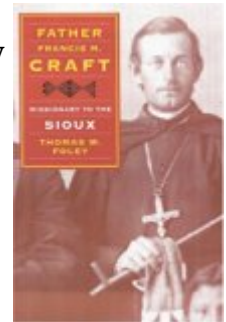


**Thomas W. Foley.** *Father Francis M. Craft, Missionary to the Sioux*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. xvi + 195 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8032-2015-7.



**Reviewed by** Benjamin L. Perez

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Father Craft, late-nineteenth-century Catholic missionary to the Sioux

In 1944, while rummaging about his aunt's apartment, Thomas W. Foley stumbled upon a curious shoebox filled with old letters, newspaper clippings, three small handwritten journals, and a photograph. The contents of the shoebox related to one Father Francis M. Craft, late-nineteenth-century Catholic missionary to the Sioux. Although Foley was only a teenager when he made his discovery, these "Indian papers" thoroughly captured his imagination, and his aunt agreed to pass the materials on to him.

Although Father Craft died in 1920, Foley had a good idea who the priest was because his father and aunt were close friends with the late Father Craft. Not only did Father Craft serve as pastor of his father and aunt's Pennsylvania church, but the priest even died in the arms of Foley's father. Growing up, Foley heard family tales of the priest's many adventures. In the 1960s, Foley began transcribing Father Craft's journals; but it was not until the 1990s, after Foley retired from his position as a labor-personnel executive, that he

and his wife conducted bona fide research, much of it in diocesan archives.

Book reviews do not often discuss the author of a biography or history, but the fact that Foley is not a professional scholar, and the fact that his work is largely a labor of love, help explain the strengths and weaknesses of his book. Refreshing is the absence of academic jargon and high-handed "theory" (both too often obfuscate rather than illuminate our understanding of the past). Moreover, Foley's attempt to present Father Craft on his own terms--and often in his own words--makes it possible for him to construct the kind of sensitive and sympathetic narrative that the best ethnohistorians employ to get at a people or person's self-understanding. Indeed, Foley does an excellent job not only narrating Father Craft's life, and the major events that influenced and shaped his life, but Foley succeeds in presenting the extravagant, aggressive, and often violent personality and person that was Father Craft.

Father Craft (1852-1920) was a complicated, if not strange, man. He was a native born Protestant American who converted to Catholicism and be-

came a priest; his paternal grandmother was the half-blood granddaughter of a Mohawk chief, but he kept his mixed-race ancestry secret even from the Native Americans he missionized; and, despite his training as a medical doctor and his calling as a priest, he possessed a fetishistic appetite for danger, confrontation, and war. Many of his contemporaries, including clergy, described him as hot headed, if not insane. When only ten years old, Craft served briefly as a messenger in the Civil War and was bayoneted at the battle of Gettysburg. He later served as a mercenary in the Franco-Prussian War and the Cuban Ten Years' War. Entering the priesthood did little to cool his temper or quell his thirst for danger. His own journals document his confrontations with Native American men, many he went out of his way to provoke. And despite being severely injured during the massacre at Wounded Knee (a Sioux man stabbed him in the back), when he could no longer ignore the fact that his unfunded--and unauthorized--Congregation of American Sisters was a failure, he volunteered himself and the last handful of his Native American nuns to serve as nurses in the Spanish-American War. He even attempted to enlist as a chaplain during WWI, despite his advanced age.

Scholars specializing in gender analysis would find Father Craft a worthy subject for a case study in late-nineteenth-century constructions and crises of Anglo-American masculinity.[1] His personal writings reek of military language, and his relationship with Native Americans--especially women--was in the worst sense paternalistic. Seen in the best light, he was a persistent, passionate man. Seen in the worst light, he was a bully. It is interesting that none of Father Craft's Native American nuns continued religious vocations after the Church and the government's Indian agents forced him to leave Indian country.

Local Sioux historians would benefit from an understanding of Father Craft's role in late-nineteenth-century Indian political history. He inter-

acted with--and often angered--many of the key players in Sioux politics, including Sitting Bull. Descendants of Father Craft's unorthodox Congregation of American Sisters, especially members of the Spotted Tail family, would likewise benefit from understanding Father Craft's role in their family and religious histories. Professional scholars with an interest in Sioux history, or an interest in late-nineteenth-century Christian missionary work among Native Americans,[2] will find Father Craft intriguing.

Foley's book has the feel of a local or family history, which serves him well because these genres engender empathy, and he wants very much for readers to empathize with Father Craft. But regrettable are some of Foley's choices of words. White Buffalo Woman is no more a "legendary being" than Jesus Christ; and traditional Sioux religion is no more "superstitious" than Catholicism. Moreover, Native Americans do not wear "costumes"; and one cannot "civilize" Native Americans because they were never savages. Also, much of the not so subtle pro-Catholic/anti-Episcopalian language in Foley's book will strike many readers as petty, indeed, as little more than the narcissism of minor differences.

#### Notes:

[1]. For works addressing late-nineteenth-century constructions and crises of Anglo-American masculinity, see Gail Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization: a Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America: a Cultural History* and Anthony E. Rotundo's *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*.

[2]. One book that addresses nineteenth-century Christian missionary work among Native Americans is Clyde A. Milner's *With Good Intentions: Quaker Work Among the Pawnee, Otos, and Omahas in the 1870s*. An excellent place to begin reviewing the literature on Native American religion and Christian missionization is Brett Rush-

forth's review essay in volume 49 of *Ethnohistory* (Spring: 2002). <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/ethnohistory/vo49/49.2rushforth.html>

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