateri as a model for all Native Americans. She told me, "When I pray, I always say, 'You're one of our Native

people, an Indian'.... Kateri *is* a Native American. That's how we got started. If she can be recognized, then there's hope for the rest of us" (Sr. Jean 1998). Perhaps Susan, a Mescalero Apache woman summed up the situation of the importance of Kateri's identity as a Native American most clearly. "She's an Indian. We're Indian." (Susan 1998). It's as simple as that.

And so it comes down to basics, essentials. There *are* no Native American saints and hardly any other potential ones; Blessed Juan Diego, who received the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe, is an important exception. This kinship draws devotees closer to the Church, providing a familiar access to the communion of saints that might otherwise remain a distant entourage in the white man's church. Yet while Kateri is unique as Indian and for Indians, devotion to her is by no means restricted solely to Native Americans. Everyone I spoke with agreed that Kateri has the universal qualities and appeal necessary for a full-fledged saint. Despite her special kinship with Native Americans, Kateri is available and accessible to all those who seek her.<sup>2</sup>

### **"Hurt in Their Own Lives": Kateri's Hard Life**

The familial ties between Kateri and many of her Native American followers are tinged with pain. Kateri's hard life is a key concept in most devotees' descriptions of the saint. Many of those I interviewed were visibly saddened when they described Kateri's difficulties. In devotees' narratives, the next key features of Kateri's life after her Indian identity were often Kateri's scarring, the disappearance of those scars, her many penances

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<sup>2</sup> This potential "localization" of devotion to a saint will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. At this point, it is important to make it clear that because of her Indianness, she has a strong Native American following. And despite, or perhaps because, of her Indianness, she also has a large non-Native following. However the discussion of devotion to Kateri among non-Natives is beyond the scope of this book.

and untold “suffering”, and her early death. These events punctuate with tragedy the short narrative of her life told by many. As Margaret told me one January afternoon in her Albuquerque home,

Kateri had a rough life. She tried to help the people, be close to Jesus, her uncle didn't want her to follow Jesus. I remember some of these stories that I've read and I tell them. She had small pox and then she died, her scars disappeared. That showed she was really someone following Jesus. I believe what I read and hear about her (Margaret 1998).

And again, it is often this type of short précis which is the totality or at least the core of the story known about Kateri by her devotees.

Like Margaret, others also emphasized that what they knew about Kateri and her hard life came from a small book or pamphlet that they had either bought at a Tekakwitha Conference or been given from a friend or family member. Soon after I arrived at Carol's home in Jemez for a visit, she left her seat at the kitchen table and retrieved an old shoebox from a high shelf in a closet down the hall. In it were greetings cards, prayer cards, programs from church services, buttons and other small mementos from her many trips to the Tekakwitha Conferences. I had just asked Carol to describe Kateri's life and as she answered she took items out of the box and placed them on the table in front of me. “I feel sorry for Kateri”, she sighed. Carol touched the picture of Kateri on a prayer card and clucked her tongue. “She had such a hard life. Kind of like Princess Diana, don't you think? She was so pretty and beautiful and had all that trouble. She was real nice, but people didn't want her. She was always carrying that cross with her”. Carol gestured to a few prayer cards and postcards of Kateri she had taken out of the box, pointing out the wooden cross with which Kateri is most often depicted. Carol continued, “That cross

protects her from the mean men. It says so in that book” (Carol 1998). She pushed a short book on the life of Kateri toward me, referring me again to the story and image of Kateri that she had read. This was how Carol described Kateri’s life for me, urging me to find the full account of her hardships in the pages of the book and on the back of the prayer card as Carol had.<sup>3</sup>

Many Native Americans I spoke with explicitly identified Kateri’s hardships with incidents in their own lives and communities. Janet, a devout and gentle elderly Jemez woman described Kateri this way, drawing out parallels between Kateri’s childhood and her own and emphasizing that she, like Kateri, had persevered in her faith despite adverse circumstances.

Kateri was a very innocent person, very devoted to Jesus. She had a hard life, but that makes us strong. Like in my situation, my mom died when I was very small. We were very fortunate to have a Franciscan priest who cared. I never gave up Church or praying (Janet 1998).

Lana, an Isleta woman, also compared life in her Pueblo village with that of Kateri and her people three hundred years earlier.

It was so sad, growing up and her parents died. Kateri did a lot of good with people, the sick, she was a caretaker. They had smallpox here in Jemez, maybe about the same time that Kateri’s people had it. I compare that with her times. All the people got sick and she was left alone as a child (Lana 1998).

Lana was clearly moved and close to tears as she recounted the sad circumstances of

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, other devotees of Kateri showed me devotional books or biographies of the near-saint they had acquired. I always got the impression that I was being shown that books about Kateri’s life had *already* been written; perhaps they were a bit confused about the necessity of me writing another one.

Kateri's childhood. From my seat at the kitchen table next to her -- so many of my interviews were conducted in kitchens -- I put my hand on her shoulder, leaned closer to her, and nodded in agreement that Kateri's life, and indeed the life of Lana's own people were terribly difficult in colonial times. A few moments passed quietly. Lana took my pale hand in her wrinkled brown one and gave it a squeeze. I dropped my pen on the floor as she held my hand which moments ago had been furiously writing her story in a coiled notebook. As I bent down to pick it up, Lana took a deep breath and continued in a cheerier tone, "Well then, where were we?"

Continuing our conversation one January afternoon in her Albuquerque home, Margaret also emphasized Kateri's perseverance in face of hardships, claiming that suffering is an integral part of Native American life. She ended on a hopeful note, admiring Kateri's strength and skills, seeing the near-saint as admirable but, at least for Margaret, inimitable.

Here's a woman that lived such a holy life. She just gave up her life, family, children, elders, the penances and sacrifices that she did, it's so unbelievable. I thought to myself, I could never, ever do that. But I really admire her for her strength, for her perseverance, to do what she did in face of all those hardships. Back in those days, you had to find your own food, make your own clothing, everything from scratch. And she was good at it, good at all those homemaking skills.... The most important thing about Kateri is her prayerful life and her never giving up, in spite of the hardships she faced. *Among us Indians, we have a lot of hardships.* We are taught by our grandparents to never give up on what you want to do. Don't succumb to the easy way, keep on going on. That's what Kateri has taught us. That's my opinion (Margaret 1998 emphasis mine).

Clerics and lay people alike portray Kateri as an exemplar or model for the religious life, emphasizing her perseverance and faith despite the hardships, ostracizing, and persecution she endured. Fr. Bruyere, Kateri's Canadian Vice-Postulator in charge of her canonization efforts in Canada, had this to say about her difficult life, echoing themes we have seen in her Native devotees' responses.

Kateri lived in uneasy circumstances. She lived with rough people, for example, incest, drunkenness, greediness, all kinds of sins, men harsh on women, even though there was a matriarchy. It was not easy for her to remain good (Bruyere 1996).

Fr. Andrew at Laguna emphasized that Kateri's life was further made more difficult by the ridicule and persecution she was said to have suffered in her home village. He told me,

I was very inspired because she was an Indian girl.... I think she's a model or symbol for the young people, because she was so devoted to the Lord and loved him so. I envision that she was ridiculed a lot. It's hard to be different in your own community. Especially when it has to do with the white man's religion (Fr. Andrew 1998).

In 1996, while I was visiting the National Kateri Shrine in Fonda, New York, its director, Fr. Kevin, had this take on Kateri's exemplary life.

Kateri was a very strong woman. She knew exactly what she wanted. She wasn't a victim of foreign philosophy or theology; she just liked the teachings of the Jesuits. Christianity provided an opportunity to break free from the violent way of life of her own village. She went to the safety of the Christian people, her own people there [at the praying village of Kahnawake]. She didn't sell out in terms of the culture, but she walked to a different drummer. Mohawks are all very strong-



willed and persuasive. Kateri didn't go along with the crowd either. She emulated the lifestyle of sisters who worked in a hospital in Montreal. She took a vow of virginity which was unheard of in her culture.<sup>4</sup> This fact attracts the admiration of Indians and even feminists. She was full of loving kindness and did ministry to the sick and poor. She wasn't treated as good as a French woman though; she patiently took her own vow rather than be accepted into a formal community of nuns. She incorporated her industrious artwork into her faith and carved crosses in woods and the name of Jesus in trees. I'm sure she did some religious beadwork too (Fr. Kevin 1996).

During that same visit to the Fonda shrine, Brother Kenny, a Franciscan friar, expressed similar sentiments.

Kateri symbolizes peace. She was someone living in a time of strife, with her Mohawk stubbornness and pride. She told her people she would never marry and went against her culture in doing so. She was probably the first to do so. She was not the first Christian, but the first to make a vow of virginity. People saw how strong she was in her beliefs and backed away. She stood for something she really believed in (Br. Kenny 1996).

Kateri suffered. She was not afraid of "doing her own thing", and her strength and determination to go her own way are also important aspects of the narratives recounted about Kateri. Yet Kateri's independence and faith lead to tragedy. Both her circumstances and the choices she made, as well as the beliefs she held led to suffering. As many devotees emphasize, Kateri not only lived in "uneasy" times -- the missionary encounter could hardly be described otherwise -- but the path she followed was overgrown with loss

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<sup>4</sup> See my earlier discussion of virgins in Mohawk society in Chapter Two.

and pain, even if many, herself included, believed it was God's chosen path for a seventeenth century Mohawk young woman.

Kateri lived a hard life, in hard circumstances, making harder choices, and these, the choices or the circumstances, are not always differentiated by those who tell her story. Importantly, little blame is laid beyond some negative references by a few individuals to the "uneasy" life that Mohawks lived at that time, exacerbated by the presence of the colonialists and missionaries. But for the most part, Kateri's life is portrayed by her followers as difficult and sad, no matter what the extenuating circumstances. She is often described as being perseverant, not giving up her Catholic faith and practice despite persecution and ridicule. This opposition, her devotees assert, only served to draw her closer to Jesus and His Church. Kateri was determined, and this fortitude allowed her to "escape" her native village and "blossom" in her new home at Kahnawake. Similarly, as we have seen in the quotations above, many devotees identify with Kateri, drawing parallels between her life and their own experiences of survival and remaining Christian despite harsh circumstances and loss. Like Kateri, her devotees show uncommon constancy and stamina. They have "pain like her", as Theresa explains at the beginning of Chapter One in her dream. "I think I've experienced a lot of things that Kateri went through, like pain" (Theresa 1996).

But what it is about Kateri's painful life that inscribes itself in her devotees' minds and hearts like a scar? What causes such depth of sorrow? Why *her* suffering? Why this mournful kinship? Vescey offers this answer about Kateri's symbolic pain from his own research on Kateri's devotees.

For many American Indian Catholics, the identification with Kateri is more intense. Sister Marie-Thérèse Archambault O.S.F., a Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux, finds Kateri

the perfect symbol of Indian peoples who experience hurt in their own lives (...). She was orphaned, persecuted, made a refugee, and damaged by disease. She wore her suffering on her face in her pockmarkings; she died an early death. Sister Archambault says that ‘her Indian people are scarred, too, so they identify with the Lily of the Mohawks. They suffer from alcoholism; they get into fights, and their faces are scarred from these episodes. They wear broken noses, cut lips, and deep scars of pain. So, when they hear in litanies that Kateri is “scarred but beautiful,” they feel themselves akin to her. She is a human symbol of their hurt humanity.’ Thus the sister finds the devotion Indians pay to Kateri a first step to their healing, the raising of their self-esteem (Vescey 1997:106).

Many Catholic saints and divine figures, including Jesus and the Blessed Mother of Sorrows, are honoured for their suffering, which invokes sorrow and sympathetic pain in their devotees. Similarly, Kateri is in many ways Blessed – and potentially canonized – *because* of the hard life she led. Perhaps her devotees’ prioritization of and identification with Kateri’s hard life is no different than many other saints whose lives are marked with persecution and martyrdom. However for Kateri’s devotees, her pain and her Indianness, and perhaps a particular kind of pain suffered as an Indian, are key spotlights illuminating her life. The pain and the Indianness of Kateri evoke kinship, sorrow, mourning, admiration, empathy, sympathy, and devotion among her devotees.

These key qualities of Kateri, her suffering and her Native identity, are extracted from the already truncated stories found in devotional literature, songs, and litanies about the proto-saint and deemed by her devotees to be essential characteristics of Kateri. Yet these saintly essentials are simultaneously re-contextualized by her devotees as they draw connections between Kateri’s Indian identity and difficult life and their own. This same

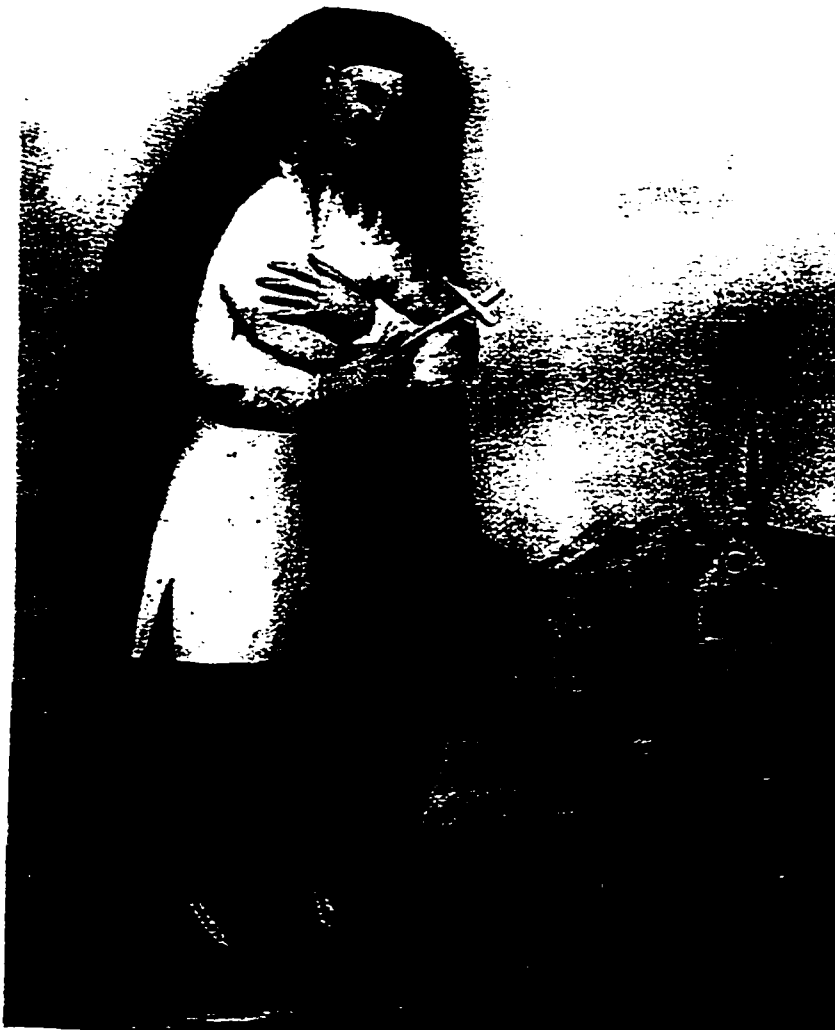
process of creative accommodation and alteration of set descriptions and images of Kateri can be seen in the discussion of devotees' interactions with the items of devotional material culture.

### **Materializing a Saint: Colours and Fabrics**

In her book *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (1995), historian Colleen McDannell suggests that religious practices are “multimedia events” where speech, vision, gesture, touch, and sound combine” (McDannell 1995:14). Further, by studying material culture, McDannell claims that we can “see how the faithful perpetuate their religion day in and day out” (McDannell 1995:2). Crucial to any devotion to a saint is that saint’s image as materialized in a statues, prayer cards, and medals. As Orsi says of St. Jude, “the material culture of the devotion – its prayer cards, statues, medals, dashboard figurines -- were the media with which women played on their world” (Orsi 1996:211). Similarly, Tweed “studied the community’s [Cuban American Catholics] material culture as well -- architecture, yard shrines, photographs, paintings, key chains, holy cards, and plastic statues -- for clues about how those express and shape attitudes about religion and place” (Tweed 1997:6).

The importance of the media that convey messages about a saint cannot be underestimated. Among Kateri’s New Mexico devotees, everything from cards to statues and fridge magnets embossed and emblazoned with her image are collected, traded, brought home from Tekakwitha Conferences as souvenirs, and given as little gifts of support to friends or family members in crisis (and to anthropologists!). To this day, when I receive letters from my friends in New Mexico, a Kateri prayer card is most often folded between the sheets of paper. I order handfuls of tiny medals, prayer cards, and touch relics

from the shrine at Kahnawake to send with my own letters in return.



(Chaucetière painting c. 1690)

The earliest known image of Kateri is an oil painting attributed to Father Chaucetière and painted around 1690 – fully ten years after her death. This image hangs

today in the church at Kahnawake. It is the “one surviving depiction by someone who actually saw Tekakwitha” (Greer 1999:152). Yet it is said that the painting does not portray Kateri as she looked during her life, but rather the image of Kateri as she appeared to Fr. Chaucetière in the years shortly following her death (Bruyere 1996). Paradoxically, her post-mortem image constitutes the earliest record of her temporal life. In the painting, Kateri stands against a stark sky next to a single tree. The Kahnawake church and St. Lawrence River with a lone boat on it are in the background. Kateri is dressed in a neutral coloured cloth tunic and black skirt with dark red laced shoes. A long dark blue shawl covers her hair and sweeps around her shoulders to the ground. She carries a small wooden cross; one hand is on her breast and the other, holding the simple crucifix is crossed in front of it. Her head and features are small compared to her body and hands, her skin is pale, and the smallpox scars have disappeared. Her mouth is drawn in, neither smiling nor sorrowful. Her feet do not touch the ground and only point to it. This detail makes Kateri look like a hovering angel, somehow out of proportion and out of touch with the earth below. She is looking down and to the left, possibly at the cross in her hand, or at unknown images that lie beyond her hands.

While the painting attributed to Chaucetière may be the first portrait of Kateri, this is certainly not her most popular image. In fact, when I showed several people in the Southwest a copy of Vescey’s book which uses Chaucetière’s painting on its cover, many were surprised to hear from me that this was the earliest known image of Kateri. For these devotees, Chaucetière’s depiction of Kateri was largely unrecognizable. It did not correspond to the way they had pictured her in their hearts or visions. I saw dozens of images of Kateri in the homes, cars, purses, and shops of her devotees and can count over twenty portraits that I have collected during my quest. In these, Kateri is most frequently

depicted wearing a brown buckskin outfit, often fringed, with some beadwork around the collar and shoulders. She has two long braids which hang down in front, and often wears a blue shawl over her shoulders. In almost all of these images she carries a wooden cross, often clutched in both hands in front of her chest, and her brown eyes look up and to the left, heavenward. Generally, her head is uncovered but sometimes she wears a beaded and feathered headband. Her skin tone ranges from pale to a deep brown, much darker than that of Chaucetière's painting. Significantly, in all the images I've seen, her smallpox scars are gone; her skin is smooth like that of a young woman. These are portraits that seek to capture the spiritual ideal of Kateri. She is not conventionally "beautiful" in all of the images: she has harsh, sharp features in several, and a rounded, cherubic quality in others. Kateri is most often set against a background of trees, birds, clouds and other "natural" settings. The church is gone from these later images, and Kateri is depicted at home in the forest, between the trees, with a simple cross of rough hewn wood. In the contemporary popular images of Kateri, then, it can be said that she has been transformed from an almost European-looking Mohawk convert into a generic Indian, not recognizably a member of any specific tribe, but definitely a Native American, imaged and imagined, clothed in and surrounded by the trappings of Indianness: nature, feathers, beads, braids, and buckskin. Images of Kateri are mass produced in the most stereotypic form (cf. Margolies 1988:103). However, as we shall see below, the creative use, alteration, and decoration of these images serve to "enshrine" Kateri in devotees' homes and lives.

Frequently, when I visited devotees' homes in the Southwest, I would ask to see any statues or pictures of saints they might own and to hear the stories of their acquisition and history. Everyone I interviewed possessed at least two or three statues or images, and many had dozens. The most popular of these are painted plaster statues which range from

eight inches to two feet in height. Many Kateri Circles in the Southwest have received one of the larger statues of Kateri as a gift from the executive director of the Tekakwitha Conference to mark the establishment of the Circle. Large statues of Kateri range in price from thirty-five to fifty dollars (U.S.) and are therefore a significant contribution to the new Circles. The statue belonging to each Circle circulates between members' homes, with each member "hosting" Kateri for a month or so. It is thought that the current host of the statue should "make something nice for Kateri", by preparing an altar, clearing a room or building a porch to designate her residence and presence (Carmen 1998). In addition to the circulating statue of Kateri, most members have their own statues -- sometimes several -- and these are always prominently displayed.

Often devotees have a friendly and familiar relationship with the images of their saints. When I visited Lana in her adobe Isleta home, she brought Kateri off her shrine in the living room and onto the kitchen table. As we talked, Lana looked at Kateri, stroked her plaster buckskin, apologized to her, laughed with her, and lovingly included her in our conversation (Lana 1998). Similarly, Kateri guards Margaret's urban house in an eight by ten inch wood framed picture set by the front doorway above a small crucifix, a bough of cedar, and a braided plait of sweetgrass. Margaret also has a statue of Kateri on a small altar in her living room, the space shared with a few other saints and a tiny pottery bowl containing cornmeal used for prayer. Another Isleta woman, Rose showed me her two statues of Kateri in the front bedroom. One is about eight inches high and mostly brown, an older one, I imagine. The other is a newer one in shiny plaster tawny buckskin. Rose has hung a Kateri chaplet that she beaded during one of the Tekakwitha meetings around the newer statue's neck. On the "altar" are several statues of Our Lady of Guadalupe and a few of the Blessed Mother, as well as many family pictures. Rose also has a vial of dirt



from Kateri's excavated village in New York beside the statues. "I give a little bit of this to my daughter who makes pottery and she mixes it in with the clay" (Rose 1998).

According to Kateri's devotees, the presence of Kateri in a household promotes good relationships and proper devotional behaviour, and the circulation of her statue has the power to bring people together. Betty, another member of the Isleta Kateri Circle, recalled, "My grandkids know about Kateri too. Whenever they come in this house, they go take the blessing from the statue" Betty's image of Kateri is a two foot high plaster statue which she keeps in the living room. Kateri wears white plaster buckskin and some turquoise beads that Betty bought specifically for the statue. Betty explains, "I have one at my other home in the village too and I bought statues for my children and grandchildren. I got this statue in Seattle. I wrapped her up in a blanket and I brought her on the train like a baby" (Betty 1998). Alice, another Isletan devotee of Kateri, told me this story of Kateri statues she has acquired over the years.

Every year at the Tekakwitha Conference, I buy a Kateri statue. But every year, I run into someone so dear to me and so I pass her around. I have given every one but one away. One year, I decided to give the statue to my old school, St. Catherine's, because although we prayed to her, there was no statue when I was there. But I ended up giving to a nun that I just hated; she was so mean. It really changed her. Now she writes and calls me and we're close. Kateri brought her to me. She calls me and tells me that Kateri is sitting on her dresser (Alice 1998).

The circumstances of the acquisition or loss of one of these statues are significant. Lynn, a middle aged Jemez woman who is active in the local Circle described the importance of her mother's Kateri statue.

My mother had a Kateri statue and she accidentally tipped it over. She was so sad.

She cried and cried. I got her a new one last year. I was going to save it for her birthday, but I decided to give it to her right away. She was so happy again. She takes it with her; it travels with her, goes in her suitcase (Lynn 1998).

Marian, who attends Queen of Angels in Albuquerque, recounted the following story when I asked how she had acquired her statue.

That was my second trip to New York for the Conference. I rented a car and me and three other ladies travelled around and we shared the expenses. The one lady paid me off with this (large, two foot high, new) statue. She said, 'Would you take this? I bought too many'. She had bought six of them and didn't have enough money left over to pay for her share of the rental car. So that's how I landed that one. I had to bring her back on the airplane like this (Marian cradled her arms), like a baby. It was fun. People wondered, 'Let me see what you have under that blanket' (Marian laughed in remembering) and then I opened it up and I could start talking about her (Marian 1998).

These statues are not simply placed anywhere in people's houses, Kateri is *enshrined* in homes. Enshrinement usually refers to the official placement of a statue in a church for the first time and a welcome ceremony and mass. In the Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache churches I visited, Kateri was usually placed beside the main altar or in a niche or smaller altar specially constructed for the statue. Often her statue was surrounded by flowers, bowls of cornmeal, or baskets containing petitions. Rather than Kateri's place in the official space of the church, however, I focus here on the popular enshrinement of the proto-saint, the kind of physical place and theological and domestic space that is created for her in devotees' homes. Kateri is a personality and active presence in the home, placed in a prominent position, often in a front room or beside a bed, in the company most often of

other divine figures, surrounded by family photos, plastic or real flowers, and other religious paraphernalia. Often a table cloth or shawl is spread out for her to stand on and she keeps company with the Blessed Mother, Jesus, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and St. Jude. She is invited in, a physical space is created for her, she is spoken to, prayed to, and conversed with.

Aunt Grace, whose two foot high statue of Kateri lives on an table-cum-altar in her living room, always says goodbye to Kateri when leaving the house. Aunt Grace tells Kateri where she's going and asks the near-saint to watch over her while she is gone. "I tell her when I'm going somewhere, 'I'll be back'". When Aunt Grace returns home, she greets Kateri and gives thanks for the safe journey. "I say, 'Sister, Mother, I'm home. I'm back home. Thank you for bringing me home safe'". She also greets Kateri first thing in the morning and says good night, asking for safe passage through sleep. Sometimes, Aunt Grace comments, when she can't sleep at night, she gets up and talks to Kateri saying, "You got me through the night so far and I thank you. Please let me go back to sleep and pass through the rest safely" (Grace 1998). Aunt Grace also told me that when people come to her house for the first time, she introduces Kateri. A proper guest would know to go to the statue and touch, speak to, or somehow acknowledge the saint. Whenever I went to visit Aunt Grace or stay with her, I made sure I included Kateri in my daily interactions, comings and goings. When I was introduced to other people's Kateris, I also made sure to greet them with a gentle touch of the plaster face or shawl.

These plaster Kateris are understood to be emotive beings, having the ability to inspire and evoke feelings of peace and goodness in the things and people around them. Lorraine, a middle-aged Laguna woman, recalled an incident during the preparation for the 1996 Tekakwitha Conference in Albuquerque.

We organized all the food for the Tekakwitha Conference in 1996. We used the mounted deer that we have in our house for the shrine. When we were trying to get them loaded, we had a tough time. Their horns kept getting stuck in the door, like they didn't want to go. My friend said they even looked mad. But when we put them in the shrine and placed the statue of Kateri there, their expressions changed, even their eyes. They looked proud to be there. Their expressions were different even from what they looked like at home (Lorraine 1998).

Similarly, Kateri herself needs care and attention. Like Betty and Marian who transported their Kateri statues to their homes cradled in their arms and wrapped in blankets like babies, many devotees believe that Kateri should be treated in a familiar and familial way. Karen, an Isleta woman who has recently joined the local Circle, described with tenderness the ways in which she cares for the Kateri statue in her home.

I have her in my bedroom and whenever there is a little dust, I take out my cloth and dust her and the other saints. It's almost as if she smiles; she likes that, being clean. ['What other saints do you have?', I asked.] Oh, St. Anthony, St. Jude, Jesus, Mary, two angel candleholders I got for Christmas, and I have all of Kateri's prayers laid out right there. Every day, I touch her, make the sign of the cross, and thank her for interceding on my behalf (Karen 1998).

Care is reciprocated by intercession.

Part of the devotees' care for Kateri involves placing objects and photographs next to the statue -- either things that Kateri "might like", or reminders to her of the devotee's petitions and prayers. These items include food offerings, flowers, prayer cards, pictures, other statues of divine figures, medals and other items of material culture associated with Kateri in particular or with devotional life in general. Miranda, who teaches catechism at

the church in Mescalero explained to me: “I collect turtles. That’s what we learned about her back home -- that she was from the Turtle clan. My house is full of turtles. I have turtle earrings and everything. During catechism, I bring my turtles and leave a few by her statue for the children to see” (Miranda 1998). Kateri enshrined has needs for attention and company, and she herself is often altered slightly and sometimes significantly to make her more “at home”.

A few years ago, Aunt Grace dressed her two foot high Kateri statue as a Pueblo woman for the 1996 Tekakwitha Conference in Albuquerque. This statue was to be placed in the shrine at the front of the assembly hall during the meetings. Aunt Grace recalls that in the days leading up to the Conference, she wondered and worried about what Kateri should wear for the Conference. Finally, she got the idea to make Kateri a Pueblo dress. In order to “make her Pueblo”, Aunt Grace used fabric and glue to create a red, green, and gold trimmed black felt *manta* peeking out from Kateri’s plaster blue shawl. She also glued white felt strips around Kateri’s plaster laced shoes, creating for her a tiny pair of traditional white Pueblo moccasins. Aunt Grace added a bit of lace around the bottom of the skirt, a beaded leather headband, and her mother’s old turquoise beads, and Kateri was dressed and ready for the Conference. With fabric and glue, Aunt Grace made Kateri Pueblo, transforming the rather cherubic and generic Indian statue to a Pueblo woman dressed for a wedding or feast or celebration. Since the Conference, this Kateri has resided in Aunt Grace’s living room. Aunt Grace loves this statue; she feels privileged that *her* Kateri was enshrined for the Conference and now lives with her.

Alice, an Isletan who had been a participant in the 1996 Conference was deeply moved by the transformations Aunt Grace had made to the statue of Kateri.

When I saw that [Aunt Grace’s Kateri dressed as a Pueblo woman], I just... my

heart... (Alice clapped one hand over her heart). It's so good to go to the various Pueblos and see how they dress her up. I mean, I'm a traditional person. I believe in our Indian way. To our Almighty, it's the same way. That's what she is, she's one of us. Even if she isn't the same tribe, she's one of us (Alice 1998).

This kind of "dressing up" is expected at every Conference. Prior to the 1998 Tekakwitha Conference, June explained,

Like now, we're going to Memphis. We wonder, what tribe is in Memphis? What are they going to do? How are they going to welcome us? You expect to see the same thing. I mean, Kateri will be there, however they dress her in their traditional ways. To me, it doesn't seem like there would be any Indians in Memphis. Of course, there will be the corn pollen [cornmeal]. If they don't have it, well, we always bring our own (June 1998).

Thus it is not only accepted but also expected that individual devotees as well as tribal communities will make Kateri "their own" through clothing. She is physically transformed into "one of us", changed from the generic Indian the plaster buckskin statues have come to represent into a member of a specific tribe, reclaimed, and repatriated.

The affection and intimacy that devotees share with Kateri is also expressed through the items with which women accessorize their statues. Miniature shawls, strings of turquoise beads, and flowers are the most common adornments seen on Kateri statues in devotees' homes in the Southwest. Susan, an Apache woman, has a folded piece of turquoise printed cloth pinned around the shoulders of her large Kateri statue, but she does not believe that this is sufficient. "I've been too busy with all that sewing for the [her daughter's puberty] feast to make her a proper shawl, but I will" (Susan 1998). Similarly, Lana apologized to me and to Kateri during our interview that she had not yet made a shawl

for the statue in her living room. "Someone made one for the Kateri in the church. I should make one for this one too" (Lana 1998). At her home on the Navajo Nation, Annette's large shiny plaster buckskinned Kateri sits by her bed wearing a purple lace shawl and a crucifix on a rainbow coloured knitted cord (Annette 1998). Aunt Grace comments on her Pueblo Kateri's accessories: " My mother's beads are not always on the statue. Sometimes there's just a plain cross, the one that I use to take communion to the hospital. She wears it until I go out. Or I would just have a fresh flower for her that she could carry" (Grace 1998).

These three dimensional representations of Kateri are enshrined in devotees' homes, made part of daily life, and woven into the domestic "landscape". Statues are treated with respect and love expressed tangibly through clothing and accessories. Kateri statues are placed in prominent positions in devotees' homes, often on makeshift altars which form the physical center of the domestic devotional life. The devout surround figures of Kateri with items representing themselves, their faith, their family, and their prayers.

Two dimensional images of Kateri, mostly in the form of small prayer cards and larger posters, are treated with the same reverence as her statues in terms of placement and devotional focus in the home, yet they are not subject to the same kind of physical touching, attention, and transformation as the statues. Two interesting issues emerge in connection with prayer cards: first, the sheer numbers of these that can be found in any one home, and second, the circulation of cards between devotees, family members, and those believed to "need" Kateri. While the posters of Kateri found in devotees' homes are significant in that they are often placed in close proximity to large numbers of family photographs rather than singly on a wall as "art", they are the least altered of Kateri's

devotional images. More revealing are the devotees' reproductions of "official" drawings of Kateri. These popular artistic expressions, a kind of individualized "folk art", have engaging production stories as we shall see below.

At all three of Kateri's official shrines, in Kahnawake, Auriesville, and Fonda, there are gift shops which sell stacks of colour copied posters, prayer cards, medals, and other small devotional items at very reasonable prices. Similarly, at each annual Tekakwitha Conference, a makeshift store is set up for the sale of souvenirs and religious mementos. All the Kateri devotees that I met had some of this material in their homes, the display and exchange of which points to the relationship the residents have with the proto-saint depicted in these images. Having a prayer card in one's wallet, a statue in one's living room, a T-shirt with Kateri's braided hair inked in, or a prayer card propped up on a mantle against the background of some family photos sacralizes the homes of the devout. These are mass produced "official" images, yet once they leave the gift shop and enter the domestic sphere of the devotee, these images become objects of devotion, art, decoration, souvenirs, and media for the communication of sympathy and good wishes.

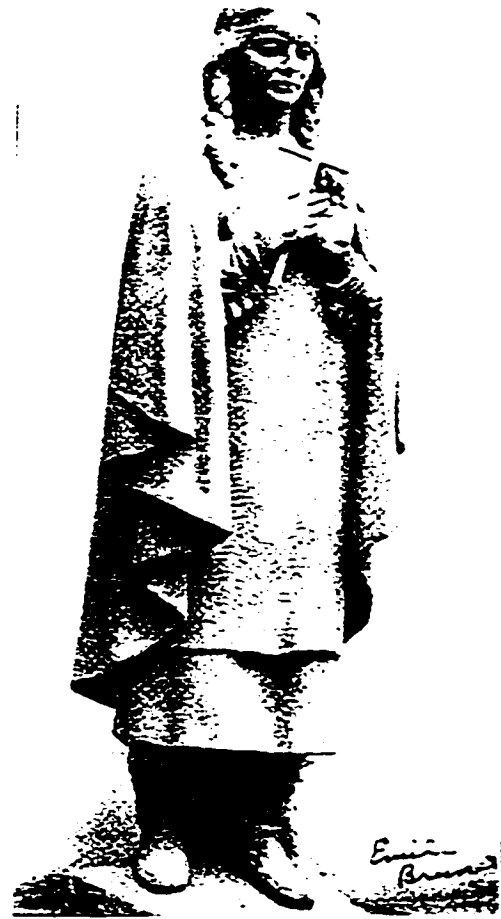
Pictorial representations of Kateri add thick texture to devotional life. As Lana told me, "When you say a prayer, you can just *picture* her as a young girl. Her prayer, we should know it by heart....." Lana produced a nine by twelve inch poster of Kateri to show me. "I got this poster in New York (during one of the Tekakwitha Conferences). I should have it framed. There's the rosary she always had." I pointed out the birds and squirrels at Kateri's feet. "Yes, she was very close to nature, to the animals. They have different pictures of her at the Conference every year. I should buy one every year" (Lana 1998).

More portable images than posters, prayer cards have one of the "official" pictures



of Kateri on the front and a prayer for her canonization or for petitions on the back. These cards are carried in wallets and purses, propped up against items in the home, stuck with magnets on the fridge, and given as gifts. Three Jemez devotees explained their use of prayer cards. "If someone comes over, I give them a prayer card", Laura told me (Laura 1998). Similarly, Lynn recalled that "When you bring a picture of her to somebody, they're really happy" (Lynn 1998). Stephanie carries a pocketful of prayer cards in her apron, ready for distribution, but she is always happy to receive another, especially one portraying a slightly different image of Kateri. During fieldwork, Father Bruyere from Kateri's shrine in Kahnawake sent me a few sepia tone prayer cards depicting a statue of Kateri outside the school in Kahnawake. Once when I was invited over to Stephanie's home in Jemez, I brought one of these cards as a small gift for her. "Oh!" she exclaimed happily, "I've never seen *this* one! Thank you!" It disappeared quickly into her apron pocket.

Lisa, another Jemez woman who sells her pottery on the plaza in downtown Santa Fe, told me that she always places a Kateri prayer card on the blanket which displays her pottery when she is out selling, "so people can see her" (Lisa 1998). Lisa had also inserted a prayer card in the plastic sleeve on the front of a photo album containing pictures of her husband and her pottery which she showed me during our conversation. A faux wood embossed plaque with a shellacked cut out poster of Kateri glued on it stood at the entrance of Lisa's adobe home, above a table full of family photos and across the room from a large picture of some generic Indians on horseback. These prayer cards and posters are miniature means of communication, signs of and invitations to devotion, and markers of identity as both Indian and Catholic.



(Kateri prayer cards)



Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha : John Steele  
Printed by The Noteworthy Company, Amsterdam, N.Y. 12010

(Kateri prayer cards)



**Kateri Tekakwitha**

Images of Kateri are also stretched out onto material for T-shirts and shrunk and shellacked onto coffee mugs and fridge magnets. Put simply, Kateri is *everywhere* in some devotees' homes. Reminders of her presence pervade every room, every corner, every daily activity. Lynn told me of the fondness that her middle-aged daughter who lives in Alaska has for her Kateri T-shirt.

My daughter's favourite T-shirt is the one with Kateri on it. I got it for her from the Tekakwitha Conference. She wears it when she travels to keep her safe. One day, she wore it here when she was visiting me. I said, 'Oh, you must like that shirt!' And that's when she told me that it was her favourite. That shirt is very special to her. It travels with her (Lynn 1998).

Isabelle was wearing a Kateri T-shirt when I arrived for a visit in her Acoma home. I

asked her about the shirt and she told me that it was a souvenir from one of the Tekakwitha Conferences. I told her that I had the same T-shirt, acquired at the 1996 Conference in Albuquerque. Isabelle brought out three others, bought as keepsakes from various meetings and Conferences and we talked about the pictures of Kateri on them, sketched by various local artists, always depicting Kateri with two long braids, surrounded by drums, pottery, birds, and stalks of corn. “Me too! I have two Kateri T-shirts!” piped in her small son, and he ran to his room to get them to show me. His mom explained, “I bought them for him from the Conferences so he can have her too” (Isabelle 1998).

So Kateri encompasses her devotees in colourful ink and fabric, tangible evidence of participation in the Conferences and personal devotion. Kateri’s picture can also be found on souvenir coffee mugs, key chains, and fridge magnets, tiny and multiple images in every space of the home. Recall from Chapter Two, Mescalero Apache Carmen’s collection of mugs commemorating each annual Tekakwitha Conference. Remember as well Alane’s confession that her main interest at her first Tekakwitha Conference was in souvenir mugs and T-shirts. Both women are now active and knowledgeable participants in the Tekakwitha Conferences, but they still collect mementos from all of the annual meetings, both for themselves and to give as gifts to those who were not able to make the trip. Alane also makes fridge magnets out of prayer cards and bits of wood. She explained how these magnets were made during a visit at her Albuquerque home in May 1998.

I make these in order to raise money for the Tekakwitha Conference trip. I buy the prayer cards and my husband cuts and slices the pieces of wood from my sister’s farm in Gallup. I buy the magnets, glue, and lacquer at a craft store. This year, I’ll be doing ones of Mother Teresa too, but I don’t know. I don’t really like them (the ones of Mother Teresa) because she’s not very colourful (Alane 1998).

Alane pointed out how the pictures of Mother Teresa were mostly done in only blue and white, while the prayer cards of Kateri and Our Lady of Guadalupe as well as other saints were more colourful, a bright mix of shades, thereby making much more attractive fridge magnets with which to decorate the kitchen.<sup>5</sup> As I left, Alane gifted me with two magnets - one of Kateri and one of Our Lady of Guadalupe, her two most popular ones. I thanked her and when I returned to Canada, they took their place in my kitchen on my fridge door. These portable images mark travel and memorialize meetings; they are a reminder of and invitation to devotion.

In addition to the acquisition and circulation of these official images, both large and small, there are also personal and popular reproductions and adaptations of Kateri's picture in devotees' homes. In the story that Theresa told me in the car that August afternoon in 1996, recounted at the beginning of Chapter One, she recalls coming home from a mass in 1980 during which she first heard about Kateri, and drawing a picture of the new Blessed Theresa further explained her picture of Kateri in 1997 when I visited her Isleta home. "I didn't know what Kateri looked like, but I drew her with the feather I found in the church. I was kneeling to pray when this little white feather floated down and landed by my knees" (Theresa 1997). Theresa's vision of the Mohawk girl is traced out with this feather dipped in brown ink on a large cream coloured sheet of paper, now framed and hung in Theresa's living room. Theresa's Kateri is simple, with a sparsely outlined face turned to the left and a shawl covering her hair, blending into her body, and disappearing into the bottom of the page. "That will always be my Kateri. That's the way I dream her," Theresa explained (Theresa 1997). From Fr. Chaucetiere's 1680 portrait to Theresa's turn of the twenty-first

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<sup>5</sup> Alane needn't have worried about the sales of her Mother Teresa magnets. When I saw Alane at the end of the 1999 Tekakwitha Conference in Spokane, she had sold all of her magnets, including the ones depicting Mother Teresa.

century sketches, Kateri is imaged and imagined as she appears in dreams and visions to her devotees.

Kateri is tied closely to devotees and their communities in other artistic ways as well. When I arrived at Isabelle and John's home in a little town on the Acoma reservation, the first thing I noticed in the living room was a large painting of Kateri standing against a background of the church on top of the Acoma mesa. The picture, a Christmas gift, had been painted by Isabelle's sister. "She went to New York for one of the Conferences and got inspired and did this painting" (Isabelle 1998). In the painting, Kateri wears the familiar tawny buckskin of the official statues, prayer cards, and posters. She has a beaded collar, and two long black braids, the same generic Indian woman reproduced by the shrines. But instead of the usual trees and birds behind her, the Southwest desert and towering adobe church provide a background for the saint. She has been transplanted from New York into the Pueblo, standing behind the Acoma church just at the edge of the graveyard, with mesas, sage and a brilliant blue New Mexico sky beyond and above it all.

These personalized representations are a mode of enshrinement, of bringing Kateri home, making her "own", (re)patriating her into various communities. Kim, the buoyant leader of the San Juan Kateri Circle, told me the story of embroidering a life size tapestry portrait of Kateri. Kim made this colourful tapestry as a vow to Kateri during the 1991 Desert Storm Operation when some of the young men from San Juan went to war in Iraq with the U.S. Army. Kim made a vow to Kateri just as her mother had made a vow to Our Lady of Guadalupe during World War II.

I thought that maybe that would be the (last) miracle (needed for her canonization).

I knew she needed one more miracle and maybe that would be it. My mom did the same thing (made a vow to) with Our Lady of Guadalupe and all our boys came

back (from the war). I had only done small embroideries before. Kateri's a Native American herself, you know, like me. This (tapestry) was a sacrifice, an obligation I made myself to do, a vow to Kateri that I would do the embroidery of her if she brought all our village boys back from Iraq. I thought, 'It's such a big piece, that will mean that much more to her (Kateri)'. The embroidery took three months. I worked every spare minute on it. Once when I was embroidering, sitting watching TV, I got up to go to the kitchen for something. I put the tapestry over the couch and started to walk off to the kitchen. I saw her eyes follow me. I walked back, then the other way, they still followed me. I thought it might be a sign for me to hurry up and finish it. There was this real feeling of piety; something came over me. That's when I decided to really do it. I'm a painter, but you see lots of paintings of her, but no tapestries. I did it with all my heart and soul. Father told me I could put it in the new chapel (in San Juan) -- that means a lot to me. She belongs there and I'll leave her there always. I was kind of disappointed that the chapel wasn't named after her, because she wasn't a saint yet, so they named it 'All Saints'. Still, she's there now. And all our boys came back safely again (Kim 1998).

While Kim's image of Kateri in the tapestry is almost a direct copy of one of the most popular official images of her -- brown beaded and fringed buckskin, clutching a wooden cross, two long braids, birds, trees, and blue sky behind her -- Kateri has been literally stitched into the San Juan community. The tapestry is the result of a fulfilled vow, a promise made by the devotee and reciprocated by the saint, earning Kateri a permanent place in the Pueblo.

All of these images of Kateri consecrate domestic space (Tweed 1997: 105). The

use, exchange, elaboration and accommodation of devotional items reveal how devotees creatively alter their personal and communal landscapes (cf. McDannell 1995:3). Kateri is multiply imaged and imagined: as Mohawk, as Pueblo, as Indian. Her images are circulated and collected. As a result, the question asked by many devotees -- what did Kateri really look like -- is answered in the plural. Melissa, an elderly Mescalero Apache wondered, "I always wanted to *really* see her, what she looked like. All the different pictures and statues, which is the right one? I would really like to know" (Melissa 1998). However, I suggest that more important than her real appearance is the malleable character of her features and countenance, her ability to be borne across and into many communities and homes, sacralizing domestic space as she goes. This malleability is symbolically encapsulated in a comment made by Roseanne, a Jemez woman, during a discussion about the multiplicity of Kateri's images. "I have a statue of her at home as well", I offered in a light, joking tone, "only in mine, she looks more like Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz*".<sup>6</sup> Roseanne laughed with me, acknowledging how differently Kateri is portrayed in statues and pictures. But then in a serious moment, she remarked, "Maybe Kateri (my statue) knew she was coming to a white lady so she changed herself. Like mine at home, well, she looks more Native, darker, like me. Maybe she changes according to who she's going to" (Roseanne 1998). "Like the Blessed Mother becoming Our Lady of Guadalupe?" I asked. "Yes, that's it!" Roseanne replied.

### **Conversations with Kateri: Relationships and Roles of a Proto-Saint**

We have seen how Kateri becomes enshrined in devotees' homes. Orsi's

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<sup>6</sup> I purchased this eight inch high statue at the headquarters of the Tekakwitha Conference in Great Falls, Montana during my research there in 1996. This Kateri is cherubic, pale, and cloaked in a blue plaster shawl.



comments about St. Jude apply equally well to Kateri.

As befits the bond between friends, the devout insist that Jude is not a guest in their homes; he lives with them and is treated like a member of the family.... [Further] By touching his statue, whispering to it, kissing it, keeping it within or bringing it into the nooks and crannies of their everyday lives, the devout physically engaged Jude, literally staying in touch with him (Orsi 1996:111).

There is, as Orsi says, an ongoing relationship between saint and devotee (Orsi 1998:110). In Kateri's case, this "staying in touch" occurs on a regular basis through conversation, petition, and prayer. Devotees feel themselves to be in an intimate relationship with the proto-saint, and both include her in daily interactions and invoke her for special favours.

How is this relationship with Kateri characterized by Native American women in the Southwest? I asked Kateri's devotees to describe the connection between themselves and the Mohawk woman. Most often she was described as a sister or friend or companion. Aunt Grace told me, "Kateri is my sister, my mother, my helper. Living alone, being a widow, I pray to her to show me, show me that I can....be a woman, to stand up. She did. She's my companion.... She's always been there for me, since I've been alone, eleven years now" (Grace 1998). Similarly, Margaret, who battled breast cancer several years ago described her relationship with Kateri this way: "Kateri is like a sister, somebody that you can talk to, listen to you. She may not always answer you, or you may not get the answer you want, but at least there is someone there you can talk to, converse with" (Margaret 1998). Kateri provides companionship and friendship, someone to tell one's troubles to, to ask for help.

On a July afternoon in a coffee shop down the highway from her Laguna home, Lorraine recounted how she began her relationship with Kateri. Lorraine had left a "really

bad marriage” a number of years earlier which had left her with “a lot of anger”. Kateri began to play a big part in her life at this time, she told me, “I give Kateri a lot of credit for getting me through”. Lorraine’s vision of Kateri in a dream cemented their friendship.

I had a dream of her soon after I got back from (a Tekakwitha Conference in) New York. It didn’t seem like a dream, but I guess it was. It was so peaceful, there was the sound of running water, lots of trees. And I saw her, wearing buckskin, and she had a black shawl over her head, and she carried a cross. I was frightened and started to walk fast away from her. I turned around and all she said was, ‘I just want to be your friend, if you’ll let me’. I’ve had a friendship with her ever since. My brother gave me a statue and I keep it by my bed. When I’m down, I just talk to her.... She helped me get to the point I’m at. I just talk to her when I have problems (Lorraine 1998).

Kateri also serves as a role model for the devout and many ask for her help with specific problems such as alcohol abuse or poor health. John, Isabelle’s Mohawk husband told me, “Kateri brought me back to the Church. She’s helped me find my wife, helped me stay out here (in the Southwest), helped me find myself mostly, get away from alcohol. It’s been eight years now (since I’ve had a drink). She’s really helped me with that. I pray to her a lot to help me” (John 1998). Kateri provides a model of someone with strength and determination who did not “give in” to the evil ways around her. Conversations with her stimulate emulation in her devotees, who seek to maintain contact and engage in contracts with a proto-saint whose life is worthy of following.

Kateri is also said to “put things in order”, acting out a translation of “Tekakwitha”, as “one who puts things in order”. She is petitioned for help in this role for problems relating to everything from housecleaning and domestic organization to garage sales to

failed marriages, poor health, disability, and in general, troubled relationships. Marian recalled a time when Kateri helped her to organize her Albuquerque trailer home.

Just recently I prayed to Kateri because her motto is getting things in order. So I thought, since that's her speciality, and I need her help in my home, I would pray to her. I need to get organized, especially in my bedroom -- it's very cluttered. I've got a lot of magazines and mail and things I need to file. So I did ask her help with that and she's helping me with that and I'm right in the process of doing it. I've bought some bookshelves and things to make it easier for me so I can get things in order (Marian 1998).

Kateri orders more than just household clutter. Jolene, a Mescalero Apache woman with a disabled teenage son told me about her petitions to Kateri.

I pray to Kateri to put things in order, my son's legs. I pray in my own language. When I pray in Apache, it has more meaning, it's more personal. She's a Native American. People ask me, 'Do you pray for your son to walk?' But I'm not that greedy. I wish I could be the last miracle, be the one to have her canonized. But I guess everyone thinks the same way. You need faith. I do have faith, but I guess it's not strong enough (Jolene 1998).

Devotees pray for peace in their lives and the lives of loved ones. Kateri is felt to be particularly adept at bringing "peace, the fruit of orderliness", as her song at the beginning of this chapter claims. Kateri is perceived as being effectual in restoring harmony and order on many levels from household organization to healing broken relationships and bodies.

Conversations with Kateri are not sought out only for petitions or prayers. There is a steady flow of daily chatter between proto-saint and devotee. At the end of a visit with

Aunt Grace one July afternoon, I asked if there was anything else she wanted to tell me about Kateri. “Well, she’s, uh, come on Kateri, help me... (Aunt Grace looked up at and touched the feet of her Pueblo Kateri statue). You just have to keep asking her, reminding her what your needs are, every day” (Grace 1998). Aunt Grace’s niece, June told me about her daily communication with Kateri.

I pray to her every day, lifting up my sons and daughters, asking that she would share some of her spirit with me so that I can be the kind of mother I need to be to teach the kids. I ask her, ‘Have I said too much (to my children)? What should I say?’ It’s so hard to bring them back to the Church. I pray to her because she had the same problem with her own family. Her own tribe didn’t want the Church. How did she come though that? Hopefully I will be able to teach my children well.

I pray to Kateri, whenever and whatever, for whoever asks (June 1998).

Laura, an elderly Jemez woman spoke about the daily help she seeks from Kateri. “I’m always saying, ‘Blessed Kateri, help me, cure me’. Every morning and every day at bed time. I have diabetes and high blood pressure and I take insulin. Every time I do, I pray to Kateri to help me” (Laura 1998). Similarly, Janet, also from Jemez, observed, “I always ask for Kateri’s help. When I am going out the door, into town or something, I say, ‘Please help me to be alert when I drive’” (Janet 1998).

Yet Kateri’s devotees worry about burdening her, troubling her with too much talk and too many prayers. June confessed that she worries about the number of favours she asks of Kateri. “Every Sunday in church we see her, pray to her, sing to her. I kind of apologize that I have to bring her my prayers -- for my family and for others who ask me to pray to her” (June 1998). Indeed, the pottery bowl by her statue in the Queen of Angels Indian chapel in Albuquerque overflows with petitions written on folded scraps of paper.

Betty, an Isleta, is also wary of wearing out Kateri with her requests. “I don’t only talk to her in English, but I talk to her in Indian too, and I know she understands. Every little prayer that I have, especially for my grandchildren and for my son who’s in Dallas. I always pray to Kateri to take care of my children. She must be tired of hearing me (Betty laughed)” (Betty 1998). Miranda, an Assiniboine woman married to a Mescalero Apache man and living on the Mescalero reservation has similar concerns.

About a year and a half ago, I had an [operation] and became terribly allergic to everything. Nothing worked. Nothing helped for so long. Finally I found something -- something natural from Arizona. Poor St. Jude and Kateri and Our Lady of Guadalupe must have got tired of me coming to beg something from them every week (Miranda 1998).

Theresa’s elderly aunt Martha also worried that “those saints must be tired of me asking all the time” (Martha 1998).

Yet while devotees worry about causing too much trouble for a saint, an ethic of reciprocity underscores the relationship. The devout return devotion, prayers and attention for favours received and requests granted (cf. Orsi 1996:113). Petitions are bound to be preceded by praises and prayers. Most devotees honour Kateri daily with prayers for her canonization, interceding on *her* behalf, believing that a multitude of these prayers will influence the saint-making process. Devotees conscientiously try to “do enough” for Kateri, to give her enough honour and attention, to treat her images with respect and love, and to be good witnesses to her life. Vows are made, a promise for a divine favour or intercession, and the devout are conscious of the give and take of their relationship with Kateri. As Orsi says, “Whatever else it is, popular devotionism is the practice of relationships. Praying is not simply a narrative practice, but a narrative practice addressed

to someone -- who looked back and responded. Prayer is always a relational imaginative activity” (Orsi 1996:202-203). Devotees emphasize that Kateri hears every prayer and listens with compassion to every petition. “Even if you don’t always get the answer you want”, it is assumed that she is still an active and willing participant in relationships with her followers. “She’s a lady of miracles. If you pray, ask, talk to her, she’ll listen,” Karen from Isleta explained (Karen 1998).<sup>7</sup>

Despite their intimate relationships with Kateri, her devotees are also, at least in some measure, devotees of other saints as well. For many, devotion to other saints preceded devotion to Kateri, since the Mohawk Maid became popular for most as recently as the early 1980s, long after Catholic devotional life was introduced to the Southwest. Sr. Rachel, a non-Native nun on the Mescalero reservation told me, “Most of those interested in Kateri were already into the lives of saints. She helps make those ties to the church closer” (Sr. Rachel 1998). Although Kateri is often one among many saints who are invoked by an individual, she is most often understood to be “something special”, occupying a key position in the saintly pantheon, and maintaining a unique relationship with Native people.

Simultaneous devotion to many saints is understood at times to multiple the intercessory power. As Carmen from Mescalero explained, “I have devotion to three saints: St. Joseph, the Blessed Mother, and Kateri. After I heard more about Kateri, it’s been stronger with her. Sometimes when I get home from a Kateri (Circle) meeting and if we’re having some problems, I just put all my three statues together and start praying” (Carmen 1998). Others choose particular saints for different problems; each is understood to have a “specialty”. Joan, who told me the story of her daughter’s rescue by Kateri,

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<sup>7</sup> Kateri’s miracle - granting status will be dealt with fully in the next chapter.

recounted in Chapter Three, revealed later in our discussion that she also prayed to other saints for specific needs.

I'm very drawn to Kateri, but I always pray to other saints too, especially St. Anthony. He's found so many things. You can pray to any saint; they will all do miracles for you, even if they are small miracles. My friend's husband once lost his wallet. It was just gone! She called me in tears about this, and I told her to pray really hard to St. Anthony, and then when the wallet was found, to be sure to light a candle for him. They found the wallet the next day and she did what she promised for St. Anthony (Joan 1998 cf. Behar in Badone 1990:99-103).

Some devotees recall that they learned slowly about Kateri, forgetting about her efficacy, needing to be reminded, "trying" her for a certain problem, and being convinced when a good outcome occurred. Kay, a Mescalero Apache recounted the beginning of her devotional relationship with Kateri. "My uncle said that Kateri was pretty good to light a candle to and ask her to pray for you. So I did. Before, I always went only to Mary. Now I go to Kateri too" (Kay 1998). Similarly, Christine, a Navajo woman, told me, "The Lagunas, they always pray to Kateri. Me, I pray to the Blessed Mother or St. Anthony. It took me awhile after I first learned about her to remember to pray to her for things" (Christine 1998).

In general, devotion to Kateri, even when she is the most important supernatural figure for the devotee, always forms a part of a broader set of relationships with a selection from the communion of saints. Devotees do not see the invocation of multiple saints as contradictory. Rather, the power of saints is seen to increase exponentially: the more saints the better, and each has his or her own purpose. Rose, an elderly Isleta woman explained, "I'm also very involved with Our Lady of Guadalupe. I pray for Juan Diego, Katherine

Drexel<sup>8</sup>, and Kateri all to be canonized. They're all Indian or associated with Indians" (Rose 1998). The "Indianness" of Kateri and other saints does not go unnoticed. As Fr. Andrew, the resident priest at Laguna pointed out, "Kateri is like Our Lady of Guadalupe for the Mexican people; she shows to the world the gifts of that particular people, that culture" (Fr. Andrew 1998). During a discussion in late March at her home in Isleta, I asked Rose about her devotion to saints other than Kateri. She replied,

St. Jude, Joseph, Francis, Anthony, the Blessed Mother, of course -- she's on top of the list -- the Holy Spirit, Our Father, St. Therese, the Little Flower. I pray mostly for Kateri's canonization. And I pray for her to bring the people together. She's the first Indian saint. And then if Blessed Juan Diego is canonized, we'll at least have two (Rose 1998).

In the end, conversations always came back to Kateri. She occupies a prominent place in the devotional lives of those I met in the Southwest. Lana apologized for "mixing in" other saints with Kateri during the course of our visit. "The poor Pope, he's getting so old. I hope he canonizes Kateri soon, because the new one might not know about her. And Mother Teresa, she was so old too. She did a lot of work with the poor. I have a picture of her". Lana got up from the kitchen table and returned with a laminated coloured prayer card displaying a picture of Mother Teresa. Lana propped it up at the base of the statue of Kateri which had joined us for the conversation on the kitchen table. Lana also brought some photocopied sheets explaining the symbolism of Our Lady of Guadalupe which she obtained during a pilgrimage to Mexico City last year on her feast day,

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<sup>8</sup> Blessed Katherine Drexel (1858-1955, beatified 1987) was the foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Coloured People and initiator and supporter of many missionary schools in the Southwest. I discuss her in detail in the next chapter.



December 12. "I haven't read these papers yet, but I will. Oh! We're supposed to be talking about you, Kateri, aren't we? I'm sorry." Lana stroked Kateri's plaster dress in apology (Lana 1998).

Like Lana, most of Kateri's devotees are involved in a large spectrum of Catholic practices. June and Aunt Grace participate annually in the Diocese of Santa Fe's Pilgrimage for Vocations and other local pilgrimages. Others participate in weekend *cursillo* retreats where lay theology and Catholic living are discussed. Still others, such as Marian, connect Kateri with better known Catholic figures. "I feel that Kateri might hang around with the Blessed Mother and help the Blessed Mother with her requests, like helping to get a grandchild to go to church or something like that" (Marian 1998). For many, key Catholic personages such as the Blessed Mother and the Pope form the core of devotional activity, preceding and accompanying Kateri. Stephanie reveals her love for the Pope in this account of their meeting:

The Pope came to Phoenix in 1987. When I got to Phoenix, the bishops said, 'There's Stephanie! We want you to greet the Pope, to be the one to welcome him.' I said, 'Wow! What am I going to say?' 'Just open your mouth and it will come out', said Father; he was laughing. I started thinking about it and talked to some of the group. I got a group of women to put their shawls down for the Pope to walk on, because they said it was like Jesus coming. I said, 'Ladies, let's get our shawls and put them down for the Pope'. The Cochitis, the San Juans, the Lagunas, the Acomas, I got them all. I have a picture of me and the Pope, of that meeting (Stephanie 1998).

Significantly, Kateri seems to be attracting people who are already at the center of Church life, already committed, rather than drawing in people from the margins of the

Church. Jemez priest Fr. John told me, “Someone who isn’t interested in the Church wouldn’t hear about her unless they were already involved in the Church at some level” (Fr. John 1998). Yet while in general, Kateri forms part of and is predicated on a larger devotional landscape, knowledge about her and the invitation to form a relationship with her is often transmitted merely by a brief narrative, a simple image, or an answered prayer. These minimal plots have the power to inspire devotion and the creation of relationship with Kateri. She is both embedded in the broader domain of devotional Catholicism and circulates around it, transmitting her story and her image, bringing devotees into her scope, entwining her story with theirs.

As we have seen, descriptions and depictions of Kateri center around her Indianness and her suffering. The proto-saint is minced and miniaturized by these verbal and visual accounts. Songs, litanies, prayer cards, posters, and statues, which I encourage the reader to see as “texts”, show a unified and essentialized, and ultimately silent Kateri. Yet at the same time that devotees embrace and propagate these simple images and phrases, displaying and exchanging these “blank” and quiet tales, they also engage in imaginative alteration of devotional media. Kateri is enshrined in a home, stitched and painted into a community, and she is dressed and accessorised with the “fashions” of the devotees, reclaimed and repatriated. In addition, the private conversations the devout hold with Kateri draw her out of the proto-saintly boundaries and place her in deep contact with individual’s lives. Devotees both modify and enact Kateri’s Indianness and suffering by drawing parallels with their own lives. These conversations, together with her miracle stories, to be discussed in the following chapter, are narrations of Kateri’s post-mortem life, creative contextual retellings through which a rich and multi-layered Kateri emerges.

## **VI *Rumor Miraculorum*: “A Saint to Me” and Other Necessary Miracles**

*The Servant of God Katherine Tekakwitha was a North American Indian, a genuine redskin, the first of that great and sorely tried human family to be presented to the Sacred Congregation of Rites as a candidate for the honours of the altar.*

(opening passage of Kateri's *Positio*)

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It was late afternoon on a Tuesday in February and the cold wind had been whipping up the red dust all day. I had just arrived back to my little borrowed adobe house from the second interview of the day in Jemez. Both interviews had passed quietly and I felt that I had begun to settle comfortably into my role as an anthropologist. That day however, there had been a brief moment where I thought, as I often would again during my fieldwork, that I had stepped onto a stage and was some kind of key actor, but that I didn't know my lines, and I wasn't even familiar with the plot.

I had been interviewing two Jemez women, Lynn and Mona, cousins, at the home of Lynn and her wheelchair-bound husband. He was watching a big screen television, some old fashioned shoot-em-up Western movie, while his three year old grandson played on the living room floor with a plastic truck. We three women were sitting around the table in the kitchen, drinking instant coffee and nibbling cinnamon buns. My back was turned to the open living room, but I could still hear the television gunfights and the child quietly playing in the background.

Lynn started to tell me about her husband, “Kateri should be canonized. My husband, he really believes in her. He was in the hospital to have surgery on his leg. He was supposed to have been in bed for ten weeks. He asked me to bring in a picture of

Kateri for him. He placed it near his bed and prayed and prayed to her. When they opened him up, the tumour wasn't there. He was only in bed three weeks for that. He really believes in her". Mona recalled her sister-in-law's cure. "She was diagnosed with cancer just about the time of the Tekakwitha Conference in Albuquerque [1996]. We just prayed and prayed to Kateri for her. She went through all the treatments. Now she says she feels good. Her hair has grown back; her check ups are good. *To us, these are miracles, prayers answered*" (Lynn and Mona interview 1998).<sup>1</sup>

After recounting these stories, tales similar to those I would hear throughout my fieldwork, Mona and Lynn began to ask me about miracles in general. In particular, they quizzed me about the last miracle required for Kateri's canonization. "Just what does the Pope *want*?!?! I mean, all these things that have happened, they are miracles to *us*!" The tone of the conversation had heightened slightly, and they seemed to be asking *me* (as the "expert", or possibly suspecting perhaps that non-Natives were in fact in charge of making saints), about necessary miracles. I had been answering in a professorial voice, referring to some book I had read on the process, saying how the Vatican's miracle medical board had recently tightened its requirements. "So, for example," I instructed, "as I understand it, the Vatican won't accept miracles concerning cancer since it 'naturally' can go into remission and is therefore difficult to prove its miraculous cure. Actually, I think there is just a five or ten year waiting period. Like, the person has to be in full remission for five to ten years before the Vatican will even consider it as a miraculous cure." In a teacher's tone, I rattled on.

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<sup>1</sup> Although both Lynn's husband and Mona's sister-in-law did seek medical treatment, their "cures" are considered by themselves and family members to be miracles wrought by Kateri through prayers and the devotional use of her image. As we shall see below, the worlds of medicine and miracles are intimately linked in the canonization of a saint.

Over my right shoulder I heard, "Excuse me, may I say something?" Lynn's husband had rolled his wheelchair into the kitchen. He was crying, tears running down his face unwiped away. I had a difficult time understanding him, for he spoke in a tumble of words. But from what I could make out, he said something like, "She's right here in front of us." He was of course talking about Kateri. "She's right there. Maybe that miracle won't happen to me or to her (points to his wife's cousin), but maybe to our kids, or our neighbour. So many times, I've asked her if I could only walk again." There was a slight pause. No one spoke and I held my breath. "Well, I just wanted to say that," he sighed. I reached out and touched his unfeeling knee, not knowing what else to do, and moved my chair to the side, inviting him to pull up closer to the table and join our conversation. He shook his head, "No", and wheeled back to the television. Mona and Lynn said nothing. Long moments passed in silence. Lynn then softened her face a bit and kindly said to her husband, "I was telling her about your surgery", projecting her voice into the living room and over the sounds of the TV. After that point, the women, who had previously during the conversation sometimes appeared bored with my questions, began to talk more openly about their own visions of Kateri and answered prayers. "We can feel Kateri's presence. She's right here in the Pueblo". The conversation ended soon after that statement. I thanked the women for speaking with me and saw myself out, stopping to grasp the man's hand -- soft and limp -- and thanked him for sharing his experiences. He looked blankly up at me, "You're welcome", turned back to the Wild West, and mumbled, "Come again" (Lynn and Mona interview 1998).

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*"She has not been canonized, but to us, she is already a saint"* (Theresa 1996).

*“For me, I see that she is already a saint. In my heart, in my book, in my living with her, her statue here, she is already a saint. If the Holy Father doesn’t see it, well,...(Aunt Grace’s voice trails off). I say to Kateri when I pray, ‘You are already a saint. You are already up there. You have already seen my husband and all the people who have been involved in the Conference who have passed on’. They have already seen her as a saint. She is with them now. A lot of people say that in praying to her, she has answered all their prayers” (Aunt Grace 1998).*

*“There’s this Indian saint, Kateri. She’s already a saint to me. Of course, the white people make too much to do with having all this documentation and paperwork. To me, she became a saint the day she died. She had that clear complexion when she died after having had smallpox. I’ve always felt that she was a saint to me” (Margaret 1998).*

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In the late twentieth century, the making of a saint has become a complicated process of official hagiography and Vatican decisions. The procedure begins with a collected biography of a potential saint’s life, or *Positio*, which, when approved, will show her virtues to be exceptional, and will earn her the title of Venerable. Next, a proven miracle is required. After it is investigated and passed by the Vatican’s medical board, the Pope beatifies the candidate and declares her Blessed. One more miracle, similarly scrutinized, will allow the Pope to canonize her and make her an official saint (Woodward 1990:99). Yet despite the apparent strictness and rigour of the canonization process, there *are* different possible paths on the road to sainthood, and Kateri has followed one of these alternate routes.

In 1943, two hundred and sixty three years after her death, Kateri was declared

Venerable on the basis of the information contained in her *Positio*. As we have seen in chapter two, this document consists almost entirely of the writings of the seventeenth century French Jesuit missionaries in New France and was collected and processed according to the orthodox lines of canonization. However, in 1980, Kateri was beatified “on the strength of *rumor miraculorum*, on her *reputation* of virtues and miracles, instead of one or more specifically accepted miracles” (Kateri no. 143 Spring 1985:25 emphasis mine). But since her beatification, the Pope is insisting on one medical, irrefutable, scientifically unprovable miraculous cure before Kateri is canonized. Thousands of miracles have been attributed to her by her devotees since her death, a pace that has quickened since her beatification, yet none of these have held up to the Vatican’s strict standards. Kateri remains one miracle shy of sainthood.<sup>2</sup>

Yet rumours of her many miracles trace their way through Pueblos, onto the reservations, around the Kateri Circles, and into the national Conference. These miracles are proclaimed in testimonies, and whispered among family members. Many of those whom I met in the Southwest had themselves experienced blessings from Kateri which they considered to be true miracles. So Kateri *acts* like a full-fledged saint, interceding and

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<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on miracles as the necessary gears for moving along the canonization process requires a bit of explanation. The question is, how can the faithful “be sure that any ‘living saint’ [someone who appeared to be saint-like during his or her lifetime] had died in perfect friendship with God and hence was capable of interceding on their behalf? The proof....was in their miracles. Augustine was particularly influential in defending the idea that miracles were signs of God’s power and proof of the sanctity of those in whose name they were wrought” (Woodward 1990:62).

In the words of Pope John Paul II,

“[miraculous healings], duly verified and recognized by church authorities are like a divine seal which confirms the sanctity of a Servant of God whose intercession has been invoked, a sign of God who inspires and legitimizes the cult being rendered to [the candidate], and [who] gives a surety to the teaching which [the candidate’s] life, witness, and action embody” (in Woodward 1990:192).

responding to her devotees' petitions, performing miracles and answering prayers. Among her devotees there is both a fervent desire for Kateri to be canonized, and a concomitant realization that when she becomes a saint, it will not make any significant difference in their own devotional lives. "Already, she is a saint to us", say her Southwest devotees. In their eyes, the Pope lags behind in his refusal to acknowledge Kateri's saintliness. This gap between the official processes of the Church and the popular beliefs and practices regarding saints is the subject of this chapter.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This disjuncture between the view of saints as a voice for the people and the view of saints as a voice for the Vatican has parallels in other cases. The murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador in 1980 prompted a heated dialogue about how and why one becomes a saint. It is generally assumed that Archbishop Romero died a martyr's death. A bullet tore through his chest, perhaps from the guns of the military or the "death squads" which were subject to his criticism in his defense of human rights. "By 1978, Romero was speaking out regularly against the random killings and other violations of human rights, thereby drawing the wrath of the national security forces" (Woodward 1990:41). Yet because his death was and continues to be politically inflammatory for many sides, his canonization process has yet to be started: "There [will] be no attempt to have Romero canonized as long as his memory and martyrdom [can] be politicized by various factions in opposition to the government" (Woodward 1990:43).

Still many believe that Romero died a saint. "Already several hundred cures and other 'miracles' have been claimed through his intercession" (Woodward 1990:38). Others have more tangible evidence of Romero's sainthood:

When the physicians removed the viscera from the archbishop's body, Romero's vicar-general, Father Ricardo Urioste, insisted that the organs not be discarded. They were the organs, he said, of a saint. So the physicians placed the viscera in a plastic bag and the sisters put the bag in a cardboard box and buried it a half meter below ground in the garden. Two years later [1982], when the sisters decided to build the shrine [to Romero], the workmen unearthed the box by accident. The cardboard box had rotted away but the viscera were as soft as the day they had been removed from the archbishop's body, and the blood was still liquefied. The viscera were taken to Archbishop Rivera [Archbishop Romero's successor], who agreed with the sisters that their preservation was probably a miracle, though not the kind that the Congregation for the Causes of Saints would accept toward canonization. But he directed the sisters to rebury their treasure and cautioned them not to publicize what they had seen. Not only would word of the 'miracle' arouse the faithful, he warned, but the powerful and wealthy elites of the city, for whom Romero is no saint, would claim that the story was invented (Woodward 1990:39-40).

Says one vicar-general, "For me he is a saint and so I really am not interested in applying for a formal canonization process" (Woodward 1990:40). But Romero inspired political



In Robert Orsi's analysis of popular devotion to St. Jude, he claims, "Jude was available for psycho-social improvisation; the blankness of Jude in the [Church and American Catholic] tradition became the space for the imaginative work of the devout" (Orsi 1991:157). Kateri too is in some ways, blank. As we saw in the previous chapter, the minimalist accounts of her life that appear on prayer cards or in the summary of the *Positio* tell a truncated version of a life which left no records of its own. Further, Kateri was in many ways removed from her historical context by the seventeenth century Jesuits and taken home to France in the *Relations*, in a kind of dis-memberment, that uprooted her from her people and local mission context. Yet shortly after her death, it appears that she became a more generalized North American missionary tool. As we have heard in the stories from elderly Pueblo and Navajo women, Kateri has been used in mission school plays, productions, and catechism books to give spiritual instruction to young Native Americans from the seventeenth century down to the twentieth.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, since her beatification in 1980, she has been replanted in Native communities, many, like the Pueblo, Navajo and Apache, far distant from her home and history.

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divisiveness with his martyrdom and the Pope himself is reported to have said, 'What a pity that Archbishop Romero has become a political banner because they say he was a guerilla. So long as that is so, we should not think to canonize him as a saint' (Pope John Paul II in Woodward 1990:44). In the case of Archbishop Romero, there are clear divisions between what the people believe about him and what the Pope thinks is appropriate and possible regarding Romero's canonization. While Kateri's is not so much a highly politicized affair as Romero's, there are similar discrepancies between the wills of the people and the Church.

<sup>4</sup> Kateri's *Positio* includes a list compiled in 1885 of "Indian Missions from which letters of petition [for Kateri's cause] were sent to Rome" (*Positio* 450). These twenty five letters were sent from tribes in Michigan, Wisconsin, Idaho, Dakota, Washington, and Oregon, U.S.A as well as from Manitoba and British Columbia in Canada. Further, in the seventeenth century writings of Frs. Cholenec and Chaucetiere it appears that Kateri was treated as a saint by both French and Mohawk and used in mission education by Jesuits since the time of her death (cf. Greer 1998, Koppedray 1993).

Kateri has been transplanted largely as a quiet, if not silent saint, with no writings, only a single phrase attributed to her upon her death (“Jesus! Mary! I love you!”), a life “minced”, dis-membered, into spiritual lessons (cf. Woodward 1990). I would argue that the silence and in many ways contextual blankness of Kateri in the official hagiographical tradition allowed for not only psycho-social improvisation, including the formation of Kateri Circles and the Tekakwitha Conference and devotional creativity as we saw in the previous chapter, but also for theological innovation expressed in the stories of her the miracles and visions she has granted devotees. In Kateri’s case, these personal and communal miraculous experiences, as well as the telling of them, have served essentially to “make her a saint”, both locally and nationally. In this popular devotion, and the people’s efforts to bring about her canonization, Kateri is made three dimensional, resurrected, and given a post mortem life in which she appears and acts like a saint. She moves beyond geographical and historical boundaries, past the lines that the Vatican has drawn around her life. No longer reined in by the official, and largely essentialized reproductions of her life, be they prayer cards, pamphlets, posters, or the *Positio*, since her beatification, Kateri has been transformed from Lily of the Mohawks to model and intercessor for all Native American Catholics. This chapter will explore some of the conversations with and communications by Kateri in the imaginative space which spins out of her silent and silenced historical self. The popular acclamation of Kateri as a saint is embedded in and a product of these discourses.

We shall begin with a brief look at the canonization process, followed by a more detailed examination of Kateri’s case. While Kateri is not a saint yet, and this is a source of frustration and sadness for many of her devotees, it becomes clear that she functions as a saint in the lives of the devout. Moreover, a closer look at this final miracle needed for her

canonization reveals the creation of a kind of miracle discourse among many of her devotees. This discourse redefines the concept of miracle and proclaims that Kateri's last miracle is the Catholic inter-tribal unity celebrated among the diverse tribes where she is known and revered. In the end, her devotees declare Kateri to be a saint, despite Vatican hesitations. What emerges is a kind of counterhagiography, an ethnotheology of sainthood based on personal and community experiences and the shared narratives of those miraculous happenings.

### **Saints in the Church, Saints in the Communities**

A saint can be defined as a holy person, whose unique and exemplary nature is not fully realized until after his or her death (cf. Noble and Head 1995:xiv-xv). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) describes the role of saints in the Church:

By canonizing some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors. The saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church's history. Indeed, holiness is the hidden source and infallible measure of her apostolic activity and missionary zeal (*Catechism* 1994:239, cf. Hinnells 1984:280).

These "posthumous personalities" function, above all, as ideal models of piety, virtue, obedience, and Christian life generally. They are in some ways, "spiritual aristocrats" who shape group values by embodying paragons of religiosity (Mecklin 1941:4, 6; Wilson 1983:189).

In that they incarnate the ideal, saints are particularly efficacious in modelling piety at times of crisis in the Church. As Church historian Jacques Douillet notes, "The Church has gone through many crises, each of which has threatened her continued growth. In every age the Holy Spirit, who is her life, has raised up saints who have understood the needs of their time, and whose wonderful foresight has cleared a way to improvement and security amid thronging difficulties" (Douillet 1958:103). Indeed, colonial expansion must have presented the Church with a number of such "thronging difficulties." In fact, Koppedrayer argues that Kateri functioned as an affirmation for, and an idealization of the Jesuit's work in New France which was under suspicion of impotence by the French government in the seventeenth century (Koppedrayer 1993:292-293).

Canonization, as a Church act, can be seen as an effective instrument for socializing the faithful to emulate a saintly ideal while at the same time attempting to insure the perpetuation of certain values, those expounded by the official documents of saint's life. Early recognition and veneration of saints was often local and informalized (Woodward 1990:23). Canonization is in many ways a universalization and routinization of that veneration. As Mecklin says, canonization is "merely a belated recognition on the part of the ecclesiastical leaders of the unparalleled opportunity for shaping group values through the varied cults of the saints" (Mecklin 1941:62). Cultus or veneration thus precedes canonization and canonization functions as an approval of the cultus (Douillet 1958:84). Douillet's and Mecklin's understanding of sainthood coincides with the metanarrative of "fertile ground" in which the nascent saint emerges from his or her "natural circumstances", and through the direction of divine will, becomes a spiritual exemplar for his or her contemporaries. In this view, canonization does not create a saint, but rather confirms one; saints are a grass roots project.

The “belatedness” that Mecklin describes is crucial. Canonization is not merely a linear process from popular to proper religion. A saint may be a grass roots project in the beginning, but at points in the canonization process, at the peaks where the candidate moves to the next official level, a saint’s post-mortem life is entirely guided by only the orthodox processes and pronouncements. Yet in between these times, when decades and centuries often pass, there are swells of popular devotion, when new narratives of the saint’s life are created, when the saint travels to various communities, enshrining herself locally and multiply, and when communities reveal and proclaim a near-saint’s efficacy long before the Vatican does. In these interims, while waiting on the Pope or the Postulators, the stories of saints often spin heterodoxically and centrifugally out of theological orbit. For example, contemporary stories attributed to Kateri in which she espouses or encourages inter-tribal unity are far beyond the scope of the figure described in her *Positio*. Even the self-designation of many Catholic Native Americans as “Kateri’s people” is a fairly recent development. In the *Positio*, Kateri is primarily involved in the lives and prayers of the Iroquois and the French. While the Vatican may eventually accept the further manifestations of Kateri among other Native American groups as part of her official hagiography, these narratives are not presently promoted beyond local priests and their communities and revivalist, and in many ways revisionist, organizations such as the Tekakwitha Conference. Thus the canonization process runs the gamut, or perhaps the gauntlet, between the experiences and desires of local communities and the official proclamations of the Vatican.

### **Saint Making: The Canonization Process**

One of the main goals of the Tekakwitha Conference and Kateri’s devotees, as we

have seen, is to lobby for the canonization of Kateri. This is a project which, for her devotees, involves activities such as distributing prayer cards, making Kateri and her intercessory powers known through witnessing and sharing of experiences, and petitioning the Pope with personal letters telling “how much you love Kateri, what she has done for you, and why you want her to become a saint” (*Cross and Feather News* June/July 1996:9). As Fr. Bruyère, Kateri’s Canadian Vice-Postulator in charge of promoting her cause and head of the shrine in Kahnawake says,

The promotion of Kateri’s cause is first of all a matter of publicity. After she is known, then we want people to pray for her canonization. We hear at the shrine from people who have made a pledge to pray for her canonization every day. We have books and pictures and prayers to send out – to give them the information they need to pray for her (Bruyère 1996).

But the Vatican saint-making process requires much more than publicity to upgrade Kateri from a blessed to a saint.<sup>5</sup> What is needed is one miracle – an authenticated medical miracle – for which the intercession of Kateri has been invoked, and for which no local doctor nor the Vatican’s medical consultants can find a scientific explanation. While there are literally thousands of cures attributed to Kateri’s intercession published in the official newsletters of the shrines at Auriesville and Kahnawake, Fr. Paret, her American Vice Postulator says,

They don’t fit the mold for full-fledged miracles because they are too easily explained as circumstance, luck, or even simple perseverance. The Vatican’s standards are much higher, and its authentication process serves as its own best

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<sup>5</sup> See Woodward (1990:64-86), Wilson (1983:191-192), and Margolies (1988:95-96) for accounts of the history of the canonization process.

devil's advocate. It's hard these days to prove a miracle (Paret 1996).

In many ways, the saint-making process has become increasingly dependent on the cooperation of doctors and the availability of medical records. Moreover, advances in medical science have made it increasingly difficult to prove miracles. For the Vatican to accept it as "miraculous", a cure must be complete and of lasting duration and be inexplicable by all known scientific measures.<sup>6</sup> As well, the recipient of the miracle must have invoked one saint only (Woodward 1990:206). Many a potential final miracle for Kateri has been discarded because the believer prayed to more than one saint at a time, so that it is impossible to know which one to credit with divine intercession. The difficulties in meeting physicians' requirements for medical miracles precipitated the 1983 reforms under Pope John Paul II which reduced the number of required miracles by half so that only one is needed to become blessed and one more to be declared a saint (Woodward

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<sup>6</sup> The medical board which analyses potential miracles has rigorous standards. Every other week from mid-October to mid-July, a panel of five physicians meet...to examine two potential miracles. The panels are drawn from a pool of more than sixty physicians resident in Rome who constitute the congregation's Consulta Medica.... Collectively, the Consulta Medica represents all medical specialties from surgery to tropical diseases. All members are Italian, all are men, and all are Roman Catholic..... More than half of the cases are rejected. In a typical year, therefore the Consulta Medica reviews about forty cases and, including those that are sent back for further information, only about fifteen purported miracles survive the physicians' scrutiny (Woodward 1990:194 - 195) Thus, a significant factor in the saint-making process of today is that now, "as never before, the 'divine science' of theology is dependent on the human science of medicine" (Woodward 1990:194). Yet at the same time, the proclamation of a miracle is understood to be a theological decision, not a medical one. A doctor may say that a certain cure is scientifically inexplicable, but it is up to theological consultants to judge whether that cure is miraculous. As well, there is the difficulty of the rapid advance of medical knowledge. Today's miracles might very well turn out to be tomorrow's common medical knowledge. (Woodward 1990:197, 205).

1990:193-208, 85, 99).<sup>7</sup>

The difference between a blessed and a saint extends further than one (albeit difficult to prove) miracle. Until recently, canonization was seen as a step from the validation of a local cult to a prescription for universal veneration. When the Pope travelled to other countries, he would often bring a “blessed in his pocket” as a gift to the local churches in order to “bond these young and culturally diverse communities of Catholics to the church universal” (Woodward 1990:116, 379). From this perspective, Kateri is more than one miracle short of sainthood. Instead, the lag between her beatification and canonization could be seen as a comment on the completeness of the incorporation of Native peoples in the Church. Is Kateri a saint for “Natives only”, or is she, as her devotees suggest, Native North Americans’ gift to the whole Church and therefore suitable for universal veneration? On the other hand, as Woodward points out, there are very few

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<sup>7</sup> The systemic changes to the saint-making process initiated by Pope John Paul II on January 25, 1983 did more than just reduce the number of miracles required. As Woodward says,

The announced goals of the reform were to make the canonization process simpler, faster, cheaper, more ‘collegial’, and ultimately more productive. It did this in two fundamental ways. First, it put the entire responsibility for gathering all the evidence in support of a cause in the hands of the local bishop [instead of in the hands of Vatican officials].... Second -- and far more drastic -- it abolished the entire series of legal dialectics between the defense lawyers and the Promoter of the Faith....The responsibility for demonstrating the truth about a candidate’s life and death now belonged to a new group of officials, ‘the college of relators’ who would supervise the writing of a historical-critical account of the candidate’s life, virtues, and in appropriate causes, martyrdom. To be sure, witnesses would still be called to testify on behalf of Servants for God [the title given to a candidate in the early stages of the canonization process], but the chief sources of information would be historical, and the medium by which each cause was to be judged would hereafter be a well - documented critical biography.

Thus at the core of the reform was a striking paradigm shift; no longer would the church look to the courtroom as its model for arriving at the truth of a saint’s life; instead, it would employ the academic model of researching and writing a doctoral dissertation. Hereafter, causes would be accepted or rejected according to canons of critical historiography, not by the arguments of contending advocates (Woodward 1990:90-91).



saints who ever attain the kind of universal cult outside their country or community of birth meant to distinguish the canonized from the beatified. Thus in effect, all saints are local saints (Woodward 1990:378, cf. Wilson 1983:6-7, 37).

Clearly some kinds of saints are needed more than others. The Vatican saint-making process seems to place priority on causes from countries with few or no saints and on candidates who represent occupations or peoples that have no saints to celebrate. This “pastoral” priority in fact inclined John Paul II in 1980 to beatify Kateri. She became the first Native American to be declared Blessed, despite the fact that all the miracles attributed to her intercession lacked certification. Thus the miracle requirements were, in a sense, waived and Kateri was beatified without proof of miracles. “It sufficed, the Pope decided, that Kateri had a reputation for producing many miracles through her intercession” (Woodward 1990:117-118, 208). In theory then, as an issue of papal authority, the Pope has the juridical power to abolish the requirements for miracles in the making of saints. Indeed Kateri’s Vice Postulators recall the circumstances of her beatification and muse (and hope) that the requirements for her canonization might also be foregone (Paret 1996).

The political and pastoral priorities of saint-making cannot be underestimated. There are but a handful of North American saints and, as is clearly stated in the opening passage of Kateri’s *Positio*, no Native American ones.<sup>8</sup> According to James Preston, an

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<sup>8</sup> To date, there are only a few American saints. These include two nuns, Mother Frances Cabrini, who opened hospitals, schools, and orphanages for the poor, and Elizabeth Ann Seton, who opened Catholic schools and started the American Sisters of Charity. Bishop Neumann, an active missionary throughout the United States who was appointed bishop of Philadelphia, is also a saint. Saints René Goupil, Isaac Jogues, and Rose Philippine Duchesne are also considered American saints although they were born elsewhere. However they all worked and died -- and are venerated -- in the United States. There is only one Canadian saint, Marguerite d’Youville, who worked with the poor and homeless in Montreal and began the Sisters of Charity also known as the “Grey Nuns” (Flanagan 1993:6, 9, 10-14).

anthropologist who has studied devotions to Kateri,

The Roman Catholic Church has an opportunity to embrace Native American Catholics by canonizing the Lily of the Mohawks. [Some] Indian Catholics feel persistent disaffection from Church institutions, and the making of saints in various ethnic communities is a strategy often used to overcome local alienation. The Church makes saints with clear political objectives, to make a people identify themselves, through their saint, with the universal Church. The time seems right to elevate an American Indian to sainthood (Preston 1991 in Vescey 1997:103).

Thus for many of the contemporary candidates, it is easy to argue, especially when the candidate is from a country with few saints (and a large Catholic population), that it would be ecclesiologically auspicious to have their causes investigated and resolved quickly. In contrast,

The Congregation for the Causes of Saints processes a number of 'ancient' causes - - that is, Servants of God who died so long ago that there are no longer any witnesses who can testify to their heroic virtues. Some of these cases are so ancient -- Queen Isabella I of Spain, who died in 1504, is an example -- that it is difficult to imagine what 'pastoral purpose' [or political purpose] would be served by making them saints (Woodward 1990:251).

Others, including, I would argue, Kateri Tekakwitha "have retained such popular devotion and historical interest that their beatification or canonization seem almost superfluous" (Woodward 1990:251). Yet for Pope John Paul II, perhaps more than any of his predecessors,

Making saints has become a form of ecclesiastical politics; yet another opportunity to remind Roman Catholics everywhere, but especially those in the Third World

[and I would include many Native America reservations in this category], of their unity in the one fold and under one supreme shepherd (Woodward 1990:379).<sup>9</sup>

Still, Kateri's case still lags behind. Despite the current political or ecclesiological "good timing" to canonizing her, and despite the thousands of miracles her devotees claim she performs everyday, Kateri is not yet a saint. The final miracle could come at any minute, or never. Her cult is still growing and the story of her life is spreading, yet she is not really -- when measured by Vatican approved miracles -- a single step closer to sainthood than she was at her beatification in 1980. During his canonization update at the 1999 Tekakwitha Conference held in Spokane, Washington, Fr. Paret, clearly frustrated by the lack of cooperation from the medical community in several cases of miraculous cures attributed to Kateri, urged the faithful to see her many miracles as blessings, even if they are not recognized as full-fledged miracles by the Vatican:

We need one more authentic miracle, authenticated by the doctors in Rome. But this is *not* a cause for discouragement! I have *hundreds* of letters coming into my shrine thanking Kateri -- so *many* cures, so *many* favours. This leads to more prayers, and more prayers get us closer to that one elusive miracle that would put Kateri over the top. There was this boy in Georgia a few years ago who got a

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<sup>9</sup> Pope John Paul II is a particularly effective saint-maker. As Woodward says, "In the hands of John Paul II, the saint-making process has become a very powerful mechanism for advancing his message.... If John Paul II has a single priority, his record suggests that it is simply to make more saints in order to multiply and replenish the church's examples of holiness" (Woodward 1990:5, 120). Pope John Paul II canonized and beatified candidates at a rapid rate:

In his first eleven years as Pope [1978 - 1989], John Paul held more beatifications [123] than all of his twentieth - century predecessors put together [79]. On canonizations [23], he is keeping pace with the record set by Pius XII [33] during his nineteen year reign [1939 - 1958]. (These figures include group causes, such as the 118 Vietnamese martyrs canonized in 1988, which are counted as one. Otherwise, the figures for John Paul II would include more that 250 saints and many more blessed) (Woodward 1990:120).

screwdriver in his eye. He was blind in that eye they prayed to Kateri for him and he could see again. But when they got the medical records, nothing in them said that he wouldn't be able to see, even though the parents were told this. And, there was this Mohawk woman who was on oxygen and in a wheelchair for fourteen years. She was cured by Kateri too. I went to see her but again, nothing in her medical records said anything about her dependence on oxygen, even though she was. Once again, the medical records failed. These two cases are of no value for Kateri's canonization, *but* they should still *encourage* us. These are tremendous blessings, but we still need the medical testimony. They go over things very carefully in Rome, they won't just grant miracles (Fr. Paret 1999).

While much of the canonization process is obscured behind Vatican walls, out of touch with and out of reach from Kateri's devotional communities, her devotees and their priests do feel they know something about how the process works, or fails to work. Fr. John, a non-Native priest in Jemez during the time of my research told me,

Well, compare Kateri to Katherine Drexel, (1858 - 1955, beatified 1987, foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Coloured People and initiator and supporter of many missionary schools in the Southwest), Drexel's life is very well documented (her *Positio* is 1600 pages long [Woodward 1990:230]).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> During my fieldwork, I heard rumours of a quasi-competition between Katherine Drexel and Kateri in the race for canonization. "There's almost like a competition between Kateri and Mother Drexel -- who will be canonized first?" (Alice 1998). Many people I interviewed mentioned Drexel's case, often in the context of telling me about the Indian boarding schools in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. The Albuquerque Indian school closed in the 1950's but St. Catherine's in Santa Fe was functioning until the year I did the main part of my fieldwork, 1998, when its closure, owing to lack of financial support, was announced. Many of those I interviewed, some of whose own children and grandchildren were attending or planned to attend St. Catherine's, were dismayed by the imminent closure. John, the Mohawk man married to Isabelle, an Acoma, told me that there were few options left for a Catholic education. "St. Pius in Albuquerque is one of the

You can see what she's done. Kateri, we don't really know. She left no writings. And how much of it is myth? I'm not saying that myth is necessarily bad. But there has to be some really hard evidence about this person, not only what we attribute to her (Fr. John 1998).

This priest and other devotees to whom I spoke commented on the lack of documentation

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only Catholic schools that's still open". He and his wife had not decided where they would send their two school age children once they completed primary grades at the local mission school.

Most of Kateri's devotees want to see Drexel canonized as well as Kateri since Drexel was a key figure in their education and upbringing. Yet some were aware that Drexel has a better chance at being canonized more quickly than Kateri largely because Drexel left a well-funded legacy of schools, missions, and an order of nuns. Speaking about Kateri, one Jemez woman told me that "I don't know what it is that is taking such a time for her to get canonized. Mother Drexel is getting ahead of her!" (Janet 1998). John, the same man concerned about Catholic education for his children, had this to say about Mother Drexel's cause:

To me, Kateri's canonization is important but I don't see it happening quickly because she was such a simple person. And it seems like in today's world, you've got to have money and power to get anywhere. Just like this Katherine Drexel. She just came out of nowhere and she's going to be a saint first. I read about that and I thought, 'This isn't right'. Yeah, she was a good lady, but she had money. That's the difference, her having power and money. And Kateri didn't have either (John 1998).

Indeed Katherine Drexel was,

As an heiress to one of the great family fortunes of the United States, undoubtedly the wealthiest American woman to ever don a religious habit. In the course of her ninety-seven years, Katharine Drexel gave away an estimated twenty million dollars, nearly all of it to missions and schools devoted to black Americans and Native Americans (Woodward 1990:228).

She left an order of nuns, institutions, writings, and a financial legacy that far surpassed Kateri's simple means. And such material resources, as Kateri's devotees and their priests admit, certainly do influence the process of saint-making. Fr. Matthew, non-Native priest involved with the Tekakwitha Conference since its inception told me,

It takes a lot of money to get in that saints' calendar of the Church. You don't get nothing for nothing. There are fees, stipends, gratuities. If you want to be a saint, you better have a wealthy family. Most saints come from some order that is rich. They have the money to push the canonization through. The canonization of saints is a big income for the Vatican (Fr. Matthew 1996).

In this view, Kateri is miles and millions away from sainthood.

One further note: as I was editing the final copy of this dissertation, word came that Mother Drexel will be canonized on October 1, 2000. I will be interested in hearing devotees of Kateri respond to this development during upcoming research trips.

of Kateri's life outside of the Jesuit accounts. She likely could not write or read, and therefore could not expound on her ideas of God or her love for Jesus beyond her actions. Her life was observed and recorded in a colonial context by foreigners to the land and culture. Compared to many other saints or proto-saints, Kateri's illiteracy and lack of colleagues who could have recorded her life is a clear disadvantage in her canonization process. Yet her cause continues.

Fr. Victor, a priest on the Navajo Nation gave me this account of Kateri's canonization process:

I was just in Phoenix and saw Father Paret (Kateri's American Vice-Postulator who resides at her national shrine in Fonda, New York) there. He says that it's just a matter of one more miracle -- something which the authorities in Rome, whoever they are, consider a miracle. Who knows if that will be today, tomorrow or five hundred years from now. That's how long it can take in the Church. Kateri being canonized isn't going to mean a thing to her. It's for us. The Church has this process. You need one miracle to be beatified and another to be canonized. There's a lot of Blesseds waiting to be canonized. The same thing is happening to Mother Drexel. It's not unusual to wait several hundred years. The Pope's hands are tied too. He can't just make a saint with no authentic miracle (Fr. Victor 1998).

Echoing Fr. Paret's statement that the final miracle must be authenticated and that the "Vatican can't just grant miracles", Fr. Victor similarly puts the saint-making process out of the Pope's hands, which are described as "tied", and into the hands of God. Ultimately, most Catholics would agree that this is the case -- *God* makes saints, raises up His Servants in times of crisis, and works irrefutable miracles when the time is right for them to be officially recognized. But on earth, saint-making is a matter of papal authority.

As in the case of Kateri's beatification, the Pope *can* essentially waive the miracle requirement, or at least reconceive it in a way that reflects the strength of her cult and the faith of her devotees. While some are concerned that "the saint-making process has become hostage to the Vatican bureaucracy" (Woodward 1990:90), clearly there are some uncontrolled and uncontrollable factors: the will of God, the efficacy of the saint, and the ultimate decisions of the Pope. In the end, Kateri's case is at the will and whim of a diverse group of individuals and institutions. This group includes each devotee who fervently prays for a miracle, local priests and national organizations who distribute devotional material and disseminate Kateri's story, the intricate and multilayered Vatican process, the Pope's insistence and waivers, and for believers, the response of Kateri to wishes of her devotees and God's plan for His Church's best emissaries. It is to Kateri's unique case for sainthood to which we now turn.

### **Kateri's Cause: Declarations and Reputations**

[The Vatican's] "Congregation for the Causes of Saints is quite precise in its understanding of holiness.... Holiness is manifest by a two-tiered structure of virtues: the three supernatural (so-called because they are infused by grace), virtues of faith, hope and charity (love of God and of neighbour), and the four cardinal moral virtues (originally derived from the ethics of Aristotle) of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Since all Christians are expected to practice these virtues, a saint is someone who practices them to a 'heroic' or exceptional degree (Woodward 1990:223).

Kateri's virtues, as recorded in her *Positio*, and for which she was declared Venerable, are vast. The account of these virtues constitutes a pointed narrative of her life

that emphasizes her ability to be “a Christian by desire”, “predestined by God to accomplish great things” (*Positio* 29). The record of her holiness begins:

Katherine had received at birth a naturally fine character. While she was still a child and a pagan, it was noticed that she shrank from all that was evil, that she was gentle, even timid, not curious, nor proud. Thus, even then she appeared prepared by nature for the practice of every Christian virtue (*Positio* 29).

As a proto-saint, Kateri fully possessed the three “supernatural” virtues of faith, hope, and charity. She is said to have had heroic faith, “growing to maidenhood in a completely pagan household”, and “bravely bearing the persecution occasioned by the now open practice of her Faith” (*Positio* 30-31). Her hope was also heroic. On her deathbed, “Katherine [had] a firm hope of entering a happy eternity”. She also appears to have had hope that she would become a friend of God in heaven.

Although the Servant of God refused throughout her lifetime to pray for others who asked her prayers, saying that she, being a neophyte still young in the Faith, was not worthy that her prayers should be answered. Yet on her deathbed she readily promised, to all who asked, that her intercession in heaven would certainly help them (*Positio* 32).

Finally, she was said to have heroic love of God and piety, evidenced primarily by her penances. As well, she is said to have had extraordinary love of her neighbours, proven in all her actions from her readiness to help elders as a child to her preferring to “suffer discomforts from others rather than offer others any occasion of suffering” (*Positio* 32-36).

According to the *Positio*, Kateri was also an exemplar of the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Her extraordinary prudence is demonstrated by the observation that she preferred “prudently to submit the choice of her penances to the



judgement of her director” when she was reprimanded by the missionaries for engaging in excessive penances (*Positio* 37). Her heroic justice is shown through her obedience and reverence to her superiors at the mission, and in her “desire of an ever better knowledge of the good and of a more constant execution of it when once it was known” (*Positio* 37-38). Kateri’s “uncommon constancy [with which] she refused more than once to be forced or frightened into marriage” and her long term perseverance through persecution illustrate her unique fortitude. Her heroic temperance is again shown through the illustration of Kateri’s obedience to Fr. Chaucetiere when he discovered that she was sleeping on a bed of thorns. Chaucetiere, “who, though inwardly moved with admiration, straightaway sternly forbade Katherine that sort of immoderate penance and ordered her to burn the thorns. With perfect obedience, Katherine at once hastened to carry out the command” (*Positio* 42-43).

As well, Kateri exhibited heroic poverty in her love of simplicity in food and dress; chastity, in her unprecedented vow of virginity; obedience, in the “glorious examples of submission” she rendered to the Fathers; and humility, in her conviction that she was a “very great sinner to whom only austere penance was fitting” (*Positio* 43-51). Kateri’s penances and vow of virginity take precedence in this account of her heroic virtues. Yet in these key moments of her life, her biographers argued, and the Vatican agreed in 1943, all the necessary saintly virtues were exhibited to an uncommon degree.

Her beatification in 1980, on the tercentennial of her death, is said to have come about in this way. This story comes from the *Kateri* magazine published by her shrine in Kahnawake.

On February 2, 1980, the two [then] Vice-Postulators [for Kateri’s cause], Father Béchar, S.J., in his Montreal office and Father McBride, S.J., in his office at Auriesville, N.Y., each received a telephone call from the Postulator

General, Father Paolo Molinari, S.J., in Rome. A bolt of lightning would not have surprised them more. It was the long hoped-for message.

The Postulator General had proposed to the Cardinals of the Sacred Congregations for the Causes of Saints that they approve of the Beatification of the Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha on the strength of a *rumor miraculorum* or a reputation of miracles instead of one or more specifically accepted miracles, in line with his [Pope John Paul II, I assume] teaching on the matter. On January 29, the Cardinals discussed the question and on February 2, 1980, the positive outcome of this discussion was communicated to the Postulator General by Corrado Cardinal Bafile, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

On that same day, Father Molinari also shared this information by telephone with the Vice Postulators 'in a strictly confidential manner', since the Holy Father had not yet taken a decision. The following weeks lumbered by in anxiety crossed through with hope. After what seemed like a thousand years, on April 15, 1980, the Postulator received a letter from Cardinal Bafile containing the following message:

'I have the pleasant duty of confirming for you by writing that with the reputation of virtues and miracles, [*cum fama virtutum et miraculorum*], the beatification of the five Servants of God, to wit, Peter de Betancur, Joseph Anchieta, Francois de Montmorency -Laval, Marie de l'Incarnation and Catherine Tekakwitha, will take place at the Vatican on the following June 22'.

Father Molinari immediately rang up the Vice-Postulator to tell him the date of the long-awaited day. There only remained two months to prepare for the great

event. They quickly set to work (*Kateri* no.143 Spring 1985:25).<sup>11</sup>

And so Kateri was beatified in Rome in 1980. Most of her devotees never saw the ceremony, although masses and celebrations were held in the Southwest and elsewhere in North America such as the mass that Theresa describes at the beginning of the first chapter. The final miracle for canonization is still needed, still awaited. Some wonder if it will ever happen. Richard King, an Assiniboine/Chippewa and former director of the Tekakwitha Conference told me in 1996,

It's one of the Roman Catholic Church's requirements, that these miracles be performed. That's the *Church's* requirements, you know. I feel that there's been more than one miracle performed because of Kateri. But a lot times people are hesitant to come forward because of the scrutiny that happens from the [Vatican's] committees that work on miracles. They have a lot of guidelines to follow. And I think a lot of people don't feel comfortable by revealing what has happened to them. I'm not saying that's right or wrong, but that happens all the time. Miracles

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<sup>11</sup> The other four Venerables to be beatified at the ceremony with Kateri were not Native Americans, but they, two Frenchmen and two Spaniards, had devoted themselves to the Native peoples during their lifetimes. Francois de Laval became the first bishop in Quebec in 1674. Throughout his episcopate, he favoured missions among the indigenous people and opposed the liquor traffic under the pain of excommunication. He baptized the first inhabitants of what was to become Kahnawake and died in 1708 at Quebec. Mother Marie of the Incarnation was a great mystic and foundress of the Ursulines in the New World. On arriving in Canada from France in 1639, she took an immediate interest in the Native people. She studied in the languages and wrote an Iroquois dictionary and catechism as well as a French-Algonkian dictionary. She died in 1672 at the age of 72. Peter de Betancur left Spain at age 21 to immigrate to Guatemala. There he worked with the Indians and Blacks, visiting the hospitals, prisons and homes of the unfortunate and seeing to their education, both religious and secular. He died in 1667. Finally, Fr. Joseph Achieta, S.J., known as the 'apostle of Brazil', was sent to that country in 1552 where he worked with the indigenous people for 44 years until his death. He rapidly learned the language of the native people, the Tupi-Guarani, wrote a grammar of it, a dictionary and two books of religious instruction useful to the Fathers in the conversion of the indigenous people. He died in 1597 and Fr. Molinari took charge of his Cause as well as that of Kateri Tekakwitha. (*Kateri* no. 143 Spring 1985:25 -27).

are something not explainable by science. A lot of Native people, our ways, our spiritual ways, have been so criticized by other people that a lot of Native people, they don't like to talk about their miracles or even their own type of spiritual relationship with God (King 1996).

As King points out, the delay in recognizing Kateri's last miracle could be the result of a lack of conjunction between expectations of what exactly miracles *are* among the various groups of people involved in the canonization process.

Mike Valdo, the current executive director of the Tekakwitha Conference, had this to say about Kateri's canonization.

I would hope that we would see her canonized within this century or the first of next century. I think that this Pope should realize or see that for 58 years, there's been all these Conferences and surely that should shed some light. As my wife stated [earlier in the interview], they're waiting for one more miracle. And we've heard of all these miracles that are taking place. But it's hard to get all the facts. Some of the doctors do not want to go on record. And they no longer want to take the cancer miracles. They want something like you poked your eyes out and you're completely blind but yet your sight has been restored. I think there's about two cases where actual miracles have happened, but the doctors don't want to go on record that it was a miracle. I think that with prayer and a lot of strong belief, I think it [Kateri's canonization] will happen without that recognized miracle (Valdo 1998).

### **Waiting for a Miracle**

Waiting for that final miracle and for Kateri's canonization can be a frustrating and

discouraging time. Many of her devotees feel passed over by the Pope and by the Church, pointing to the seemingly interminable span since her beatification, a span which for them has been filled with miracles, visions and dreams of the proto-saint. Particularly deep disappointment was felt when the Pope visited Phoenix, Arizona in 1987, appearing before a huge crowd of Native Americans, many of whom had travelled from the Pueblos and reservations of New Mexico for the occasion. From all accounts, the Pope was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm as we saw in the previous chapter in Stephanie's story of being selected to welcome him. Yet many were dismayed that he did not seize the seemingly perfect opportunity to canonize Kateri in front of a sea of her people.

Jemez priest Fr. John recalled the Pope's visit and the expectations that accompanied it:

Her canonization, it's kind of inevitable that it will happen. It will be interesting, the emotions that it will spark. I wonder if it will have the same emotional impact as it would have had it happened a few years ago. Like when the Pope came to Phoenix in 1987, that would have been the perfect time. The excitement when the Pope came into the auditorium, it was incredible! As he came in, the cheers, the emotion, it was such incredible emotion, it was just overwhelming. My provincial turned to me and said, '*He should canonize her right now*'. There were so many points when the Pope was speaking that it looked like he was leading up to the announcement. But he just didn't (Fr. John 1998).

Sister Ann, a Mescalero nun, reflected on the Pope's visit and her feelings when the Pope failed to canonize Kateri:

It was a *terrible* disappointment when the Pope came to Phoenix in 1987 and didn't canonize Kateri. I felt very strongly about that. Because he went on to California

and canonized Junipero Serra<sup>12</sup>, the one who set up all the missions in California. I didn't even think he should be canonized at all. I mean, at that time [during Serra's life], they enslaved Natives and forced the religion upon them. So even though it was a sister from my order whose healing was the last miracle for him, to get him canonized, I didn't feel that I could celebrate. I mean, I thought, 'It's the same old thing'. Others always come first before us Indians (Sr. Ann 1998).

Theresa summed up the feelings of exclusion that the long wait for Kateri's canonization evoke among her devotees.

If only Pope John Paul would believe in Indian dreams, she could have been made a saint a long time ago. Many Indian people have dreams about Blessed Kateri --

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<sup>12</sup> Father Junipero Serra (1713-1784) was a Franciscan friar who founded a network of missions in California. In fact, Woodward suggests that Serra's final miracle was "pushed through" for the Pope's 1987 visit so, at the Pope's request, he would have "an American Servant of God whom he could beatify or canonize in connection with his trip" (Woodward 1990:201). While Serra was California's top candidate for sainthood, some of Kateri's devotees feel that her miracles could have been foregrounded at the Vatican in attempt to make *her* the next American Servant of God to be canonized.

Serra's miraculous intercession was granted in the spring of 1960 to Mother Boniface Dryda, a Franciscan nun who was then aged forty-five. She suffered from a mysterious disease, possibly lupus erythematosus, had been hospitalized and given the last rites:

Faced with the prospect of Mother Dryda's imminent death, the chaplain to her convent suggested that the sisters begin a novena to Father Serra.... On Good Friday, exactly one week after entering the hospital, Mother Dryda suddenly felt better... A month later, she was released from the hospital and the mysterious disease never returned. Was it a miracle? (Woodward 1990:202).

The doctors could not agree on a diagnosis. Further complicating the miracle case was the fact that Mother Dryda was still alive and theoretically it was still possible for her to suffer a relapse, even though none had occurred for the past twenty-seven years. However, in order for a cure to be deemed miraculous,

The medical consultants need not arrive at a clear diagnosis in order to conclude that an inexplicable cure has taken place. In such cases, the critical determination is that the patient's condition had so degenerated that she should have died. The fact that she did not... was sufficient to regard the healing as beyond natural causality or scientific explanation. ...The full board of five physicians concurred (Woodward 1990:203).

just like the dreams of the old prophets, just like what we read in the scriptures, year after year. And here, in the Pueblo, it's the same thing, we have dreams. The Old Testament prophets were old medicine men too and they had dreams. But our dreams don't matter to the Church, because they see us as pagans. But messages come through dreams. In dreams, Blessed Kateri talks to us and tells us and shows us, but it doesn't mean anything. If the Pope could only believe the dreams of the Indian. But he can't because he's not an Indian. It's hard to put yourself in another's place. Blessed Kateri has lead me to all these little veins of wisdom (Theresa 1996).

Other devotees lacked an understanding of Kateri's cause and the workings of the canonization process. Many of the people I interviewed turned to me for answers. I always felt uncomfortable about this questioning. I was no "expert", although I was sometimes treated like one, despite my protestations that I was there to learn about Kateri from *them*. Certainly, her devotees knew I was a university student and had studied topics associated with Kateri for several years, but I did not introduce myself primarily as an anthropologist or a scholar of religious studies. Yet I was often treated as an authority on matters concerning Kateri.

I will never forget the disjuncture I experienced once while talking with several women in San Juan's Kateri Circle. A woman interrupted my introductory overtures with her own: "We want to talk to *you*. We thought you were going to tell *us* something about Kateri" (San Juan 1998). I squirmed against the wooden pew where I was leaning, my heart racing at this turn of events. I mumbled something about my research to date in the Southwest and then, gaining speed, recounted some of the stories I had heard. The women relaxed back into their pews, listening, and then sharing their own narratives of experiences

with Kateri. This process of tacking back and forth between student and “teacher”, inquirer and “expert” during the course of my fieldwork, and often during the course of a single interview, will be discussed more fully in the final chapter.<sup>13</sup> Suffice it to say at this point that at many times, I was the object of questioning and while I considered the switch of roles fair and understandable, I felt most times at a loss for words (cf. Behar 1993, Dubisch 1995, Narayan 1989, B. Tedlock 1992).

Toward the end of our conversation at the kitchen table of her Isleta adobe home, Lana summed up her feelings about Kateri: “She has answered my prayers. She’s a powerful woman, a powerful saint. She’s already a saint. What’s taking so long?” Lana at once proclaimed Kateri’s sainthood and questioned me about it. This inquiry was not rhetorical, and, as in many of my interviews, I ended up proposing an explanation for the lengthy span of time that has elapsed since Kateri’s beatification. I recalled books and articles I had read, and answers priests had given me. My response was peppered with plenty of my own opinions, tempered with a healthy respect for the Catholic hierarchy. On this occasion, I told Lana that perhaps there was some distance, some lapse in communication between the Vatican and the Pueblos, where Kateri is known and loved among her people. This suggestion seemed to satisfy her. There was truth to my answer - - my description of a communications gap or lag -- yet I wanted to be sure to show no disrespect to the Vatican processes held in esteem by my interviewees.

Others with whom I spoke in the Southwest answered their own questions about why Kateri’s canonization is “taking so long”. Tara, a San Juan woman in her fifties who returned to Catholic Church in 1986 when her marriage ended, expressed frustration with

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<sup>13</sup> Recall my experience of interviewing Lynn and Mona recounted at the beginning of this chapter where I slipped back and forth from being a “student” and a “teacher” during the course of the interview.



the wait:

We need to emphasize more on her canonization. I heard that now we need to wait *ten years* for a cancer miracle [for a remission to be considered complete by the Vatican's medical board]?!?! What else could we do as Native Americans? Are we strong enough? What can we do to show that we need her to be canonized? What else more can we *do*?" Then her voice softened and her posture relaxed. "I guess just be patient. Just pray, get together, meet with friends who want Kateri to be canonized, that's all" (Tara 1998).

Emma, an Isleta woman in her eighties who had worked at the local church for decades, was more at peace with the process and summed up the situation of waiting for a miracle in the following way:

Blessed Kateri is important to everybody because someday she might do miracles for us. She was chosen to become a saint. But we have to wait a little longer to show that she can become a saint. It's hard to get what you want. We're all hoping that she will become a saint. But we feel like it's taking too long. We may be in a hurry, but God has a reason for it. *He's* not in a hurry for her to become a saint (Emma 1998).

Yet many people expressed to me the hope that Kateri's canonization would happen in their lifetime, perhaps so they could go to Rome to see the ceremony or at least attend one of the celebrations bound to be held in North America. Marian, a retired, self-proclaimed "urban Indian" active in Albuquerque's Queen of Angels Kateri group told me, "Kateri will be the first Indian to be canonized as a saint. When that happens, I want to go to Rome and see it!" (Marian 1998). Similarly, Rose, also Isleta, expressed her hope of witnessing Kateri's canonization in person.

I'm worried that her canonization will take too long. Two years ago, when a group of people from the church were planning a trip to the Holy Land, I told them that I was waiting for Kateri's canonization to go to Rome. I hope that it happens before I'm too old to go (Rose 1998).

Emma, who had lived on the reservation all her life told me, "We're all hoping that Kateri will become a saint some day. Maybe she will, someday, hopefully, before we all get too old. I'm in my eighties now" (Emma 1998).

These are serious wishes, as the majority of Kateri's devotees are elderly women in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. Most have been involved with Kateri for at least the last twenty years since her beatification. Many have had a private devotion to her since the 1930s or 1940s when Kateri's story was first told in mission schools. In short, there is not unlimited time left for these women, Kateri's most ardent supporters. Passing on the faith to younger generations has been an explicit directive of the Tekakwitha Conference and remains the fervent desire of Kateri Circles that include many grandmothers. My own observations however, indicate that this endeavour has not been entirely successful. Certainly there are some younger people involved in both the local Circles and the national Conference, and many of the older women have been successful at least in alerting their grandchildren, nieces and nephews to Kateri's presence and efficacy. But in general, Kateri's devotees are women who have already spent a lifetime praying for her canonization. They cannot wait many more years to witness her becoming a saint.

### **Acting as if She Were: Miracles and Other Saintly Favours**

Father Matthew, a long time participant in the Tekakwitha movement, told me about the ways in which Kateri functions as a saint.

*I once asked Kateri's Vice-Postulator about her canonization. I said, 'All the Natives know she's holy. What's canonization going to do?' He replied, 'They'll be so proud.' And I told him, 'They're proud now.' To get your name on a calendar, it's not such a big deal. Canonization is an admission by the clergy that she was a good woman. It would be like the clergy saying what the folks knew all along (Fr. Matthew 1996).*

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In the eyes of her devotees, and perhaps more significantly, at her shrines and national gatherings, Kateri is already seen as a saint. Her tomb at Kahnawake is littered with photographs and notes of thanksgiving; earth from her childhood village in New York state is gathered and sold in vials at the nearby shrine as "Holy Earth"; water from the spring in which she was baptized is collected in bottles marked "Holy Water"; and pilgrims visit the spring and immerse their disabled children and pray to Kateri for their healing.

In the summer of 1996, at Kateri's national shrine in Fonda, New York, I witnessed a Native family wheel their disabled child up the forest path to the spring in search of healing from Kateri's natural baptismal font. The spring is located next to the excavated village of Caughnawaga where Kateri is understood to have been born and baptised. On this morning, I was reading on a shady bench by the spring. No one else was around when the family came through the quiet trees with sunlight streaming through the spaces between the leaves. Gently a woman who I assumed was the mother, unwrapped the girl from several blankets and braces. She lifted the child, perhaps seven or eight years old, out of the wheelchair, and straightening her crooked legs, lowered her into the pool that is fed by the spring. The mother then placed the girl back in the chair and various family members took hands cupped full of water and rubbed it up and down her

twisted legs while whispering prayers. The eldest man in the group, perhaps the grandfather, told the other members, "Let's have a prayer for this little gal. Kateri, lift up Olivia. Help her walk and be strong. May these waters that touch her make her strong". Turning to the child, who had not spoken during this episode, he warmly joked, "Are you going to jump right in that pool like you used to? Or maybe get right up and walk right out of this forest?" The family lingered at the pool for twenty minutes or so during which members filled empty bottles and jugs with the spring water, and drank it from a cup. As they headed back down the path, we exchanged greetings. I had a small Kateri touch relic in my purse and I offered it to the mother, telling her about Kateri's tomb in Kahnawake where I had recently visited. "Yes, Kateri has been a great help to us," the woman said quietly, and the family turned back towards the woods. I wondered both at the time and afterwards, if I had been an intruder on this clearly intensely personal devotional moment. I considered leaving during the blessing but somehow thought that would be more rude and obtrusive than remaining quietly on the bench, some distance from the pool, with one eye observing and one eye on my book.

Similar to this family's devotional use of water from Kateri's birthplace, earth from the excavated village of Caughnawaga in upstate New York, considered also to be sacred, is sold in the shrine's gift store and bought by Kateri's devotees across North America. The vials are purchased as souvenirs and as gifts, but also as a medicinal remedy to be used when the visitor returns to her community. Ramona, who is current president of the Laguna Kateri Circle, told me about her use of the Caughnawaga sand.

It's like holy water to me. My cousin's wife got really sick a few years ago and they couldn't diagnose her. She had terrible pains in her stomach. I went to visit her with my little bag of sand. I put it on her tummy. I said the Kateri prayer first

and made the sign of the cross with the sand on her stomach. The next day, her pain went away and they released her from the hospital. My cousin said that he'd like some sand too, but his cancer was too far gone and he died. Anytime someone hurts, I'm coming with my sand! Prayers are always answered if you're a believer. I've heard other people say too that the sand takes their pain away (Ramona 1998).

Kateri has an extensive reputation among her devotees for answering prayers.

Testimonies of cures and favours received are reported on the back pages of monthly editions of her official newsletters and show that Kateri answers a wide range of petitions from finding lost items to helping secure employment, granting safe passage, guaranteeing successful studies in college, ensuring the birth of healthy babies and of course, providing physical cures. For example, Jane, a Mohawk from the Akwesasne reserve, which borders Quebec and New York, whom I met during the 1996 Tekakwitha Conference in Albuquerque told me that, "Kateri cured my back. I had a broken disk and a pinched nerve. It's better. But I still can't stand too long. I sent the report to Fonda [New York, home of the American Vice-Postulator], but I haven't heard back." (Jane 1996).

Some of Kateri's devotees feel that the Conference itself is a particularly powerful time for receiving healing from the proto-saint. As Betty from Isleta recounts:

I had heard about Kateri before the Conferences but never knew very much about her until I got there. I think my first meeting was in Norman, Oklahoma. I went in the bus with the other people from the Pueblo, but my back was just killing me. I've had so many back problems. I even wanted to lie down in the aisle of the bus. On that bus, we were saying the rosary and praising the Lord and praying to Kateri. We got there the next day and my back was better. That's when I knew what the Conferences were all about. And then, at the Conference, a miracle happened

again. My son, well, his kids were having a really hard time. That night, when we were in prayer, I said, 'Blessed Kateri, please do something so that I can take my grandkids home.' That same night, Lucy, the boys' mother said, 'Betty, I want to ask you a favour. Would you please take the boys home with you?' I felt like I saw Blessed Kateri smile at that. I asked Kateri and she did it (Betty 1998).

Betty went on to tell me about her healing experience at another Conference and her hopes for the 1998 meetings.

Again in Seattle, at the Conference one year, I had a bad case of allergies. I couldn't even take the smudge since I would be sneezing my head off from the smoke. I asked Kateri that this would be my healing, and it was. I don't take allergy pills or allergy shots any more. When I tell people, sometimes they just look at me, but I tell them that all it takes is faith. Kateri has done a lot for me. I'm hoping that she will heal my arthritic hips this year in Memphis. I hope, no not hoping, I'm praying that she will ease my pain again (Betty 1998).

Kateri has also appeared to many Conference participants in dreams and visions, most often with a personal message, guidance, or reassurance. Janet, an elderly Jemez woman, recalled a time at one of the Conferences. "That time, I don't know what I was worrying about, but something. I had a short dream, just a moment really. This lady appeared with a feather. It was Kateri. I guess she didn't want me to worry" (Janet 1998). At the Conferences as well, Kateri's relics are kissed and her statue is honoured. So final miracle or not, and certainly in the public venues of the national Conference and her shrines, Kateri appears, "just as a saint" to her devotees.

For her devotees in the Southwest, in addition to "medical miracles" which will be discussed below, Kateri provides daily help and reassurance with the quotidian difficulties

of life. For example, in a recent edition of the Kateri magazine published at Kahnawake one finds the following testimonies:

\* Enclosed is twenty-five dollars in thanksgiving for finding my glasses. (K.L. New York)

\* Enclosed is a cheque for thirty dollars towards Kateri's cause. She helped me again when I was out of state and found a nail in my front tire which caused a slow leak. As usual, I asked for her help and there was a Firestone Tire Dealer in the area near where I was to be all that day. They were open early and plugged the tire for FREE! We were able to travel the 300 miles back to Maryland worry free. (M.W. Baltimore)

\* Enclosed is a postal money order for fifty dollars which is half of the amount I promised if our house was sold quickly. Within a week we had a buyer. Kateri helps me in many ways and I call upon her often. Thanks to her, my wife and I can now retire to Florida. (P.Y. Ontario) (*Kateri* no.189, Autumn 1996).

Those to whom Kateri grants assistance during crises and in everyday affairs speak of her answers to all their prayers as miracles. Kateri's presence is said to pervade all levels of a devotee's life from the annoyance of losing an important item, to the disruption to a trip that a flat tire causes, to the worries associated with selling one's house and retiring, to larger financial difficulties. Karen, a middle aged Isleta woman who has been involved with the local Kateri Circle and known about its patron saint for only two years, described to me how Kateri has helped her recover from some debt she had incurred.

*Paula:* How has Kateri helped you specifically?

*Karen:* She's helped me with my bills. I retired a few years ago. I worked for 36 years, thirteen for the state and twenty three for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And because I

didn't think they were going to let us retire, I had two loans and a lot of bills. I went two years without a job and everyday I would pray to Kateri for help, to find me an easy job. This past September I was interviewed and hired the same day at the Gaming Palace. I still work there. It's at the right times and with the right amount of hours so I can still take care of my grandchildren. It's an easy job. I work at the switchboard. Since September I've managed to pay off *four* loans.

Karen leaned back and smiled with satisfaction in her achievement. I offered my congratulations. "Kateri's helped me pay those off," she summed up.

Karen told me about another miracle in her life that Kateri was in the process of working:

About six months ago, my grandson was driving my truck to school. He rear ended a woman and we heard from her lawyer. We got a letter saying that she was going to sue us. I had a month to respond to that letter and all that time I put the letter by Kateri's statue and prayed about it, prayed that it would work out. On the last day of that month, I called the lawyer. It turns out that he knew my daughter who had died a few years ago. That was her son who was in the accident. The lawyer said he would do what he could to help both me and the lady who was in the accident. That was four months ago, so maybe he is working something out that will help us both. Kateri is helping with that. She's done a lot of miracles in my life (Karen 1998).

Karen was assured by her experiences with Kateri that this crisis situation would be resolved to the benefit of all those involved. I heard about similar forms of assistance from Kateri from most of her devotees. As Tara from San Juan, who has known about Kateri since the Pope's visit in 1987, told me, "Kateri is the first person I turn to when something



goes wrong” (Tara 1998).

In addition, Kateri has proven effective for averting disasters. Tara also recounted this narrow escape from an automobile accident:

*This was a miracle to me.* In our Kateri Circle, we have a travelling statue of Kateri that each member gets to keep in her home for two weeks. I had had the statue in my house and I was bringing it over to the next person. I had her lying on the front seat beside me, like a little passenger. The weeds are tall on my road and I almost hit one of those four wheel drive vehicles coming the opposite direction. It would have been a head on crash! But all I saw was some dust to my right. That vehicle must have *flown over my truck*. I always thank Blessed Kateri for saving me that day. That was a miracle. It happened to me (Tara 1998).

Of greatest consequence perhaps, is Kateri’s ability to work medical miracles, many in cases which the devotee felt to be hopeless. Alane, a Navajo and Choctaw member of the Queen of Angels congregation, and sister to Margaret, told me about their niece who, with Kateri’s intercession, made a remarkable recovery from an accident.

In 1995, my nine year old niece was hit by a drunk driver up in Red Rock on the Navajo Nation. My dad’s from there. They flew her to the University of New Mexico hospital in Albuquerque. She was crying, in terrible pain, in intensive care. She didn’t want anyone to touch her. The following Sunday, at Queen of Angels, we had a Kateri Circle meeting. I mentioned her accident during our prayer circle. I went into the middle of the circle and everyone put their hands on me and prayed to Kateri for my niece. That afternoon, my sister Margaret and I went over to the hospital to see her. We laid hands on her with all the prayers that people had given us at the Circle. I pinned a medal of Kateri on her hospital gown and brought a

picture of Kateri to put by her bed. The next day, she was out of intensive care. The next day she was walking with a walker. The next day, with crutches. The next day, all by herself. And the next day, they released her! The doctor was so surprised at how fast she healed. He said it was almost impossible! Ever since then, I've always prayed to Kateri (Alane 1998).

Kateri is also credited for miraculous healings in Jemez. Stephanie told me about both her granddaughter, Shawna's cure, also recounted by Theresa in Chapter Three, and Stephanie's own rescue from the edge of death.

My granddaughter came to us deformed. She could barely sit or walk. She was on the floor on her belly. Then I started praying to Kateri and as it is right now, she's *walking* with the crutches and leg braces. That was through the intercession of Blessed Kateri that she got that way. The doctor told us that Shawna would never walk, that she would need a wheelchair. But she walked! She's walking. She's been having a lot of problems with her legs, but she's OK. That's one of the intercessions where Kateri helped.

And then myself. I was in the hospital a few years ago. I had had a heart attack and I was just laying there. That was the second one I had. I thought, 'That's it'. I didn't think I was going to be able to get well again. As I was laying on the table, I could not feel myself. But I could think. My mind was not gone, but my whole body seemed like it was gone. I started to think, 'Mother Mary', thinking of how Kateri always called on Mary. 'Blessed Kateri, help me! Touch me!'. As soon as I said that, she touched me because I came back. I could feel my whole body again. She touched me. I heard one of the doctors say, 'She's coming back', and then they started working on me. Right after I said, 'Kateri, hold me!

Help me!', she did right away. She touched me and my whole body came alive again. I said, 'Thank you, Kateri' (Stephanie 1998).

Such miraculous healing augments and solidifies the faith of Kateri's devotees. After experiencing or witnessing a miraculous recovery, as Alane did with her niece, devotees often turn their petitions and devotional attention more exclusively towards Kateri; "Ever since then, I've always prayed to Kateri" (Alane 1998). Another common theme in these narratives relates to the disbelief expressed by medical professionals in the face of a healing. Cures are obtained through Kateri's assistance in the most unexpected and seemingly futile situations. Alane and Margaret's niece made an "impossibly" rapid recovery. According to Stephanie's account, doctors had suspended cardio-pulmonary resuscitation after her heart attack and expected her to die. But with Kateri's touch, "she came back", and the medical staff continued resuscitation and stabilization efforts.

The circulation of these miracle stories is an important part of devotional life among Kateri's devotees in the Southwest. Victoria, the director of religious education in Jemez, told me about the tales she had heard, including Stephanie's account of her heart attack:

Stephanie, who lives over by the entrance to the Pueblo, I heard that when she had a heart attack, she prayed to Kateri and she came to her and then her heart attack wasn't as bad as the doctors said it would be. She's up and around again now. Her whole family was gathered at the hospital because the doctors said it was really bad. But it didn't turn out to be. I heard her story. And another one, this lady who is half Isleta and half Acoma but is married to a San Juan man, she also prays to her. She was ill or something in the hospital and Blessed Kateri came to her and she got well. I heard her story too. The ladies always hear those kinds of stories at the meetings and Conferences (Victoria 1998).

As a result of this exchange of narratives, those whom I interviewed had not only their own miracle stories to tell, but also those of others they knew. These narratives were common property of the whole community of devotees to Kateri in the Southwest. The frequent sharing of the miraculous accounts, both in public venues such as the regional meetings or the Tekakwitha Conferences, and more privately among family members and friends, provides the vehicle for the propagation of Kateri's extraordinary powers.

Further, the miracle tales that women tell can be seen as more than simply stories about Kateri, but also as stories about themselves, as individuals and as members of the Native Catholic community (cf. Orsi 1996). Writing of St. Jude and his devotees, Orsi puts forward the notion of hagiographical autobiography, which involves combining of one's own narrative with that of the saint (Orsi 1991:141, 143). Hagiography, in this sense, refers not to the pre-mortem "life" of a saint, but also to his or her post-mortem existence. The former is often compiled and regulated by orthodox agents such as Vice-Postulators, and consists of one standard account, while the latter is a popular production and can consist of as many multiple versions as there are devotees. Hagiographical autobiography thus involves the telling of a devotee's life entwined with petitions made to and favours received from a saint, narrating the lives of both, each dependent on the other. the kinds of conversations devotees have with Kateri, praying for her canonization, praising her, and in return, asking for blessings, miracles and help. Once received, those favours inspire the devout to narrative (cf. Orsi 1996:121). These miracle stories about Kateri, told nationally at the Tekakwitha Conference, locally in Kateri Circles, and domestically around kitchen tables, function as social unifiers and symbolic tales.

### **The Miracle That the Vatican Won't Accept**

Despite her saintly activities, Kateri is essentially one miracle short of being canonized, or declared officially to be a saint by the Catholic Church. Devotees are told that the Vatican is “insisting” that this miracle must be an indisputable, scientifically unexplainable medical cure. While literally thousands of physical cures, and cases of emotional, spiritual, and financial aid are informally attributed to the intercession of Kateri, a sampling of which we have seen above, none of these has been declared official.

But there *is* one “miracle”, widely known, greatly discussed, and “the most miraculous of all”, which, according to her devotees, “the Vatican won't accept”. This is the “miracle” of inter-tribal unity, or a kind of pan-Indianism, which has emerged within the Catholic Church centered around Kateri as generic Indian claimed by diverse groups of native peoples as “one of us”. It is understood by devotees that the message of Kateri to “her people” is “to above all, unite”. As Msgr. Lenz of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions explains,

All over, Native Americans are uniting under Blessed Kateri. *The miracle of Kateri that the Vatican won't accept* is that we have all these people uniting from all over the U.S. and Canada. I don't know if any other saint does this” (Lenz 1996, cf. Vescey 1997:103-104).

Heather, an elderly Jemez woman who has been attending Tekakwitha Conferences since 1984, told me what she thought about Kateri's last miracle.

Kateri will be the first Native American saint. They say we need one more miracle. But to me, the people keep adding up and adding up at the Tekakwitha Conference from all different tribes. Don't you think *that's* a miracle? I do. The Tekakwitha Conference has been going on for 58 years!! A miracle!! (Heather 1998).

As we can see in the above comments, many devotees see the Conference itself, which promotes inter-tribal unity, as a miracle.

This “miraculous” unity was evident at the 1996 and 1998 Tekakwitha Conferences in a number of ways. One of the express purposes of the Conference is for diverse groups to “learn about each other as native peoples” (Tekakwitha Conference pamphlet, n.d.). As Margaret, who has been a longterm participant in the national Conference and also leads the Queen of Angels Kateri Circle in Albuquerque, said,

Right now she is uniting the different tribes at the Conference. We go to the Conferences and we have all these different areas. We learn about the tribe who is hosting the Conference. The more you learn about the Native American people, the less you will ostracize them or be racist. You need to get to understand their ways, why they do the things they do. And they get to understand your tribe’s ways. Eventually we come to understand each other and then to help each other as Native peoples (Margaret 1998).

In 1996, this process of intertribal education took a variety of forms including a presentation by a Laguna Pueblo woman (a member of the “host” tribe) on “native spirituality”, displays of tribally specific dance and dress, and prayers in her native language. These diverse manifestations were all characterized as “Indian ways” and “Indian things”. Moreover, devotees talked explicitly about Kateri engendering “healing of the reservations”, with “former enemies now living in peace”, different tribes “uniting under the mantle of Blessed Kateri”, and Tekakwitha Conference members “all praying together as Native Catholics under Kateri” (various speeches and events during 1996, 1998, 1999 Tekakwitha Conferences, Lenz 1996). Father John from Jemez recounted a comment made by one of the original Native American participants at a Tekakwitha

Conference several years ago:

I remember what this man said at a Tekakwitha Conference once. He said, 'I am a Crow and I'm standing in line for the grand entry (a parade with banners and flags featuring representatives from all the different tribes in attendance held on the first and final nights of the Conference) with other tribes, some of whom were our enemies for centuries. *We were* historical enemies, but *here* we are brothers. You wouldn't find that in a lot of places, maybe a powwow. Our history as Indian people, we have fought one another. But here we are standing together' (Fr. John 1998).

Kateri, as the catalyst for inter-tribal unity, is represented both as every tribe's "own" and also more broadly as simply "Indian". This malleability of Kateri's racial identity is, I believe, one of her most appealing features to her devotees. Father John explains Kateri's identity like this:

She has become, in a sense, a generic Indian. I think that that is what she is supposed to do. I see her as a manifestation of her inclusiveness of other people. Each tribe or each Pueblo can claim her as their own. Yes, she was a Mohawk, but she's not really a Mohawk. She's a Pueblo or an Arapaho, anyone. I see that as really one of the miracles. I guess that's why I don't view the miracles necessarily as personal healing. I think that those are there too, but I would look for the greater miracles, maybe the more subtle and pervasive miracles (Fr. John 1998).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Woodward suggests that in the Vatican, the mode of the miraculous might be changing. As cases of physical healing are becoming more rare, a partial solution espoused by some of the Vatican's top saint-makers would be to include physical miracles of a non-medical nature. Examples might include "miraculous" charity, the multiplication of food, the salvation of an area or building from fire or bombs, all received after petitions and prayers were made to a specific Venerable or Blessed. Finally, it is possible that the Vatican might consider "moral miracles" such as those expressed in the life of Irish Matt

Kateri thus becomes a generic and universal Indian, no more Mohawk than Pueblo, but a representative of what is determined by her devotees to be “Indianness”. In her manifestation as essentially Native, the symbolic figure of Kateri thus becomes both a model of and a model for native presence in the Church (cf. Macklin 1988:70). As Carol and Jim, two of the original Southwest participants in the Tekakwitha Conference told me, “That’s one of the miracles Kateri has done. She has shown us that it’s the same God we’ve had all along, instead of having to give up our Native ways to be in the Church” (Carol and Jim 1998).

That this inter-tribal unity is seen by devotees as “miraculous” is interesting. The miracle discourse seems to imply that such unity could not have been accomplished without the figure of Kateri as a model. Kateri is described foremost as “Native American like us”. Her life is retold as one that manifests a message of unity to “her people”, that is, all Native peoples. For example, a play recounting Kateri’s life that was staged during the 1996 Conference ended with the miraculous resurrection of Kateri who appeared to her grieving friends with the message to love Jesus, love each other, and “above all, unite.” Thus both her earthly life and her post-mortem existence are interpreted by contemporary devotees as embodying a divine message of Indian unity, a message which would be clarified, and a unity which would be cemented by her canonization.

Sr. Jean, who works on the Navajo Nation and is Margaret’s and Alane’s sister, gave me an impassioned description of the social, historical and spiritual healing of Native Americans she believes will take place when Kateri is officially canonized:

Her canonization will be a healing. Some of our people have been martyred for

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Talbot (1856-1925). Talbot recovered from alcoholism, went on to become a kind of labouring-class ascetic, and in his name, many American centres for recovering alcoholics were set up (Woodward 1990:208-213).



their ways. Some even had their legs cut off. Another nation comes in and destroys another. And then there were the mission schools they set up. They didn't even let us speak our own language. And we had some fundamentalist priests and nuns over here at the mission school. They punished us for speaking our language. We really suffered. They destroyed our language and the way we prayed (Sr. Jean 1998).

Christine, an elderly Navajo woman who was also present at this discussion, and who had attended the mission school to which Sr. Jean referred, added the following comment about her own experience as a young girl in a Catholic school: "I used to be punished for talking Navajo. We would have to walk around in circles under the hot sun for two hours just for talking our *language*" (Christine 1998).

Sr. Jean continued:

Kateri's canonization will be a real healing for us. We're still invisible in our own country. My mom and dad didn't want us speaking Navajo or Choctaw at home because they didn't want us being punished like they were at school. Some of the Choctaws over in Mississippi (where her mother's family is from) were brainwashed to the point that our spirituality was pagan, the Baptists especially. But in the Catholic areas, like here in the Navajo Nation, we've been able to preserve dances, songs, wakes and herbalists. Her canonization will allow for the full realization and incorporation of the Church and our ways. Her canonization will heal our Native American people. It will be a miraculous healing (Sr. Jean 1998).

Clearly much moral and historical weight is placed by Kateri's devotees on her canonization. This emphasis heightens the emotional investment made by her devotees in

praying to and testifying about Kateri. Despite their efforts, they still wait for her last miracle to occur. Or perhaps what they are waiting for is simply the *recognition* of Kateri's *greatest* miracle, the inter-tribal unity and Native presence in the Church as expressed in the continuation and proliferation of diverse Native Americans gathering annually to pray, sing, learn, and become a united Indian Catholic community.

### **Counterhagiography and the Ethnotheology of Sainthood**

As we have seen, there is a tension between Vatican saint-making processes and the experiences and beliefs of Kateri's devotees. Some of the key questions involved are, who has the ability and right to recognize sanctity? Who has the ability and right to define the miraculous? Who do saints represent, the Church or the people? And perhaps, underlying all of these questions, what purpose do saints serve? As Woodward says,

The thrust behind papal canonization [is] to present the faithful with lives worth imitating, not saints to be invoked for miracles and other favours. In this respect, the division between official and local or popular saints [such as Kateri] reflects the mounting tension within the Church between the saint as exemplar of virtue and the saint as thaumaturge or wonder-worker (Woodward 1990:71, cf. Macklin 1988).

The category of saints is inherently paradoxical. "Indeed the cult of saints presupposes personal experience of the divine" (Woodward 1990:158). The miracles, dreams, visions and other mystical events form the core not only of the saint's life but also define the devotees' experience of her postmortem powers as well. Yet saint-making at the Vatican level is intimately tied to the most non-mystical matters of scientific scrutiny, historical research, Church politics, and money. The Vatican's approach seems to be that "the pious ravings of the faithful" -- the saint's *and* the devotees' -- must be sifted through

to find the “truth” of the saint’s life and abilities (Woodward 1990:163). Yet perhaps these “facts” exist only in relation to an interpretive scheme, a story, a narrated tale of some individual’s encounter with the divine. Further, it may be said that the Church has never been comfortable with private revelations (Woodward 1990:183). Recall Theresa’s comments about Indian dreams or witness the Church’s hesitant response to Marian apparitions such as those that appeared to children at Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje (Wilson 1983:35, Zimdars-Swartz 1991).

Yet so much of the Church’s theological and moral teachings beliefs and standards, including the category of saints, (recall, for example, Paul’s experience of the road to Damascus), are predicated on unique visions and encounters. Accepting the definition of saints as those with *extraordinary* resources and activities puts their analysis outside the realm of the ordinary processes of modern life. Fittingly, canonization is ultimately an act of papal infallibility, in which the Pope invokes the absolute decision making ability Catholics believe he is given by God. And while a saint’s potential miracles are subject to scrutiny by medical science, the pronouncement of a cure as miraculous is a theological decision. This innate ambivalence in the process of saint-making gives rise to the tensions we have explored.

In this chapter, we have been particularly concerned with the populist dimensions of saint-making. As Woodward observes,

The formal canonization process, properly understood, is not an action, but a *reaction*, and in most cases a decidedly delayed reaction. To identify sainthood exclusively with formal canonization, therefore, is to overlook the populist dimension of saint-making. There can be no officially approved saints unless there are first ‘saints of the people,’ or at least some of the people. And it is this populist

action, rather than the official reaction, which constitutes the *true history* – the stories of the stories – of the saints (Woodward 1990:388, emphasis in original, cf. Orsi 1985, 1996, Wilson 1983:195, 199).

Similarly, as Margolies describes in her discussion of the canonization of Venezuelan folk saint Jose Gregario Hernandez, the expansion of the popular devotional cult in fact spurs the Church to “play a growing role in redirecting the expressions of faith within the context of orthodox ritual” (Margolies 1988:106), thereby underscoring the importance of the “the people” or “the folk” in saint-making. While Margolies sees the canonization process and the transformation of a figure from a folk saint to an official one as more a matter of the Church reigning in, taming and unifying unruly and potentially unorthodox popular devotion, it may be more useful to view Kateri’s case less linearly and less competitively (cf. Gudeman 1988, Macklin 1988). Canonization is perhaps better seen as a series of actions and reactions on the part of all actors. Kateri’s cult expanded as a result of her beatification in 1980; it was an “official” action which resulted in a “popular” reaction. Yet now, in the contemporary miracle discourse of her devotees, the folk have in many ways preempted Church decisions and pronouncements.

When Kateri’s devotees declare of her final miracle to be inter-tribal unity as manifest in the Tekakwitha Conference, we see a community proclamation about the nature and true reality of a saint. We have seen in the discourse of unity the local construction of a saint ahead of or perhaps in contradistinction to the Vatican’s processes. Further, in the stories the devout tell about Kateri, we see the potency of the rumour of miracles. Kateri is a saint by reputation, by experience, and by acclamation. At the 1999 Tekakwitha Conference, a non-Native nun gave an energetic and humorous speech to the general assembly during which she referred to Kateri as a saint: “....SAINT Kateri. Oops, did I

say *SAINTE* Kateri? I meant... **SAINTE** Kateri! Her and all those other Indian saints which haven't been recognized yet. Don't wait for others to do it! Canonize them yourselves!!!” The audience applauded in enthusiastic agreement, thrilled to be pushing the boundaries of orthodoxy en masse

Similarly, Sr. Rachel who has worked on the Apache reservation for several decades, recounted this story to me:

When the Pope came to Phoenix in 1987, we took two busloads of people from here, including a dance group. We brought a big yellow banner, the one that hangs in the (mission) church, to Phoenix too. It says, ‘*Saint* Kateri Tekakwitha, Bless Our People’. We expected her to be canonized then. But now, whenever I’m giving a tour of the church or something, I tell people that Kateri has been popularly acclaimed as a saint in Mescalero! (Sr. Rachel 1998).

The nun’s proclamation and the audience’s response, as well as the Mescalero banner, which hangs to the left of the Apache Christ over the altar, can be seen as counterhagiography, an ethnotheology of sainthood in which the people’s beliefs and experiences override, or at least beg to differ with, the Church’s official statements and stories about Kateri. Ethnotheology of sainthood involves the popular rethinking of the nature and function of holiness. As Vescey witnessed during his attendance at the 1992 Tekakwitha Conference, “They call her ‘Saint Kateri’ (Orono August 8, 1992), even without approval from the Church, because she epitomizes ideals ‘the people’ have canonized for themselves” (Vescey 1997:107).

But her Southwest devotees have done more than canonized the ideals, such as Indianness and suffering, which they believe Kateri represents. More importantly, the basis for this popular canonization, what they believe makes Kateri a full-fledged saint, are

the visions, dreams, answered prayers and miracles devotees receive from her. She acts as though she were a saint, protecting, leading and healing “her people”. Her official hagiography may be “on hold” at the Vatican, waiting for a miracle, but in the Pueblo villages and on the Apache and Navajo reservations, her story continues along a different trajectory. Perhaps, as Orsi suggests, is it useful to think of the hagiography of a saint as “stories in two voices” (Orsi 1996: 119). More accurately, these are stories in multiple voices. In the Native women’s stories of their encounters with Kateri, we hear the voices of counterhagiography, voices that tell Kateri’s life and post mortem existence creatively and expansively, beyond the silent limits set in the official reproductions of the Vatican and Kateri’s official shrines.

The blankness and silence left by Kateri’s short earthly life and by her truncated official story has opened up much imaginative space for her after-life interactions with those who claim her as their own. According to her devotees, Kateri acts broadly and miraculously in all areas of their lives. And perhaps most imaginatively and most miraculously of all, Kateri serves to unite many Native American Catholics, bringing them under her mantle, into the Church, sweeping out a historical and spiritual space for their uniqueness. Freed from her dismembered existence on a prayer card or in a seventeenth century Jesuit’s recounting of her cardinal virtues, among Southwest Native Americans, Kateri is re-membered, conversed with, taken in, and treasured.

## VII “It’s in the Movement”: Following and Forging Paths to Kateri

*Kateri.....I feel like I see only her reflections, refractions and footsteps. I feel drawn to her, as a subject (both of my research and women’s devotional narratives), as an actor, as a symbol, as a mediator, as a historical woman. I love what she has become -- a crucible where histories and identities meet. And I love what she has remained -- just an Indian girl who loved her God too fervently and died too young.*

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Kateri’s Mohawk name Tekakwitha has been translated in various ways. In the Southwest, devotees understand her name to mean “one who puts things in order” (cf. Queen of Angels promotional pamphlet). However, Tekakwitha is also translated as “one who bumps and bounces off things that might be in her way (Litkowski 1989:11), “one who walks groping for her way” (Bécharde 1994:7), and “pushing one’s way through or clearing the path” (McCauley 1992: 5).<sup>1</sup> Biographer Margaret Bunson describes the multiple meanings of Kateri’s Mohawk name:

Her name was originally Tekakwitha, or Tegarouite (translated by some scholars as meaning she who puts things in order), or as Tegahkouita (translated as meaning one who advances or cuts the way before her) (Bunson 1992:33).

At a workshop at the 1998 Tekakwitha Conference, the Chief of the Akwesasne Reserve in New York and Quebec answered an audience member’s question about the meaning of Kateri’s name in this way: “Her name? “Tekakwitha” means something like moving, not

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<sup>1</sup> In contemporary biographies, the notions of bumping or groping in her name are attributed to Kateri’s uncle who, when seeing the young child with poor eyesight feel her way around the longhouse, named (or re-named) the girl Tekakwitha. Litkowski also claims that Kateri’s birth name was “Little Sunshine” (Litkowski 1989:6, cf. McCauley 1992:xii).

so much bumping, but more like moving the boundary of your land. It's in the *movement*" (Tekakwitha Conference workshop 1998). In this book I have traced Kateri's roots and routes (cf. Clifford 1997), and emphasized that Kateri Tekakwitha is both a crossroads and location for dialectical and dialogical movement. I have taken the reader to the space of encounters, meetings between histories, cultures, folk and official religion, and between devotees and myself. We have followed the roads of narrative that lead to and from the symbolic figure of Kateri, as she re-orders identities, challenges boundaries and borders, and cuts paths where none existed before.

### **Popular and Official Religion**

One of these key areas of movement with regard to the creation and negotiation of Kateri as a saint is the dialectic and dynamic relationship between popular and official religion (cf. Badone 1990). While contemporary devotion to Kateri is largely a grassroots endeavour, the narratives about her have their origins in the "official" *Jesuit Relations*. The stories recounted about Kateri today encompass both "traditional" and innovated elements of her life, at once affirming and moving beyond the official biographies. Similarly, the Tekakwitha Conference also fits somewhere between the realms of official and folk religion insofar as it was started by non-Native clergy but came to be "revitalized" by Native laity. Likewise, while inculturation is a mandate of Vatican II, the embodiments and interpretations of what inculturation means to Native Catholics are found in popular expressions, both communal and individual. Moreover, although Kateri's images are mass produced by Church sanctioned shrines in standardized forms of prayer cards and statues, she is simultaneously shaped to particular local milieux as these items of material culture are brought into the realm of popular devotion. Further, while Kateri is enmeshed within the



Vatican process of saint-making, she also moves beyond these limits in her devotees' acclamations of her as *already* a saint. Finally, in the narratives of the devout, the Church's definitions of miracles and saintliness are expanded by the widespread miraculous experiences of Kateri's devotees. Kateri's canonization, devotees claim, would largely be a matter of "the clergy saying what the folks knew all along" (Fr. Matthew 1996).

In all of these facets, we have seen that the symbolic figure of Kateri cross-cuts the borders of orthodoxy and official Catholicism. Yet I am careful not to oversimplify Kateri as solely a popular character, nor to see devotion to her merely as a defiant act of the folk. The boundaries are simply not that clear. In this work, I have looked beyond a theoretical construct of official productions and popular responses, or of folk innovations and official regulations. Kateri's sainthood is not so much a competition or struggle for moral and theological control between the folk and the Church officials as Macklin (1988), Margolies (1988), and Wilson (1983) suggest for other similar cases (cf. Gudeman 1988). Rather, Kateri's case is more a matter of the expansion and contraction of definitions and functions of a saint, on both popular and official levels. In the fluid and dynamic space between these spheres, Kateri, as a symbolic figure, models and remodels the place of Native Americans, both historic and contemporary, in the Catholic Church.

### **Essentialization and Emergence**

I suggest that we can understand the symbolic nature and function of Kateri as characterized by tendencies toward essentialization and toward emergence. These impulses do not neatly follow the lines of official and popular religion respectively. Rather, as Kateri herself moves between the two domains, she is simultaneously bounded and expanded, trapped and freed by historical, theological, and devotional elements.

In her official biography as contained in the Jesuit writings of the seventeenth century, Kateri emerges as a standardized figure, embodying and enacting preconceived French understandings of holiness and sainthood. Her *Positio*, compiled in the late 1930s, further deconstructs her life into spiritual lessons, slotting her actions into the “orthodox” saintly virtues. Later biographies, both written and told orally emphasize Kateri’s Indianness and her suffering as keys to her character. Materially, she is genericized as a un-located Indian, de-historicized from her Mohawk background and the texture of the colonial encounter, and marketed – and bought – in the form of statues and prayer cards as EveryIndian. Theologically, in inculturative efforts, she is uniquely and essentially Indian, the incarnation of Native American voice, presence and identity in the Catholic Church

In her discussion of devotion to Venezuelan folk saint José Gregorio Hernandez, Luise Margolies claims that “the qualities mentioned by devotees are standardized, prescribed traits, emphasizing the characteristics that conform most precisely to the tenets of the Church” (Margolies 1988:100). I would argue that while Kateri’s contemporary devotees do emphasize a small set of standardized characteristics, these seem not to be prescribed by the Church nor even reminiscent of the key descriptions of Kateri in her “official” *Positio*. Rather, the key qualities of Kateri, her suffering and her Native identity, are those which are most important to her contemporary devotees, qualities which are arguably obscured in the early Jesuit accounts. While the *Positio* does mention her self-imposed penances, these are contextualized and largely deflated by accounts of Kateri’s obedience to her Jesuit confessors’ requests to curb her austerities. References to these penances all but disappear in the written biographies. The “suffering” to which her contemporary devotees refer is the general sadness and difficulty of Native American life in the colonial, and by extension, in their own times.

With regard to her Native identity, I suggest that in the seventeenth century, Kateri is represented by the Jesuits as “wholly other” with respect to the Mohawks. She is fundamentally separated from and marginal to her indigenous heritage, yet simultaneously linked to European categories of saintliness as they tried to “own” her. Moreover, in the early Jesuit writings, Kateri is presented as the “Holy Other”; her “holiness” is predicated on this “otherness” from her Native identity. Because she is deemed so different from other non-Christian Iroquois and even from other Native converts, particularly because of her vow of virginity and extreme austerities, she is defined as exemplary. By contrast, in contemporary devotional communities such as the Tekakwitha Conference, Kateri is “wholly own”. She is in her essence, Native, and by extension, the pride and the patroness of all Native Catholics. For the Tekakwitha Conference members and Kateri’s devotees in general, her holiness is not a result of her renunciation of Native spirituality, but of her ability to remain fully Native and fully Catholic; she is “Holy Own”. Moreover, Kateri’s virtues are not radically unattainable, and imitation by contemporary devotees is both possible and desirable.

This exploration of the symbolic function of Kateri Tekakwitha as “other” and “own”, points the researcher toward further investigation of the dialectic between the imitability and inherent inimitability of saints; and of the complex relationship between historical personages and the various historical communities for whom they are defined as exemplary. Whether essentialization characterizes the official narratives of all saints is yet to be determined. Woodward (1990), Koppedrayner (1993) and Greer (1998) suggest that there are standardized saintly stories and that the tales of a proto-saint are moulded to fit these expectations. Even so, one might explore if and how Kateri is essentialized by her non-Native devotees, and if Kateri undergoes similar processes of “ownership” outside of

Native communities.

Insofar as Kateri is standardized and genericized both in seventeenth century writings and contemporary devotion, she appears “blank”, even “silent” (cf. Orsi 1991). With no writings and only a few words attributed to her, Kateri becomes easily moulded, miniaturized as “Indian”, distilled from a historical personage into a univocal symbol. These processes of essentialization leave much imaginative “space”, socially, theologically, culturally, historically, and materially. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Kateri moves beyond a unified and singular definition of herself as Indian. Her symbolic nature is also characterized by emergence, by elaboration, creativity, accommodation, alteration, re-contextualization, re-membering, and repatriation.

Repatriation is the bringing home of something valuable and sacred to its homeland, to its people. The term often refers to items of indigenous material culture which have been taken by non-Natives, and used for their own purposes whether educational, museological, or simply to satisfy greed. These objects were taken out of context and removed from their communities of origin for decades. Now, with the help of new attitudes, and in the U.S., new regulations, many of these artifacts are currently in the process of being returned to their originating communities. It is possible to view Kateri as a figure who has been taken “out of context”, and used by Europeans and then Euro-Americans for missionary and theological purposes. Even now, her canonization process is controlled by boards of white males in and from countries far away from her place of origin. In this dissertation I explore the repatriation of Kateri as a symbol, the multiple ways in which she is being recontextualized and reclaimed by Native Americans. Kateri is being brought back home to the reservations, repatriated, claimed by all, endowed with new meanings and a new life as a twentieth century Indian saint who belongs to and is the patroness of the Native Church.

This process involves both impulses toward essentialization, as we have discussed above, and toward emergence.

Kateri can be said to be an emergent symbol insofar as she inspires innovative social organizations such as the Tekakwitha Conference and Kateri Circles. As a symbol, she facilitates the creation of lines of membership and belonging where none existed before, and functions as the justification and inspiration for Native American presence in the Church. As the symbolic head of these organizations, Kateri entertains contesting discourses, provides space for revitalization, and contributes to the richness of community. Further, she is a location for the emergence of Catholic Pan-Indianism -- a phenomenon which is characterized by both essentialization, in the re-defining of things Indian, and as expressed in Pan-Indian translocative and transtemporal symbols (cf. Tweed 1997), and also expansion when, in the eyes of her devotees, Kateri brings together and creates community among previously diverse and often divided Native American peoples. Through the Pan-Indian impulses of the Tekakwitha Conference, Kateri is re-membered as a constituent of every tribe. While a fuller exploration of the Pan-Indian movement, both Catholic and non-Catholic, lies beyond the scope of this book, suffice it to say at this point that Kateri's identity as generically Indian, an identity asserted by her followers, involves a creative recombination of a broad spectrum of elements. Essentialism is embedded in Pan-Indian innovation.

Similar re-ordering of essential traits characterizes the theological and missiological practices of inculturation as well. As we have seen, the mechanism of translation espoused by inculturationists is that of metaphoric parallels used to bridge diverse and culturally specific religious practices and beliefs. The metanarrative of hybridity which surfaces as descriptive of inculturation combines both essentialist and emergent impulses.

There are aspects of devotion to Kateri that challenge essentialist understandings of her, as well as of saints and Native Americans in general, altogether. Historically, her life is retold in contemporary written biographies and oral life-stories so that she is understood to embody what it means to be “fully Indian” and “fully Catholic”. These reconceptualizations of the seventeenth century stories move Kateri both within and outside of stereotypical images of Indians. Materially, Kateri travels between “official” images transmitted from shrines, to devotees’ creative use and adaptation of them, to the re-creation and independent invention of her re-imagined likeness. Ownership and care of as well as conversation with Kateri’s image as expressed in statues or prayer cards serve to expand and elaborate the standard pictures. Other devotees create their own versions of Kateri through personalized “folk art” wherein the proto-saint is re-located and re-presented to devotional communities. Finally, Kateri pushes theological boundaries, since her devotees experience her as an active divine presence and tell stories of her miracles to one another. In so doing, her devotees redefine the notion of “miracle”, moving beyond Vatican assessments, urging each other to consider “more subtle and pervasive miracles” (Fr. John 1998). In the popular acclamations of Kateri’s sanctity, official processes of canonization are preempted and standard definitions and functions of a saint are called into question. The ethnotheology of Kateri’s sainthood is largely counterhagiographical; Kateri’s devotees tell innovative and experiential tales of her life which move the boundaries of traditional hagiography.

### **Symbol Tales**

I have explored these impulses towards essentialization and emergence which characterize the creation of Kateri as a saint through the vehicle of symbol tales. Symbol

tales are the multiple narratives and “texts” that construct and reconstruct a symbol; including the storied paths that point and lead to the creation and negotiation of Kateri’s saintly identity. I use the term “symbol tales” to emphasize not only that the stories I have discussed are *about* the symbolic figure of Kateri, but also that the narratives *themselves* serve a symbolic function. The concept of a symbol is also redefined and expanded in this discussion. While Kateri is both descriptive and prescriptive (cf. Geertz 1973, Macklin 1988), I look to move beyond a static understanding of her symbolic function by emphasizing her fluidity and malleability as well as the creation, maintenance and recreation of Kateri as a symbol as expressed in narrative.

In this book, I have used narrative to recreate a sense of movement, travel, and translation, as well as the emergence of my own understanding of Native Catholicism, devotional life, and miracles. I rely on the motion of the storyline, both my own and others’, to reveal the negotiation of Kateri’s identity as a saint. I emphasize narrative “translation” in many senses: the translation of Kateri’s stories between generations and nations; the translation of her identity between official and popular forces; the translation between miraculous experience and devotional narratives; and the translation of my fieldwork encounters into written text.

My presentation of the Kateri movement is both multilocal – I take the reader into many communities both past and present, and multivocal – we come to hear hagiography, or the tales of saints’ lives, as stories told by many voices. These accounts of Kateri, from those of the seventeenth century Jesuits to contemporary Pueblo devotional narratives, are positioned and audience testimonies; they are “partial”, in both senses of the word, truths (cf. Clifford 1986). Kateri’s life, both postmortem and earthly, is continually reinvented, condensed, expanded, and localized. The revelation of Kateri’s saintliness and her

incarnation as a Native American are ongoing processes.

**Walking in Memphis: The Path Home**

*Now Muriel plays piano*

*Every Friday at the Hollywood*

*And they brought me down to see her*

*And they asked me if I would --*

*Do a little number*

*And I sang with all my might*

*And she said --*

*“Tell me are you a Christian child?”*

*And I said “Ma’am I am tonight”*

*Walking in Memphis*

*Walking with my feet ten feet off of Beale*

*Walking in Memphis*

*But do I really feel the way I feel?*

(Marc Cohn “Walking in Memphis, 1991)

What follows are vignettes from the 1998 Tekakwitha Conference in Memphis, Tennessee. At the beginning of August 1998, I drove from Albuquerque to Memphis, the halfway point for me, both geographically and personally, between “the field” and “home”. The snippets of speeches, presentations and experiences presented below encapsulate many of the key themes of this dissertation, and I offer them here as reminders of topics I have



discussed earlier and prompts for further research. Finally, I seek to end the dissertation, as I began it, with voices other than my own, thereby emphasizing the multivocality of my research and the multivalency of Kateri as a symbolic figure.

Monsignor Lenz, the director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions in Washington, D.C. had invited me to give a workshop at the Memphis Conference on my research about Kateri. I had prepared what I hoped was an energetic yet reverent talk about Kateri's "travels" as a symbolic figure, across space and through time, into the Conference participants' own devotional lives and inter-tribal meetings. I was terribly nervous not only about the tremendous accountability and credibility I would have to convey, but also about the peculiar paradox of the situation in which *I*, as the anthropologist, would be *teaching them*, the devotees, about Kateri. This bizarre situation did not go unnoticed by Conference participants, and I include some of their interpretations of my talk. Finally, I choose to end this book with an exit rather than with analysis. I walked through one door in Memphis, leaving it ajar so I might see my way back, and followed Kateri onto paths not yet carved.

#### A Bishop on the Church's Process of Miracles:

God has to show his *favor*. *Never* does the Church dispense with this. God has not worked his miracle through Kateri yet. It's up to us and to Kateri, not the Holy Father. We need to pray very very *very* hard. We have to pay attention to what happens around us -- to what might be a miracle. Canonization is an infallible movement in the Church. Therefore, She requires that final physical miracle.

The American Vice-Postulator of Kateri's Cause on the Miracle Business:

We still need one more miracle. There was this woman in a wheelchair who prayed to Kateri and then no longer needed her oxygen -- but that didn't work. It still didn't work. It has to be stronger and clearer than that.

My eyes wandered from my notebook where I had been furiously scribbling key points about canonization to the main door of the large gym that had been set up as an auditorium for Father's talk. I thought,

*Now would be a good time just to walk in that door, Kateri. Walk through. Reach into this muggy room of Indian women wearing your face on tight t-shirts. Touch a brow furrowed under curled hair damp with canonization prayers and faith and wishing. Let them see you! A dare, a taunt.... A miracle! they would proclaim,.... and the Vatican would want physical proof. Hundreds of awed cameras and pencil points would snap, developing only fuzzy outlines of what actually, physically, undeniably, indisputably happened.*

Father goes on...

They'll probably re-run that ABC special on miracles -- the show that she was on. More people have been coming to her shrine since then, asking to see her relics. If we can only make her more well known. The better known she is, the more people will pray for her miracles. I encourage you all to keep your attentions as focussed as possible. Be on the look out for that last miracle!

The Chief of the St. Regis/Akwesasne Mohawks on the Life of Blessed Kateri:

We can relate to her suffering. The same kinds of suffering are happening today on our reservations. We didn't realize how much of our ways were already in the

Church before it was allowed to be there. There are so many similarities between our Longhouse way and the Church. Kateri was experienced in this system and we have it. We pray in the same language as she did. Imagine the pressures she survived -- gossiping women who chattered about the one who would not marry, an uncle who harassed her. Imagine the endurance she had for loving Jesus. Her mother was Catholic and knew that the pressures were unreal. Yet she prayed for those people and they became Catholic. That's where we come from. Imagine the lonely life she lived because her own people isolated her because she wanted to be Catholic. Imagine the pain she endured trying to see through her damaged eyes. She wasn't fitting in; she was hanging on to God. I admire her very much. Imagine her flight to Kahnawake. Her uncle and his men who chased her knew the land, but still they escaped. Something was protecting them. There was something about this girl escaping. They knew something was different about Kateri when she arrived because she escaped. She was special from the beginning. Kateri led an exemplary Christian life. She was an apostle among her people. She challenges us by her example, by her charity, kindness, heroic courage and strength. They [the Vatican] can take forever. We already have our Kateri. In our eyes, she is a saint.

#### Another Bishop on Dialogue

How does one live as a Roman Catholic and as a Native American? How do we blend these two powerful worlds together so that we can offer to our kids something that makes more sense than what we have now.

### The Anthropologist on Display

It was the morning of the last day of the 1998 Conference. I put my cafeteria tray beside June's for breakfast. We joked about the greasy sausage, endless supply of watermelon and weak coffee before us. "Come to the Kateri prayer room after breakfast and before your talk," said Aunt Grace, who had joined us at the long table. "Don't be nervous about your talk. Kateri will give you the words. We'll go ask her." In the little room set up for private prayer, I kneeled in front of Kateri's altar while Aunt Grace, June, her cousin and aunt laid their hands on me. They prayed, they sang in Acoma, they asked for words and courage, and June rubbed Kateri's relic encased in a gold monstrance on my back and head.

I was scheduled to give my workshop entitled "Repatriating Blessed Kateri: A Saint Comes Homes After 300 Years" twice that day, morning and afternoon. Msgr. Lenz was there to introduce me for the morning session. He joked about being afraid of the woman with the tape recorder and how he expected to be interviewed by an ugly woman with long unwashed hair and dirty clothes and lo! when he opened the door that first day we met, here was this attractive young woman. "*And she's not even Catholic!*" he said with a kind of pride and incredulity. It was a comment I had heard many times before during the course of my fieldwork. I was not a "Christian child", nor did I ever pretend to be one, but my account, which I hoped was sympathetic, of widespread and innovative devotion to Kateri seemed to both baffle and convince her devotees that deep inside, Kateri *was* working in my life.

My talk that morning went very well, I thought. My energy was high, my animation in fast forward, people nodded and kept awake and approached me afterwards. One of the main points of my talk was to suggest that Kateri's story was not entirely

contained and told by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, and that she continues to reveal herself in dreams, visions, prayers answered and miracles received today. This is an important part of her ongoing story as well, I offered.

One woman put up her hand, "I had a dream in which I only saw half of Kateri's body. She was saying, 'Pray for me'. What does this mean?" I was a bit taken aback at this question, but launched into the tale of how Kateri's bones were separated a century after her death and that indeed half of her "body" is missing. "On the other hand", I quickly added, "It could be seen as symbolic, perhaps of the unity of Indian people, or of the Conference. Maybe she is asking you to pray for unity." "Yes, yes, I'm sure that's it!" the woman replied excitedly. Feeling partly like a 1-900# psychic and partly like a pontificate herself, but fully confident, entirely revved up, and way over my head, I called on the next hand.

"I had a dream about Kateri coming to my house with all these children," said another woman. "She was asking me to feed them. But all I had was eggs and bread. I told them to come in and I'd make them all scrambled eggs and toast. So I did. But Kateri kept asking me to feed them. What do you think that means? Does she want me to work on the reservations and feed people?" "Welllll", I hummed as I thought quickly. "It could be real food, like helping out in the community, or she could be referring to spiritual food." I paused. "Oh, I really don't know", I continued, laughing, catching myself in my vanity, but the woman urged me to go on. The crowd dissipated and she and I talked a bit more about how Jesus really believed in feeding people. I knew I had stepped far -- perhaps much too far -- beyond my role as an anthropologist. Others came up to me, some wanted pictures. I heard my name being called across the room. There was Stephanie, my good friend from Jemez, dwarfed by the crowd. I bent down to greet her and she gave me a hug

and a kiss, “That was *beautiful!*” she grinned. I floated out of the room and on to lunch.

The response to the same talk that afternoon was a different matter. Spent from the morning’s performance, I didn’t know how to muster up the same kind of enthusiasm a second time. It went like an unmemorable undergraduate lecture, but then something happened. A woman who identified herself as Mohawk was the first to ask me a question. I handed her the microphone and stood back about four feet so as not to block her from the rest of the audience. “I have to tell you...” Betrayal flashed in her voice. “You say the Church took her away from us and that she was ridiculed in Europe... [I didn’t! My heart dropped, silent, stunned, stranded in the middle of the auditorium floor]... You can’t say that! We believe in the Catholic Church. It’s all we have. We’re not savages or pagans. You can’t take her away from us!” She is angry, aggressive, accusing. “And I’ll tell *you* about a miracle. I had breast cancer two years ago. Kateri cured me. Three years, you come back here, and you’ll have your miracle!” Disgusted, defiant, she put the microphone on the chair beside her with a crackle, and walked out.

I was deeply shocked. It was not that she had disagreed with what I had said -- I believe that in fact our views on Kateri were more similar than different. Rather she had entirely, by 180 degrees, misunderstood what I was saying, whose voice I was speaking in, and what I really believed about Native Americans and the Catholic Church and miracles and Kateri. I retrieved the microphone and turned back to the audience. Trying to regain my composure, I mumbled something about there being a misunderstanding in the gentlest way I could. The woman clearly did not want to engage me any further, but I was terrified that others felt the way she did, or that I had mispoke everything I meant. I turned quickly to the story of her breast cancer and thanked her, in absentia, for “the beautiful story of healing that this lady has shared with us.”

Another man raised his hand, another question, this one with kinder and only inquisitive eyes: “Well, I don’t really *get* who Kateri was. I mean, your talk really didn’t tell us one way or the other. Is she the seventeenth century one or the one we know today?” “Precisely!” I said excitedly, bouncing back from heart to mind. A puzzled look crossed his face and I knew that my answer was not helpful. I had been so busy exposing the roots of the historical Kateri, that I had messed up the garden of contemporary devotion. Trying to reconnect with my audience, I spoke of the beauty of Kateri being in her many images, affirming that her multiple historical personalities are in fact a testament to her power and endurance and not some kind of saintly schizophrenia. My questioner seemed reassured, smiled, and leaned back.

While the audience was dispersing, several people came up to me, many that I knew, to tell me that I had done a good job and handled the questions well. I imagine that my face betrayed my shock and disappointment; Aunt Grace and June told me not to worry about it, “She didn’t understand you. She was rude and out of line.” Nevertheless, I felt disconnected in many ways, “my feet ten feet off” of the “main street” of devotion to Kateri. Even though I hadn’t intended to, I had hurt and offended some of the people from whom I had come to learn. Tears welled up in my eyes as Aunt Grace spoke, “Don’t cry *hija* (my little daughter), we don’t all feel that way.” She gave me a hug and gently held my hand as I thanked her for her support.

Still shaken after the afternoon’s experience, I wandered out after the crowd, half considering skipping the four o’clock mass that was to start in twenty minutes and going back to think things over in my dorm room. Just outside the doors of the air conditioned gym, the heavy muggy air enveloped me. Distracted, I bumped right into my Navajo friend, Annette, in whose home I had stayed in Lukachukai, Arizona. She asked how my

talk had gone. I sighed, “Oh, well, not so good”, and gave a half hearted and wholly weary attempt to explain what happened. Annette put an arm around me, “You must not worry about this”, she said solemnly, “Give it to the wind.” And then, with a quick twinkle, “And remember, the Navajo tribe has adopted you, and we’re the biggest of them all!” I basked in Annette’s warmth and turned back toward the auditorium to join her and the rest of the devotees for mass.

Later that afternoon, Theresa took me aside and told me her thoughts about my presentation, fitting her own “work for Kateri” into my research:

You spoke about Kateri having fire and a willingness to speak her mind and you did that too. You’re following in Kateri’s footsteps, all the way from Canada, you traced her back to here. You know, I made a commitment to Kateri long ago that I would help her in my life to become a saint, and when I met you years ago, I knew this was my chance. You’re young, you’re a writer, you will take our stories and “tell them”, just like Kateri asked me to do in my dream. I feel that you will help make her a saint. Somehow and sometime I will tell my people about you. I will hold you up and say that Kateri’s spirit is so strong, she drew *you*, not Native and not Catholic to her -- look how strong her pull is! Why were you drawn to her, so far away from your people? You could be home studying something else, but you’re here because of Kateri.

Flattered, flustered, then flattered again, I worried about the strange situation in which I had found myself as an anthropologist telling the “natives” about their own devotion and beliefs. I do not see myself as evidence of Kateri’s strength, nor as a visionary, seer, or expert of any sort. Yet it seemed appropriate to accept Msgr. Lenz’ invitation and share my research with those who had shared their lives with me. In my presentations, I opened



myself up to interpretation by those who had been my “subjects” and “consultants”. In that one afternoon, in a turn of interpretive tide, I was humbled, shocked, devastated and elated by the way Kateri’s devotees made sense of *me* (cf. B. Tedlock 1991).

And the Last Act.....

It was the final night of the 1998 Conference, the last dance of the powwow, and the drum group was catching its breath. The auditorium at the University of Memphis was almost empty, the vendors packed up, shawls and fans collected from the benches in the stands. It was past 10:30 p.m. and many participants had early departures the next morning. Filled with blessings, masses, and chicken-fried food for the journey home from Memphis, the people were dispersing. Promises of next year, souvenirs of this year, nothing really *happens* at the Tekakwitha Conference, I have learned, except this coming and going, an annual re-creation and affirmation of the Native Catholic community. “This, *this* is what I like best about the Conference”, they say.

But it was different for me. I was at the end of eight months “in the field”, in a place that was by definition not home. Multi-sited as it may be, the field is not a place for rooting. So the time had come to say goodbye. Operatic bittersweetness soared from my car stereo the day I left Albuquerque bound for Memphis and then for home. It had been a long few days, filled with an anthropologist’s triumphs and terrors, and I felt both like the belle of the ball and an exhausted stranger as I circled around in my ribbon dress and turquoise necklace, making sure I caught everyone’s hand for a farewell. In some ways, attending the Conference in Memphis as my last act in the field was perfect. Almost everyone I had interviewed was there. But my hugs and teary eyes and promises to write and return soon to the Southwest seemed like only the tiniest threads to tie myself to these

people and places.

The last song began and there were only a few dancers on the floor. Margaret and Alane's sister, Rebecca reached for my hand, "We want to have a circle to pray for your journey home." I was seated on a folding chair and a dozen of my dearest Southwest friends surrounded me. A buckskin pouch of corn pollen fastened with a toggle of turquoise was passed around. Each person prayed for me, using a pinch of pollen to send her or his prayers. I heard Acoma and Laguna and Navajo and English. Corn pollen, weighted with wishes, collected in my hair, on the palms of my upturned hands, on the straps of my Birkenstock sandals, in a pale smudge on the fabric over my heart, a tasteless grain on my tongue. Tiny bundles of sage, tobacco, and cedar -- "these are our sacred herbs" -- were pressed against my forehead and placed in my hands. "Burn a bit of this cedar on your car lighter each morning as you set out to drive home. It will remind you of us," Annette's son James instructed me. One day later, in the interstate off-ramp wasteland of LeGrange, Kentucky, I sprinkled some cedar on the hot glow of the lighter, watched it fizzle to gray ash, inhaled deeply, and drove north.

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