



Tadeusz Lewandowski. *Ojibwe, Activist, Priest: The Life of Father Philip Bergin Gordon, Tibishkogijik.* Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2019. 208 pp. \$28.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-299-32520-6.

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Published on H-AmIndian (May, 2020)

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Not Just a Supporting Player: The Life of Tibishkogijik, Ojibwe Priest and Overlooked Progressive-Era Indigenous Activist

Tadeusz Lewandowski's biography on the life and work of Tibishkogijik, an Ojibwe Catholic priest and activist who went by the English name of Father Philip Bergin Gordon, offers a welcome contribution to the scholarship on American Indian activism during the Progressive Era. Lewandowski argues that "despite the notoriety Gordon enjoyed during his lifetime, he has received scant attention" in the scholarship and has been relegated as a "supporting player" in a movement to abolish the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs when, in fact, "he was a driving force" and "one of the original radicals" (pp. 6-7). Gordon's involvement in the Society of American Indians (SAI), founded in 1911, placed him in the company of such notable Indigenous activists as Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai), Charles Eastman (Santee Dakota), Arthur C. Parker (Seneca), Henry Roe Cloud (Ho-Chunk/Winnebago), and Gertrude Bonnin (Yankton Dakota), whose contributions have already been well documented. This work brings Gordon's unique set of experiences and perspectives into the fold, offering new opportunities to examine the tensions that SAI activists encountered in working toward securing Native civil rights and liberating "indigenous nations from the

government strictures that confined them on reservations" (p. 8).

As one of the first Indigenous people to be ordained a Catholic priest in the United States, Gordon is positioned as a contradictory character. The author grapples with the implications of Gordon's vigorous efforts toward Native Catholic conversion and his feelings toward the Bureau of Indian Affairs, stating that "in some ways he was a product of bureau policy dating from the Grant era—specifically, the placing of religious groups on reservations" (pp. 5-6). With the careful treatment of primary sources, the author has allowed us to see things from Gordon's perspective, offering vivid descriptions of the context in which he was raised and the impact the church and federal Indian policies had on shaping his worldview. What this created, Lewandowski argues, was an "immensely difficult" man whose "arrogance, quite clearly, often interfered with his personal and professional relationships" (p. 131). It isn't clear whether such a harsh characterization of Gordon is warranted since some of the sources that shape this assessment call for further scrutiny; however, this book does a stellar job detailing the challenges he faced throughout his career. Among other

things, Gordon experienced discrimination, was consistently misunderstood, and suffered accusations of financial impropriety. Yet he pushed on, arguing that “with the rights of white men, most Indians would flourish” (p. 65).

Organized chronologically, this book takes us through the trajectory of Gordon’s life (1885-1948) as he reckoned with both his celebrity status and struggles to be understood. The strength of this work is that it places Gordon’s lived experience within a broader political landscape, where predominantly white, upper-middle-class Protestant reformers “sought to remedy the nation’s social ills following decades of economically polarizing industrial development” (p. 7). Chapter 6 (“War in Europe, Battles at Home”) is particularly noteworthy in situating Gordon’s life within broader global happenings. This work also provides a valuable historical treatment of the SAI and the complex relationships and interactions of its members, as well as the tensions between religious and secular institutions within Indian progressive ideology. If the author were to expand his analysis, however, it would be worthwhile to offer more context on the Bureau of Indian Affairs/Office of Indian Affairs itself to help deepen the basis of understanding of Gordon’s position on the institution. Also, this book would have benefited from more attention to distinguishing between civil rights and tribal self-determination, which was a critical point of tension during the Progressive Era and tends to get lost at certain points in the narrative.

Ojibwe, Activist, Priest is a concise biography that I recommend to anyone interested in Indigenous activism, Progressive-Era politics, and the role of the Catholic Church in Indian country. It is well written and makes an important contribution to the existing scholarly treatment of other Indigenous intellectual leaders of the early twentieth century.

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Citation: Denise E. Bates. Review of Lewandowski, Tadeusz. *Ojibwe, Activist, Priest: The Life of Father Philip Bergin Gordon, Tibishkogijik*. H-AmIndian, H-Net Reviews. May, 2020.

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