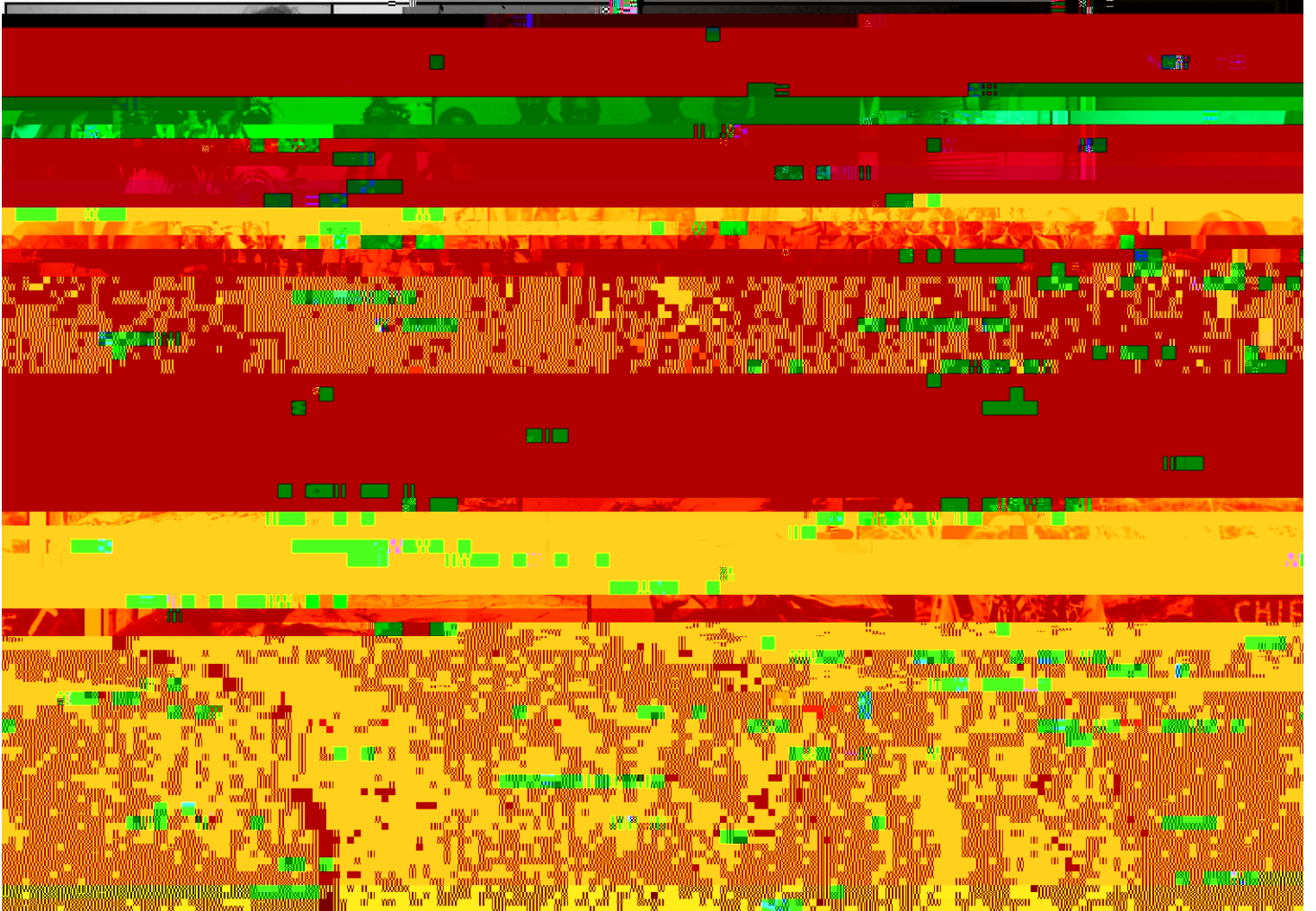


Highlights from the Holiness of Nicholas William Black Elk, Sr., 1866 - 1950



Born into a great lineage of traditional healers, Black Elk was favored by a great vision, in which he was atop Harney Peak in the Black Hills. While still very young, he too became a healer and his continued a lifelong quest to better know and serve the Great Spirit.

Soon, he noticed Christianity. In 1885, he signed a native petition urging the Pope to declare Kateri Tekakwitha a saint in heaven. During the next three years, he traveled to Europe with Wild West shows and saw Christianity in action. He returned home to the South Dakota Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, and while participating in the Ghost Dance, he had visions of Jesus and was wounded in the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre. In 1904, while praying for a Vcmŋ \YU`b[ , \Y a YhU JYgi ]hk \c ]bj ]hYX \]a hc ghi XmC\`f]gh]Ub]hm HY X]X so, and was baptized Nicholas William Xi f]b[ h\Y ÍMccb cZPcdd]b[ HfYYgÍ on December 6<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of St. Nicholas. Thereafter, he followed St. Nick as his Christian model of charity and generosity, which resonated with Lakota values and his role as a healer.

Believing that the Great Spirit led him to greater service through Jesus, he became an authentic Christian who seamlessly intertwined and followed Lakota and Catholic teachings with peace, love, and harmony for all creation. He regularly prayed with his rosary and pipe and participated in mass and Lakota ceremonies. In 1907, the Jesuits appointed him a catechist (teacher of Christian faith) because of his enthusiasm and excellent memory for learning Scripture and church teachings in Lakota. Like St. Paul, he traveled widely, preached and told stories, and wrote pastoral letters with verses on good Christian living, which Lakota newspapers distributed. Oftentimes, he taught the faith by narrating the ÍTwo RoadsÍ picture catechism, which featured colorful graphics of h\Y ÍGccX FYX FcUX of JesusÍ UbX h\Y ÍB`UW FcUX cZD]Z]W`h]Yg.Í From 1927 to 1946, he used this background to narrate demonstrations on traditional Lakota life and ceremonies for Black Hills tourists.

John G. Neihardt and Joseph Epes Brown provided glimpses of his life and advocacy in and . However, the full life story Black Elk envisioned did not materialize until after his daughter Lucy Looks Twice requested Michael F. Steltenkamp to do so, which culminated in and

Just before he passed on August 17, 1950, Black Elk predicted that God, in his mercy, would show a sign in the sky. Although out-of-season, aurora borealis danced with unprecedented brilliance in the night sky, both overhead at his wake at St. Agnes Church and around the world.

### More Information

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by Michael F. Steltenkamp, University of Oklahoma Press, 1994; his ÍCUh\c`]W`mYars, 1904-1950, first alerted hcXUmŋ readers about his life as a catechist.

by Nicholas W. Black Elk; edited by John G. Neihardt and Raymond J. DeMallie, Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2008.

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