

Native American ministries #9

- Thom White Wolf Fassett's Giving Away Our Hearts- Native American Survival. ibid. p.40.

Perhaps one of the most lucid commentaries on the relationship of Christian missions to Native people came from an old Seneca chief in 1805. Missionary Cram was sent to Red Jacket and others of the principal chiefs and warriors at Buffalo Creek (now Buffalo, NY) to instruct the Indians on "how to worship the Great Spirit." Red Jacket was acquainted with the Christian church and knew that while nomadic Hebrews were eulogized, transient Indians needed to be 'civilized.' Christians talked about the Holy Ghost in their places of worship while at the same time damning the Indian spirit world. Red Jacket had witnessed denominations reluctant to share pulpits, yet proclaiming the unifying nature of God's Word. It was out of this context that the chief replied to Mr. Cram after patiently listening to him deliver his message:

"Brother, our seats were once large and yours were small. You have now become a great people, and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets. You have got our country but are not satisfied; you want to force your religion upon us...You say that you are sent to instruct us how to worship the Great Spirit agreeably to his mind, and if we do not take hold of the religion which you white people teach, we shall be unhappy hereafter...We understand that your religion is written in a book. If it was intended for us as well as you, why has not the Great Spirit given it to us, and not only to us, but why did he not give to our forefathers the knowledge of that book with the means of understanding it rightly? We only know what you tell us about it. How shall we know what to believe, being so often deceived by the white people? Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the book?...Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to white people in this place. These people are our neighbors, we are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said..."

It has been suggested that the term "cram it down your throat" derived from this meeting with Missionary Cram.