

plural marriage<sup>22</sup> in several western states and in a few places in Canada and Mexico.

## Native Americans and Religion

Today, nineteenth-century missionaries who sought to reach Native peoples are often disparaged. In fairness, however, it must be noted that some missionaries sought to protect Native peoples from white encroachment on tribal lands and to hold whites accountable for the promises made in treaties. For example, Episcopal bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple (1822–1901) became an advocate on behalf of the Sioux, Ojibwas, and other peoples. Whipple met with Abraham Lincoln to press for reforms in the federal conduct of Indian affairs; throughout his lifetime, Whipple continued his advocacy for Native Americans.

The efforts of Whipple and other well-intentioned missionaries could not, however, offset the effects of disease, warfare, treaty breaking, and removals to reservations. Those

harsh realities, according to historian Henry Warner Bowden, “always interfered with evangelical efforts and changed them before they could operate as intended.”<sup>23</sup> Insofar as they saw Christianity as the “white man’s religion,” Native peoples were hard pressed to take the claims of Christianity at face value.

American expansion ended an entire way of life for Native Americans west of the Mississippi. As traditional ways of life were crumbling, the Plains Indians experienced a revival of religion in the 1880s. Inspired by the Paiute prophet Wovoka, a new religion called the “Ghost Dance” was born. It awakened the hope that life could return to the way it was before the coming of the whites. The Ghost Dance invoked the spirits of the dead and sought to bring about their return. Some said that the Ghost Dance was a peaceful religion; others hoped it would “bring about a day when [Native peoples] were “strong enough to wage an all out war against the whites.”<sup>24</sup> The Ghost Dance spread through several reservations, including Pine Ridge and Rosebud in the Dakota



**Fig. 5.13** Episcopal Church and Indian Mission School, Fort Hall Reservation, Idaho, between 1912 and 1953.

MRL 10: G.E.E. Lindquist Papers, 41, 355, The Burke Library Archives (Columbia University Libraries) at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

territories. It promised a better future than the one offered “by missionaries, the Office of Indian Affairs, and the United States Army—a future in which the only way to survive” was to give up their distinct cultures and assimilate.<sup>25</sup> Ghost Dance shirts were believed to have the power to stop bullets of the white soldiers. But the Ghost Dance shirts did not protect anyone on December 29, 1890. On that day, federal troops, expecting an uprising, massacred more than two hundred Miniconjous Sioux who were camped at Wounded Knee Creek. Old men, women, and children were shot down; some of the victims were wearing Ghost Dance shirts, which soldiers stripped off to keep as souvenirs. Wounded Knee is remembered as the last official engagement between the U.S. Army and Native Americans.

Settlers continued moving west as tribal peoples were increasingly confined to reservations. The federal government enlisted the aid of various Christian denominations, which were to send missionaries to reservations. The missionaries were expected to help transform native peoples into Christian farmers. Missionary teachers started boarding schools on reservations to get Native children to “travel the white road” by adopting the language, religion, and culture of the whites. Toward this end, children were separated from their families and forbidden to speak their own languages, wear Native dress, and practice tribal religions. (Not until 1978, with the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, were Native Americans guaranteed the right to practice their traditional religions.)

The problem of tribal land became acute in the late nineteenth century. Many tribes had been given lands, but whites kept pressing to settle on these reservations. Access to and attitudes toward land were intimately tied to the

survival of Native cultures. Many whites felt that tribes would never assimilate as long as they held land communally. So “by the 1880s, in near unanimity, government officials, military officers, congressional leaders and Christian reformers agreed that . . . reservations should disappear along with Indian identity.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the Dawes Act of 1887 forced several tribes to give up their communal land and become individual property owners. Land not designated to private Native owners was sold to whites.<sup>27</sup> Given this long and tragic history, it seems little short of a miracle that some Native Americans did become Christian. Yet there were (and continue to be) Native American congregations on many reservations. Over time, the Native American church developed a blend of Indian religious practices and basic Christian teachings. Such a faith does not ignore the wrongs of the past but manages in many instances to transcend them.

## Overseas Missions

While the U.S. was closing its western frontiers, a new frontier of global mission was opening up. For a long time, America had been primarily a receiver of missionaries; many churches imported priests and pastors from Europe. Rather early in our history, however, Americans began sending as well as receiving missionaries. In 1810 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was founded. By the late nineteenth century, the U.S. was a major sender of missionaries; and by 1920 “North America had become the principal source of missionaries.”<sup>28</sup> In the progressive era of the late nineteenth century, the mission movement sought to spread both Christianity and democracy around the world. Mission societies