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A NEW AND FAMILIAR POWER: THE RISE OF PENTECOSTALISM

AMONG THE BLACKFEET IN MONTANA, 1940-1975

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A New and Familiar Power: The Rise of Pentecostalism Among The Blackfeet in Montana, 1940-1975

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This thesis charts the rise of Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet in and around Browning, Montana on the Blackfeet Reservation from 1940 through 1975. The Pentecostal message was first brought to the Blackfeet around 1940 by white ministers with the Assemblies of God from nearby Cut Bank, Montana. By 1965 the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement was led entirely by Blackfeet ministers, leading to the proliferation of the Pentecostal message among the tribe. The Pentecostal movement made tremendous inroads among the Blackfeet because of its emphasis on receiving dramatic power from a divine source. This experience of divine empowerment was both new, yet familiar to Blackfeet people.

This essay describes how Pentecostalism took root among the Blackfeet in the mid-twentieth century, a time of increased poverty, significant population migration, and difficult political turmoil on the Blackfeet reservation. This thesis argues that Pentecostalism exploded among the Blackfeet because of its dual emphasis on practitioners regularly receiving supernatural power and the commissioning of new leaders through divine calling. The promulgation of Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet was aided by their participation in a robust pan-Indian Pentecostal network, a Native religious innovation, which helped link Native Pentecostals from across the northwestern United States in training and mentoring relationships.

This thesis elevates the Native voices of both Pentecostal practitioners and non-Pentecostal Blackfeet in relating the narrative of the rise of Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet. In addition to an analysis of the economic and political factors that led to the promulgation of Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet, this essay also compares some of the similarities between Pentecostalism and traditional Blackfeet religion. It explains how two generations of Blackfeet Pentecostal converts dealt differently with the tensions that developed between Pentecostalism and traditional Native ways.

Introduction

“That’s a story that needs to be told,” remarked Bill Old Chief, a former Blackfeet tribal councilman, when asked about the origins of the Pentecostal movement among the Blackfeet. His father, Grayson Old Chief, had followed Blackfeet traditional religion. He was a medicine bundle carrier and a Sun Lodge worshiper, but he rejected the bundles after he converted to Pentecostalism at a revival meeting. Describing the intensity of his father’s post-conversion fervor, Old Chief remarked, “My dad and the men would go out into the hills and pray till the sun came up. All the men back then would go into the hills to pray, then come back to eat and rest, and then go back up in the hills to pray and seek the Lord. They saw miracles first hand.”¹

Old Chief is one of the descendants of the many Blackfeet men and women who in the mid-twentieth century began following a new form of Christianity introduced into the tribe: Pentecostalism.² Pentecostals are defined by a belief in the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues, physical healing, and prophecy. Pentecostalism’s origins in the United States are often traced back to 1906 and an interracial holiness church located on Azusa Street in Los Angeles.³ From these meetings, known as the Azusa Street Revival, Pentecostals scattered all over the nation and the world sharing the Pentecostal message and establishing churches. Just over one hundred years later, it is estimated that there are between four hundred

¹ Bill Old Chief, Interview by Author, Phone, March 5, 2016.

² The term “Pentecostal,” and its various derivatives, comes from the Biblical narrative of Acts ch. 2, detailing the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus’ disciples on the day of Pentecost following Jesus’ reported death, resurrection and ascension. This outpouring resulted in the disciples “speaking in tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). The Jewish festival of Pentecost is so named because it occurred fifty days after Passover.

³ For more on Pentecostalism see: Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

million to six hundred million Pentecostal practitioners worldwide, second numerically in Christianity only to the number of Catholic adherents.⁴

Pentecostalism began to spread into Indian populated lands in the 1910s and 1920s, especially in the southern and western United States, including the Crow Reservation in Montana in the late 1920s.⁵ Pentecostalism first made inroads among the Blackfeet Indians in the early 1940s, by way of white ministers with the Assemblies of God. These men met in the homes of various Blackfeet people in and around Browning, Montana, the main town on the Blackfeet Reservation, located on the east side of Glacier National Park. The early house gatherings involved classic Pentecostal practice: vibrant times of worship, prayer for healing, and in-depth teaching about the Bible and Pentecostal belief. A small group of Blackfeet converted to the Pentecostal message and together they built the first Pentecostal church in Browning in 1948 with logs culled from trees cut down in the nearby mountains.

This effort was soon mired in controversy after a Blackfeet man accused the pastor of the new log church of finagling the deed to his property into the hands of the Assemblies of God. The effects of this dispute led to the proliferation of Pentecostalism, as future key converts to Pentecostalism would decide to strike out on their own versus joining in with the Assemblies of God congregation meeting in the log church. A young Blackfeet man named Earl Old Person started the first indigenous-led Pentecostal church among the Blackfeet in the fall of 1954, after witnessing the powerful healing of a family friend. It was quite a year for Old Person, as a few months earlier the Blackfeet people elected him to the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, the governing body for the Blackfeet tribe. Only twenty-five years old, Old Person became the

⁴ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

⁵ Mark Clatterbuck, "Healing Hills and Sacred Songs: Crow Pentecostalism, Anti-Traditionalism, and Native Religious Identity," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Volume 12, Number 2 (Fall 2012): 253, Project MUSE.

youngest person ever elected to the Blackfeet Tribal Council. A gifted orator and an influential leader, Old Person would later in 1978 be appointed as the honorary lifetime Chief of the Blackfeet Nation.

The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council election of 1954 was called the “most important election in [Blackfeet] history,” by the *Glacier Reporter*, the local newspaper in Browning.⁶ These elections signaled a shift in the political winds of the tribe, as the often marginalized older traditionalists among the Blackfeet made an electoral push to gain a stronger voice in the tribe’s governance. The shifting politics of 1954 mirrored the rise of the new Blackfeet-led Pentecostal church, as Old Person’s church was mostly made up of the same older, traditional Blackfeet people who had pushed for increased power in the 1954 election. These Blackfeet Pentecostals spoke very little English, so Old Person often spoke the Blackfeet language at most of the meetings.

In 1959, Old Person invited a Pentecostal evangelist from the Crow tribe named Tom Tobacco to hold a series of revival meetings in an old house in Starr School, a few miles northwest of Browning. From these revival meetings attended by hundreds of Blackfeet people, the Pentecostal message exploded among the tribe, leading to the future commissioning of dozens of Blackfeet Pentecostal ministers, the founding of over ten new Pentecostal churches, and the saturation of the Blackfeet reservation with the Pentecostal message.

This thesis argues that the Pentecostal movement took root among the Blackfeet tribe in Montana in the mid-twentieth century because Pentecostalism offered Blackfeet people, steeped in traditional ways and often fluent in the Blackfeet language, access to a new, yet familiar, type of spiritual power. This new, yet familiar, power gave many Blackfeet a fresh form of hope during the 1940s and 1950s, a season of intense economic hardship, significant population

⁶ “Cullen’s Proposal is Rejected,” *Glacier Reporter*, June 18, 1954.

migration, and growing political conflict on the Blackfeet reservation. This essay also contends that the traditional Blackfeet people who originally converted to Pentecostalism cultivated a nuanced identity, viewing Pentecostalism's emphasis on accessing supernatural power through the lens of traditional Blackfeet religion, beliefs and practices which were quite familiar to the first generation of Pentecostal converts. By seeing Pentecostalism through the lens of traditional Native religion these more-traditional Blackfeet converts were able to re-enact some of the healing components found in former traditional Blackfeet ways, but in new forms marked by Pentecostalism.

This essay further argues that even though Pentecostalism took root among the tribe when older more-traditional Blackfeet first converted to Pentecostalism, the movement radically expanded numerically after a younger group of Blackfeet, less familiar with traditional ways and the Blackfeet language, converted to Pentecostalism in the 1960s and 1970s. These younger, less-traditional Blackfeet, often fluent only in English, adopted an identity more rooted in their Pentecostal conversion. They viewed traditional Blackfeet practices with more suspicion than their Pentecostal predecessors; viewing most Native practices through their familiarity with Pentecostalism versus the way the early Pentecostal converts viewed Pentecostalism through their familiarity with Native traditional practices. Although this younger second wave of Pentecostal converts were often wary of many aspects of Blackfeet traditional ways, they were also simultaneously attracted to Pentecostal forms of leadership calling and ministry training because these Pentecostal practices were similar to historical Native forms of leadership calling and ministry training.

This thesis will also show that the origins and expansion of Pentecostalism among the tribe mirrored the political realities occurring among the Blackfeet people during the mid-

twentieth century, as older, traditional Blackfeet often struggled politically against the influence of younger, less-traditional Blackfeet. These tensions most often played out in the contentious political wrangling surrounding the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council. Although the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement would become more of an expressly political force in the decades after the focus of this study, namely the 1990s and 2000s, this thesis will reveal that the Pentecostal movement among the Blackfeet from 1940 through 1975 was not merely a spiritual movement of renewal and hope for Blackfeet people but also an alternative method for Blackfeet men to gain leadership status and a sense of self-determination versus relying on the Tribal Council, the only other significant outlet for Native leadership and self-governance available to Blackfeet men at the time.

This thesis will add to recent efforts by historians to identify Native American self-agency in the rise and promulgation of various Christian movements.⁷ Beginning in the 1960s, political and social historians like Bernard Sheehan, Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., Francis Jennings, and James Axtell began to accurately document the oppressive colonial tactics used by the U.S. government against Native Americans, like allotment policies, the use of boarding schools, and Indian re-location programs.⁸ During the 1970s, but especially in later decades, scholars of religion like Howard L. Harrod and George E. Tinker joined with their other academic

⁷ For examples see: Angela Tarango, *Choosing the Jesus Way: American Indian Pentecostals and the Fight for the Indigenous Principle* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Andrea Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Kirk Dombrowski, *Against Culture: Development, Politics and Religion in Indian Alaska* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins, eds., *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2003); James Treat, ed., *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁸ For Examples see: Bernard Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974); Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian* (New York: Knopf, 1978); Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975); James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

colleagues by exploring the devastating effects various Protestant and Catholic missionaries, usually working for or alongside the U.S. government colonial project, enacted upon Native peoples as they endeavored to spread Christianity to the original inhabitants of the American continent.⁹

Tinker, an Osage/Cherokee scholar, documents missionary efforts across North America in general, while Harrod, a specialist in Blackfeet history, focuses on the various Christian mission endeavors carried out among the Blackfeet people of Montana in particular. While their research is impeccable and their arguments beneficial to the historical field, they, along with many other religious scholars, have emphasized the colonial aspects of the Christian mission among Native peoples to such a degree that they often ignore or lump important aspects of Native responses to Christianity into their overarching colonialistic narrative. Tinker reinforces this type of analysis in his book *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* when he claims that even when Native people enter into Christian leadership positions they are almost always being co-opted into participation in a colonialistic enterprise, “While many denominations have successfully developed something of indigenous leadership, the actual power, which ultimately determines how Indian people will interpret Christianity and how they will function as churches, is almost always a white authority structure.”¹⁰ While the existence of indigenous Christian leadership or indigenous-led churches do not automatically mean that colonialistic influences have been severed, scholars like James Treat argue that colonial

⁹ For Examples see: George E Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis, MN: fortress Press, 1993); Howard L. Harrod, *Mission Among the Blackfeet*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); William McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries: 1789-1839* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); Donald A. Grinde, Jr., *The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1977); Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988, originally published in 1969).

¹⁰ George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 117.

narratives, like those advanced by Tinker and Harrod, can often have the effect of distorting or marginalizing the diverse ways in which many Native Christians, especially those in leadership, have created new innovations into Christianity or even used Christianity as an agent of change to push back against colonialism. Treat forcefully contends that “to dismiss all native Christians as acculturated, anachronistic traces of religious colonialism, is to miss innumerable demonstrations of their insightful historical and social analysis, their complex and sophisticated religious creativity, and...to deny their human agency, their religious independence, and ultimately their very lives.”¹¹

This thesis attempts to push past a purely colonial narrative of what outsiders have done to Native Americans by documenting how Blackfeet Pentecostals expressed *their own* religious identity, and the effects this expression of Native self-agency had on their communities and their understanding of themselves. This essay builds on the work of two recent historians, Angela Tarango and Andrea Smith, who examined Indian Pentecostals and Native Christian activists in the United States. Tarango documents how Native Pentecostals, primarily in the American Southwest, used the philosophical force behind the “Indigenous Church Principle” to demand more representation and resources within the Assemblies of God.¹² In a similar vein, Smith argues that Native activists, many of whom identify as Christian, have appropriated power in the political arena in compelling and strategic ways. Smith shows how Native activists have courted unlikely alliances with conservatives in their geographical regions to form potent new blocs of political power. She argues that historians have understudied both Native activists and

¹¹ James Treat, “Introduction: Native Christian Narrative Discourse” in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 10.

¹² Tarango identifies the “Indigenous Church Principle” as a missions philosophy originating in the 1800s and promulgated among various smaller Christian denominations, especially the Assemblies of God, which mandated that all missionary efforts should exist *only* to build up the indigenous church to be self-led, self-financing, and self-proselytizing. Angela Tarango, *Choosing the Jesus Way: American Indian Pentecostals and the Fight for the Indigenous Principle* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 31-40.

evangelical Christians to such a degree that their successful political efforts and methods are either misunderstood or simply ignored.¹³

Tarango, writing in 2014, claims that research into Native Pentecostals is such an understudied field “that I found myself alone, in the void.”¹⁴ She identifies her book as part of a movement of “new scholarship, much of it undertaken by young scholars of American religion [that] posits that Native Christians often found autonomy and power within Christianity.”¹⁵ This thesis will emphasize the inclusion of Native Christian voices while also uncovering examples of Native self-agency and Native Christian identity formation found in both Tarango’s and Smith’s work. This essay will add to their work by also including an analysis of the connections between the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement and traditional Native ways; these similarities include a shared emphasis on receiving radical power by supernatural means, the establishment of leadership positions by means of visions and dreams, and participation in systems of information sharing and leadership training more familiar to Native ways. These similarities helped Blackfeet Pentecostals embrace and express their identity as both Native and Pentecostal. In addition the Blackfeet Pentecostal converts embraced participation in a robust pan-Indian network, a uniquely Native Pentecostal innovation, which helped to promulgate the Pentecostal message across the tribe, while also serving as a mechanism for training and launching a new generation of Blackfeet Pentecostal leadership.

Although a few historians, like Harrod, have examined Christianity in general among the Blackfeet people, only one scholar has attempted to document Blackfeet Pentecostalism.

Thomas Eric Bates published a dissertation, “An Ethnohistory of Pentecostalism among the

¹³ Andrea Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), xxiii-xxiv, xxxii.

¹⁴ Tarango, *Choosing the Jesus Way*, 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

Blackfeet Indians of Montana,” in 2014.¹⁶ He wrote a version of events from an anthropological point of view, detailing a general timeline of Blackfeet Pentecostal history, and lightly exploring the integration of Pentecostal belief and Native identity. This thesis will go beyond Bates’ research by documenting a more detailed history of Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet, including an analysis of the Blackfeet economy and politics around the time that Pentecostalism took root and began to expand, exploring the relationship between Pentecostalism and Blackfeet traditional religion, and examining the pan-Indian traits in the Native Pentecostal movement which both strengthened and propagated Blackfeet Pentecostalism. This thesis will integrate the history of the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement into the larger body of historical research examining Native self-agency, Native identity formation, and Native religious re-invention in the United States.

The primary source material for my thesis comes from interviews with key participants in the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement as well as interviews with non-Pentecostal Blackfeet. Other sources include regional newspapers, government archives, published memoirs, and personal family documents. One of the main challenges in researching this thesis is the lack of Pentecostal church archival documents commonly found in many other types of Christian churches. Pentecostals in general, and Blackfeet Pentecostals in particular, often did not create or preserve archival material such as attendance records, financial documents, land and building purchase paperwork, or detailed lists of pastors, lay leaders and members. This thesis therefore relies heavily on interviews and memoirs.

Historians must be careful when using interviews as a main base of primary source material as people’s memories can be faulty. People will often remember events differently over

¹⁶ Thomas Eric Bates, “An Ethnohistory of Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet Indians of Montana” (PhD diss., Union Institute & University, 2014), ProQuest LLC.

time, especially if the events recalled have important ramifications for personal identity or a person's place in a particular community. Every effort has been made to cross check the events discussed in interviews and memoirs with available public records like government archives and newspapers.

The people interviewed for this thesis are often sharing about religious belief and practice, especially experiences with supernatural power like receiving physical healing or having a dramatic vision. This thesis will follow the lead of the religious historian Robert A. Orsi, who advocated for taking people at their word when discussing religious belief rather than allowing rational bias or scholarly perspective to curtail people's discussion of the supernatural. "People do not simply act, of course; they attempt to understand and narrate themselves as actors," contends Orsi, "So the study of lived religion includes the work of social agents/actors themselves as narrators and interpreters (and reinterpreters) of their own experience and histories..."¹⁷ Orsi's argument that we can best understand the religious belief and practice of people in the past when we document their beliefs as they describe them and live them out in practice, what Orsi calls "lived religion," undergirds this thesis.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge a caution elicited by Andrea Smith in her book *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances*. She states that, "to fully understand, to 'know,' Native peoples is the manner in which the dominant society gains a sense of mastery and control over them. As a result, researchers have not often asked such questions as 'Do Native people want others to know about them?' and 'Do Native communities find this research helpful?'"¹⁸ There is a tension present in this thesis between sharing the story of Blackfeet Pentecostals, who forged a counter-narrative to the typical colonial

¹⁷ Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* 3rd Ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), xxxviii-xxxix.

¹⁸ Smith, *Native Americans*, xxii-xxiii.

religious histories we often read, and using Blackfeet voices and experiences for a scholarly end goal that ultimately subjects the Native people who show up in this thesis to the colonialism-tainted enterprise previous historians have documented so well. This is not an easy tension to navigate, but scholars like Tarango and Smith have charted a helpful path for discovering and examining Native Christian self-agency. This thesis attempts to follow their lead by acknowledging the heavy handed colonialism employed against Native peoples in the past and present, while also emphasizing Native responses to colonialism which often push back against colonialism in ways that are sometimes subtle and often surprising.

Chapter 1: Early Seeds of Blackfeet Pentecostalism (1940-1954)

It must have been quite a spectacle in the spring of 1948 as the logs of the first Pentecostal church in Browning, Montana, were slowly assembled together. The people of Browning had seen other church buildings go up, the beautiful stone work of the Little Flower Catholic Church or the large white walls of the Methodist Church a few blocks away, but what probably impressed many of the people watching the construction of the log church was that it was not just Blackfeet doing the work, but Blackfeet leading the work as well. The log church started as a vision given to Tom Jackson, a Blackfeet man, who felt God told him to build a Pentecostal church on his land. Many other Blackfeet Pentecostal converts, stirred by the idea, partnered together with Jackson to cut down trees from the surrounding mountains, painstakingly strip the bark, and assemble the logs into a thirty foot by forty foot square building which became the iconic church representing Blackfeet Pentecostals for the next thirty years. By the time the log church was moved out of Browning on the back of a diesel truck in 1975, Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet in Montana had exploded from a fledgling group of twenty to thirty people to a mass movement of significance with hundreds of Blackfeet counting themselves as Pentecostals and numerous Blackfeet-led churches dotting the landscape of the community.

The origins of the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement began about eight years before the construction of the log church. Around 1940, Jack Edgar, a white minister from the Assembly of God church in Cut Bank, Montana, began visiting Blackfeet families in and around Browning; praying with them and teaching them about Pentecostalism. From 1942-1944, Eugene Born, the next pastor of the A/G church in Cut Bank continued Edgar's practice, but Born expanded the

visits into prayer meetings, where multiple families would gather together.¹⁹ Edgar and Born found a welcoming audience among the various Blackfeet families they visited, as many of them were willing to embrace not only the unique message, but also the exuberant worship style that marked many Pentecostal meetings. “Those two went around to every community on the reservation, holding services, house meetings,” described James Boy, an early Blackfeet convert to Pentecostalism, “They carried with them one of those old-time wind-up phonographs, and that’s how we learned the hymns...I liked the way that they worshiped, the way they sang and clapped their hands, that drew us...we found it to be really happy.”²⁰

These home visits were the early seeds of a Pentecostal movement that grew to be a powerful force on the Blackfeet Reservation especially in and around Browning.²¹ In the early 1940s the Blackfeet people were struggling under the weight of consistent poverty and pervasive unemployment. These early converts were willing to embrace the new form of hope offered by Pentecostalism, which promised supernatural power to its practitioners. This type of supernatural power reminded many of the early Blackfeet converts of how individuals had received supernatural power in the glorious past of the Blackfoot Confederacy, a past marked by strength and prosperity rather than struggle and poverty.

For over two hundred years, the Blackfoot Confederacy dominated a massive land area encompassing the eastern two thirds of the modern state of Montana and significant territory north of the Montana border in modern day Canada as well. The Blackfoot Confederacy was

¹⁹ Harry S. Garrett, “A History of the Montana District Council of the Assemblies of God” (Thesis, Western Evangelical Seminar, 1960), 44, http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/wes_theses/17.

²⁰ An interview with James Boy recorded in *The Blackfeet Papers*. Adolf Hungry-Wolf, *The Blackfeet Papers - Volume Four: Pikunni Biographies* (Browning, MT: The Blackfeet Heritage Center & Art Gallery, 2006), 996.

²¹ During the time period covered in this thesis (1945-1975) there were about 6,200 registered Blackfeet people nationwide, with about 4,000 Blackfeet living on the reservation - “Press Predicts Bright Future for Blackfeet,” *Glacier Reporter*, Sept. 16, 1955. This study is primarily focused on Browning and the immediate surrounding areas but the conclusions of this essay will be considered as applying to the whole of the reservation, because by 1940 Browning had become the epicenter of political and cultural life on the reservation.

made up of four distinct tribal groups: the Kainah (Bloods), Siksika (Northern Blackfoot), Northern Piegan, and the Southern Piegan. The first three tribal divisions currently reside mostly in Canada, while the Southern Piegan, or Pikuni, live in Montana, in the United States. The Southern Piegan, referred to as ‘Blackfeet’ in the United States, are the subject of this essay.²²

The Blackfeet maintained their vast territory by keeping relentless pressure on the tribes surrounding them through fierce, surprise attacks, often by small bands of male warriors, to obtain enemy horses and supplies. The Salish, Kootenai, Nez Perce, Shoshone and Crow all lived in a constant state of wary vigilance against Blackfeet insurgencies into their territory.²³ Since the early 1700s when European fur traders first started encroaching on their land, the Blackfeet used violent force to keep most of their territory free from white intrusion. In 1837, a terrible outbreak of small pox, carried by newly arriving Americans, decimated the tribe. Almost two-thirds of the entire Blackfeet population, around 6,000 individuals, perished in the epidemic.²⁴ By the mid-nineteenth century, with the Blackfeet reeling from the devastating effects of the small pox epidemic, and American trappers, settlers, and miners poured into the southern and eastern sections of Blackfeet territory, pursuing lucrative furs, setting up farming homesteads, and seeking to find gold. Envoys of the United States government soon followed, backed by an intimidating military force, which rapidly built forts throughout the area.

In the late 1800s the U.S. government initiated a series of treaty arrangements with various Plains tribes, including the Blackfeet. These treaties, negotiated at times with only a portion of the Blackfeet tribe represented, slowly reduced the boundaries of Blackfeet land.

²² The term ‘Blackfeet’ is thought to have originated from the color of the moccasins of this tribe because of the soil color in the north of their territory, or from the black getting on their moccasins after walking through the remains of various brush fires. Adolf Hungry-Wolf, *The Blackfeet Papers – Volume One: Pikunni History and Culture* (Browning, MT: The Blackfeet Heritage Center & Art Gallery, 2006), 14.

²³ John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

Even with the loss of almost half of their territory, the Blackfeet were still mostly self-sufficient up through the 1870s because of their ability to hunt the vast herds of bison grazing in their remaining territory, providing the tribe with large quantities of food, clothing, and shelter. The bison herds suddenly vanished in the early 1880s, after an American-initiated season of excessive buffalo hunting for profit and pleasure. The loss of the buffalo had tragic consequences for the Blackfeet tribe as hundreds of Blackfeet starved to death during the difficult winter of 1883.²⁵

By the late nineteenth century, the Blackfeet, now in a state of almost utter dependence on the U.S. government for food and provisions, were confined by law to a 1.5 million acre reservation, a fraction of the size of their original territory fifty years earlier. Under President Ulysses S. Grant's "peace policy," the U.S. also instituted policies aimed at eradicating Native culture and religion; with the goal of assimilating Native people quickly into the dominant American culture that surrounded them. The U.S. government recruited various religious institutions to help enact U.S. assimilation policies by inviting various churches to help choose the Indian Agent, who governed each reservation, and by funding these same religious groups to educate Indians in special boarding schools. In the late 1870s, the U.S. government declared the Blackfeet reservation the purview of the Methodist church and entrusted the Methodist leadership with the tasks of both recommending the reservation's Indian Agent and educating Blackfeet youth. The government assigned the Blackfeet reservation to the Methodist church, even though Catholic missionaries had been working with the Blackfeet since the 1840s, including building numerous churches and schools around the reservation.²⁶ Many Blackfeet

²⁵ Ibid., 294.

²⁶ Howard L. Harrod, *Mission Among the Blackfeet*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 68.

consider themselves Catholic even up to present times, because of the early influence of Catholicism among the tribe.

Both the Catholic boarding schools and the government funded Methodist boarding school had strict rules governing Blackfeet students, including forcing Blackfeet children to cut their hair short, restricting students from speaking the Blackfeet language, and severely disciplining children for a violation of any of the many rules. These boarding schools often had numerical quotas they needed to reach, and would utilize the police power of the Indian Agent to reduce the rations given out to parents who were reluctant to send their children to the boarding schools or even arrest students who left the boarding schools without permission. After several decades of boarding school education many Blackfeet could no longer speak the Blackfeet language and many Blackfeet lost the knowledge of important elements of Blackfeet history and culture.²⁷

In 1934, the U.S. government passed the Indian Re-Organization Act (IRA), an attempt to reverse the government assimilation policies of the previous sixty years. The IRA gave tribes the right to enact a new level of self-determination through the formation of elected tribal governments as organized business entities; still subject to U.S. government oversight. The Blackfeet elevated the representative elected body the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council (BTBC) to be the new governmental entity representing the tribe. The Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), which had previously made most of the important decisions for the tribe remained a fixture on the reservation, but their role was supposed to transform into more of an advisory

²⁷ Leroy Old Man Chief described how his grandmother, a full-blood Blackfeet woman, grew up in a Catholic boarding school. She “often snuck in the basement of the mission to talk Blackfeet with the other children,” but they had to be very quiet “because the nuns were sleeping right above them and they could be very mean.” Leroy Old Man Chief, Interview by Author, In Person, April 6, 2016.

body helping the BTBC.²⁸ After the IRA, the Blackfeet people began to make important decisions through their tribal government, but the BTBC found it difficult to have the necessary information needed to make educated decisions about many of the problems facing the tribe: unemployment, health care, and education. The OIA still controlled the flow of important information and did not seem willing to empower the BTBC to navigate through many of the new economic opportunities and challenges the Blackfeet were encountering.²⁹

By the middle of the twentieth century, many Blackfeet felt tremendous tension about all the difficult issues surrounding them. In the midst of this tension, Pentecostalism started appearing in various places around the reservation. The Pentecostal message promoted the typical Christian message that a spiritual salvation could be obtained by a person through belief in Jesus Christ, but in addition to spiritual salvation, Pentecostalism also promised the reception of supernatural gifts to its practitioners as well. Pentecostalism advanced the idea that every Christian could have an experience with the Holy Spirit that empowered the person in a new way marked by physical signs: an ability to spontaneously speak in unlearned languages, called speaking in tongues, the reception of revelations concerning future events, often called prophecy, the healing of diseases or infirmities, and uncontrollable bodily shaking or falling to the ground under the influence of divine power.³⁰

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is not linked exclusively to Christians labeled Pentecostals in the early twentieth century. Historical reports concerning various groups of Christians speaking in unlearned languages exist from the first weeks of the early church,

²⁸ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 323-324.

²⁹ Paul C. Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation, 1912-1954* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 281.

³⁰ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong, "Global Pentecostalism: An Introduction to an Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Amos Yong (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

narrated in the biblical book of Acts, up through the end of the nineteenth century.³¹ Even though groups of Christians claiming to speak in tongues emerged from time to time during the history of Christianity, these groups seldom coalesced into any type of lasting religious movement defined by this phenomenon. Early in the twentieth century a small group of eager religious seekers experienced the phenomenon of speaking in tongues after an all night prayer meeting near Topeka, Kansas. However, unlike previous groups of Christians, this group of ‘tongue talkers’ became the catalyst for a worldwide movement, labeled Pentecostalism, which continues to expand numerically. The impetus for this small group to become a lasting religious movement, contrary to the historical experience of earlier groups of Christians who similarly spoke in tongues, seems to lie in the theological innovation of the eccentric white minister who led the Topeka prayer group.

Charles Parham was an itinerant preacher affiliated with various holiness movements scattered around the U.S. in the late 1800s. He became convinced that the empowerment referred to repeatedly in the New Testament as the ‘Baptism in the Holy Spirit’ was a verifiable experience. A true product of his modernist times, Parham hypothesized that a person could empirically prove that he or she had received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit by the physical evidence of the person speaking in tongues after the experience. In the year 1900, Parham gathered some zealous students together at a temporary Bible School he established in Topeka, Kansas. He asked the students to study the New Testament, especially the book of Acts, and determine themselves if indeed speaking in tongues could be *the* Biblical evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. After a period of intense study, all the students agreed with Parham’s assertion and together they began to pray earnestly to receive a verifiable experience with the Holy Spirit. On January 1, 1901, after praying all night, one of Parham’s students, Agnes

³¹ Allan Heaton Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 19-24.

Ozman, started speaking in tongues; a language they all guessed to be “the Chinese language.” Over the next few days many of the other students had similar experiences of speaking in tongues, including Parham himself “in the Swedish tongue.”³² Armed with this new evidentiary based theology, Parham and his students scattered all over the area proclaiming the tenants of their new teaching about the link between the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. It did not take long for Parham’s new message to spread around the nation and soon around the world.

Parham traveled to Houston, Texas, where he taught a new group of interested seekers his fresh theological innovation, including a black man in his thirties named William Seymour. Even though Parham, an ardent racist and segregationist, required Seymour to sit outside the classroom and listen through the doorway, the eager Seymour readily embraced Parham’s theory about speaking in tongues as the physical evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In February 1906, after the Houston teaching sessions ended, Seymour traveled to California to become the new preacher for a small church in Los Angeles. After a few weeks of sharing his theology concerning speaking in tongues, Seymour was surprised to find himself locked out of his new church by some of the key people in the congregation. A few sympathetic church members invited him to hold meetings at their homes instead. At these house gatherings, attended by both black and white Christians, some of those in attendance, including Seymour himself, began speaking in tongues. News about the group spread rapidly around Los Angeles and soon hundreds of interested people were showing up at the prayer meetings. After the porch of one house collapsed under the weight of the crowds gathered, Seymour moved the gatherings to an old livery stable located on Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles.³³

³² Ibid., 34-35.

³³ Ibid., 40-42.

Over a three year period from 1906 to 1909, thousands of people from the U.S. and even from around the world visited these meetings, which often lasted day and night, and were marked by sensational reports of people speaking in tongues, receiving healing, experiencing visions, shaking, shouting, falling down, singing while in trance-like states, and laying on the floor as if dead for long periods of time. In addition to the strange religious manifestations reported, the Azusa Street Revival, as historians would later label it, was also marked by an interracial quality uncommon in early twentieth century America. Both black leaders, like Seymour, and white leaders worked together to guide the Azusa Street meetings, while people of all colors mixed together in worship and prayer sitting on the benches or rolling on the floor. Seymour and the other leaders consistently challenged the thousands of people who cycled through the meetings to scatter around the nation and the world to share the news about their recently discovered access to power and supernatural gifts. Many people, inspired by their experiences at Azusa Street, traveled to far-flung towns and cities around the U.S., preaching on street corners, holding prayer meetings, and establishing Pentecostal churches.³⁴

It took thirty years for the Pentecostal message to make it from the Azusa Street Revival to the Blackfeet Reservation. It first came by way of regular visits to various Blackfeet homes by Jack Edgar and Eugene Born, white ministers with the Assemblies of God (A/G), one of the many Pentecostal denominations started in the afterglow of the Azusa Street Revival. These visits later turned into larger prayer gatherings, featuring times of prayer, singing and Pentecostal teaching, especially the promise that a person could receive supernatural power from God. Doris Born, the wife of Eugene Born, recorded that on one of Eugene's visits to the Blackfeet Reservation, he noticed "a boy that was critically ill. Gene prayed over him and in the next

³⁴ Ibid., 43.

weeks, while visiting the reservation, they found the boy running around, very healthy.”³⁵ This emphasis on supernatural healing certainly made an impression on the early Blackfeet listeners. By 1944 there were ten to twenty Blackfeet who identified as Pentecostal, individuals like James and Margaret Boy, Tom Jackson, Jim Bad Marriage, Peter Red Horn and Jess Black Weasel.³⁶

As the group grew, the Pentecostal believers moved out of homes and rented the old Presbyterian Church building in Browning, which had stopped meeting in 1939. They used the Presbyterian building from 1944 till 1948, when the log church was completed. During this time the Montana District Assemblies of God sent a succession of pastors to help lead the small congregation: Raymond Bache, Reverend Kindall, and a female pastor named Tessie Nelson. Each stayed for a short time, a year or two at most.³⁷ In the early months of 1948, as Tom Jackson began to encourage the members to build a new building to meet in out of logs from the mountains, Nelson moved away and the A/G sent Rolland Murphey to pastor the church. Murphey, like all the previous A/G ministers, was a white non-Native, but he ingratiated himself with the locals by learning to speak in the Native sign language; impressing quite a few older Blackfeet in the community.³⁸

In the spring of 1948, Jackson, with the help of a group of Blackfeet men and Pastor Murphey, cut down trees from behind the East Glacier Park Lodge. Many Blackfeet women, along with Murphey’s wife Ethel, spent numerous days scraping bark from the logs. Together

³⁵ “Eulogy for Doris Marie Born,” Born family collection, Document in the possession of Author.

³⁶ Hungry-Wolf, *The Blackfeet Papers - Volume Four*, 996.

³⁷ Garrett, “A History,” 44. Although the work of pastoring a small church on a reservation with a difficult economic situation was certainly challenging, it was also quite common for Pentecostal pastors in this era to only minister in a community for a few years before moving on to another community. In a short survey of Montana A/G pastors during the 1940s & 1950s, the average stay appears to be only about 2.5 years. The MT A/G Superintendent encouraged pastors at the 1958 Montana District Council gathering of MT A/G pastors that “a longer term of pastoring would encourage our churches numerically and financially.” Garrett, “A History,” 101.

³⁸ Robert Bryant (later A/G pastor in Browning), Interview by Author, In Person, April 19, 2016.

the Blackfeet Pentecostal believers assembled the church building piece by piece.³⁹ The new church building, at the corner of 1st Street S.W. and 2nd Ave S.W., near the center of Browning, was affectionately known around town as the Log Church or Log Assembly. Although the building was erected and Pentecostal believers could now meet there regularly, the inside of the building remained unfinished.

In the months after the completion of the log church, a conflict arose between Jackson and Murphey concerning the ownership of the land on which the log church sat. This dispute would play a pivotal role in the expansion of Blackfeet Pentecostalism, as future Blackfeet Pentecostal leaders, hearing about Jackson's grievance, chose to start their own churches rather than join in with the Assemblies of God log church. There is some discrepancy from sources concerning exactly how the conflict transpired and who was in the right or who was in error, but an historical attempt to reconstruct the dispute will give valuable insight into the challenges both Blackfeet Pentecostals and non-Native Pentecostals experienced as they attempted to work together in the new Pentecostal movement.

An article printed in 1975 in the *Glacier Reporter*, the local newspaper for Browning, reflected back on the building of the log church and indicated that Tom Jackson was the head contractor for the project. The article also stated that a man named Louis Night Gun "bought the knotty pine lumber for the interior walls and also the oil stove used for heating. The church group pledged and bought the ceiling."⁴⁰ Robert Bryant, the A/G pastor who succeeded Murphey as pastor of the A/G church in 1952, rejected the claims in the article that Night Gun bought the wood to finish the inside of the building or the claim that the church pledged money

³⁹ Hiram Upham (Blackfeet pastor), Interview by Author, In Person, April 4, 2016.

⁴⁰ "Log Church gives way to larger, modern building," *Glacier Reporter*, Oct. 9, 1975. Hiram Upham said he wrote this article for the newspaper from information he received directly from Tom Jackson. Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 4, 2016.

to buy the ceiling. Instead, Bryant claims that he spent much of his own money and many days of labor to complete the inside work. “I finished the church,” Bryant stated emphatically, “I spent hours and hours and hours...I chinked the walls...insulated it all and built walls in there...and sheet rocked the ceiling. I got one of the young Indians to help me put in the ceiling. We would do everything by hand. I bought the materials [myself].”⁴¹

According to a third account passed down to others, Jackson claimed that the inside of the church was finished with money financed by the Montana A/G District. In exchange for this financing, Pastor Murphey asked Jackson, on whose land the log church sat, to sign some papers acknowledging that the money to finish the inside came from the A/G. After signing these papers, Jackson discovered that the papers he signed were a transfer of property from Jackson to the Montana A/G District Council. Jackson was reportedly upset enough about this turn of events, he stopped going to the log church, even though it had been his vision and organization that had led to the construction of the building.⁴²

To further complicate the narrative, the Glacier County records show that Tom Jackson did not officially own the land on which the log church sat. The land passed between several hands before 1948. Originally the tract of land was allotted to Sophie Nequitte, a Blackfeet woman, who the records indicate was a widow. She was officially allotted the land September 17, 1920, but before it was put into the records on May 11, 1921, her allotment had already been sold to Joseph H. Sherburne and recorded as such on May 9, 1921.⁴³ Sherburne’s name is strewn throughout the county land transaction records of the early twentieth century. Sherburne was a wealthy non-Native businessman who owned the main mercantile in Browning, where many Blackfeet took out credit to buy food and provisions. The county records indicate that Sherburne

⁴¹ Robert Bryant, Interview by Author, In Person, April 19, 2016.

⁴² Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 4, 2016.

⁴³ Glacier County Courthouse, Land Transaction Records, P-1-303; D-2-212.

later sold the plot of land to an individual named Little Young Man on November 7, 1931.⁴⁴ Not much is known about Little Young Man, but Gordon Monroe, a Blackfeet Pentecostal pastor who grew up going to the A/G log church, claims that Little Young Man was part of a Cree contingent living in and around Browning at the time. Monroe says Little Young Man was a consistent presence in and around the Pentecostal community, but that he also “liked to play the stick game,” a form of gambling popular in many Native communities.⁴⁵ Perhaps at some point Little Young Man sold the land to Jackson, but if this occurred Jackson did not formally update the ownership deed at the Glacier County offices with any information about their transaction.

On February 28, 1947, the Glacier County Treasurer confiscated the tract of land, which was still officially in Little Young Man’s name, for not paying the back taxes on the property. The unpaid taxes appear to have started accruing even before Little Young Man owned the land with the earliest unpaid taxes of \$0.48 being recorded in 1928. By 1947, the total unpaid tax bill appears to be \$52.54, a considerable sum for most Blackfeet residents in the tough economic conditions of the late 1940s.⁴⁶ After the county confiscated Little Young Man’s tract of land, the next transaction in the county records is the sale of the plot of land from Glacier County to The Montana District Council of the Assemblies of God on May 3, 1948 for a total of \$22.50.⁴⁷ This transaction date would have been during Rolland Murphey’s pastorate and just before or around the time that the log church was being constructed. Murphey may have travelled to visit the county office to inquire about securing the deed of land and found that, contrary to Jackson’s account, the land was not officially owned by Jackson, but rather by Glacier County. Even

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2QD-11-568.

⁴⁵ Gordon Monroe, Interview by Author, In Person, March 5, 2018.

⁴⁶ Glacier County Courthouse, Land Transaction Records, D-21-217.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2QD-23-139. This is the only sale amount we can document for this tract of land since its allotment in 1921. Montana does not require the sale price of land to be listed on the documents at the County Office, so often the documents list the sale price of the land as \$1.

though there are many examples of non-Natives using government entities to manipulate land sales for their own benefit on various reservations, Murphey certainly had nothing to do with the land being taken by the Glacier County treasurer since the confiscation of the land happened in 1947, before Murphey arrived in 1948. However, when Murphey informed Jackson that the Assemblies of God now legally owned the land, Jackson felt aggrieved. Perhaps Jackson was unwilling to record the land in his name with the county, or was unaware that the county had even confiscated the land from Little Young Man a year prior. But regardless of the particulars, Jackson clearly felt that Murphey and the A/G had been unjust toward him by either not offering to give the land back to him or by not remunerating him for his perceived loss. For many Blackfeet who were unaware of or unwilling to follow the formal legal systems of land transaction set up by the U.S. government, they often perceived that transactions with complicated narratives, like the one involving this tract of land, were simply bureaucratic ruses used by non-Native people to unfairly take Indian land and possessions. Whenever the story of Jackson's grievance was shared with Blackfeet people interviewed for this project, both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals alike immediately assumed that Jackson had been wronged. Several people cited other stories they knew of businessmen and religious institutions taking Blackfeet land through legal, yet dubious means.

The Montana District Assemblies of God archives do not contain any records for Browning from this time period that could help shed light on the exact details of when and how the Assemblies of God came into possession of the land and the log church.⁴⁸ However, in a thesis written in 1960 by Harry S. Garrett, a student at Western Theological Seminary in

⁴⁸ All of the Blackfeet Pentecostal churches cited in this study lacked useful archives. Even the Assemblies of God Montana District Council Office in Billings, MT only had records for the work in Browning dating back to 1993. The lack of Pentecostal archives has led many historians of Pentecostal movements to heavily rely on memoirs, newspaper accounts, and interviews.

Portland Oregon, Garrett makes numerous references to the “log church” in Browning. Citing a letter written to him in 1960 by Robert Bryant, the pastor in Browning at the time, Garrett writes that “a log church was started in 1947. This church was built largely by the local congregation. The lumber for this building was hewn by the men of the church from the forest in the nearby mountains.”⁴⁹ Referencing the minutes of the 1948 and 1950 annual A/G pastor gatherings called Montana District Councils, Garrett records that in 1948 “building projects were being started in...Browning...”⁵⁰ and in 1950 the report informed the pastors that “a new log church had been built at Browning, Montana, and also a jeep was purchased for use of the Browning Indian Reservation Assembly.”⁵¹

Later in his thesis, Garrett contradicts what he had written earlier about the construction of the log church. “[Murphey] pastored the church at Browning from 1948 to 1952,” writes Garrett, citing a letter sent to him by Murphey in 1959, “The church at Browning was constructed while he was there. Much of the work was done by Reverend Murphey.”⁵² Perhaps Garrett unwittingly gives us some insight into why Jackson was frustrated with Murphey and unable to reach any meaningful resolution concerning his grievance about the tract of land. In the letter Murphey sent to Garrett he certainly revealed a desire to recast history in a way that made his contributions to the construction of the log church in Browning look more impressive to others. In effect, Murphey marginalized the significant Native contributions involved in the building of the log church, which by all other accounts had been envisioned and carried out by the Blackfeet Pentecostals themselves, and placed himself as the central figure who made the log church possible. Perhaps his inability to bring a satisfying resolution to Jackson’s grievance

⁴⁹ Garrett, “A History,” 44.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 68.

revolved around Murphey's unwillingness to share recognition with Jackson for the log church's origin.

The true history of what transpired between Jackson and Murphey may be forever lost to history, but we do know that Jackson felt angry enough with how Murphey and the A/G came into possession of the land and the log church that he left the A/G church and widely shared his grievance around the community. Jackson's disillusionment would play an integral role in the future expansion of the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement as two future key Pentecostal converts, familiar with the rumors about Jackson and the log church, started their own Pentecostal churches rather than join in with the Assemblies of God log church. This surge of Blackfeet Pentecostal leadership transformed the Pentecostal community from a fledgling group on the margins of Blackfeet society into a mass movement making a powerful and permanent mark among the Blackfeet tribe.

Chapter 2: Blackfeet Pentecostalism Explodes (1954-1965)

When Robert Bryant followed Rolland Murphey as pastor of the Browning Assembly of God in 1953, only twenty to thirty adult Blackfeet considered themselves Pentecostal, attending either the log church or home prayer meetings. A few of the Blackfeet who were attending the log church at this time were: “Joe and Tom No Runner, Francis Red Horn, Cecile Big Beaver, James and Margaret Boy, Louis Night Gun, Takes Gun’s, Old Chiefs, Still Smoking’s, Agnes and Alfred Wells, Running Fisher’s, [and] Sydney Wolf Talk.”⁵³

In 1954, the dramatic healing of a Blackfeet woman named Louise White Grass became the catalyst for a Pentecostal wave that would soon wash over the reservation. White Grass had been unable to eat for quite some time. Her mysterious malady, most likely gall stones, led to her body wasting away; her bones visibly protruding from beneath her skin. In the late summer of 1954, she and a small group of other Blackfeet headed to a large Pentecostal revival meeting in Spokane, Washington, led by Oral Roberts.⁵⁴

Roberts, who claimed to be part Cherokee Indian, had begun to gain an extensive following among Christians because of his unique ministry methods. He traveled around the U.S. and Canada holding large religious gatherings he called “crusades” under a massive tent that could seat up to 12,000 people. These crusades featured a lengthy time of worship, followed by Roberts’ inspirational preaching, usually about faith in Jesus and God’s power to heal. Roberts would then sit on a folding chair set up on the front edge of the stage and pray for the physical healing of anyone who came forward for prayer by laying his hand on each person’s

⁵³ Bates, “An Ethnohistory,” 73.

⁵⁴ A large ad appeared in the *Glacier Reporter* on August 21, 1958 with the title “Oral Roberts Special Services for Indians Only.” These special services took place in Fort McLeod, Alberta, Canada near the Blackfeet Reservation on a subsequent trip to the area after the 1954 Spokane Crusade.

head as they crossed in front of the stage. Long lines of people desiring for Roberts to pray over them would often snake throughout the large tent.⁵⁵

White Grass claimed to experience healing after Roberts prayed for her. Her body showed the signs of healing by gaining weight and news about her spread all around the reservation. Earl Old Person, a young Blackfeet man recently elected to the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, was profoundly moved by White Grass' healing. He had grown up Catholic, but had recently converted to Pentecostalism after attending a Pentecostal revival service in Tacoma, Washington. Inspired by Robert's prayer of healing over White Grass, Old Person, along with another Blackfeet Pentecostal named Louie Yellow Wolf, started holding regular Pentecostal meetings in various homes around Browning. Old Person's house church became the first Blackfeet-led Pentecostal church on the reservation.⁵⁶

Old Person's house meetings attracted many full-blood traditional Blackfeet people. Most of the forty to fifty people who attended his meetings could not speak English very well. Old Person, who was fluent in both Blackfeet and English, would often speak in both languages so everyone in attendance could participate.⁵⁷ In 1959, Old Person moved his church to a permanent building about seven miles northwest of Browning in an area called Starr School, on land owned by the family of Louise White Grass. The family had just built a new house with money gained from a gas lease on their land. They invited Old Person to hold his church meetings in their former house. The house, down along the brush filled banks of Cut Bank Creek, had held numerous Blackfeet traditional religious ceremonies over the years, including the opening of various medicine bundles. Its discreet location offered plenty of privacy from

⁵⁵ Keith Schneider, "Oral Roberts, Fiery Preacher, Dies at 91," *New York Times*, December 15, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/16/us/16roberts.html>

⁵⁶ Bates, "An Ethnohistory," 75-76.

⁵⁷ Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 6, 2016

prying eyes so participants could carry out the elaborate and often lengthy traditional Blackfeet ceremonies. Blackfeet traditional religious practice had been deemed illegal in past eras by governmental authorities and even when not considered illegal these practices were often still heavily discouraged.

To get the house ready for church meetings, some of those involved with Old Person's church like Edward Little Plume (Red Man), Louie and Ella Yellow Wolf, Virginia (White Grass) Old Person, Louise White Grass, and Tom Yellowfoot busily cleaned the house, built a small stage and podium, and painted the inside of the house. During one of these times a strange, strong wind roared through the building, causing everyone to take cover. As they huddled near the floor Louie Yellow Wolf encouraged everyone to gather at the stage and pray in tongues. As they followed his instructions the strong wind subsided. Some of the Pentecostal believers attributed this strange wind to be "a contrary spirit of Indian religion once performed regularly in the house [that] had come against the Pentecostals," but following the dramatic experience they now "felt the house was sanctified for the Holy Spirit's use."⁵⁸ They named their new church building the District Full Gospel Church.

Paul Old Chief's house on South Piegan Street, halfway between 3rd and 4th Avenue, had been one of the last homes that Old Person's church met in before moving to the permanent building out in Starr School. Old Chief was an example of the type of Blackfeet person that Old Person's church attracted. Old Chief had been steeped in Blackfeet traditional ways, including setting up numerous Sun Dance lodges, a role learned through detailed instructions passed down orally from his elders.⁵⁹ Like Old Chief, Old Person himself was also steeped in traditional

⁵⁸ Bates, "An Ethnohistory," 79.

⁵⁹ Hungry-Wolf, *The Blackfeet Papers – Volume Four*, 1504-1505. The Sun Dance, called Okan by the Blackfeet, is an annual summer event lasting several days and attended by most of the tribe. It is a celebration of the Sun, believed by anthropologists to have been passed to the Blackfeet by other tribes on the Great Plains. Many

Blackfeet ways. He had been taught many of the traditional practices by his grandfather Bear Medicine and his father Juniper Old Person. His grandfather often hosted various traditional ceremonies, like the opening of the Medicine Pipe bundle, in his home, while Old Person looked on.⁶⁰

There are some distinct similarities between Pentecostalism and the traditional forms of Blackfeet religion that may have helped Blackfeet people steeped in traditional ways, like Old Person and Old Chief, feel that Pentecostalism was a new, yet familiar, power. Pentecostalism emphasized that people can receive supernatural power from the Holy Spirit, power that would help a person in a time of need or empower a person for a difficult mission. This Pentecostal emphasis on receiving power through a spiritual connection to the divine contains echoes of the emphasis in Blackfeet traditional religion on accessing power through a spirit-helper. According to Blackfeet scholar Rosalyn LaPier, “The Blackfeet believed they could alter, change, and control nature to suit their needs, and they did this with the assistance of supernatural allies.”⁶¹ In the Blackfeet tradition, a young man would go up into the hills and fast for four days and nights. During this time a spirit person, often in the form of an animal, would take pity on the young man and give him supernatural help by passing on to him sacred songs and instructing him on how to make specific physical symbols. These physical symbols, often smoking pipes or the skins of animals, were then collected by the young man, with the help of a more knowledgeable medicine man, and wrapped in a blanket held together by cords, forming a medicine bundle. Medicine bundles are to be opened only at special times. These opening ceremonies involve a complicated ritual where the sacred songs for each of the various objects

detailed rituals are involved in setting up a Sun Dance lodge, which then becomes the focal point of all the religious ceremonies and dancing for the duration of the event.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1252.

⁶¹ Rosalyn R. LaPier, *Invisible Reality: Storytellers, Storytakers, and the Supernatural World of the Blackfeet* (Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press, American Philosophical Society, 2017), xxxvii.

must be sung in a precise way as the objects are being unwrapped from the bundle.⁶² If the opening ceremony is performed correctly the owner of the bundle is then endowed with special power; power that will benefit him in a hunt, in battle, in raids or in leadership. In addition, and more importantly, the power received from the supernatural allies will also benefit the community as well and strengthen the tribe as a whole.⁶³

Another key similarity between Pentecostalism and Blackfeet traditional religion is the emphasis on visions and dreams. Visions are very important in Blackfeet traditional religion, as the person gaining help from a spirit person often receives their instructions from this helper through means of vision or in a dream during sleep. These visions offer the recipient aid from suffering, specific direction, and confirmation that the person is going in the right direction. In a similar way Pentecostal believers are often quick to share how specific dreams they have received from the Holy Spirit have brought comfort when under duress or how “a vision the Lord gave me” helped them with specific direction when they were struggling or confused.⁶⁴ These dreams and visions always come with the promise of supernatural strength for any future contingencies.

These similarities between Pentecostalism and traditional Blackfeet religion certainly made conversion to Pentecostalism more accessible for Blackfeet, like Old Person, who were familiar with traditional ways. After Old Person became a Pentecostal convert, he distanced himself from some of the more traditional religious elements of his upbringing, like medicine

⁶² Clayton Charlton Denman, “Cultural Change among the Blackfeet Indians of Montana,” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1968) 38-48. Denman contends that the power the spirit-person gives in a medicine bundle is connected more to the singing of the sacred songs than to the objects themselves.

⁶³ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 162-165.

⁶⁴ In many interviews Blackfeet Pentecostals mention dreams they have received. In two such interviews each person shared at least three different dreams they had received from God. They did not give the impression that receiving dreams or seeing visions, some containing an amazing level of detail, was unusual or should be questioned. For them, receiving dreams and seeing visions from the Holy Spirit was a normal part of life. Bill Old Chief, Interview by Author, In Person, April 5, 2016; Rayola Running Crane, Interview by Author, In Person, April 6, 2016.

bundle ceremonies, but unlike many of the later Blackfeet Pentecostal converts, less familiar with traditional ways, Old Person remained active in spreading the knowledge about traditional Blackfeet songs and stories, while faithfully leading a traditional Blackfeet dancing group.⁶⁵

Old Person and many of the other early Blackfeet Pentecostals, because they had been immersed in Blackfeet ways, language, and traditions from a young age, viewed their new Pentecostal experiences through the lens of what was already deeply familiar to them. After their conversion to Pentecostalism, they recast their old traditional religious ways as sincere, yet flawed. As an example, James Boy, one of the earliest Blackfeet Pentecostal converts, in an interview with Adolf Hungry-Wolf, talked with awe about the spiritual fervency of his elders, especially his adopted grandfather, Bird Rattle, who lived, taught and modeled traditional Blackfeet ways for James Boy. “My grandpa was always praying – anything that he did, he prayed about it,” described James Boy, “The old people I knew, they didn’t just perform their ceremonies on the weekends, or pray just at certain times. Everything they did was part of their prayers.”⁶⁶ Even though he admired his elders’ spiritual sincerity, James Boy also revealed that as a Pentecostal believer he struggled with the deeper meaning behind the prayers of his elders, “In my grandfather’s ways, they believe in every animal and every flying thing-birds, and all these I know he worshiped...I find a big difference in the two ways [his grandfather’s ways and Pentecostal ways].”⁶⁷ James Boy embraced the sincere spirituality of his elders, but felt that their worship had gone astray. He directed his main criticism of traditional Blackfeet religious practice at the younger practitioners in modern times, “As far as today’s traditional Blackfoot culture is concerned, I don’t believe in them. It seems that they are mostly just imitating

⁶⁵ *Glacier Reporter*, February 26, 1960. In a report from the Starr School area, the newspaper states that “Dancers, under the leadership of Earl Old Person will be part of an entertainment feature of the All-Indian tournament to be held March 3-5 in Browning.”

⁶⁶ Hungry-Wolf, *The Blackfeet Papers – Volume Four*, 993.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 996.

something that they don't really understand... what I saw those old people doing. Their real ways will never come back."⁶⁸

Jess Black Weasel, another Pentecostal convert who grew up immersed in Blackfeet traditional ways, captured the same sentiment held by James Boy concerning the sincerity of his elders in an interview he gave to Hungry-Wolf as well. "Those people of the past were much closer to their religion in daily life," explained Black Weasel about his ancestors, "The ones today may be quite serious about what they're doing, but it looks to us like something new...it's not the same, even if they say that they are doing their best."⁶⁹

These are two examples of the way many Blackfeet, knowledgeable in traditional ways, grafted Pentecostalism onto their previous understanding of Blackfeet traditional religion. They recast the ways their elders practiced traditional religion as sincere, yet flawed. This analysis of the past allowed them to admire their elders and to hold on to many of the traditional Blackfeet ways taught by their elders, while simultaneously distancing themselves from much of the Blackfeet traditional religious practices they observed occurring around them. Old Person, although twenty four years old at the time he started his church, was much more similar to the older, traditional Blackfeet Pentecostal converts who attended his church. Like them, Old Person became leery of practicing traditional Blackfeet religion, while still embracing most everything else considered part of Blackfeet traditional ways: Blackfeet language, stories, songs, dancing, etc...⁷⁰ In the next wave of Pentecostal growth, a younger generation of Blackfeet, who had not

⁶⁸ Ibid., 995.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 981.

⁷⁰ My assertion concerning how early Blackfeet Pentecostals navigated the tension between Pentecostalism and traditional ways has been influenced by Damien Costello, *Black Elk: Colonialism and Lakota Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005). Although at times Costello seems to devolve into an apologetic for Catholicism, his innovative analysis of Black Elks' conversion to Catholicism and his compelling conclusions in chapter three, "Traditionals and Christian Conversion," would be helpful for any historian trying to unravel the complicated interplay between belief and practice for Natives who have been immersed in traditional ways yet convert to Christianity even amidst the oppression of colonialism.

been immersed in Blackfeet ways, would deal with the tension between Pentecostalism and Blackfeet traditional culture in a much different form than the pattern set by Old Person and the first generation of Blackfeet Pentecostals.

In the fall of 1959, Old Person invited a prominent Crow Pentecostal named Tom Tobacco to come to his new church building in Starr School to speak at a series of multi-day meetings, often called “revivals” by Pentecostals. The Crow have had a rich history with Pentecostalism since 1927, when a small delegation of Crow visited Aimee Semple Mcpherson’s large Pentecostal church in Los Angeles. After this informative and inspirational visit, the Crow converts rapidly spread Pentecostalism among the tribe.⁷¹ The revival meetings with Tobacco, marked by supernatural healings and prophetic words, powerfully inspired the Blackfeet believers. They asked Tobacco to return again in January to hold more meetings. The people of Old Person’s church invited neighbors, friends, and relatives to come hear the unique Crow preacher. In January 1960, the church was filled to the brim each night of the two week revival, with over one hundred people packed into the meeting space. News about these revival meetings helped the Pentecostal message reverberate around the reservation.⁷²

Hiram Upham, an eighteen-year-old Blackfeet man, was one of the many people deeply affected by the January 1960 revival meetings with Tobacco. It was through Upham’s later ministry that Pentecostalism rapidly multiplied among the Blackfeet, with many Blackfeet men becoming Pentecostal leaders and numerous Pentecostal churches and ministries launching out of Upham’s church. Upham, who grew up Catholic, converted to Pentecostalism, after his brother Burl, who was married to a Nez Perce woman whose father was a Pentecostal pastor, slowly introduced the Pentecostal message to the whole Upham family. Hiram converted to

⁷¹ Clatterbuck, “Healing Hills,” 253.

⁷² Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 6, 2016.

Pentecostalism at the Assembly of God church in Lapwai, Idaho his brother attended. After Hiram returned to Browning, he started going regularly to the Assembly of God log church. In January after one of the services, a woman invited him to attend the revival meetings with Tom Tobacco taking place out at Old Person's church later that night. The revival meetings made a deep impression on Upham, "When I saw people dancing and speaking in tongues and falling on the floor, it was like putting on a glove, it just fit."⁷³

Keith Black Hawk, the leader of Tobacco's worship team, invited Upham, a talented guitar player, to play with the worship band each night during the revival. When the revival finished, Upham had been so powerfully touched by the experience, he asked Tobacco if he could travel with his group and play with the worship band at future revival meetings he had planned. Tobacco agreed and instructed Upham to meet him later in April, as they would be doing several revival services on various Indian reservations around the Northwest. Tobacco informed Upham that traveling the revival meeting circuit would be an amazing adventure but he also warned Upham that it would be difficult as well. "If we eat steak, then you'll eat steak," Upham recalled Tobacco telling him, but "if we eat bologna, then you'll eat bologna!"⁷⁴

Tobacco's visit to the Blackfeet Reservation became the catalyst for the explosion of Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet, but it also typified a unique Native innovation to Christianity, the creation of a pan-Indian Pentecostal network that both strengthened and perpetuated Native Pentecostal churches, while functioning as the main system for commissioning and training new Native leaders.⁷⁵ After Tobacco, other Crow Pentecostal

⁷³ Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 4, 2016.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 239. In her groundbreaking book Hertzberg argues that there were three main types of Pan-Indian networks operating in the middle of the twentieth century. The first type of Pan-Indian network was among "middle-class Indian elite who had left the reservation." The second type was between

ministers like Harold Stone and Harold Carpenter came regularly to the Blackfeet Reservation throughout the 1960s to minister to the Blackfeet. In addition to Crow ministers, Native Pentecostal preachers from the Fort Peck reservation, the Nez Perce tribe, the Blood and Blackfoot tribes north of the border, and even from as far away as Washington and Oklahoma came regularly to Browning to speak at revival services held by Old Person and Upham.⁷⁶ This pan-Indian Pentecostal network flowed in both directions, as Blackfeet Pentecostal ministers also began to travel to other tribes on a preaching circuit that snaked all around most of the northwestern United States.

From its inception as a movement, Pentecostalism had featured preachers traveling around in the same manner as the famous Methodist circuit riders of the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century. These itinerant speakers, often called “evangelists” in Pentecostal vernacular, were usually talented, dramatic communicators, charged with inspiring visitors in the crowd to become Pentecostal converts, while stirring converted Pentecostals to a revival of the intense emotions they had experienced in the earlier years of their conversion. These traveling preachers would also carry news from church to church about what was happening in the Pentecostal movement in other parts of the nation. Native Pentecostals emulated many of the same itinerant preaching methods of non-Native Pentecostals, but they also introduced a unique innovation into the typical Pentecostal traveling circuit system by

“Indians who had moved [away from the reservation] to towns and cities.” The third type of Pan-Indian network was made up of Indians still living on the reservation who belonged to religious movements. The Blackfeet Pentecostal movement would certainly fall into this third category.

⁷⁶ Two articles/ads in the *Glacier Reporter* highlight the Pan-Indian ministry present in the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement: “Three-day Minister’s Fellowship begins tomorrow,” *Glacier Reporter*, May 29, 1975. This article mentions J Swallow speaking at the Full Gospel Church, along with several others from “Washington, Idaho and Canada”; “Revival Fellowship Camp starts Sunday,” *Glacier Reporter*, July 10, 1975. This article alludes that Harold Carpenter from Lodge Grass (on the Crow reservation) would be speaking along with Sam Young Running Crane and Louie Yellow Wolf of Browning at revival services a few miles outside of Browning. It goes on to say that, “The religious retreat will include spiritual messages daily by Indian evangelists, ministers and missionaries; music and singing; praying and healing and testimonies by reborn again-” [The line is abruptly cut off.]

overlaying it with a robust pan-Indian network that served as an alternative seminary or ministry-training school. The exchange of ideas, the modeling of minister behavior, the codifying of theological beliefs, all took place more often in pan-Indian led revival services or while travelling on the pan-Indian preaching circuit than in church Sunday School classrooms or formal Bible colleges; the main methods for training and equipping Christians favored by most non-Native Pentecostals. The pan-Indian Pentecostal network first came to the attention of Blackfeet Pentecostals in the late 1950s with Tom Tobacco's arrival, but their participation in these networks remains an important part of Blackfeet Pentecostal leadership calling and training even up through modern times. Most of the Blackfeet ministers interviewed for this project were part of various pan-Indian Pentecostal networks, spreading from western Washington and Oregon to western North Dakota, and from southern Canada to southern Idaho and Wyoming.

Bill Old Chief, a Pentecostal minister, described the pan-Indian Pentecostal training process in his book *Somewhere in Montana*. "I was asking God for a 'spiritual mentor' in my life," writes Old Chief, "I actually prayed and asked God to 'give me' a preacher who would teach me how to serve God to the best of my ability and that person was Johnny Iron Shirt [a Northern Piegan Indian from Canada]." Old Chief went on to describe where this mentoring would take place, "He would invite me to travel with him and his family on ministry trips in parts of eastern Montana [the Fort Peck and Fort Belnap Indian Reservations] and Washington State, which I considered the highest honor since he was my Pastor and I considered myself to be the least qualified concerning the things of ministry."⁷⁷ After affirming that this mentoring by Iron Shirt was the key to his success as a Pentecostal minister, Old Chief states emphatically, "You don't need huge financial sums to begin your ministry, you don't need to be ordained, you

⁷⁷ Bill Old Chief, *Somewhere in Montana: A Spiritual Awakening in Blackfeet Country* (Bloomington: West Bow Press, 2016), 133-134.

don't need to be incorporated. You do need approval by God, vision, purpose, and direction.”⁷⁸

In this statement Old Chief reveals the sentiment many Blackfeet Pentecostals feel about the conventional ministry expectations held by most non-Native Christians. Conversely he also shows the immense value the pan-Indian Pentecostal network provided to young Blackfeet Pentecostal men by providing mentoring, training, and validation to be future Pentecostal ministers. In addition the pan-Indian Pentecostal network employed styles of training more familiar to Native culture like apprenticeship, versus the formalized ministry training, rooted in European methodologies, found in most denominational seminaries.

From April through September of 1960, Upham travelled around the northwestern U.S. with Tobacco and his band. While Upham loved playing guitar with the band, during his last month with Tobacco, Upham began to feel a strange loneliness in his heart for Browning. He asked God to give him a sign in the next sermon if God wanted him to return to Browning. That night Tobacco preached a sermon entitled, “The Place that God Wants You is the Place You Need to Be.” Upham felt God had confirmed to him that he should return to Browning. He informed Tobacco that he needed to leave the group. Tobacco blessed him and encouraged him to go if it was indeed God's leading.⁷⁹

Upham set off back for Browning with Zelma Edmo, a Shoshone woman who worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in Browning and owned a car. She was a passionate Pentecostal convert who happened to be in the same town as Upham visiting relatives. On their way back to Montana, Edmo and Upham stopped in Pocatello, Idaho to attend a Pentecostal revival meeting. The pastor of the church recognized Upham and invited him to play guitar on stage with the music band. During the sermon, a female evangelist, named Phyllis McPherson,

⁷⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁹ Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 4, 2016.

stopped in the middle of her preaching, turned toward Upham, who was sitting behind her on the stage, and spoke directly to him, “You will soon preach and reach many young people for Jesus.” She then turned back to the audience and continued on with her sermon. Upham considered this a divine prophecy from God directing him what actions he should take when he returned home. As soon as he arrived back in Browning, Upham started holding regular Pentecostal meetings. His was the second Blackfeet-led church in Browning. Upham was only nineteen years old.⁸⁰

The first meeting place for Upham’s new church was an old frame tent house on the land of Upham’s grandmother eight miles west of Browning on Highway 89 in an area called “Sweet Pine.” The meetings were quickly marked by reports of supernatural power, including the healing of Rose Little Plume DeRoche.⁸¹ Upham’s account of DeRoche’s healing, occurring in 1961 in the small house where the fledgling church met, gives a sense of the dramatic nature of the event, but it also reveals how Pentecostals describe experiences of supernatural intervention. “She came to our services and her hip kept falling out,” explained Upham, “She was just pale because of the pain. She came up and she was crying. We got ready to pray and we didn’t even get a chance to lay our hands on her [before] the power of God hit her and she just let out a scream and right there in the front she just started walking back and forth.”⁸² News about people being healed, speaking in tongues, and shaking violently under the influence of divine power spread around the reservation; there were even reports of people being delivered from evil spirits.⁸³ Over the next year, more and more Blackfeet started showing up at the house for Upham’s church meetings.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ This healing was described by two different people in interviews: Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 6, 2016; & Roy Wolftail, Interview by Author, Phone, April 9, 2016.

⁸² Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 6, 2016.

⁸³ Roy Wolftail, Interview by Author, Phone, April 9, 2016. Wolftail claims to have been delivered from an evil spirit at the church. His story was also attested to by Hiram Upham. As Wolftail described it, they were in the front of

In addition to the curiosity about the reports of supernatural events, many people were also attracted to Upham's church because of the upbeat, guitar-driven style of worship music regularly featured at the services. Gordon Monroe, a future Pentecostal pastor, was seventeen when he discovered Upham's church. He had grown up going to the Assembly of God log church, while also dutifully attending the Little Flower Catholic Church in Browning where his parents went every week. He was training to be an altar boy when he fully converted to Pentecostalism after attending one of Old Person's revival meetings where he "met a real preacher, Tom Tobacco!"⁸⁴ However, Monroe discovered that when Old Person's church was not having special revival services his church was usually filled with older, traditional people who only spoke Blackfeet. When Monroe visited Upham's church he found a gathering filled with younger Blackfeet people, like him, who mostly spoke English. "We'd go there for the music," Monroe remembers, "Hiram was a young rock and roll singer. So wherever him and [his other musicians] were, we would go."⁸⁵ Upham learned to play a distinctive type of worship music from Keith Black Hawk, the worship leader for Tom Tobacco. This style of worship became a staple of most Pentecostal church gatherings and revival meetings among the Blackfeet for the next fifty years.⁸⁶

Through most of the 1960s, Old Person's church in Starr School and Upham's church in Browning met regularly and featured a consistent string of pan-Indian Pentecostal network

the church during a service praying for a young teen age girl. After a little bit, the girl suddenly started curling her arms back "like she was a cat" and she started speaking with "a real ugly voice, like a hissing voice, with a man's voice." They began praying for her to be delivered from "an evil spirit" when Wolftail says he saw a "black thing" come out of the girl's chest, jump towards him, and hit him in the chest. He began running around the church and he says a voice started coming out of him that was not his own. A group of people grabbed him and prayed over him, after which he states matter-of-factly, "I was delivered."

⁸⁴ Gordon Monroe, Interview by Author, In Person, March 5, 2018.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ A video was posted in 2013 of Hiram Upham playing this style of worship at his 72nd birthday party, best described as hillbilly gospel rock. photodiva1. "Hiram Upham 72nd Birthday – Hiram singing." YouTube video, May 2, 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6LBEa8AVx0

revival meetings. When a larger space was needed Old Person would use the community round hall in Starr School and Upham would use large tents out on the edge of Browning at a spot nicknamed Cree Corner. So many people were converted to Pentecostalism during these years, that they would hold water baptism services at nearby rivers with hundreds of participants and onlookers.⁸⁷

In 1965, an associate of Upham's, named Edward Little Plume, known to everyone in Browning as "Red Man," found out that the Assemblies of God were looking to sell the old log church. Robert Bryant had been the pastor of the A/G church from 1953 through October of 1960. During this time the church averaged around twenty adults and over twenty-five children, as Bryant and the other leaders heavily emphasized bringing Blackfeet children in to church from all around the neighborhood.⁸⁸ In 1960, Bryant moved to Baker, Montana and the A/G asked a pastor named Fred Steffensrud to oversee the small congregation. The attendance at the church dwindled so significantly during Steffensrud's tenure, likely due to the popularity of the churches led by Old Person and Upham, that by 1965 the A/G decided to close down the church and put the log building up for sale. Upham and Little Plume met with the Montana A/G officials, who agreed to sell the building to Upham for a price of nearly \$2,500. They gave Upham one week

⁸⁷ Bates, "An Ethnohistory," 83-84, 87. Bates details a few more dramatic healings that occurred during this era (Although the source is not cited, based on context, the information was most likely provided to Bates by Earl Old Person): "One Blackfeet elder, John Eagle Ribs, was crippled and sick and could not lift his legs. When the people prayed for him he stepped up on the platform and was immediately healed. Another young Blackfeet boy who was mentally and physically challenged was also healed and restored to his right mind. Blackfeet elder, Francis Bull Calf, was delivered from chronic alcoholism. Deanna Old Person required very thick eyeglasses to be able to see, but needed them no longer because her eyesight was completely restored to normal."

⁸⁸ Number estimates corroborated by both Robert Bryant, Interview by Author, In Person, April 19, 2016; & Gordon Monroe, Interview by Author, In Person, March 5, 2018. The A/G Log Church might have increased in attendance or received increased finances sometime in 1955 as ads for the church started regularly appearing in the *Glacier Reporter* beginning in May 1955. The other two churches with buildings in Browning, the Little Flower Catholic Church and the Browning Methodist Church also featured regular ads. There were three other church groups without buildings that also featured regular ads in the *Glacier Reporter* in 1955: the Episcopal church (met Sunday evenings in the Bank Annex); a Baptist group (held Bible Studies on Tuesday evenings in the Bank Annex and Wednesday evenings out in Starr School); and the Latter Day Saints (met Sunday mornings at the Cut Bank Boarding School located in Browning).

to gather the funds or else they would put the building on the open market. Little Plume thought he might know some people who could help, so he travelled across the Rocky Mountains to the Flathead Reservation. He shared the vision for buying the log church with Robert Larrison, a pastor who had started his own non-denominational church in St. Ignatius, Montana in 1951 called The Christian Church.⁸⁹ Larrison told Little Plume, “I don’t have any money, but the Lord owns the cattle on a thousand hills.” A few days later Larrison approached Little Plume excitedly and told him, “I have the money!”⁹⁰ Little Plume was able to secure a no interest loan from the sympathetic non-Pentecostal pastor for the full amount needed to buy the log church.⁹¹ “The payments were \$20 a month,” recounted Upham, “It took almost three years to pay it off. Back in them days money was really hard to come by, so it was a real trial to get \$20.”⁹² Upham and Little Plume renamed the log church The Browning Christian Church.

In many ways the purchase of the log church by Upham’s congregation in 1965 brought the story of the rise of Blackfeet Pentecostalism full circle. The log church which had been envisioned and built by the first generation of Blackfeet Pentecostals, was now, seventeen years later, owned once again by the Blackfeet; but this time by an entirely new generation of Pentecostal converts. The Pentecostal movement among the Blackfeet which had been initiated in the early 1940s by non-Native ministers was now completely led by the Blackfeet themselves.

⁸⁹ John Stromnes, “Sharp-Eyed Preacher,” *Missoulian*, August 24, 1998, http://missoulian.com/sharp-eyed-preacher/article_6a294146-64e0-5d7d-b3a6-028f96e70547.html

⁹⁰ Oral Little Plume (Eddie Little Plume’s son), Interview by Author, In Person, March 5, 2018.

⁹¹ Glacier County Courthouse, Land Transaction Records, 2QD-55-537. (Robert Larrison’s name and address are listed as the return address on the transaction deed.)

⁹² Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 6, 2016.

Chapter 3: The Crest of the Wave (1965-1975)

“Most of our people who were of more blood belonged to that Pentecostal movement; I called them Holy Rollers,” described Virgil Edwards, a Blackfeet man who grew up during the explosion of Pentecostalism in the 1950s and 1960s. When he was twelve years old he stumbled into a Pentecostal revival meeting being held in a local community hall in Browning, thinking that it was one of the 50s-style sock-hop dances often put on back then. “As this music starts,

this guy starts running from one end of the stage to the other with this loud booming voice saving people, calling people forward to the stage,” Edwards pauses as he remembers the strangeness of the scene to his young eyes, “This lady [behind me] got up and started vibrating and she was knocking these chairs out of the way. I got the heck out of the way and she went up there and she flopped down in front of the stage and starts acting like she was having some kind of a fit. So that was my first experience of going to a revival or a meeting.” Edwards, who is Catholic, believes that it was the compelling music played at the meetings combined with the promise of supernatural power that drew Blackfeet people to convert to Pentecostalism, “I think our people are drawn to the music, the hype that goes on there, the getting saved, helping them along. I know it’s very strong here today, I don’t know how many there is, there were a few and now there are many.”⁹³

John Murray, one of the growing numbers of Blackfeet who practice traditional Blackfeet religion, describes the experience with Pentecostalism as similar to doing a drug. “[It’s] like meth, the first time you take it it’s really good, the next time you take it you got to take more to get that same thing,” explains Murray, “Everybody has a spirit...and most of the time you are not giving it much attention, then your spirit is celebrating this high, then you go home and there’s nothing to eat at your house.” Although Murray doesn’t subscribe to Pentecostal belief, he does see some value in Blackfeet people embracing Pentecostalism, but with a caution, “It’s good to take care of your spirit. I believe that we have a Spirit and no matter how you take care of it, it’s good...no matter what religion or whatever, the downside of [Pentecostalism] is that you turn your back on the Blackfeet ways.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Virgil Edwards, Interview by Author, In Person, March 2, 2018.

⁹⁴ John Murray, Interview by Author, In Person, March 2, 2018.

Tyson Running Wolf, the current Blackfeet Tribal Business Council Secretary, and like Murray a practitioner of Blackfeet traditional religion, had both praise and critique for the Pentecostal movement among the Blackfeet. “Pentecostals kept a place of outlet for music that had really been lost among us...gave families a place for relationship,” explains Running Wolf while also adding that the movement allowed Blackfeet men opportunities to have “functional leadership” roles in Pentecostal churches. “[However] some of the leaders [who became Pentecostals] were old traditional people. They could have kept Blackfeet knowledge going: the sacred songs, the medicine bundles, the pipes. Instead they looked at it as witchcraft, and they stopped using their sacred items or sold them,” argues Running Wolf who adds the question, “Why couldn’t they be Pentecostal pastors and still have a medicine bundle, or be a Pentecostal and still go to the ceremonies and sing the sacred songs?”⁹⁵

For many Pentecostals, Running Wolf’s contention that Blackfeet Pentecostals should have maintained their traditional religious practices while simultaneously embracing Pentecostalism strikes them as incompatible. Many Blackfeet Pentecostals state that it was an encounter with the power of God that converted them to Pentecostal practice, therefore they argue that sharing the worship of that God with anything else claiming to also have supernatural power would be akin to idolatry. Rayola Running Crane, a Blackfeet Pentecostal woman, describes this sentiment when she reflected on her own conversion to Pentecostalism, “It’s true. There isn’t anything as powerful as God. I don’t find where [Native traditional religion] is true. There are no medicine people practicing. It was not a hard transition for me [to Pentecostalism]. I knew it was for real.”⁹⁶ Roy Wolftail, who converted to Pentecostalism in the early 1960s while attending Upham’s church and later became a prominent Pentecostal pastor in Browning,

⁹⁵Tyson Running Wolf, Interview by Author, In Person, April 5, 2016.

⁹⁶ Rayola Running Crane, Interview by Author, Phone, March 12, 2016.

says encounters with true power are what led many Blackfeet to turn from traditional ways and convert to Pentecostalism, “I think the thing that brought them out was the power of God that they saw. They saw that God’s power was real and his healing was real.”⁹⁷

Since the rise of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the 1970s, there has been an increase of traditional religious practice among Native Americans. The AIM movement was dominated primarily by Native Americans who grew up away from the reservation in urban settings.⁹⁸ For many of those stirred by the AIM movement, one of the keys to re-establishing a truly Native identity was to learn and practice traditional Native religion once again. This renewed interest in the ancient ceremonial life of their elders fueled a resurgence of many Native traditions that had fallen into disuse in some tribes like the Sun Dance, the sweat lodge, and medicine bundle and medicine pipe ceremonies.⁹⁹

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the U.S. government made it very difficult for Native people to practice traditional ceremonies or Native religion. Native religious ceremonies were often declared illegal and in times when they were not technically illegal, the non-Natives in positions of authority on the reservations still highly discouraged Native religious practice. These colonial policies restricting traditional Native religion were intended to remove Indian culture from Native communities in order to hasten assimilation. Because of these oppressive policies many Native communities suffered a severe loss of traditional ceremonial knowledge, as well as the loss of many sacred objects central to these practices.¹⁰⁰ “The

⁹⁷ Roy Wolftail, Interview by Author, Phone, April 9, 2015.

⁹⁸ Mark Edwin Miller, *Claiming Tribal Identity: The Five Tribes and the Politics of Federal Acknowledgment* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 127.

⁹⁹ George E. Tinker “American Indian Religious Tradition, Colonialism, Resistance, and Liberation” in *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance*, eds. Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins (Lawrence, KS: the University Press of Kansas, 2003), 224.

¹⁰⁰ Henrietta Mann, “Earth Mother and Prayerful Children: Sacred Sites and Religious Freedom” in *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance*, eds. Richard A. Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins (Lawrence, KS: the University Press of Kansas, 2003), 195-196.

government outlawed traditional practice,” explained John Murray, who also serves as the Blackfeet Tribal Preservation Officer, “People would hold these night ceremonies, but [other] people would look through the windows and turn them in. So people would close their curtains or take an army blanket and hang it over the window so nobody could see in.”¹⁰¹ Virgil Edwards remembers his relatives from across the international border coming down to Montana to practice Blackfeet traditional religious ceremonies in secret, “My grandmother [would invite her relatives] and the old ladies came down from Canada, [they] practiced their ceremonies around a leg bone that belonged to her grandfather, mak[ing] sure it was pretty quiet and the windows were closed and the blankets were up...”¹⁰² It took the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978 for Native people to once again have the freedom to fully practice traditional religion without government interference.

Murray and Tyson Running Wolf believe that returning to Blackfeet traditional ways, especially traditional Blackfeet religious practice, is an important step in regaining the power necessary to overcome the challenges present on the Blackfeet Reservation today. Running Wolf estimates that only 20-25% of Blackfeet people are currently trying to learn or practice what he calls “the old ways.”¹⁰³ Both Running Wolf and Murray view the Blackfeet Pentecostals as a force of opposition in the community opposing an increase in Blackfeet practicing traditional ways. Blackfeet Pentecostals regularly discourage other Blackfeet from engaging with traditional Blackfeet religious ceremonies, especially the Okan, or Sun Dance as it is known among many other tribes. Every summer during the time the Okan is practiced, Pentecostals, as well as other Christian groups, often put up posters and distribute flyers around Browning deriding the Okan as destructive to people’s spiritual health. In addition to these types of

¹⁰¹ John Murray, Interview by Author, In Person, March 2, 2018.

¹⁰² Virgil Edwards, Interview by Author, In Person, March 2, 2018.

¹⁰³ Tyson Running Wolf, Interview by Author, In Person, April 5, 2016.

campaigns, many Pentecostal leaders often teach that practicing various aspects of traditional Native religion can invite dangerous demonic spirits into a person's life.¹⁰⁴ Murray related a story about an old Pentecostal man who frequented Tribal Council meetings clutching his Bible and telling the Council members in the Blackfeet language "that practicing traditional religion was devil worship." Murray went on to describe how a prominent Pentecostal Blackfeet politician even made a special trip across the reservation to discourage Murray's wife from participating in a ceremony where she was being painted in order to be inducted into a traditional Blackfeet high society, stating to Murray and his wife that "what [we] were doing was bad."¹⁰⁵

For many of the early Blackfeet Pentecostal converts, following their introduction to Pentecostalism there was immediate pressure to cease being part of any Native practices that might contain elements of traditional Blackfeet religion, like carrying a medicine bundle, owning a medicine pipe, attending the annual Sun Dance, or participating in sweats or smudging. These cautions most likely originated with the non-Native pastors who first brought Pentecostalism to the Blackfeet. Eugene Born, the pastor from Cut Bank, whose regular visits helped coalesce the small group of Blackfeet Pentecostals into house prayer meetings often preached about abstaining from "going to any place that involved worldliness."¹⁰⁶ For his non-Native parishioners that meant places like movie theaters, dance halls, gambling venues, bars and even bowling alleys. For the Blackfeet he was speaking to, Born certainly expanded this list to include an injunction to avoid any Blackfeet traditional practices that would impede their new religious zeal. Although the Pentecostal obsession with listing activities and locations a person

¹⁰⁴ In an interview with Bill Old Chief, a Pentecostal pastor, he described how "wearing face paint is to invite spirits to come to aid you in the hunt or in battle. As a Native American you have to know where you came from, but when you don't know what you are doing you can conjure up the Bear and the Badger which are evil spirits from our old ways." Bill Old Chief, Interview by Author, Phone, March 5, 2016.

¹⁰⁵ John Murray, Interview by Author, In Person, March 2, 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Beverly Tonn (daughter of Eugene Born), Interview by Author, Phone, March 15, 2018.

needed to avoid may seem extreme, even to many modern Pentecostals, the philosophical concept of avoiding “worldly trappings” dominated early Pentecostal teaching. Beverly Tonn, the daughter of Eugene Born, recalled that her family did not own a TV, a perceived source of much undesired worldliness, until 1963, when a parishioner gave her family a TV set so her parents could watch the news covering the assassination of President Kennedy.¹⁰⁷

In many ways the injection of prohibitions on participating in Native traditional activities by a non-Native outsider is certainly a form of colonialistic imposition, especially when that person is from the dominant culture that has shown a consistent propensity to strategically undermine Native traditional ways. There is no plausible way that a non-Blackfeet person could accurately parse out what parts of Blackfeet culture might be permissible for a Pentecostal believer to practice in the same way a non-Blackfeet Pentecostal could do such an exercise with things familiar to his or her own culture. The non-Native Pentecostals who brought Pentecostalism to the Blackfeet certainly prescribed a repudiation of Blackfeet ways that did not just include Blackfeet traditional religion but would have included many other Blackfeet cultural practices as well.

Burton Butterfly, a Blackfeet Pentecostal minister, explained that when he first converted to Pentecostalism the Native preachers he heard back then regularly denounced participating in Native traditional religion as “taking you to hell.”¹⁰⁸ When he became the pastor of a Pentecostal church in Browning in 2003, he followed the example of these Native ministers by regularly teaching that Blackfeet believers should stay far away from any type of Blackfeet traditional ways. As the years went by, he began to notice the incredible tension embracing Pentecostal belief created for some Blackfeet people. “There’s a push-pull struggle,” described

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Burton Butterfly, Interview by Author, Phone, Mar. 28, 2016.

Butterfly, “People would get saved in our church, then I wouldn’t see them again, just out on the streets. It’s because they come from families of traditional ways. They don’t know how they can live in both. They feel like they have to either go to the ‘white man’s ways’ or to the old culture.”¹⁰⁹

The second generation of Blackfeet Pentecostals like Hiram Upham and Roy Wolftail were often unfamiliar with many traditional Blackfeet ways, unlike the first generation of Blackfeet Pentecostal converts like James Boy or Earl Old Person. The early, more-traditional Blackfeet Pentecostals viewed their new religious belief through the lens of the Blackfeet ways they knew extremely well. They often embraced the sincerity of their elders’ religious practices, while also believing that their elders had drifted into misguided worship along the way. The knowledge of traditional ways, combined with an admiration for the sincerity of those who practiced traditional ways in the past, helped these older, more-traditional Blackfeet fully embrace Blackfeet language, culture, and traditions, while also simultaneously rejecting certain aspects of Blackfeet religious practice. Later Blackfeet Pentecostal ministers, like Upham and Wolftail, often lacked intimate knowledge of Blackfeet traditional ways and thus looking through their newly acquired Pentecostal viewpoint, treated many traditional Blackfeet ways with deep suspicion. The second generation of Blackfeet Pentecostals often rejected many Blackfeet traditional ways as sinful distractions, or worse, demonic deceptions.

Wolftail says he preached against many forms of participating in Blackfeet traditional ways as a young Pentecostal minister. Now in later years he has more willingness to re-define what parts of Blackfeet ways are permissible to practice as a Pentecostal. “There’s the culture and the religious part,” explains Wolftail, “The cultural part is beautiful, the dancing, the language, the clothing, but the religious part, the sun is involved, and praying to animals, it’s

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

animism.” Wolftail goes on to describe how in the early years of Christianity among the Blackfeet “the ministers [who] came stripped the people of everything. They said everything is of the devil. There was a time we were brainwashed to believe everything Indian is of the devil. We realize it’s not. We lived in the spirit of condemnation as young people. You heard it, then you preached it...later [you] realized you’re not preaching the Word,”¹¹⁰

Bill Old Chief, gives an example of this type of thinking in his book *Somewhere in Montana*. He describes how his father Grayson Old Chief, after his conversion to Pentecostalism, not only distanced himself from many traditional Blackfeet ways, but also even discouraged people from participating in any part of Native culture that would distract a person from devotion to God, including attending sporting events in the community. Old Chief describes walking into his dad’s house to find Grayson listening to the radio broadcast of a basketball game featuring Bill’s son. He urged his dad to come with him in order to watch his grandson in person, but Grayson reluctantly declined, saying to Bill, “I can’t go. I have set a standard too high in my life and the sad part, it isn’t even a Biblical standard, it’s a man-made standard.”¹¹¹

Upham, the most influential of this second generation of Blackfeet Pentecostals, claims that at the age of 59, he had a revelation from God concerning the value of his Blackfeet culture. In this revelation God revealed to Upham that every culture has both good and bad things in it, including Blackfeet culture, and that God would not have made Upham a Blackfeet man if he did not want Upham to be fully Blackfeet. Since receiving this revelation, Upham says that he is much more approving of things in Blackfeet culture that he would have been closed off to in his

¹¹⁰ Roy Wolftail, Interview by Author, Phone, April 9, 2016.

¹¹¹ Old Chief, *Somewhere in Montana*, 20.

early years as a Pentecostal preacher, like attending pow-wows, playing native drums, and participating in Blackfeet dances.¹¹²

For many of the Blackfeet Pentecostals of Upham's era who lacked intimate knowledge of Blackfeet traditional ways, they found it far easier to discourage participation in most aspects of Blackfeet culture, rather than attempt to navigate the challenging gray areas of what a Pentecostal person should hold on to or reject in Blackfeet culture. Upham shared a story that illustrated the difference between the approach many Pentecostals of his generation had towards Blackfeet ways versus the approach taken by Old Person and many of the first generation of Blackfeet Pentecostals, who had been immersed in traditional ways from a young age. Upham recounted how his wife Yvonne, as a teen, used to be part of a traditional dance troupe led by Old Person. After she became a Pentecostal, Yvonne told Old Person that she could no longer dance with the group. Old Person countered by telling her that it was not necessary to give up traditional dancing in order to serve the Lord, but she insisted. Old Person kindly shrugged and let her leave the group. Now many years later Yvonne has gotten back into Blackfeet dancing; Old Person never gave it up.¹¹³

In his book, *Mission among the Blackfeet*, published in 1971, Howard L. Harrod describes some of the economic hardships many Blackfeet were experiencing at the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s as the Pentecostal movement among the Blackfeet was beginning to explode. "Although the Blackfeet had been poor since the disappearance of the buffalo," states Harrod, "at the beginning of the [1960s] their condition was desperate. In 1958, some 50 percent of the tribes' work force [was] unemployed and by 1962 this figure had risen to 75 percent."¹¹⁴ Harrod goes on to describe what he witnessed in and around Browning during his field study, "In

¹¹² Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 4, 2016.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Harrod, *Mission*, 157.

huts all over the reservation, disease was common and people were hungry...In Browning itself poverty was dramatically visible...many of the 1,622 Indians who lived in Browning in 1960 were huddled together in a miserable rural slum picturesquely known as Moccasin Flats.”¹¹⁵

The level of trauma that accompanied the poverty and disease described by Harrod would certainly have induced many Blackfeet people to look for new answers to their problems. Pentecostalism held out the promise of hope for physical healing, as well as encouraging the person that God was with them, not in an abstract way, but in a personal way evidenced by supernatural signs. In Harrod’s description of Browning, he notes that the poorer area of town was a section of Browning known as Moccasin Flats. This area, more visibly affected by poverty, was where most of the Pentecostal house meetings of the 1940s and 1950s met; it was also the location of the Assembly of God log church. The other main church buildings in Browning at the time, the Catholic Church and the Methodist Church, were both located a few blocks north of Moccasin Flats, detached in some ways from the immediacy of its squalor. Part of Pentecostalism’s appeal was certainly that its gatherings took place in homes and buildings right next to the very people who were suffering the most under the economic hardship.

A second factor that influenced the growth of Pentecostalism among the tribe was a sharp increase in people moving from rural areas of the reservation into Browning during the middle decades of the century. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1930 the population in Browning was just 1,072 people.¹¹⁶ By 1940, that figure had reached 1,825 people, and in 1960 the total population in Browning was 2,011; a doubling of the town’s population in thirty years.¹¹⁷ An even more revealing statistic is the population of the “Browning area,” which includes the population in Browning plus areas in the vicinity around Browning. Using this

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. *Census of Population and Housing. Browning, MT, 1930.*

¹¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. *Census of Population and Housing. Browning, MT, 1940; 1960.*

metric the population in 1950 for the Browning area was 2,906 people.¹¹⁸ In 1960 that figure grew to 4,831 people, an increase of almost 60% in ten years.¹¹⁹ The newspaper in Browning acknowledged this significant population boost in several articles written in the mid-1950s commenting on the increasing numbers of people moving into Browning. One of these articles even requested that people open up their homes to host all the new people moving into town who could not find housing.¹²⁰

Leroy Old Man Chief, a long time resident of Browning, moved into Browning with his family in 1951. “We moved into town from Two Medicine,” explained Old Man Chief, “My father was a horseman. I was eight years old. [In Two Medicine] things were getting hard and food was getting scarce.” After moving into town, Old Man Chief said he missed the wide open areas where he used to live, “I hated town, because of all the togetherness.” By “togetherness” he meant the feeling of constantly being surrounded by people. Old Man Chief remembered playing around the old log church where the Pentecostals gathered regularly. “The music really got to me,” Old Man Chief said with a smile, as he described how he could hear the music emanating out from the log church as he played near it with his friends.”¹²¹ Many of the people pouring into Browning from rural areas on the reservation, like Old Man Chief, also heard the music; some of them chose to go inside and join something new as a way of coping with the loss of something old.

Politics was the third factor influencing the rise of Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet. Since the 1930s and the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), the full-blood, more traditional Blackfeet population in the tribe had been growing discontented with the Blackfeet

¹¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau. Census of Population and Housing. Browning, MT, 1950.

¹¹⁹ US Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing: 1960.

¹²⁰ “New Families Bring Acute Housing Shortage Here,” *Glacier Reporter*, February 12, 1954; “Many New Buildings Indicate City Growth,” *Glacier Reporter*, August 12, 1955.

¹²¹ Leroy Old Man Chief, Interview by Author, In Person, April 6, 2016.

Tribal Business Council (BTBC), the official Blackfeet tribal government entity. The IRA promised Indian tribes an opportunity for self-government if they would agree to organize as corporate entity in the manner of a township or county government; including creating and passing a constitution and charter for their new government. Many tribes across the U.S. were divided on the promises of the IRA. Some tribes felt the IRA was a new way of forcing assimilation on Native Americans, while other tribes, like the Blackfeet, thought the IRA gave them an opportunity for self-determination, an opportunity that may not be available in the future. Almost nine hundred Blackfeet voters braved a frigid winter snowstorm in October 1935 to cast their vote in favor of the IRA offer, 883 – 171.¹²²

Once the BTBC became the governing entity of the Blackfeet, the newly elected council members immediately faced intense scrutiny from the members of their own tribe, who demanded instant economic prosperity now that the Blackfeet themselves, rather than the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), seemed to be in control of tribal decisions. The BTBC endured especially harsh criticism from the Blackfeet considered full-bloods, the very same type of traditional Blackfeet who converted to Pentecostalism in the 1940s. These vocal critics, often older men steeped in traditional ways, felt that the BTBC, if left to its machinations, would spend the tribe's money on projects that only benefited mixed-blood Indians, who the older full-blood Blackfeet believed wanted to be more white than Indian.¹²³

In many ways the frustration the full-blood, traditional Blackfeet had with the BTBC had less to do with the actual decisions of the BTBC, but rather more to do with the IRA's undermining of traditional Blackfeet leadership structures. In the past, Blackfeet men became chiefs or respected tribal leaders through proving themselves in battle or on the hunt. Their

¹²² Rosier, *Rebirth*, 95.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 147.

success not only proved their courage and wisdom, but their victories indicated to the rest of the tribe that these men had surely made alliances with supernatural beings, like the beaver, the thunderbird, or the bear who helped the person achieve success on the dangerous mission.¹²⁴

Traditional Blackfeet leadership positions in the past had therefore been contingent on previous success in challenging situations and a dedication to the traditional religious practices enabling the person to gain supernatural assistance.

During the era of strict U.S. government oversight of Native tribes, these traditional leadership positions could still operate in a similar manner to the past since the only available leadership positions for Blackfeet men were often symbolic and ceremonial, as the agents of the U.S. government held all the political positions of power. Elders who had lived during the time of the buffalo often still held great respect across many tribes and they still led many of the cultural and religious ceremonies practiced both publicly and in the shadows of the reservation. With the elevation of the BTBC as the head of Blackfeet tribal government, the BTBC displaced the last remnants of traditional Blackfeet leadership remaining in the tribe.¹²⁵ As Paul Rosier explains in his book *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation, 1912-1954*, “The IRA formalized the passing of an era, from a time when Blackfeet full-bloods dominated the sociocultural aspects of the Blackfeet Tribe...to one in which a council of mixed-bloods dominated the political and economic management of the [tribe].”¹²⁶ These full-blood elders pushed back against the encroachment of the BTBC into their traditional leadership structures by continuously deriding the BTBC, even after the Council acquiesced to many of the elders’ demands.

¹²⁴ LaPier, *Invisible Reality*, xxxvii.

¹²⁵ David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 62.

¹²⁶ Rosier, *Rebirth*, 104.

During most of the 1940s the leadership of the BTBC tried to respect the older tribal men by giving them honorary non-voting spots on the Council and inviting a large contingent of elders to a constitutional convention in 1947 to air their grievances with the constitution. Many of these traditional elders even agreed at the convention that the IRA gave them the best chance to govern the tribe's affairs and control its own future, but just weeks after the convention finished, many of these same elders complained to federal officials that they did not trust the BTBC and wanted U.S. government oversight of the tribe once again.¹²⁷ This consistent criticism of the BTBC points more to the instilled frustration of the full blood elders' loss of tribal authority than it does to any particular frustration with BTBC actions. These very same elders would be some of the Blackfeet who turned to Pentecostalism during the 1940s. For them Pentecostalism seemed like an opportunity to embrace new forms of power in a time when many of the last vestiges of traditional life were eroding through the loss of familiar leadership structures.

The BTBC had been plagued by instability through much of the 1940s and early 1950s. Rosier describes some of the political angst bubbling over by the middle of the 1950s, "There existed on the Blackfeet Reservation a growing disjunction between middle-class mixed-bloods and poor Blackfeet of both full-blood and mixed-blood."¹²⁸ Many of these full-blood Blackfeet did not speak English and were anxious to keep their cultural ways from deteriorating, while many of the more affluent mixed-blood Blackfeet spoke only English and were much more willing to assimilate to the non-Native culture prevalent around them. For most of its history as the governmental entity of the tribe, the BTBC had been dominated by the more assimilation minded, less traditional "mixed-blood" group. Many from this group had been advocating for

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 202-204.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

more corporate control of the tribe and they often wanted to cut back on the dividend amounts the BTBC regularly dispersed to all tribal members from funds gained through the sale of gas and oil leasing on communally-held tribal land. According to Rosier, the full-blood, traditional contingent among the tribe distrusted the mixed-blood assimilationist-leaning leadership.

This growing tension came to head in the election of 1954, when the tribe overwhelmingly voted to reject the overtures the members of the BTBC were making with a wealthy businessman from Texas named Lucien Cullen to run the tribe's business interests. At the time the *Glacier Reporter* called the Blackfeet tribal election of 1954 "the most important election in their history."¹²⁹ In addition to rejecting the Cullen proposal, the Blackfeet voters ousted nine of the thirteen councilmen on the BTBC. In their place, the people of the tribe elected individuals more sympathetic to the full-blood cause, including a twenty-four year old man immersed in Blackfeet traditional ways named Earl Old Person.

In the months after being elected to the BTBC, Old Person started the first Blackfeet-led Pentecostal church; a church made up of mostly older, full-blood Blackfeet. In many ways Old Person starting a Pentecostal gathering to help full-blood Blackfeet take control of their spiritual destiny mirrored his running for tribal government in order to help full-blood Blackfeet take control of their political destiny. In an interview documented in *The Blackfeet Papers*, Old Person described his early years on the BTBC, noting the rarity of full-blood Blackfeet like himself, "Of the full-blood old-timers, I served for a little while with Willie Buffalo Hide. He and George Kicking Woman were pretty much the only other full-bloods on the council with me, even back then. The rest were mixed-bloods, so we held our meetings in English."¹³⁰ In the same interview Old Person gave an example of how full-blood Blackfeet elders considered him

¹²⁹ "Cullen's Proposal is Rejected," *Glacier Reporter*, June 18, 1954.

¹³⁰ Hungry-Wolf, *The Blackfeet Papers – Volume Four*, 1256.

an advocate for them in his new position, “I used to interpret for many of them. Whenever they needed something through the Tribal Office, they’d come to me. One reason was that I could speak their language. Many others on council couldn’t.”¹³¹ From 1954 onward the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement had a political tonality, not overtly political in the way one thinks of the Christian Right in current mainstream American politics, but more subtle, in that Pentecostalism offered an alternative for Blackfeet self-determination that from 1934-1954 only politics in the BTBC offered, yet failed to actualize.

By 1968, Old Person decided to stop holding Pentecostal meetings at his church near Starr School. He felt he should focus more time on his political duties, as he had recently been elevated to Chairman of the BTBC. Many of the people who attended his church either started meeting in homes again or went to Upham’s church, now meeting in the distinctive log building.¹³² For Upham, it appeared that the prophecy given to him by the female evangelist in Idaho had come true, as out of his church numerous young Blackfeet received the Pentecostal message. Many of the young men converted in Upham’s church like Roy Wolftail, Freddy Bull Calf, Lockley Bremner, Gordon Monroe, Grayson Old Chief, his son Bill Old Chief, Willie Wells, and his two brothers George and Leo, went on to start their own churches and ministries in and around Browning. Church on the Rock, Browning Full Gospel Church, Victory Outreach, Community Christian Fellowship, Chief Cornerstone Church, and First Embassy Nation of Faith are some of the various Pentecostal churches started by Blackfeet Pentecostals in later decades.¹³³ In addition to the many Pentecostal churches, every summer various Blackfeet pastors erected large canvas revival tents in places like Cree Corner, Chewing Black Bones

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Hiram Upham, Interview by Author, In Person, April 6, 2016.

¹³³ Ibid.

Picnic Grounds, and the Fairgrounds, where various speakers would passionately share the Pentecostal message to large crowds of Blackfeet.

During most of the 1960s, Blackfeet Pentecostals were marked by a distinct lack of denominationalism. As Gordon Monroe explained, “Basically everyone kind of knew one another and if someone was having a special meeting we would all go; there were no walls.”¹³⁴ In the early 1970s much of that unity was severely strained after two Native preachers from Oklahoma named Larry Gilbert and J. Swallow came into Browning driving a shiny Cadillac, wearing immaculate suits, and preaching a different Pentecostal theology than most Blackfeet Pentecostals had heard before. “People were oohing and aaahing because they looked like rich business men,” Bill Old Chief described as he relayed the story told to him by his father Grayson, “Previously the teaching was about the Trinity and the Rapture. But these guys told everyone that they were ‘taught wrong.’ [Instead] they taught about Oneness and that everyone would have to go through the Tribulation. The church split right down the middle. People would no longer come together or meet in the same place.”¹³⁵ Roy Wolftail, a Blackfeet Pentecostal pastor during that time, called it a minor issue in the history of Blackfeet Pentecostalism. Wolftail had his own take on Gilbert and Swallow, “They were powerful, powerful ministers. Some of [the Blackfeet Pentecostals] here embraced what they were teaching, then later changed and rejected it...there are some diehards still practicing what they believed.”¹³⁶

Debates over the same types of theological issues encountered by the Blackfeet marked the Pentecostal movement in its first few decades after the Azusa Street Revival. In 1915, just one year after the formation of the Assemblies of God, several influential people in the A/G

¹³⁴ Gordon Monroe, Interview by Author, In Person, March 5, 2018.

¹³⁵ Bill Old Chief, Interview by Author, Phone, March 5, 2016.

¹³⁶ Roy Wolftail, Interview by Author, Phone, April 9, 2016.

started advocating for all Christians to be water baptized in the name of Jesus only, based on examples found in the biblical book of Acts. This argument went counter to the customary formula used by most ministers in the A/G at the time of baptizing new believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, an injunction given by Jesus to his disciples found in the book of Matthew. The advocates for this new theology, labeled the “oneness movement,” began to grow in strength and threatened to split the Assemblies of God while it was still in its infant stage. After some very public and vigorous debate many of key A/G leaders and congregations settled on the Trinitarian emphasis for water baptism and their voices convinced most other A/G pastors and churches to follow suit. The A/G has continued to hold a Trinitarian position on water baptism up to the present time.¹³⁷

Other Pentecostal churches, as well as other evangelical non-Pentecostal churches, have also debated and fought over the theological issue of whether God will remove Christians from the earth before, during, or after “the Tribulation;” an especially tumultuous time of war, disease, and death prophesied by the Bible to come sometime in the future. Churches have settled in all different areas of this theology with pre, mid, and post tribulation adherents. The tension behind this argument usually centers on the character of God versus the need for a believer to be prepared. Pre-tribulation adherents are emphatic that their position expresses a view of God that is more Biblically accurate in that God is full of grace and wants to protect believers from wrath by rescuing them before they suffer in the Tribulation. Mid and post-Tribulation adherents often emphasize a believer’s need to be prepared to trust God for provision through any difficult time, while also proclaiming the blessing of potential martyrdom for Christ if the Tribulation should indeed be too difficult to survive. There are evangelical churches that also reject the idea of

¹³⁷ Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Popular History* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1985), 44-50.

Christians being removed from the world in any manner and there are churches that vacillate between the various positions.

In light of the many sharp debates and acrimonious splits evangelical Christians and Pentecostals have historically had in trying to find common theological ground on these types of issues, it should probably be more surprising that it took the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement almost thirty years to experience any kind of division based on theology. Gordon Monroe, a Blackfeet Pentecostal pastor who had grown up around Pentecostalism from some of its earliest days in the log church, viewed this season of fractured Blackfeet Pentecostalism as an opportunity for Blackfeet Pentecostals to work out newly introduced theology, but to do so in a way that is distinctly Native. “An Indian will receive an Indian,” Gordon states, “and if you know who is there you can make up your mind one way or another.”¹³⁸ By this Monroe means that even if an Indian disagrees with another Indian, he or she will still receive this person with a welcoming spirit, so the person has the freedom to make up their mind about a thorny issue, versus making a decision in order to avoid possible rejection. The Blackfeet Pentecostals struggled with sharp disunity for a season, but after a few years most Blackfeet Pentecostals had worked out their thoughts on the thorny theological issues brought up by the Oklahoma preachers and were committed to unity once again. This is another evidence of how the Native innovation of perpetuating a pan-Indian Pentecostal network not only enhanced the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement by bringing in teaching from outside the reservation, but also helped to strengthen the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement by forcing it to work through internal theological discussion and debate over new ideas and new teachings introduced through the pan-Indian network.

¹³⁸ Gordon Monroe, Interview by Author, In Person, March 5, 2018.

In 1975, Upham and his congregation decided it was time to part with the log church. His church hired a mover to take away the “aging landmark” on the back of a large semi truck in order to make way for “a new, more modern facility.”¹³⁹ They replaced the old log building with a larger metal building and Upham changed the name of the church to, “The Browning Evangelistic Center.”¹⁴⁰ As the large moving truck slowly hauled the old log church through the tight streets of Browning and out of town, its departure marked the end of the first era of Blackfeet Pentecostalism. It was an era of remarkable growth in the new religious movement marked by numerous reports of Blackfeet men and women experiencing supernatural healing and emotional uplift. It was also an era of significant self-determination as several key Blackfeet men stepped into important leadership roles in the new movement radically expanding the reach of the Pentecostalism throughout the Blackfeet Reservation.

¹³⁹ “Log Church gives way to larger, modern building,” *Glacier Reporter*, October 9, 1975.

¹⁴⁰ Glacier County Courthouse, Land Transaction Records, 2QD – 69 - 233. Upham along with four trustees: Samuel Murray, Johnny TailFeathers, Fred Steffensrud, and Harold DustyBull felt the need to sell the land where the log church sat from “The Browning Christian Church” to a new entity “The Browning Evangelistic Center,” and recorded the transaction with the county, even though the new building, now fitted with a new name, still remained Upham’s church.

Conclusion:

When asked to explain why so many Blackfeet turned to Pentecostalism in the 1950s and 1960s versus joining the other possible religious churches available to them, Gordon Monroe answered, “We were running the show! We wanted to be in charge of our own destiny...”¹⁴¹ From its early beginnings in the 1940s, Blackfeet Pentecostalism transformed from a non-Native initiated religious offering into a fully Blackfeet-led religious movement. This thesis has argued that Pentecostalism took root among the Blackfeet because it created a link for older, more traditional Blackfeet people to previous forms of Blackfeet traditional spirituality. Pentecostalism’s emphasis on receiving supernatural power, especially physical healing, offered fresh hope to people struggling under the weight of difficult economic conditions, radical population migration, and continuous political instability.

While the older, traditional Blackfeet who first converted to Pentecostalism viewed the new movement through their intimate knowledge of traditional Blackfeet ways, the younger Blackfeet Pentecostals, who were less familiar with traditional ways, often chose to place themselves in direct opposition to most traditional Blackfeet practices, leading to sharp disagreements between Blackfeet Pentecostals and practitioners of Blackfeet traditional ways. The complicated ways Blackfeet Pentecostals navigated the tension between their new religious faith and their traditional Native practices reveals the inherent challenges Native Christians experience as they attempt to define what aspects of Native culture are incongruent with their new religious beliefs.

Much of the past historical analysis concerning Native American religious practice has centered on debates about Native identity formation. Influential scholars like Vine Deloria Jr. have advanced the argument that if Native people want to hold on to a truly Native identity they

¹⁴¹ Gordon Monroe, Interview by Author, In Person, March 5, 2018.

must push back against centuries of white colonial domination by “throw[ing] out the white man’s religion and return[ing] to the ways of their fathers.”¹⁴² George Tinker takes this type of identity-focused analysis a step further than Deloria by contending that “The incongruity of maintaining Indian self-pride and self-conscious identity as ‘Indian’ communities while participating in a religion imposed on us by our colonizer finally began to break down the inroads made by several generations of missionary imposition on our Indian communities.”¹⁴³ This scholarly fixation on cultivating a pure “Native identity” has left numerous aspects of Native Christian religious practice unexamined, including Native Pentecostalism.

This thesis has complicated these common identity-focused historical narratives by showing that in the practice of Pentecostalism, Blackfeet people found a powerful mechanism for self-determination and resistance to outside colonial forces. The proliferation of Blackfeet-led Pentecostal churches, from a single house church in 1954 to numerous Blackfeet-led Pentecostal churches dotting the landscape around Browning in just a few decades, is a remarkable testament to the potency of Native autonomy. Blackfeet men, inspired by the example of other Native Pentecostal leaders in the pan-Indian Pentecostal network, stepped into positions of authority, took risks, both financial and spiritual, and radically expanded their religious movement numerically.

Contrary to the opinion of many religious historians, the Blackfeet who joined, led, and promulgated the Pentecostal movement from 1940-1975 did not lack a Blackfeet identity.

Among the Blackfeet critics of Pentecostalism, those interviewed used terms like, “our people,”

¹⁴² Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988, originally published in 1969), 124.

¹⁴³ Tinker “American Indian,” 224.

or “people of more blood,” when describing Blackfeet Pentecostals.¹⁴⁴ One critic even used the analogy “when they look in the mirror there is a Blackfeet looking back at them” when talking about Pentecostals.¹⁴⁵ For these critics the “Native identity” of Blackfeet Pentecostals was never in question, rather it was the obvious Blackfeet identity of the Pentecostal converts that fomented the frustration many of these critics feel towards Blackfeet Pentecostals because they refused to keep and perpetuate Blackfeet religious knowledge. The examples in this thesis of full-blood, traditional Blackfeet embracing Pentecostalism are a compelling counterpoint to the simple, anachronistic “Native identity” themes found in much of the scholarship focused on Native religious practice.

James Treat, in the introduction to a book he edited called, *Native and Christian*, describes how Native Christians are often maligned by scholars but continue to challenge the academic understanding of Native religious attitudes and actions, “Native Christians have been called heretical, inauthentic, assimilated and uncommitted; they have long endured intrusive definitions of personal identity and have quietly pursued their own religious visions, often under the very noses of unsuspecting missionaries, anthropologists, agents and activists.”¹⁴⁶ In a similar vein, this thesis has also revealed that Native resistance to colonialism occurred within Pentecostal practice through Native Pentecostal religious re-invention. The Native innovation of creating a pan-Indian Pentecostal network functioned as an alternative to the Euro-American ministry education systems that still dominate the Christian religious alternatives available to the Blackfeet, namely the Catholic and Methodist church. These churches still lack a significant Blackfeet leadership presence because the ministry training systems they provide often operate un-intentionally, and sometimes even intentionally, to exclude Native participants in Christian

¹⁴⁴ Virgil Edwards, Interview by Author, In Person, March 2, 2018.

¹⁴⁵ John Murray, Interview by Author, In Person, March 2, 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Treat, “Introduction,” 9.

leadership. Even non-Native Pentecostal ministry training systems, while more diffuse than the Catholic or Methodist church, are often rooted in classic Euro-American style seminary systems. Conversely, the pan-Indian Pentecostal network allowed Native believers, like Blackfeet Pentecostals, an opportunity to hear new teaching, view inspirational examples of strong, expressive Native leadership, and receive apprentice-type ministry training in ways more familiar to Native culture. This type of religious re-invention acted as a form of Native resistance to non-Native forms of Pentecostalism allowing Blackfeet Pentecostals a distinct sphere of Native autonomy in which they could forge Blackfeet Pentecostalism into a truly indigenous movement, rather than a facsimile of non-Native Pentecostal institutions.

Since 1975 and the removal of the distinctive log church, the Pentecostal movement has continued to be a strong influence among the Blackfeet, with numerous new Pentecostal churches established in Browning and around the reservation. In 1993, a non-Native minister named Richard Stewart planted an Assembly of God church in Browning, thirty three years after the A/G abandoned the original work in 1960. Stewart passed the pastoral leadership of the church to a Blackfeet man named Burton Butterfly in 2003.¹⁴⁷ Hiram Upham's son, Titus Upham, started a church in 1999 called "The First Nation's Embassy of Faith." It grew to be one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Browning for a time, with several hundred people attending.¹⁴⁸

Some compelling historical questions concerning the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement worthy of additional future research are: How did the role of Pentecostal Blackfeet women differ from Blackfeet men throughout the history of the movement? What were the main non-Native influences on the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement from finances donated for building projects to

¹⁴⁷ Richard Stewart, Interview by Author, Phone, January 27, 2016.

¹⁴⁸ John Grandchamp (a Blackfeet minister who assisted Titus Upham with his church), Interview by Author, Phone, March 28, 2016.

theological innovations imparted into the movement from non-Native sources and how did these influences affect the Blackfeet-led nature of the movement? How did the increased political power of Blackfeet Pentecostals, especially with the election of numerous Pentecostal leaders to the BTBC in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, affect the movement internally and externally? How did the music that became the staple of the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement evolve over time? In addition to these questions a future historian will want to document the detailed history of the Blackfeet Pentecostal movement from 1975 up through modern times.

The Blackfeet Pentecostals of the middle twentieth century left an indelible mark on their community by promulgating a religious movement that promised healing and hope to many Blackfeet in the midst of difficult times. The Pentecostal message was new, yet familiar, as it contained echoes of past Blackfeet spirituality. Blackfeet Pentecostals not only embraced the new religious movement, they eventually took ownership of the movement by establishing numerous Blackfeet-led churches and ministries. In addition, Blackfeet Pentecostals participated in a robust pan-Indian Pentecostal network. This Native religious innovation helped perpetuate the influence of Pentecostalism among the Blackfeet, while also serving as the main mechanism for commissioning, training, and launching new Blackfeet converts into leadership positions in the Pentecostal movement.

The Blackfeet Pentecostals who took over the new religious movement in the mid-twentieth century inspired a younger generation of Blackfeet to a greater degree of self-determination and became a surprising source of Blackfeet resistance to the consistent tide of religious colonialism that had inundated the tribe since the middle of the nineteenth century. Through participation in the pan-Indian Pentecostal network, the story of the Blackfeet-led Pentecostal movement has not just been shared among the Blackfeet, but has become an

inspiration for religious self-agency and colonial resistance for Native people all across the northwestern United States.

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