

Missionaries in Collision: Anglicans and Oblates among the Gwich'in, 1861-65

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ABSTRACT. The history of the first missionary efforts among the Gwich'in Athapaskans (Loucheux) living in northeastern Alaska, the northern Yukon Territory, and the northwestern part of the Northwest Territories is vividly portrayed through the correspondence and journals left by the Anglicans James Hunter, William West Kirkby, and Robert McDonald and by their Roman Catholic rivals, the Oblate priests Henri Grollier and Jean Séguin. On several occasions during the early 1860s, the Anglicans and the Oblates found themselves traveling together and competing one on one for the conversion of the Gwich'in. This resulted in some highly charged and dramatic confrontations. Although the Anglicans and Oblates have since reconciled many of their differences, their early competition produced tremendous confusion and turmoil among the Gwich'in, and it effectively foreshadowed other interdenominational conflicts that continue in the present day.

Key words: missionaries, Anglican, Oblate, Gwich'in, Kutchin, Loucheux, Fort McPherson, Fort Yukon, tobacco

RÉSUMÉ. L'histoire des premiers efforts missionnaires chez les Gwich'in Athapaskans (Loucheux) vivant dans l'Alaska nord-est, le Yukon du nord, et la nord-ouest partie des Territoires Nord-ouest est décrit avec éclat dans la correspondance et les journaux particulier des Anglicans James Hunter, William West Kirkby, et Robert McDonald, et aussi dans ceux de leur rivaux Catholique Romains, les Oblate prêtres Henri Grollier et Jean Séguin. Sur occasions plusieurs pendant le début des 1860s, les Anglicans et les Oblates se découvrent marchant ensemble et se faisant concurrence tête-à-tête pour la conversion des Gwich'in. Il aboutit à quelques confrontations dramatique et vive. Quoique les Anglicans et les Oblates avont réconcilié beaucoup de leur différences, leur concurrence ancien produit une confusion et une agitation extraordinaire chez les Gwich'in. Aussi, cette concurrence a préfiguré effectivement autres conflits entre dénominations qui continuent à présent.

Mots clés: missionnaires, Anglican, Oblate, Gwich'in, Kutchin, Loucheux, Fort McPherson, Fort Yukon, tabac

It is fairly well known that during the early years of exploration in the far North, British and French-Canadian fur traders were the first whites to arrive and settle on the frontier. Backed with substantial capital, the fur trade took priority over other kinds of sustained European contact with indigenous Athapaskan peoples such as the Gwich'in, also known as the Kutchin or Loucheux (see Slobodin, 1981:530-532), whose homeland spreads across the Mackenzie River basin of the Northwest Territories, the northern Yukon Territory, and northeastern Alaska. It was not for many years after the major forts were built and after transportation routes were well established that British and French missionaries followed.

The post at Peel's River, for example, later to be called Fort McPherson, was established by John Bell in 1840-41, but the first missionaries did not arrive there until nearly two decades later. Although the Anglican Archdeacon James Hunter, of the London-based Church Missionary Society, made an initial scouting trip into the upper and middle Mackenzie River region and met a party of visiting Peel's River Gwich'in at Fort Simpson in the fall of 1858, it was 1860 before Father Henri Grollier, the Oblate priest who started a Roman Catholic mission at Fort Resolution in 1852 and another at Fort Good Hope in 1859, made the first missionary trip to the Gwich'in living at McPherson (Hunter, 1859:237; Coudert and Le Chevalier, 1955:371). In a similar fashion, Fort Yukon, located in Gwich'in territory at the extreme outer edge of the Hudson's Bay Company interior trade network, was established by Alexander Hunter Murray in 1847 but did not receive its first missionary, the Anglican William West Kirkby, until 1861.

The fact that missionaries arrived in the region somewhat later than the traders, however, in no way diminished their tremendous power and influence over the Gwich'in. Since the impact of missionaries on aboriginal peoples in the North over the long term has arguably been more profound than that of the traders, in that missionaries intended to accomplish what Robin Fisher has called "the complete destruction of the traditional integrated Indian way of life" (1977:125), it is certainly worthwhile to attempt to understand the kinds of social and psychological conflicts they generated during the early period of missionization.

Unlike the Hudson's Bay Company, which had a virtual monopoly on trade, the Anglican and Catholic churches found themselves in a competitive free-for-all as they tried to win Indian converts. In the Mackenzie River region it seems to have started when Archdeacon Hunter butted heads with Father Grollier in 1858 over their mutual plans to set up missions at Fort Simpson (Hunter, 1859:235), but this was only a preliminary skirmish and did not directly involve the Gwich'in. When Anglicans and Oblates finally did visit Fort McPherson and Fort Yukon almost simultaneously in the early 1860s, the Gwich'in were placed in a real quandry as to where to place their spiritual allegiance. This quandry is well illustrated by the following series of events.

On 19 June 1861, the Anglican William Kirkby left his home at Fort Simpson, floated down the Mackenzie River, and then ascended up Peel's River to Fort McPherson, also known at the time as Peel's River. From Fort McPherson he proceeded on foot westward over the Richardson Mountains to La Pierre's House on the Bell River, where he held services for 15-20 Indians. Traveling with him was a young Gwich'in boy

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named William Flett, the stepson of Orkneyman James Flett, who acted as his interpreter. From La Pierre's House, Kirkby floated down the Porcupine River to Fort Yukon. He arrived at the fort on 5 July, greeted by his friend James Lockhart (the "chief trader in charge"), the American naturalist Robert Kennicott, and 500 Indians gathered there to trade (Kirkby, 1861b; Boon, 1965:39).

In making this trip Kirkby became the very first clergyman to visit the homeland of the western or Alaskan Gwich'in. After a frantic week of holding services three times a day, teaching hymns, and receiving long lines of individuals into his improvised schoolroom at the fort (Boon, 1965:42), Kirkby claimed his influence was so great that "the medicine men renounced their craft, murderers confessed their sins, polygamists gave up their wives, mothers told of deeds of infanticide..., and then all begged for pardon and for grace" (Kirkby, 1861b, 1863, 1872:419).

When he left Fort Yukon a week later, Kirkby was ecstatic. However, when he arrived back at Fort McPherson on 2 August he was dismayed to find Father Grollier, who was attempting to convert the Gwich'in to Catholicism. Besides his earlier work at Fort Resolution, Grollier had established a mission at Fort Good Hope in 1859 and another at Fort McPherson in September 1860, but he was not entirely welcome at McPherson. Mr. Gaudet, the Hudson's Bay Company trader there, had complained about the priest's activities the year before and offered him no assistance. Even as Grollier landed his canoe at McPherson that June, he was met by a Loucheux woman who apparently told him: "The minister is good to us; he is better than you; he gives us tobacco and tea. He has taken all your pictures and crosses out of the camps" (quoted in Duchaussois, 1923:272-273). Grollier had wanted to visit La Pierre's House and Fort Yukon, but his poor health and his inability to get supplies at McPherson forced him to return to Fort Good Hope that same August.

Earlier that summer at Fort Liard, Kirkby became disillusioned with Catholic missionaries when he learned that a priest he shared his tent with was attempting to win away his own followers. He was openly jealous of the Oblates' success in winning Indian converts and attributed that success to "their perfect knowledge of the [Indian] language, their gaudy ceremonies, and...their untiring zeal and perseverance" (1861a; see also Kirkby, 1860). At the same time he accused them of using unscrupulous means to accomplish their purposes, including falsehoods and frauds. He also disliked their methods, claiming that they merely taught the Indians to recite prayers and did not endeavor to teach or preach to them.

According to Grollier, however, Kirkby himself was bribing those who listened to him with tobacco, and he accused Kirkby's converts of being "tobacco Christians" (Grollier, 1860). Grollier claimed that Kirkby had approached him at Fort Norman to try to work out an agreement for the good of the Indians such that they would try not to missionize the same forts. However, Grollier saw this as a ruse, thinking that Kirkby wanted to take over both Fort Norman and Fort Simpson.

The battle was on to establish ideological territories in the western Subarctic. Being "reasonable" men and recognizing their limited resources, Grollier and Kirkby finally agreed to leave those Indians alone who were already praying with

missionaries of the other faith — an agreement that was lacking in sincerity and was broken repeatedly. This truce was probably arranged through interpreters, since although Grollier could speak at least one Indian language, he did not speak much English and Kirkby did not speak French (Hunter, 1859:236; Grollier, 1860).

Kirkby left Fort McPherson in August 1861 and returned to spend the winter with his family at Fort Simpson. In the summer of 1862, he headed north to McPherson again, arriving there on 13 June, where he prepared to make another visit to the western Gwich'in on what is now the Alaskan side of the mountains. It was certainly to Kirkby's consternation, then, that Father Jean Séguin, an Oblate priest sent to replace the ailing Grollier, had moved from Fort Good Hope to Fort McPherson in April and had been preaching to the Peel River Gwich'in for over a month before Kirkby arrived (Séguin, 1862a,b).

While Kirkby seems to have left no detailed accounts of events that transpired in Fort McPherson, it is instructive and worthwhile to read the letters of Father Séguin to Bishop Taché. Like Grollier, Séguin also complained that Kirkby was gaining the loyalty of the Gwich'in by bribing them with gifts of tobacco (Séguin, 1862b). When Kirkby returned to McPherson on 13 June, Séguin observed that some of his own followers went to see the Anglican to get some tobacco and then faithfully returned to him. According to Séguin, this made "the small man" furious.

Kirkby never admits in his journal that he gave out tobacco to the Indians, but his direct predecessor, friend, and superior, Archdeacon Hunter, clearly did give some away to the Slavey chief Grand Blanc at Fort Liard and to unnamed others at Fort Simpson, where the Loucheux from Peel's River came to visit during the fall of 1858 (Hunter, 1859:237,240,265). It is also noteworthy that Kirkby's successor, Robert McDonald, made gifts of tobacco on at least one occasion to some Black River Gwich'in camped along the Porcupine River (McDonald, 1866:21 April). Knowing that this practice was already well established in the region before Kirkby ever arrived, that it continued after he left, and that Séguin's allegations are made repeatedly within in the context of Indian expectations, we can conclude that there probably was some real substance to this charge.

Before Kirkby arrived at McPherson in June 1862, Séguin gave religious instruction to about 30 families of Peel River Gwich'in. Using the services of Mrs. Gaudet, the wife of the Hudson's Bay Company manager, the priest was able to translate three prayers, the Pater, the Ave, and the Credo, into Gwich'in.

Most interesting is Séguin's story that:

An Indian came to tell me that he [Kirkby] wanted to see me. I told him to answer that if he needed me, he could find me. The reply was carried back to him, and soon I saw my good little man as red as a rooster's comb. Entering, he asked what I wanted of him. I told him that he was the one asking for me, and my response embarrassed him for a minute, but finally he replied that he hadn't called for me.

Then he accused me of having told the Indians not to shake his hand. I told him that he was enough of a liar to have invented this story and to show me the Indians I said it to. "There are plenty of them", he told me. "I only ask you for one", I replied.

He went to the door and invited in an Indian from the Mackenzie River. I asked the latter where he had seen and heard

me speak in this fashion. The Indian replied that he had never seen me. The little man got more and more red-faced. He then invited me to go outside and assemble the Indians so that he could read his bible and confront me before them. I replied that when he had gone to school a little bit more and understood his own bible a little better, I would see what I could do. For the moment I begged him to go back to school. He stomped with rage. He wished then to speak to the Indians who were gathered at the door, but I told them not to listen to him, that he spoke foolishly....

The Indians began to laugh when he tried to speak.... Thereupon, not knowing what position to take and having also some need of a little fresh air, he said that his breakfast was getting cold, that it was a long time since he left his table. Then he grabbed his little hat and left.

Then he started calling all the Indians, one after the other, into his house, like a doctor receiving his patients. But he had parted with all his tobacco. Furious at not obtaining anything here, he left the day after his arrival, June 14, for La Pierre's House and Fort Yukon [Séguin, 1862b].

How did this big showdown come about? Was it simply a case of miscommunication? In contrast to Grollier, Séguin was fluent in English and, judging from his own words in the above account, must have told the Indian messenger something like, "If he needs me, he can find me," which may have been construed to mean, "Tell him to come see me." However, after reviewing the full circumstances, including the report of the Indians laughing at Kirkby, I think it is more reasonable to suppose that this theological minidrama was not the result of miscommunication between the two missionaries but that it had been deliberately staged by the Gwich'in.

I believe that the Gwich'in were so confused by the conflicting ideologies of the two missionaries that they were anxious to know what would happen when the two men met face to face and toe to toe. This confrontation between the minister and the priest was probably arranged by the Gwich'in in order to see which missionary was the most powerful. In other words, which one had the strongest medicine? As Kenneth Coates (1982:67-68) has observed, the Gwich'in of that period were well established as middlemen between the Hudson's Bay Company and more distant tribes and were very adept at "manufacturing" competitive situations to manipulate the fur trade to their own advantage. It is equally important to realize that they did the same thing with the missionaries.

Kirkby's and Séguin's rivalry continued to build for the next few days, as Séguin decided to join Kirkby on foot with a caravan of 20 Indians to La Pierre's House. Séguin arrived with Kirkby at La Pierre's House on 17 June 1862, where he met the zealous Protestant, James Flett, who as post manager threatened not to give ammunition to Indians who prayed with the priest.

One night after prayers, Séguin noticed that the two chiefs in their midst began to chant loudly in Broken Slavey a pidginized phrase he wrote down as: "*tchezjekudjin, pagin' i séni l'aime todi, kûka ts'édezjie séni l'aime 'lan*" ("The English priest I don't love at all, but I love the tobacco very much") (Séguin, 1862a, b). This curious mixture of Chipewyan, French, and Gwich'in caused Séguin much laughter and merriment and apparently prompted the embarrassed Kirkby to get a translation from Flett's son.

The historian in us all enjoys knowing something of what went through the minds of these adversaries on their arduous journey over the Richardson Mountains. Fortunately, both men kept records. Kirkby wrote that "We suffered equally in walking the mountains, but I took care not to manifest the pain and fatigue I felt that he might not rejoice over my weakness or even know it" (Kirkby, 1862). The suffering was not entirely equal, however. The party had to ford twelve rivers, four of which were waist deep, and also break trail along muddy mountainsides. Séguin admitted he was envious because Kirkby had a mosquito head net and gloves, while he had none. The bugs were so thick that they hindered his eyesight during the day and made it impossible to close his eyes at night. They bit so badly they made Séguin's head feel like a pumpkin and his fingers swelled up until they looked like sausages (Séguin, 1862a; Champagne, 1943:16-17).

Séguin accused Kirkby of lying to the Gwich'in, of telling them that he, as a priest, had several wives. According to 19th-century Gwich'in standards, having several wives should have elevated his status (Hardisty, 1872:312; Leechman, 1954:29; McKennan, 1965:56), but Séguin figured that Kirkby damaged his reputation so much that out of 60 Indians gathered at La Pierre's House, only 15 of them would listen to him. Specifically, he wrote that Kirkby tried to make the Indians believe that a priest resembles the devil by always keeping fire in front of him, that his candles represent the fires of hell to which he and those who pray with him must go after he dies (Séguin, 1862b). How much of this was actually said by Kirkby will never be known, but it is rather telling that five days later Kirkby went on to Fort Yukon rejoicing, while Séguin returned rather discouraged to Fort McPherson.

In September 1862, Séguin received orders from Bishop Grandin to try again to go all the way to Fort Yukon. Séguin traveled this time with Kirkby's replacement, the Reverend Robert McDonald, later to be named Archdeacon of the Yukon. McDonald, who was one-quarter Objiway and who was fluent in Objiway, Cree, and French, as well as English, was linguistically better prepared for working in the far North than any of his colleagues or rivals (Peake, 1975:55-56). Although McDonald had originally planned to begin work at Fort Liard, he suddenly changed his plans after he learned from Kirkby that Séguin was headed for Fort Yukon (McDonald, 1862).

At La Pierre's House, Séguin faced the same old problem with the Indians all demanding tobacco. He concluded that "*Pour les Loucheux, le tabac est leur Dieu*" ("For the Loucheux, tobacco is their God") (Séguin, 1862d). At Fort Yukon Séguin spent a very lonesome winter and did very poorly, unable to persuade a single Indian to adopt Catholicism (Gilles-Mousseau, 1946:164-165). Totally isolated, his only friend was a man named Sanderson, a halfblood who had recently been converted to Catholicism.

At Fort Yukon Séguin was forced to live with the Hudson's Bay Company servants while McDonald was invited to share the chief factor's own quarters and dined as a guest at his table. McDonald also had the use of the hall of the principal building at the fort for holding services and conducting school. Séguin bore all of this in stride, identifying his own persecution and suffering with that of Jesus Christ. He was

handicapped even more by knowing only a few words of Gwich'in, while McDonald had the able services of Antoine Houle, an apostate Catholic Métis employed as an interpreter by the Company. Séguin tried to get Houle to teach him how to write Gwich'in by offering him tea, but Houle only came to him once. It seems as though Houle was instrumental in dissuading the Gwich'in from listening to Séguin. In Séguin's words, "It is not the Factor who is master of the fort. It is Antoin Hool [sic]. He alone can do what he wants to with these Indians . . ." (1862e). In spite of these setbacks, Séguin took credit for stopping the practice of female infanticide after he claimed to have discovered that every Gwich'in woman over the age of 30 had engaged in this practice at least once (Séguin, 1862c).

How well acquainted Séguin and McDonald became at Fort Yukon during the winter of 1862-63 is not known. While they were almost certainly on speaking terms, and McDonald later considered his rival "a good man" (Wright, 1911:2), their relationship was obviously strained by the competitiveness of their missions. On 1 June, just before their joint departure from Fort Yukon, McDonald observed that Séguin "has not affected anything among the Indians. However, I hope he will not return, as he may unsettle the minds of some of the Indians eventually if he does" (McDonald, 1863a).

On the very next day, 2 June, Séguin was convinced that the victory was all his, thinking that McDonald would probably return to the Red River country from whence he came, leaving the Oblates as "undisputed masters of the battlefield" (Séguin, 1863:83). For Séguin, McDonald was "detested by the whites as much as a man can be" (Séguin, 1863:83), so much that "his fellow Protestants don't even want to go to his sermons, and his interpreter [Antoine Houle] has already told him to go to the devil more than once" (Séguin, 1863:83).

When they reached La Pierre's House, the two missionaries parted company. McDonald returned to Fort Yukon for another season, and Séguin continued on to Fort McPherson and Fort Good Hope.

Little more is heard about Séguin's work among the Gwich'in for the next two years. In the meantime McDonald solidified his influence among the western Gwich'in by staying at Fort Yukon another year, but then poor health forced him to leave from June 1864 until September 1865, during which time he lived at La Pierre's House and Fort McPherson. During this time Séguin could have gone back to Fort Yukon and taken over the western battlefield, but Father Grollier died in Fort Good Hope on 4 June 1864, and Séguin was pretty well forced to retrench and stabilize the mission work Grollier had begun at that outpost (Coudert and Le Chevalier, 1955:376).

The Gwich'in at Fort McPherson remained very unsettled during the next two years. In the summer of 1863, McDonald heard accounts that the Indians at Peel's River had visions of heaven, had been carried there, and had brought back hymns that they were singing. The Indians at La Pierre's House told him that those living at Peel's River had been instructed through dreams not to kill foxes and martens (McDonald, 1863b:23 June). Most of those affected were supposedly under Catholic influence, but McDonald may have mistaken the Catholic influence for a kind of syncretism that incorporated elements of Christianity and traditional Gwich'in shamanism. When McDonald encountered one Indian named Shahoo,

who had been communicating with heaven through dreams, the traditional medium of Gwich'in shamans (Leechman, 1950:158-159, 1952:88; McKennan, 1965:78; Slobodin, 1981:527), he told the man not to rely on his dreams but on "what God's word says" (McDonald, 1863c).

Catherine McClellan has noticed that this is a widespread pattern, that shamans making visits to heaven are a recurrent theme among the Yukon Territory Indians, and that they predictably bring back "new amulets, new songs, and several new rules on how to treat game." She concludes that shamanistic visits to other worlds are closely related to "prophet movements" and represent "an old and very important pattern of Yukon shamanistic behaviour, well rooted in pre-contact times" (McClellan, 1975:557; see also McClellan, 1956.)

In his annual letter to his superiors in London the following year, McDonald reported that two of the Indians at Peel's River were attempting to assert authority over the others, "representing themselves as commissioned by the Almighty to teach them" (1864). At the same time he also heard that Peter, one of the Chandalar River Gwich'in, had taken the gospel to proselytize the Eskimos on the arctic coast. These reports illustrated not only how fast Christianity was spreading but also how the Gwich'in were beginning to circumvent McDonald's own spiritual authority and leadership. In the same letter he confessed that "I am not sure of anyone being truly converted to God among the whole of them. I rather fear not" (1864).

Six months later, McDonald talked with one of the Peel's River enthusiasts, a Mackenzie River Gwich'in named Tuyito [sic Tuyiti'], who had been making prophecies and receiving divine revelations and had been instructed by God to pardon the sins of those who confessed to him and to baptise his fellow Indians:

He expressed his inability to know who to receive as his instructor in religion, the [Anglican] minister or the Romish priest, since both profess to be commissioned by God to teach men; that the minister said the priest taught error, and that the Romish priest says the same of the minister. He said besides that the Romish priests say that it was the English people who crucified Christ [McDonald, 1865:12 January].

In his typically clipped style of writing, McDonald wrote in his McPherson journal for 19 June 1865 that Séguin had arrived in McPherson with some Mackenzie River Indians and that he "Called on Père Séguin this forenoon" (McDonald, 1865:19 June). McDonald supplies no details regarding this conversation, although on the following day he observed: "Excitement among some of the Indians with respect to who is the true teacher, the Romish priest or the minister; they are in a state of perplexity" (McDonald, 1865:20 June).

Again, on 21 June, McDonald wrote: "A proposal was today made by one of the Indians to Père Séguin that he should with me speak on the revelation God has given to man for his instruction. The priest declined it. Several Indians in consequence left him" (McDonald 1865:21 June). Again it appears that the Peel River Gwich'in were trying to arrange a public debate or a test of powers between the priest and the minister. Five days later McDonald notes that Séguin left McPherson and went back to Fort Good Hope in the company of several Indian families. So while the Anglicans won the war in Fort Yukon and Fort McPherson, Séguin seems to have been considerably more successful at Fort Good Hope, where he

built a church and reportedly converted over half of the Indians there (a mixture of Gwich'in and Hare) to Catholicism.

Although Séguin did not fare well among the Gwich'in at Fort McPherson, La Pierre's House, and Fort Yukon, a certain portion of his failure seems to have been linguistic. He did not seem to be able to learn Gwich'in or Broken Slavey, the *lingua franca* at Fort Yukon. It is ironic, however, that Kirkby had immense success without demonstrating any ability to learn Gwich'in and that Kirkby perceived that the Oblates were all expert linguists. Kirkby may well have underestimated his own talents, for in 1862 he published a collection of hymns and prayers in Slavey stemming from his work at Fort Simpson and later on translated hymns and prayers into Chipewyan (Boon, 1965:38). To be sure, McDonald himself eventually became fluent in Gwich'in, but not until after many more years of hard study and the added benefit of marrying a Gwich'in woman, Julia Kuttug. And it must be added that McDonald not only had the advantage of Antoine Houle's translation services in Fort Yukon, but also those of Mrs. Andrew Flett at La Pierre's House and of William Flett of Fort McPherson, the young boy who first accompanied Kirkby to Fort Yukon.

In hindsight, the spiritual allegiance of both the eastern and western Gwich'in was largely won by the Anglicans, not only because they arrived first and stayed the longest but also because they were supported by the Hudson's Bay Company Protestant infrastructure, which included sympathetic bilingual interpreters and (apparently) a large supply of tobacco. It is in fact revealing that the list of contributors to the erection of the first Anglican Church at Fort Simpson included the Company's chief factors James Anderson, Bernard Ross, Lucas Hardisty, Alex Christie, Jr., Robert Campbell, and D. Finlayson, not to mention numerous other clerks and servants (Boon, 1965:37).

However, the Anglicans also prevailed because they and their American counterparts, the Episcopalians, encouraged a Native ministry and Native lay readers. There are accounts, both early and late, indicating that several of the early Gwich'in catechists and lay readers were former shamans, men who were able to syncretize aboriginal beliefs and world view with Christian ones (Kirkby, 1861c:13 July, 1862; McDonald, 1868:23 June, 1875; McKennan, 1965:86-88).

The lively saga of missionaries in collision continued on into the early 1870s, when Bishop Clut and Father Le Corre locked horns with Bishop Bompas at Fort Yukon. When all is said and done, however, ideology and doctrine probably had little to do with which brand of Christianity was adopted by most of the Gwich'in — their conversion was undoubtedly tied closely to the personalities of individual missionaries and the power of their rhetoric.

And while the Anglicans and Oblates have long since made their peace on the Canadian side, my own field experience demonstrates that this early history of denominational conflict effectively foreshadows the battle for Indian souls that still continues in northeast Alaska today. There is no denying that the Gwich'in as a whole are a very religious people, and the well-established American Episcopal Church, which inherited Kirkby's and McDonald's Anglican converts in Alaska, still has a large and loyal following. Yet the Episcopalians now face an ongoing challenge not only from followers

of the Assembly of God, the Baptists, and other fundamentalist Protestant groups that have moved into the area, but also from a new nativistic religion.

I first saw this new religion emerge during an hour-long ceremony held at Gwich'in Niin Tsyaa, the historic gathering of Canadian and Alaskan Gwich'in held in Arctic Village, Alaska, in June 1988 to address oil development and caribou protection in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. As one would expect, the Gwich'in Episcopal clergy walked out of this ceremony in silent protest, but whites were not excluded, and well over 100 other Gwich'in stayed for the duration. Conducted primarily in English by a young Gwich'in from Old Crow, the ceremony was introduced as a purification and cleansing of the new Arctic Village community hall, but it was also clearly intended to purify and cleanse all of those in attendance.

Following a series of prayers to the Creator and the Great Spirit, a fragrant sage smudge placed inside a steel frying pan and fanned with an eagle feather was circulated around the hall. This was followed in turn by a jug of water and a large bowl of blueberries, which were sampled as symbols of the water and the land. At the very end, people were invited to bring blankets, guns, feathers, and beadwork up to the front of the hall to cleanse them in the smudge, and a number of individuals did so. Nearly overlooked, but carefully placed on the floor in front of the young leader throughout the entire ceremony, were a small lighted candle and a package of tobacco.

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Note: Material for this essay is derived from several manuscript collections. These are abbreviated below as: NAC = Records of the Church Missionary Society of London (Correspondence), Microfilm MG 17 B2. National Archives of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N3. AEPRL = Journals of Robert McDonald, Microfilm P 340, MS 4001. Archives of the Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land, Manitoba Provincial Archives, 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 1T5. ADOMI = Archives Deschâtelets, Oblates of Marie Immaculate, 175 Rue Main, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 1C3. EDAUA = Collection of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska, University of Alaska, Rasmuson Library, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775.

To the best of my knowledge, *Missions*, O.M.I., which contains the first-hand accounts of Oblate missionaries, seems to be available in Canada only at the Archives Deschâtelets. Similarly, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, which contains first-hand accounts of Anglican missionaries in the service of the Church Missionary Society, can only be found in Canada at the Leonard Library, Wycliffe College, 5 Hoskin Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1H7.

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