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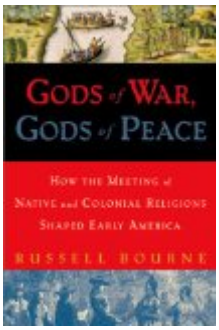

Russell Bourne. *Gods of War, Gods of Peace: How the Meeting of Native and Colonial Religions Shaped Early America.* New York and London: Harcourt, 2002. xv + 425 pp. $28.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-15-100501-7.

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Published on H-AmIndian (October, 2002)

Specially Empowered Men and their Legacy in Early America

Russell Bourne makes a very sensible argument in the preface and chapter 1 of *Gods of War, Gods of Peace: How the Meeting of Native and Colonial Religions Shaped Early America.* He argues that neither economic nor political conflict can adequately describe the cultural trajectory of early America because both Europeans and Native Americans viewed the world in religious terms from 1635 to 1830. Therefore, Bourne proposes to analyze cross-cultural contacts through a lens of uniquely American religious meanings and intent--just as the participants viewed and understood their world. This shift in focus and understanding, Bourne contends, will allow us to see how an American culture was created by both Europeans and Native Americans. So far so good.

Bourne goes on to add a more provocative element to his argument: this Americanness was (and is) about difference, not commonality. Bourne's early America in war and peace is a tale of two cities: Europeans and Native Americans all became Americans though their cultures remained unique and "uncombined" (p. xiv). How these unique cultures relate to the book's focus on religion is unclear. More often than not, Bourne relies on economics and international politics as well as religion to explain the development of American history and culture. For example, the Pequot War was undertaken with religious sentiment as well as the desire for land (p. 62); the Delaware pledged neutrality in the French and Indian War in exchange for the promised return of their stolen lands (pp. 218-219); and Pontiac's success was equally due to Neolin's new pan-Indian spirituality as well as to Pontiac's "native genius" in the guise of his revised military strategies (aptly described by Bourne, pp. 247-248).

After setting forth the argument in his preface and chapter 1, Bourne divides his book into three sections roughly corresponding to three centuries: early colonial America (1600s), the mature colonies (early and mid-1700s), and Revolution and the young United States (late 1700s-1830s). Each section contains two to three chapters on the major upheavals in each era with detailed descriptions of European and Native

American religious leaders who, Bourne argues, used their religious ethos to advocate "interracial" war or peace. Bourne uses previously published monographs refocusing their analyses with an eye for persuasive, religious leaders who, for the most part, advocated peace over war.[1]

I like Bourne's approach because it is so reasonable and levelheaded: we view historical actors using the value system they themselves used to understand their world. I eagerly anticipated the new interpretations this approach would generate. However, instead of systematically analyzing colonial and native religions, their interactions in times of peace and war and the resulting American culture(s), Bourne focuses on a few religiously-minded radicals, or "specially empowered men" (p. 386) of both European and Native American origin. It is not so much the meeting of native and colonial religions that he interrogates as it is the individuals who bucked the system in their attempt to build "biracial" communities and nationalism. Bourne wants his audience to know that Euro-Christians *and* Native American Christians tried to mingle, at least on a religious plane, at the same time they tried to build "bi-racial" communities and an American nation. His emphasis is on Native American agency in the American nationalist effort and Christian appreciation of native culture.

The latter is a tough sell and Bourne's slim evidence does not bear it out: the Jesuit Relations, ministers' speeches and sermons are used to show the good-faith effort of missionaries and the converts' love and appreciation of them. Native American words are used without mention of translators or their intent. Sources are used at face value and never probed critically for their self-serving features. One has to place a great deal of faith in Bourne and his interpretation. Given Bourne's career as an editor and publisher, perhaps this faith would not be misplaced. As an academic, I longed for a more closely edited text that focused on proving assertions, especially with thorough analyses of speeches, sermons and events.

Much of my uneasiness with *Gods of War, Gods of Peace* can be attributed to the lack of citations. The book has neither notes nor a bibliographic essay. Its bibliography lists 140 secondary sources with almost half published before 1980, many between the 1930s and 1960s. This dated historiography shows in the language and lack of critical analyses of missionaries' assertions and Native American motives. Unfortunate but all too common word phrasing prevails: Hiawatha grew up in an "Edenic forest world" where "nature ruled" prior to European contact (p. 72); other Native American scenes are described as "that wild forest" (p. 46), "a howling siege" (p. 58), but Jesuits are "loved" (p. 110), "care-bringing" (p. 116) and "compassionate" (p. 117). Even Euro-American non-Christians are "wilderness-inclined Americans" (p. 361).

Bourne's book as a whole reads as an attempt to privilege Native American culture and values from a Christian point of view. He points out the racism of early missionaries but also wants to appreciate their compassion for Native Americans and their attempts to bridge cultural differences. He acknowledges earlier historians' paternalism and their stereotyping of Native Americans as "savage." His salve seems to consist of valuing the "noble Indian," and in particular, Christian Native American converts over the unconverted. This will not be to everyone's liking.

Native agency, inter-group co-operation, and accommodation are themes explored by several "new world" historians, especially James Merrell, Colin Calloway and James Axtell. Richard White provides the darkest, and perhaps most realistic, view of these efforts in *The Middle Ground*. Bourne does not consult White's work but could benefit from this more complicated analysis of co-operation amid misunderstanding. Bourne's contribution is that he focuses on religiously-minded fellows who might have had a better than average

chance--because of their higher calling--in persuading both their followers and their enemies to behave and co-habitatate peacefully. More than anything, that is what this book is about: possibilities. Bourne emphasizes moments in time when co-operation and inter-group mingling seemed more probable than war and racism. Unfortunately, war and racism inevitably raised their ugly heads, all too often justified by the same religious systems that had advocated peace.

Bourne's focus on possibilities for peace and inter-group co-operation is rejuvenating. His desire to view the effect of both Native American and European actions on American culture is laudatory. The Delawares' intent to become the fourteenth state, the increased use of nature allegories and a benevolent God in missionaries' sermons and a plethora of other findings of Native American agency and centrality in ***Gods of War, Gods of Peace*** all deserve further study to discern cause and effect. The effect has all too often been uni-directional in favor of the Europeans, an error which Bourne tries to correct. Other concepts--"the middle ground" and "new worlds for all"--also further the shift away from Euro-ethnocentrism and towards a new understanding of Native American influence. The effect of native religions, in particular, on early American culture is a worthy topic and one that needs a thorough examination. The work of James P. Ronda on Native Americans' critique of European religion has long been the standard. A forthcoming essay by Jason Eden, "Negotiating a New Religious Culture on Martha's Vineyard," provides new evidence that Native Americans were not simply acted upon by missionaries but influenced European religious culture as well.[2] The questions are finally being asked, the direction of influence transposed. Bourne's book is another example of just how different U.S. history can look when scholars place Native Americans centrally within the realm of influence and action.

Notes

[1]. In his acknowledgments, Bourne lists a great deal of primary research including interviews with Native American leaders. I found none of these referenced in the text or bibliography. Bringing out their contribution within the text, citing these interviews and the way in which they were central to the argument would have improved the authenticity and reliability of Bourne's claim to a Native American point of view.

[2]. Jason Eden, "Negotiating a New Religious Culture on Martha's Vineyard," ***CIC Conference Papers*** (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, forthcoming).

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Citation: Kathleen M. W. Thomas. Review of Bourne, Russell. *Gods of War, Gods of Peace: How the Meeting of Native and Colonial Religions Shaped Early America.* H-AmIndian, H-Net Reviews. October, 2002.

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