

Rochester Priest Calls Indians Back To Simple Life

By MIKE O'NEARA
(NC News Service)

Ottawa, Ont.—Father Bernard Brown, OMI, is arousing people power. And he's doing it from all places—the frozen wastelands inside the Arctic Circle 1,000 miles north of Edmonton, Alta.

(Father Brown is one of two priest-sons of Mrs. Frank J. Brown, 315-Lake Front, Rochester. He was ordained for the Oblate Order in 1948, and has been serving in Canada since then. Father Thomas Brown, ordained an Oblate in 1955, has been serving in Brazil since 1957.)

Father Brown is calling the Hareskin Indians back to hunting and trapping from the lure of easy life—in reality unemployment, liquor and degradation on the fringes of booming towns and trading posts in the Northwest Territories.

He's a voice in the wilderness, calling from Colville Lake 110 miles north of Fort Good Hope, in the traditional hunting grounds of the Hareskins. And he is being heard, at least faintly, both by the Indians and government officials. He has a message for both.

For the Indians: Come back to where you can work and live with dignity, and enjoy a stable family situation.

For government officials and educators: Break the chain of circumstances that lures Indians away from their traditional ways or subtly undermines their interest and pride in hunting and trapping. And he spells out the links.

When Father Brown came to Colville Lake in 1962, he found two dozen Hareskins living in dilapidated log cabins and tents. Since then more than 50 other Hareskins have returned to the old village, taken up the traditional ways, and replaced every building with new log structures.

They have built a new log church, community hall and a six-bunk cabin with a picture window for tourist hunting and fishing parties. An independent trader has set up shop at the opposite end of the village. There is an air of permanency about Our Lady of the Snows mission.

Father Brown calls the project "a regrouping" of the Hareskins, a satellite community to Fort Good Hope, and he strongly believes there should be more such satellites to call Indians back to the life and ways they know.

The dilemma of the Hareskins—named by early explorers who found them dressed in the skins of the



Father Bernard Brown, OMI, baptizes Indian infant in his log chapel mission above the Arctic Circle in Canada's Northwest Territory.

Snowshoe rabbit or Arctic hare—is that they have no written language, no cave paintings or other ancient art to tell them of their history or culture.

They speak the same language as the Navajo Indians of the southern United States and are of the same anthropological stock. But they don't know their past, and find it difficult to accept the white man's sense of competition, industry and the discipline of routine work day after day.

They call themselves simply "Dene." The Men. Other Indians call them "The End-of-the-Earth People." They've been there since mastodons roamed the Arctic 4,600 years ago—2,600 B.C.

If white men are confused by the turmoil and increasing tempo of change in their society, think of the Indian. The old ways have lost their appeal, and the new ways of the north—mining, oil fields, electronics—beckon at first, but circumstances somehow put them on the edge of society.

Father Brown sees more links in the chain of alienation.

"One of the costliest mistakes we whites have made has been in building good homes for the Indians at the forts. Had government officials built them for the people out on the traplines, he said, they would deserve nothing but praise. But as laudable as was their purpose, they have forged another link in the chain that holds the native trapper a prisoner in the white man's settlement."

He also faults the federal educational system, which provides free air transportation for children from far-flung villages to boarding schools in central points—and separates them from their parents for most of the year.

Stress on trades and technology is turning out more graduates than jobs available, destroys the young Indians' interest in trapping, and often turns them southward where few succeed in adapting to the white man's mentality.

Although the fur harvest is greater than ever, and although good trappers can make \$10,000 in the four-month season—take eight months vacation—and live well on less than half of that for a year, few young Indians want to trap, he declared.

Father Brown blames the school system. Children are too long away from their parents, for one thing. For another, "it certainly is not that true that they forget how to trap. Nor do they lose the only advantage the native has over the white trapper: the ability to withstand the cold. It is mental. Somehow, they

Corporation should report price changes on the fur market, as it does farm marketing in agricultural areas. And it should broadcast interviews and advice from old-time trappers, he advocated.

Youth trapper associations, like 4-H clubs, should be formed and offer prizes for the amount and quality of furs caught, with special rewards for its handling," Father Brown said.

And, why not form junior dog-drivers clubs? "A few years ago the Indian Affairs Branch gave prizes for the best gardens in the various forts. I have never heard of their awarding prizes for the most fur harvested," he declared.

What makes it more imperative is that he is speaking of, and to, a youth society. Half the residents of the Northwest Territories are under 21. There are 4,000 children under 5, 9,000 in the 5-to-9 age group, 2,600 in the 10-to-14 group, and 1,800 in the 15-to-19 group.

"The implications of these figures for education in the near future, and for employment in the more distant future, are obvious and almost frightening," Father Brown said.

Father Brown is a hardy man, physically and in his convictions. He has to be to

survive in a land where winter is nine months long. At 48, he looks at least 10 years younger. He is as good or better than the best in Colville Lake at hunting, trapping, fishing, breeding his own dogs for stamina and intelligence.

He makes his own bread, plays a good folk guitar, pulls teeth, doctors axe cuts and delivers babies. He is a pilot, accomplished cameraman, ham radio operator, town planner, and artist.

For all these reasons, but perhaps most for his dispen-

sary and radio, the people depend on him. And he loves his people. He is not preaching at them but demonstrating—as a Christian, a man, and a priest, in that order—that a better life is available to them in the old ways.

Some Indians are hearing. Some other missionaries and traders are hearing. So are a growing number of government officials.

Father Brown's people power isn't violent. It does, however, involve confrontation—of the dispossessed man with himself.

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Property Improvement Loans .. 247,854.46 <i>Loans made under Home Modernization loan plans... all repayable in 5 years or less.</i>	Loans In Process 561,176.53 <i>These loans have been made and the funds set aside for disbursement. Most of these loans are for the construction or modernization of homes in the Chemung Valley area.</i>
Other loans 145,436.12 <i>Made to members who use their passbooks as security for an amount up to 90% of their savings.</i>	Other Liabilities 112,557.93
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