



**Directors of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions:
1. Reverend John Baptiste Abraham Brouillet, 1874-1884**

Kevin Abing, 1994

J.B.A. Brouillet, the first director of the BCIM, was a native Canadian. He was born on December 11, 1813, and spent his childhood on his father's farm in the village of St. Jean-Baptiste

Bishop John Charles Prince provided the necessary orders. Less than a week later, Blanchet appointed Father Brouillet vicar general for the Diocese of Walla Walla.²

Bishop Blanchet, his new vicar general and two other volunteers set out from Montreal on March 23, 1847. They traveled across New York and Pennsylvania by stage and railroad, then by boat down the Ohio River. The missionaries reached St. Louis on April 15 and remained there twelve days, gathering supplies for the trek across the plains. While in St. Louis, Blanchet's group was joined by four Oblate missionaries from France. Leaving St. Louis on April 27, the small company made their way across Missouri to Westport, one of the jumping off points to the West. They linked up with a wagon train and began the arduous journey along the Oregon Trail. Once the party reached Fort Hall on the Snake River, Bishop Blanchet decided that he and three others should proceed on horseback to Walla Walla and make arrangements for lodging and provisions. The rest of the group, led by Father Brouillet, would follow with the wagons. Blanchet arrived at Fort Walla Walla on September 5, 1847, while Brouillet and his contingent reached their destination on October 3.³

Shortly after his arrival, Brouillet became embroiled in one of the most famous controversies in the history of the Oregon Territory. Dr. Marcus Whitman had proselytized among the Cayuse Indians for over a decade, yet the tribe had become dissatisfied with him because Whitman had been actively helping white settlers move into Oregon Territory. Also many of the tribe died from various diseases, raising suspicions in the Indians' minds that Whitman was poisoning them. The tribe's disenchantment prompted Tautau, one of the tribal chiefs, to appeal to Blanchet to start a mission among the Cayuse. Convinced that the Catholics could succeed where Whitman had failed, Blanchet assigned Father Brouillet to establish St. Anne's Mission. In early November, Brouillet chose Tautau's village on the Umatilla River as the site for the mission and returned to Walla Walla on November 10. The next day, Blanchet sent a crew to repair the proposed mission. When the buildings were ready, Brouillet occupied the mission on November 27.⁴

On the evening of November 30, Brouillet arrived at a Cayuse camp near Dr. Whitman's mission to baptize infants and any interested adults. To his horror, he learned that Cayuse warriors had killed Dr. Whitman, his wife and nine others the day before. With the killers still milling about, Brouillet spent a sleepless night at the camp. The next morning, he hurried to the Whitman mission

Brouillet knew that Henry Spalding, another Protestant missionary targeted by the Cayuses, would soon pass through the village. At great personal risk, Brouillet left the village and warned Spalding of the danger. Spalding escaped, narrowly avoiding capture. Soon thereafter, he wrote a letter to Blanchet thanking his "dear friend" for saving his life. But the next year, Spalding wrote several letters to the *Oregon American* charging that the Catholics were responsible for the massacre. Incensed at Spalding's ingratitude, Brouillet wrote a 107 page pamphlet refuting Spalding's accusations. The "murder of Dr. Whitman and his associates," Brouillet claimed, "was premeditated, matured and determined upon by the evil disposed Indians among the Cayuse nation, long before the arrival of the Bishop of Walla Walla and his missionaries." His spirited defense quieted the controversy for a time, but Protestant accusations hounded Brouillet for several years, as political and religious enemies periodically raised questions about his role in the matter.⁶

White settlers in Oregon were outraged by the Whitman massacre and soon mobilized a military force. Brouillet, in the meantime, returned to St. Anne's Mission. The Cayuse were angry with Brouillet because he had helped Spalding escape, but they did not retaliate. Nevertheless, the eruption of full-scale fighting between whites and Indians forced Brouillet to close the mission on February 20, 1848. Shortly after he left, the Indians burned St. Anne's to the ground.⁷

While he waited for the situation to become less chaotic, Brouillet worked with Bishop Blanchet at St. Peter's Mission at The Dalles. During that summer, news of the discovery of gold in California reached Oregon. The diocese was plagued with numerous debts, and so, Blanchet immediately sent Brouillet to California to raise much-needed funds.

Brouillet arrived in San Francisco in December 1848 and immediately began visiting the mining camps, seeking donations for the Oregon missions. The spiritual destitution of the population convinced the vicar general that his help was desperately needed in California. His first step was to build a church. He collected \$5,000 and erected a small frame church on Vallejo Street, the first Catholic house of worship in San Francisco. Brouillet celebrated the first Mass there on June 17, 1849. In addition, Brouillet successfully recruited Jesuit priests to minister to the ever-growing population and also encouraged Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur to estab.⁷ 0 T-5(gotion a-6(ab.7 y)

following year to raise funds but with the proviso that he not occupy himself "with any foreign affairs."⁸

Brouillet returned to Oregon after a two-month stay in California. Thereafter, Brouillet immersed himself in his many ecclesiastical duties. In 1850, Bishop Blanchet was transferred to the newly-created Diocese of Nesqually, with its headquarters at Vancouver. Not surprisingly, he appointed Brouillet vicar general of Nesqually in November. In his new post, Brouillet actively sought donations and recruited missionaries to staff Indian missions and schools. He served as pastor of St. James Mission in November 1850, but he also inspected the other Indian missions in the diocese. Eventually the scope of his activities broadened to include white settlers. As Americans flooded into the Northwest, Brouillet recruited the necessary personnel to minister to their spiritual needs. And, when Bishop Blanchet embarked on fund-raising trips to Mexico in 1851 and to Europe in 1856, Brouillet assumed control of all diocesan administrative duties.⁹ Although these administrative burdens eventually ended, a new task absorbed increasing amounts of Brouillet's time.

Bishop Blanchet feared that the Church would have to relinquish the lands occupied by missions in his diocese. His concern arose from the increased number of white homesteaders, overlapping claims with the military and the unsettled state of the Indians. Thus he and Brouillet labored for years to secure a clear title to those mission lands. In 1859, Blanchet sent Brouillet on a trip to the East seeking financial support as well as missionary recruits. Brouillet also visited Washington, D.C., and successfully gained title to the land at Cowlitz Mission. Brouillet made another trip to Washington in 1862 to protect diocesan mission property.¹⁰

His 1862 trip marked another turning point for Brouillet. For on this trip, Brouillet became more politically involved in the cause of Catholic missions. Bishop Blanchet encouraged Brouillet to meet with the Secretary of the Interior and Indian Department officials to encourage the government to "adopt a system which will withdraw [Catholic missionaries] from the bigotry of the Protestant ministers and of the local administrations which are generally devoted to them."¹¹ Consequently, Brouillet sent a memorial to President Lincoln in October 1862. Foreshadowing Grant's Peace Policy, Brouillet requested Lincoln to instruct government superintendents and agents in Oregon and Washington to act in concert with religious missions. Brouillet also asked that Indian reservations served by the Catholic Church "be placed under the religious care of the Catholic

⁸Kowrach, *Journal of a Catholic Bishop*, 144-45; Thomas, "Abbe Jean-Baptiste Abraham Brouillet," 22-29; Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J., *The Jesuits of the Middle United States*, 3 vols. (New York: America Press, 1938), 2: 395-403; Schoenberg, *Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest*, 124-25; Zephyrin Engelhardt, O.F.M., *The Missions and Missionaries of California*, Vol. 4: *Upper California* (San Francisco: The James H. Barry Company, 1915), 614-616; Bryan J. Clinch, "The Jesuits in American California," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 17 (1906), 54-58; John B. McGloin, S.J., "The California Catholic Church, 1840-1849: A Report on Religion," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 60 (December 1949), f. 14, p. 220.

⁹Thomas, "Abbe Jean-Baptiste Abraham Brouillet," 29-48; Kowrach, *Journal of a Catholic Bishop*, 145.

¹⁰Kowrach, *Journal of a Catholic Bishop*, 145; Thomas, "Abbe Jean-Baptiste Abraham Brouillet," 37-38, 48-52, 58-59.

¹¹Blanchet to Brouillet, June 17, 1862, quoted in Thomas, "Abbe Jean-Baptiste Abraham Brouillet," 59.

Missions." Moreover, reservations with Indians taught by Protestant missions should be placed under their care.¹² The White House forwarded Brouillet's memorial to William Dole, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Dole thought Brouillet demanded too much of the government. The government's Indian policy seemed "sufficiently liberal" to Dole because it protected all religious denominations in the control of their own missions. The Commissioner was "not willing to relinquish any of the powers of this office to regulate and control the affairs of the Indians through our regularly constituted Superintendents and Agents."¹³

Unsuccessful, but undaunted, Brouillet returned to Washington, D.C., in 1864 to handle the claim of St. James Mission. Again, Brouillet got caught up in "foreign affairs," and again, Bishop Blanchet urgently requested Brouillet to return home. Brouillet, however, did not go back to Washington Territory until the summer of 1867. For the next several years, Brouillet devoted his attention to the missions in the Walla Walla region. During this time, he helped establish the first government contract schools under religious control.¹⁴

Brouillet's career took another turn in 1872. In November, Francis and Augustin Blanchet again sent the vicar general to Washington, D.C., to settle land claims for the diocese. On this trip,

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Washington, D.C., a little longer because Ewing and he were negotiating with the government for

