

Culture, Christianity and the Northern Peoples of Canada and Siberia*

DAVID N. COLLINS

Introduction: the Problem Presented

Flying in a military helicopter along the coast of Baffin Island in 1986 Captain James MacFie discovered traces of an abandoned Inuit camp. Among the remains, undisturbed for fifty years, lay a Scripture Union membership card, signed Arnguak, and a calendar of Bible readings for 1934 of which 'all but two days in late November were conscientiously marked off'. Not only was the mystery of the disappearance of Arnguak and his family during a routine hunting trip solved, but it became obvious that he had been not a nominal Anglican, but a keen practising evangelical Christian.¹

This paper explores aspects of indigenisation and syncretism in Christian mission based on examples from Canada, Siberia and to some extent Alaska.

Antonio Gualtieri defines the concepts thus:

By *indigenization*, I mean a process of cultural adaptation in which the fundamental meanings of an historical tradition are retained but expressed in symbolic forms of another, diverse culture. *Syncretism* is a more radical form of cultural encounter in which the traditions entailed are fused – usually unconsciously and over a period of time – into a novel emergent whose meanings and symbolic expressions are in some respects different from either of the original singular traditions.²

In the Book of Revelation the saints round God's throne sing a new song to Jesus – '... with your blood you purchased men for God from *every* tribe and language and people and nation' – which echoes the final command of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: '... go and make disciples of *all* nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'.³ This command clearly sets the Gospel within a universal framework, and has formed the basis for Christian missions ever since the journeys of the apostle Paul, including all the multifarious missionary endeavours to the indigenous peoples in the northern hemisphere. As a riposte to 'secular disparagement of missions' which has 'gone to the extent of suggesting that mission-

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aries threatened native culture more gravely than traders did', Philip Goldring has written:

The Victorian missionaries' reply would have been to point out that individual salvation through Christ outweighs the value of native cultures and indeed demands the dismantling of some native customs ... certainly the missionaries threatened indigenous concepts of status, property and social relations, but so did the contemporaneous reform movements in the United Kingdom, the origin of Britain's modern political democracy and welfare state.⁴

The contemporary rediscovery of their cultural and religious roots by the descendants of the 'first peoples' of the northern hemisphere raises the question of the validity of Christian outreach to them both historically and in the present. To what extent can there be an authentic indigenous expression of the Universal Church among the native peoples of Canada and Siberia? Is it possible to be 'a true Indian and a true Christian', as a contemporary native American evangelist puts it, or are indigenous believers part of a postcolonial subculture, alienated both from whites and their own racial kin?⁵ If there really is a universally valid Christian Gospel how does it relate to 'culture', both that of the indigenous peoples and that of the incomers who brought a Christianity obviously 'infected' with their own culture? Can the essence of Christianity be transferred without mortally wounding native identity?

Paul Hiebert's analysis of the dichotomies inherent in missionary approaches to traditional societies provides a helpful tripartite subdivision into *rejection of contextualisation*, *uncritical contextualisation* and *critical contextualisation*. The first leads to a rejection of all old customs as 'pagan' and hence unacceptable. The second leads to the incorporation of virtually all aspects of traditional beliefs and behavioural patterns into the church, corresponding to Gualtieri's 'syncretism'. The third, which Hiebert evidently favours, leads to 'the communication of the gospel in ways the people understand, but that also challenge them individually and corporately to turn from their evil ways' and is thus closely associated with the development of spiritual discernment.⁶ This corresponds to a certain extent to Gualtieri's definition of 'indigenisation', although Gualtieri is keen to point out that in his eyes the term implies far more than just translation into the indigenous language and the use of native church leaders.⁷

Examples of Different Missionary Approaches

For convenience of analysis and discussion I have subdivided the different missionary approaches to this question into four categories adapted from Hiebert's three, which I have rather clumsily entitled as follows: *culturally highly non-indigenous* (rejection of contextualisation); *culturally highly indigenous* (uncritical contextualisation); *culturally moderately non-indigenous*; and *culturally moderately indigenous* (aspects of critical contextualisation).

1. Culturally Highly Non-indigenous

This approach was more evident in the past than in the present day, although features of it are strongly evident now in postcommunist Russia.⁸ Missions in this category have sought (whether consciously or unconsciously) to transfer to the indigenous recipients not only the essence of Christianity, but also cultural elements which are

not inherently Christian, and which could easily be separated from it. This would include: services in the language and musical modes of the incomer; culturally inappropriate forms of ecclesiastical architecture, decor and dress; and insensitive educational activities, names, eating habits, economic pursuits and imperial ideas.

In Canada, some of the seventeenth-century Catholic missions could be placed in this category, since their assumption was that a christianised, hence civilised, Indian would naturally become assimilated to current French culture, with all the piety and imagery of the Counter-Reformation.⁹ The legacy of this time is still evident among sections of the church in the Western Arctic. A Catholic priest in Inuvik stated that Christianity was 'weak-kneed' in his region because there had been too many concessions, including dispensations from the pope to permit the eating of meat on a Friday and to be absent from mass if there were sufficient reason (such as boat mending or fishing). Gualtieri notes with disfavour 'a dissonant and foreign medieval piety' and inappropriate ecclesiastical decor in Catholic churches; and he castigates the Pentecostals in the following fashion:

The Gospel hymns contained all the old imagery which has become almost meaningless and therefore irrelevant in the South, let alone the Arctic – streets of gold, lambs and shepherds, and trumpets sounding to announce the doom of the present age. The pastor's commentary on certain verses or motifs of the hymns were punctuated with the same 'alleluyah', 'thank you, Jesus', 'I love you, sweet Jesus', as one would hear in a fundamentalist service in the South. The whole service proceeded as far as was visible to me without any consciousness that it was being conducted among a people whose perceptions of the world, whose images and symbols, whose needs, might be different from those of a southern, urban congregation. Unlike some of the Anglican and Catholic churches, there was not even any rudimentary attempt at Native decoration in the church building or sparse appointments.¹⁰

The residential schools established in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada by Catholics and Anglicans are also good examples of this approach, particularly in view of the traumatic effects they evidently had on family life and cultural continuity.¹¹ Similarly some of the attempts to set up arable farming among the Indians of the Canadian prairie reserves could well be held to be culturally insensitive, although in this case the extenuating factor of the disappearance of the buffalo, the staple diet and provider of shelter and clothing for the Plains Indians, renders this a less clear example. In Siberia the Transbaikal Orthodox Mission seems to have tried to instil Christianity into the Buryats through the medium of Old Church Slavonic services and Russian language instruction, with little attempt to make any adaptations. Hence when religious toleration was permitted in Russia after 1905 many Buryats reverted to their previous beliefs.

Indeed, this category of missionary endeavour, apart from its sometimes harmful nature, seems generally to have led to superficial results. Let us take for example the Konda Monastery in the Russian north in the eighteenth century:

It is difficult to say how successful the monastery's mission was: from the history of the subjugation and enlightenment of the Ostyaks [Khanty] it is evident that they yielded slowly to Russian power, Russian habits and faith; the savage yielded on the surface, even getting baptised and changing from idol worship to Orthodoxy, but secretly maintained his

idolatry, which was superstition rather than faith, as it is at present.¹²

The nineteenth century showed no better results. A special outreach in 1836 yielded 17 baptisms (most inhabitants fled to the forests to escape the priests); a school set up in mid-century could attract few pupils; and by 1883 the Holy Synod almost decided to abandon the effort, hoping that Ostyak intermarriage with Russian women would eventually lead to assimilation.¹³ During the reign of Peter the Great the Russian authorities attempted forcible conversions of the peoples of the Ob' north. 'Hundreds of the Ob-Ugrian gods (or idols according to the Russian traditional terminology) were seized and burned during this terrible time. But this did not prevent the Khanty and Mansi from remaking their gods as well as founding new sacred groves.' A very poor understanding of Christianity was evident among the local indigenous peoples even in the early twentieth century.¹⁴ This may account for the impression of Alexander Boddy, an Anglican clergyman from Sunderland who made a pilgrimage to the Solovetsky Monastery in the early 1890s: 'the Orthodox Church does not seem as yet a strong missionary power in the way of educating its converts from heathenism, though a priest is sent to minister to them from time to time.' Interestingly enough, schools in the Arkhangel'sk diocese regarded their role as being to teach 'the Russian language and the Christian faith, together with some of the elementary lessons of civilisation – such, for instance, as to eat bread, and to cook their meat instead of eating it raw, and not to drink the blood of the animals they slaughter.'¹⁵ Incidentally, insistence on the Judaeo-Christian prohibition on eating blood 'because the blood is the life' (Deuteronomy 12:23, reiterated for Gentile converts to Christianity at the first church council, Acts 15:20) could well have literally fatal consequences for northern peoples, whose vitamin intake is directly dependent upon consuming the liver fresh from a kill.

According to Slezkine, Russian Orthodox missionary work in Siberia was too closely related to russification in the minds of the indigenous peoples for them to accept it. This is not entirely true, as the experience of Makari Glukharev in the Altai demonstrated. Orthodox missionary policies were not consistent, as the section on Innokenti Veniaminov below will also show.¹⁶ An interesting example of an attempt to eliminate pagan practices entirely is related by Ann Fienup-Riordan in an article on the Moravian mission to the Yup'ik Eskimos along the lower Kuskokwim headed by John Kilbuck and his wife. Efforts, apparently successful, were made to induce the Yup'ik to abandon traditional rituals such as the 'Masquerade'. In 1890 the people of Kwethluk 'burned their masks, forsook every heathen rite, and "diligently inquired how to walk as the redeemed"'. This led to complex events including instances of madness and ritual murder, barely, if at all, understood by the Kilbucks, related to an interplay between Russian Orthodox, shamanist and Moravian beliefs.¹⁷

2. *Culturally Highly Indigenous*

This approach is represented by those who claim to be looking for a 'selective synthesis that avoids syncretism' but who have gone so far down the road of accommodation that the forms of Christianity which they advocate verge on 'christopaganism'.¹⁸ In relation to the rediscovery of native American spirituality Carl Starkloff writes that the mission of the church is 'to witness to the Jesus Christ who not only accepts all that is good and holy in tribal religion, but also to the Jesus who pleads with and even denounces those in positions of power'.¹⁹ Writing from a distinctly liberal Anglican perspective Janet Hodgson and Jay Kothare propose 'a new

paradigm for dialogue between native and Christian spiritualities', which would, they hope, lead to a humble understanding that 'a much maligned native spirituality that is truly evocative of the spirit of Christ' will prove that the Bible and Western Christian traditions do not contain by any means all the truth.²⁰ There are moves afoot in the Russian periphery to return to shamanism, updated with current technology, in an attempt to fill the moral vacuum left by the collapse of communism.²¹ It is not yet clear how these efforts will be met by the Russian Orthodox Church, given the current uncertainties and the Orthodox Church's own history of inconsistent policies.

3. Culturally Moderately Non-indigenous

This approach is characteristic of organisations led by whites who are sympathetic to some aspects of contextualisation. Historically it seems to have been weak. Among the early American Protestant missionaries to the Indians only Johnson and Brant among the Mohawks and Charles Chauncy in Boston 'held that the Indians could be Christian and remain Indian culturally'.²² However, Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society eagerly looked forward (in the middle of the nineteenth century) to the development of 'self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating' indigenous churches throughout the world,²³ (a policy, incidentally, misused by the Chinese communist government). Contemporary evangelical willingness to move towards a form of limited indigenisation is implied in the Lausanne Convention of 1974, which states that 'He [the Holy Spirit] illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its [the Bible's] truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole church ever more of the many-coloured wisdom of God.'²⁴

The Northern Canada Evangelical Mission has just celebrated 50 years of outreach to the indigenous peoples of the Canadian north, and while pioneering culturally relevant journalism, radio and television, has never compromised in its strongly evangelical stance.²⁵ The Bible Churchman's Missionary Society, active in the Arctic from the late 1920s to 1951, was similarly firmly Bible-based, teaching what its members regarded as the irreducible eternal truths of scripture to the Inuit. This line has been followed by the Diocese of the Arctic as a whole under bishops Fleming, Marsh, Sperry and Williams. The concessions to local needs have been linguistic, and cultural to the extent that the Anglicans have sought to share the local lifestyle as far as possible and to preserve the Inuit against southern commercialism and social problems. Howard Bracewell, a former missionary in the area, regrets that they insisted on native clergy wearing typical Anglican clerical garb, and shows a keen love for the people and their heritage. A similar attitude is clear in the writings of Donald Marsh, and in his wife Winifred's remarkable paintings of Inuit life in the 1930s.²⁶ Bracewell says that the missionary's job should be like that of a scaffold round a building: eventually it should be redundant. All that missionaries should do is to 'integrate into the situation as a privileged visitor'. Now all instruction of Anglican trainee Inuit clergy at the Arthur Turner Training School in Pangnirtung is in Inuktitut, and the afternoons are devoted to hunting.²⁷ The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada Native Ministries Department is now led by James Kallappa (a Makah originating in Washington State, and active in British Columbia). There are approximately 100 native congregations, more than under any other banner, across Canada, and the believers include some prominent activists in the native rights movement, such as Billy Diamond. Incidentally, the publication *Native Pentecostal News* is published in English since it is the one lingua franca for people from different tribes. A Pentecostal Bible School for native pastors is held in Saskatoon.²⁸

Makari Glukharev, founder of the Russian Orthodox Altai Mission in southwest Siberia, believed in a moderate form of indigenisation: having developed an alphabet and grammar for the Altaians he translated many scriptures, liturgical texts and songs into the language and educated the children in their own language. However, like many missionaries he believed in the superiority of a sedentary arable life over nomadic stock raising, and tried to accustom his converts to living a russianised material existence.²⁹

Gualtieri found that, in general, non-native Anglican and Catholic missionaries in the north were very ambivalent about promoting too deep an indigenisation, for two reasons: firstly because where a culture has been thoroughly eroded attempts to reconstruct it would be 'artificial and forced', and secondly because attempts by them to promote indigenisation could be interpreted as 'perhaps another instance of do-gooding white paternalism'. Gualtieri's counter-proposal that priests had a duty to act in a prophetic role, guiding their congregations towards indigenisation, was not received at all well. Such concessions to syncretism as the Catholics favoured were limited to 'the incorporation of certain Native psychological and moral traits into congregational life'.³⁰

Gualtieri's study, undertaken in 1971, has been utilised extensively, since it reveals so much about attitudes at the time. There was considerable training of lay catechists and native clergy had been ordained. Some Catholic parishes were demonstrating 'a refreshing willingness to relinquish clerical authority to the community of believers' in a theological populism based on the idea of the congregation as the locus of the Holy Spirit (reminiscent of the Russian Orthodox concept of *sobornost*'). This approach might possibly have led to greater indigenisation in the future, but the research disclosed that 'there has been negligible indigenization of Christianity'. Nor was there evidence of significant syncretism. Considerable energy, however, had gone into translation of the scriptures into native languages. The 'most substantial efforts at indigenization have been in the area of liturgical decoration.'³¹ The Anglican church had been the most sensitive to this: 'The liturgical hangings at Fort McPherson's Anglican church were, in my judgment, the most striking in the area I covered. The traditional Christian symbols had been rendered in magnificent bead work on white caribou skin by the Loucheux Indians served by that mission.' In this connection one might well mention the igloo-shaped cathedral at Iqaluit.³²

4. *Culturally Moderately Indigenous*

This approach is mainly characteristic of church organisations which are led and run by native people themselves, but which eschew elements of native culture which could be construed as 'non-biblical'.

A fourth generation Christian from the Mohawk people, Tom Claus, 'saw the great spiritual need of the Seminole Indians' in 1945 and dedicated his life to evangelising the native Americans.³³ In 1974 he was invited by Billy Graham to be the American Indian delegate to the International Congress on World Evangelisation at Lausanne. Stirred by the number of native leaders from third-world countries at the Congress he summoned an 'interdenominational, intertribal group of evangelical native leaders' to a meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1975. This meeting gave birth to the Christian Hope Indian Eskimo Fellowship (CHIEF), whose mandate is:

1. To encourage, strengthen and help build up the body of Christ in all our Native American tribes by providing discipleship training in a manner

uniquely suited for their culture and the ongoing needs of the indigenous church;

2. To help in the evangelism ministry of the local native church by providing native evangelists, musicians, counselors and follow-up discipleship training for crusades in all the tribes of the Americas and other related tribal groups throughout the world;

3. To bring hope to our native people by demonstrating compassion for their felt-needs and providing practical assistance, not in a vacuum, but in the context of God's love, shown through the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁴

By 1992 they were holding a second congress, SONRISE '92, 'to challenge our native Christian leaders to disciple and evangelize all our native tribes with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ'. The congress was attended by 500 native delegates from 70 tribes, including delegates from all the provinces of Canada.³⁵

Fundamental to the beliefs of CHIEF is that being born again into Christ is a supranational matter, transcending racial barriers. As Rev. Tom Claus has written:

It is true, an Indian with tribal ancestry, distinguishing Indian features and native heritage will always be an Indian while on this earth in the physical realm, but an American Indian who is a true Christian is no longer an Indian in the spiritual realm (as God sees us) because now we are clothed in the Lord Jesus Christ and no longer Indians, Anglos, Jews, Greeks or any other race or culture. For God has made us one in Christ! True Christians are members of One Race, One Tribe, One Clan and One Body in Christ!³⁶

This belief, summed up aphoristically as 'I'm proud to be an Indian by race, but I'm happier to be a Christian by grace'³⁷, leads to a deliberate avoidance of any conduct which could be regarded as sinful; in the present context this means eschewing native rituals which might be considered spiritually harmful.

Within Canada the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission (NCEM) was instrumental in establishing the Native Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (NEFC). Launched at Island Lake in 1969, and receiving its Dominion Charter in 1970, the NEFC was the first all-native denomination in Canada. In 1995 it had oversight over 21 churches and approximately 35 associate fellowships in six provinces, with a second generation of committed Christian leaders now emerging. Their annual General Conference at Caronport, Saskatchewan, is attended by around 500 people.³⁸

This approach might also be said to characterise the work of Innokenti Veniaminov in Alaska. Regarded as the 'Enlightener of the Aleuts', Veniaminov served as missionary priest and then bishop in Alaska for 30 years from 1824.³⁹ Veniaminov

established a contextualized or enculturated form of evangelization that was not to become commonly accepted by the majority of Christian missionaries for nearly a century and a half ... whenever possible, traditional native qualities and spiritual customs would be affirmed ... It is not surprising that the Aleutian church developed a loyal, stable following that has survived to the present.⁴⁰

However, some of Veniaminov's policies, such as the approbation of certain shamans, have been interpreted as proceeding too far towards the fostering of a syncretistic faith, not least by Moravian missionaries in Alaska.⁴¹

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Certainly those active in the Native Evangelical Fellowship of Canada tend to regard their ancestors' traditional religious rites very gingerly. Bill Jackson, a Cree Christian leader from northern Alberta, relates the testimonies of Barney Lacendre and Norbert L., both converted shamans. Norbert became a Christian at the age of 80:

He lived in Loon Lake, Alberta and had been a medicine man for a long time. Norbert told me that he had been against the 'Bible ways' that the white missionaries brought. But after seeing others who believed in Christ and seeing how their lives were changed he started to read the Bible in Cree syllabics. Sometime later he came to accept Christ into his life. The man told me that he lived in fear before he became a believer. He did not want to be alone. He feared spirits, hexes or whatever else those with power could do to him. Also, he himself was feared by others. Then there was the fear of retaliation (revenge) by means of bad medicine, the same kind of fear people have that are deeply involved in this way. There is no love in this system.⁴²

The absence of love in native religions is remarked on elsewhere too. Bishop John Sperry, retired from the Arctic and now (1997) president of the Canadian Bible Society, was recently reported to have said 'people who are destroying the truth of the Gospel and accusing the Church and Christianity of destroying prehistoric, pre-Christian truth have never felt fear'. Similar sentiments were expressed earlier by a Navajo woman, Lorena Wood.⁴³

Intertribal Communications (Indian Life Ministries) in Winnipeg has for years been serving the development of an evangelical understanding of a native church through its bimonthly newspaper, *Indian Life*, and through the publication of culturally relevant books on important issues and biographies of successful native leaders such as Ray Prince, from the Carrier tribe of British Columbia.⁴⁴

Conclusion

It is clear that if a viable and lasting Christianity is to develop among the indigenous peoples of the northern hemisphere the questions of the relationship between culture and Christianity which have formed the subject of this paper need to be answered. From the examples cited above it is clear that there are differences over the issues of *contextualisation*, *indigenisation* and *syncretism* within denominations, as well as differences between various traditions within the church. Jean-Guy Goulet notes the development among some Athapaskan Catholics of a 'religious dualism' in which both aboriginal and Christian beliefs are 'generally socially available and meaningful'.⁴⁵ Might this be the way of the future, given the resurgence of aboriginal self-identity? Or is it more likely that thoroughly syncretised 'christopaganism' will develop as some seem to advocate?⁴⁶

Perhaps, however, another element needs to be considered as we look to the future. Over recent years events during the worldwide spread of the charismatic and pentecostal movements have led church growth researchers to emphasise the supernatural element in Christianity which they claim has been neglected, particularly in the Western churches, since the onset of the Enlightenment. Maybe the 'weak-kneed' nature of Christianity taken to the north is a consequence not so much of a failure to abstain from meat on Fridays, but of the absence of the demonstrable power of the Holy Spirit?⁴⁷ Fascinating pieces of literature such as the twentieth-century American

novelist Margaret Craven's *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* and the nineteenth-century Russian writer Nikolai Leskov's *On the Edge of the World* attempt to convey the missionary's dilemma in the face of totally alien world-views. They depict little men adrift in an alien Canadian and Siberian environment respectively; the missionaries seem incapable of functioning properly on a personal or spiritual level, overcome by otherness.⁴⁸ The supernatural dimension surely needs to be faced with the same dimension in Christianity. On St Lawrence Island in 1910 a shaman, Ugunalskwok of Poowowaluk, attempted to obtain Jesus as a spirit assistant. Jesus appeared to him in long robes as depicted in Sunday School wall-charts: 'Jesus hit him on each side of the face with the Bible ... "Why don't you believe my word. I am stronger than all devils ... all devils just the same as a handful of rocks to me. Do not half way believe. Those who half way believe are a curse to believers."' When the shaman shared this testimony in church a number of people were converted.⁴⁹ 'Power encounters' between Christian missionaries and shamans have been noted in many areas.⁵⁰ Perhaps, as in Elijah's day, there has to be a contest to decide which god answers with fire?⁵¹

Notes and References

- ¹ Quoted from *Scripture Union News*, January–March 1987, in *Our Family: The Family Newspaper of the Diocese of the Arctic*, vol. 13, no. 1, Easter 1987, p. 4.
- ² Antonio Gualtieri, 'Indigenization of Christianity and syncretism among the Indians and Inuit of the Western Arctic', *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 12, part 1, 1980, p. 57 (my emphasis).
- ³ Revelation 5:9 and Matthew 28:19–20 (NIV; emphasis added).
- ⁴ Philip Goldring, 'Religion, missions, and native culture', *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society*, vol. 26, 1984, pp. 47–48.
- ⁵ Tom Claus, 'A true Indian and a true Christian', *Native Discipleship in the Americas*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1993, p.8.
- ⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1985), pp. 183–90 (my emphasis).
- ⁷ Gualtieri, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–57.
- ⁸ Deduced from official Orthodox attitudes to freedom of religion (see Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness* (London, 1996)), and from the tone of the Holy Synod's new missionary journal *Missionerskoye obozreniye* (founded in 1995).
- ⁹ Cornelius Jaenen, *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Toronto, 1976); 'Problems of assimilation in New France', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 4, 1996, pp. 265–89. For the flavour of the period see hagiographic works such as Yvon Charron, *Mère Bourgeoys* (Montreal, 1950). Apparently the Jesuits' assimilationist policies were modified by the government of New France, whose fur trade interests required the continuation of a viable native society. See R. Pierce Beaver, 'The churches and the Indians: consequences of 350 years of mission' in R. P. Beaver (ed.), *American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective* (South Pasadena, CA, 1977), p. 276.
- ¹⁰ Gualtieri, *op. cit.*, pp. 51, 52. Having induced a native clergyman to admit that abstinence from drink among Indians who had attended native ceremonies at Morley, Alberta demonstrated that there must be some virtue in that religion, Gualtieri did nevertheless note elsewhere that one of his native informants who had been born again through Kayy Gordon's Pentecostal mission had successfully given up drink.
- ¹¹ For instance, see Ken Coates, 'Betwixt and between: the Anglican Church and the children of Carcross (Choooutla) Reservation School, 1911–1940', *BC Studies*, vol. 64, 1984–85, pp. 24–47; Gary Taljit, 'Good intentions, debatable results', *Past Imperfect*, vol. 1, 1992,

Certainly those active in the Native Evangelical Fellowship of Canada tend to regard their ancestors' traditional religious rites very gingerly. Bill Jackson, a Cree Christian leader from northern Alberta, relates the testimonies of Barney Lacendre and Norbert L., both converted shamans. Norbert became a Christian at the age of 80:

He lived in Loon Lake, Alberta and had been a medicine man for a long time. Norbert told me that he had been against the 'Bible ways' that the white missionaries brought. But after seeing others who believed in Christ and seeing how their lives were changed he started to read the Bible in Cree syllabics. Sometime later he came to accept Christ into his life. The man told me that he lived in fear before he became a believer. He did not want to be alone. He feared spirits, hexes or whatever else those with power could do to him. Also, he himself was feared by others. Then there was the fear of retaliation (revenge) by means of bad medicine, the same kind of fear people have that are deeply involved in this way. There is no love in this system.⁴²

The absence of love in native religions is remarked on elsewhere too. Bishop John Sperry, retired from the Arctic and now (1997) president of the Canadian Bible Society, was recently reported to have said 'people who are destroying the truth of the Gospel and accusing the Church and Christianity of destroying prehistoric, pre-Christian truth have never felt fear'. Similar sentiments were expressed earlier by a Navajo woman, Lorena Wood.⁴³

Intertribal Communications (Indian Life Ministries) in Winnipeg has for years been serving the development of an evangelical understanding of a native church through its bimonthly newspaper, *Indian Life*, and through the publication of culturally relevant books on important issues and biographies of successful native leaders such as Ray Prince, from the Carrier tribe of British Columbia.⁴⁴

Conclusion

It is clear that if a viable and lasting Christianity is to develop among the indigenous peoples of the northern hemisphere the questions of the relationship between culture and Christianity which have formed the subject of this paper need to be answered. From the examples cited above it is clear that there are differences over the issues of *contextualisation*, *indigenisation* and *syncretism* within denominations, as well as differences between various traditions within the church. Jean-Guy Goulet notes the development among some Athapaskan Catholics of a 'religious dualism' in which both aboriginal and Christian beliefs are 'generally socially available and meaningful'.⁴⁵ Might this be the way of the future, given the resurgence of aboriginal self-identity? Or is it more likely that thoroughly syncretised 'christopaganism' will develop as some seem to advocate?⁴⁶

Perhaps, however, another element needs to be considered as we look to the future. Over recent years events during the worldwide spread of the charismatic and pentecostal movements have led church growth researchers to emphasise the supernatural element in Christianity which they claim has been neglected, particularly in the Western churches, since the onset of the Enlightenment. Maybe the 'weak-kneed' nature of Christianity taken to the north is a consequence not so much of a failure to abstain from meat on Fridays, but of the absence of the demonstrable power of the Holy Spirit?⁴⁷ Fascinating pieces of literature such as the twentieth-century American

novelist Margaret Craven's *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* and the nineteenth-century Russian writer Nikolai Leskov's *On the Edge of the World* attempt to convey the missionary's dilemma in the face of totally alien world-views. They depict little men adrift in an alien Canadian and Siberian environment respectively; the missionaries seem incapable of functioning properly on a personal or spiritual level, overcome by otherness.⁴⁸ The supernatural dimension surely needs to be faced with the same dimension in Christianity. On St Lawrence Island in 1910 a shaman, Ugunalskwok of Poowowaluk, attempted to obtain Jesus as a spirit assistant. Jesus appeared to him in long robes as depicted in Sunday School wall-charts: 'Jesus hit him on each side of the face with the Bible ... "Why don't you believe my word. I am stronger than all devils ... all devils just the same as a handful of rocks to me. Do not half way believe. Those who half way believe are a curse to believers."' When the shaman shared this testimony in church a number of people were converted.⁴⁹ 'Power encounters' between Christian missionaries and shamans have been noted in many areas.⁵⁰ Perhaps, as in Elijah's day, there has to be a contest to decide which god answers with fire?⁵¹

Notes and References

- ¹ Quoted from *Scripture Union News*, January–March 1987, in *Our Family: The Family Newspaper of the Diocese of the Arctic*, vol. 13, no. 1, Easter 1987, p. 4.
- ² Antonio Gualtieri, 'Indigenization of Christianity and syncretism among the Indians and Inuit of the Western Arctic', *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 12, part 1, 1980, p. 57 (my emphasis).
- ³ Revelation 5:9 and Matthew 28:19–20 (NIV; emphasis added).
- ⁴ Philip Goldring, 'Religion, missions, and native culture', *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society*, vol. 26, 1984, pp. 47–48.
- ⁵ Tom Claus, 'A true Indian and a true Christian', *Native Discipleship in the Americas*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1993, p.8.
- ⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1985), pp. 183–90 (my emphasis).
- ⁷ Gualtieri, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–57.
- ⁸ Deduced from official Orthodox attitudes to freedom of religion (see Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness* (London, 1996)), and from the tone of the Holy Synod's new missionary journal *Missionerskoye obozreniye* (founded in 1995).
- ⁹ Cornelius Jaenen, *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Toronto, 1976); 'Problems of assimilation in New France', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 4, 1996, pp. 265–89. For the flavour of the period see hagiographic works such as Yvon Charron, *Mère Bourgeoys* (Montreal, 1950). Apparently the Jesuits' assimilationist policies were modified by the government of New France, whose fur trade interests required the continuation of a viable native society. See R. Pierce Beaver, 'The churches and the Indians: consequences of 350 years of mission' in R. P. Beaver (ed.), *American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective* (South Pasadena, CA, 1977), p. 276.
- ¹⁰ Gualtieri, *op. cit.*, pp. 51, 52. Having induced a native clergyman to admit that abstinence from drink among Indians who had attended native ceremonies at Morley, Alberta demonstrated that there must be some virtue in that religion, Gualtieri did nevertheless note elsewhere that one of his native informants who had been born again through Kayy Gordon's Pentecostal mission had successfully given up drink.
- ¹¹ For instance, see Ken Coates, 'Betwixt and between: the Anglican Church and the children of Carcross (Chooutla) Reservation School, 1911–1940', *BC Studies*, vol. 64, 1984–85, pp. 24–47; Gary Taljit, 'Good intentions, debatable results', *Past Imperfect*, vol. 1, 1992,

- pp. 133–54; Carol Devens, 'If we get the girls we get the race', *Journal of World History*, vol. 3, 1992, pp. 219–38; Peter Ernerek, 'Between God and the Devil: telling the truth about Chesterfield Inlet School', *Arctic Circle*, Spring 1993, pp. 6, 11; Todd Phillips, 'A wounded generation begins to heal', *Arctic Circle*, Fall/Winter 1993, pp. 21–29.
- ¹² K. Nosilov, 'Kondinsky monastyr' i yego missionerskaya deyatel'nost' na severe', *Pravoslavny blagovestnik*, no. 12, 1898, p. 164; c.f. Jean-Luc Moreau, 'Un Épisode de l'évangélisation des Vogouls: la "conversion" de "prince" de la Konda', *Études Finno-Ougriennes*, vol. 24, 1992, pp. 113–20.
- ¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 165–66. In 1892 it was converted into a nunnery. The writer of the article had high hopes of eventual success because the nuns kept everything spick and span (pp. 166–71). See also K. Nosilov, 'Kondinskaya zhenskaya obshchina', *Pravoslavny blagovestnik*, no. 21, 1900, pp. 214–17: by 1900 there were 16 Ostyak children in the school.
- ¹⁴ Elena Glavatskaya, 'Christianization = russification? On preserving the religious and ethnic identity of the Ob-Ugrians', in Juha Pentikainen (ed.), *Shamanism and Northern Ecology* (Berlin, New York, 1996), pp. 378–80. Graphic details of such catastrophic activities are given (admittedly from documentation published in the Soviet era) by Yuri Slezkine: see his *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY and London, 1994), chapter 1.
- ¹⁵ Rev. Alexander Boddy, *With Russian Pilgrims, Being an Account of a Sojourn in the White Sea Monastery and a Journey by the Old Trade Route from the Arctic Sea to Moscow* (London, 1893), pp. 61, 168.
- ¹⁶ Yuri Slezkine, 'Savage Christians or unorthodox Russians? The missionary dilemma in Siberia', in Yuri Slezkine and Galya Diment (eds.), *Between Heaven and Hell* (New York, 1993), pp. 15–31.
- ¹⁷ Ann Fienup-Riordan, 'The martyrdom of Brother Hooker: conflict and conversion on the Kuskokwim', *Alaska History*, vol. 3, no. 1, spring 1988, p. 4.
- ¹⁸ See remarks in Beaver, *op. cit.*, pp. 308–15 on the general effects of missionary impact. The term 'christopaganism' is from Hiebert, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
- ¹⁹ Carl F. Starkloff, 'Religious renewal in native North America: the contemporary call to mission', *Missiology*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1985, pp. 81–101.
- ²⁰ Janet Hodgson and Jay Kothare, *Vision Quest: Native Spirituality and the Church in Canada* (Toronto, 1990).
- ²¹ V. V. Makhinin, 'Potrebnost' v etnotraditsionnykh verovaniyakh', *Izvestiya Sibirskogo otdeleniya Russkoi Akademii Nauk (seriya istorii, filologii i filosofii)*, no. 3, 1992, pp. 31–36; Yuri Simchenko, 'Kompyutor dlya shamana', *Severnyye prostory*, no. 1, 1989, pp. 18–22.
- ²² Beaver, *op. cit.*, p. 288.
- ²³ John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto, 1984), p. 266.
- ²⁴ Quoted in John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Growth* (London, 1991), p. 204.
- ²⁵ *Light on the Horizon: Northern Canada Evangelical Mission's Fifty Years of Ministry to Canada's First People* (Prince Albert, SK, 1996); c.f. my unpublished article 'Christian missions and the first peoples: fifty years of the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission', submitted for publication to the *British Journal of Canadian Studies*.
- ²⁶ From an as yet incomplete study of the BCMS presence in the Canadian north. Donald B. Marsh, *Echoes from a Frozen Land* (Edmonton, 1987); *id.*, *Echoes into Tomorrow* (Three Hills, AB, 1991); and Winifred P. Marsh, *People of the Willow: The Padlimiut Tribe of the Caribou Eskimos, Portrayed in Water Colours* (Toronto, 1976), a few of whose wonderful evocations are reproduced in Jeanne L. Pattison, 'Images of another time: Winifred Marsh among the Padlimiut', *Up Here* (September/October 1995), pp. 30–37, 53.
- ²⁷ From a talk given by Howard Bracewell at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, October 1995.

- ²⁸ *Native Pentecostal News*, Fall 1994, p. 5; information also from Rev. Peggy Kennedy of Native New Life Church in Saskatoon, whose husband Jack is a Tsimshian.
- ²⁹ See my 'Colonialism and Siberian development: a case study of the Orthodox Mission to the Altay, 1830–1913' in A. Wood and R. French (eds), *The Development of Siberia: People and Resources* (London, 1989), pp. 50–71; 'The role of the Orthodox missionary in the Altai: Archimandrite Makary and V. I. Verbitsky', in Geoffrey Hosking (ed.), *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine* (London, 1991), pp. 96–107; and 'Makarii Glukharev: pietist Orthodox missionary to the Altaians', to be published by the Franckesche Stiftungen, Halle, Germany.
- ³⁰ Gualtieri, *op. cit.*, pp. 54–55.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, p. 47, 49–50.
- ³² *ibid.*, pp. 55–56; Jeanne L. Pattison, 'Iqaluit's famous igloo cathedral', *Up Here*, March/April 1996, pp. 20–21.
- ³³ *Native Discipleship in the Americas*, no. 8, 1995, p. 5 (hereafter *NDA*).
- ³⁴ *NDA*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1993, pp. 28–29.
- ³⁵ *NDA*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 29.
- ³⁶ Tom Claus, 'A true Indian and a true Christian', *NDA*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 20.
- ³⁷ From a CHIEF talk given at Waverton, Cheshire, June 1994.
- ³⁸ See my unpublished article referred to in note 25.
- ³⁹ See Paul D. Garrett, *St Innocent: Apostle to America* (Crestwood, NY, 1979).
- ⁴⁰ From a review by Wayne Holst in *Arctic*, vol. 48, 1995, p. 398, of *Journals of Priest Ioann Veniaminov in Alaska, 1823–36*, with introduction and commentary by S. A. Mousalimas (Fairbanks, AL, 1993). The development of Russian Orthodox theology of mission towards the Alaskan peoples is investigated at length in Michael Oleska, *Orthodox Alaska: A Theology of Mission* (Crestwood, NY, 1992), chapters 5 and 6. To the outsider there still seems to be a good deal of Russian (as opposed to Christian) culture in the thought patterns and practices. For the Moravian attitude, see note 17 above.
- ⁴¹ Soterios Mousalimas, 'Russian Orthodox missionaries and southern Alaskan shamans: interaction and analysis' in Richard Pierce (ed.), *Russia in North America* (Kingston, ON, 1990), pp. 314–21.
- ⁴² Bill Jackson, *Scripture and Traditional Religion* (Prince Albert, SK, 1992), pp. 4–5; c.f. his *God and the First Nations* (Calgary, AB, 1996). The biography of Barney Lacendre has been published as *The Bushman and the Spirits* (Beaverlodge, AB, 1979).
- ⁴³ The Bible Society's broadsheet *Word in Action*, no. 82, 1997, p. 1; Lorena Wood, 'Speaking from the heart', *Mission Frontiers*, vol. 16, no. 5–6, May/June 1994, p. 17.
- ⁴⁴ Mark Ward, *The Conquering Indian* (Winnipeg, 1994); Arthur H[olmes], *The Grieving Indian* (Winnipeg, 1991); and Alta Tanis, *God's Warrior: the Life Story of Ray Prince* (Winnipeg, 1996).
- ⁴⁵ Jean-Guy Goulet, 'Religious dualism among Athapaskan Catholics', *Canadian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 3, no. 1, Fall 1982, p. 1.
- ⁴⁶ Hodgson and Kothare, *op. cit.*
- ⁴⁷ See, for example, John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism: Signs and Wonders Today* (London, 1985).
- ⁴⁸ Margaret Craven, *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* (Toronto, London, 1967); Nikolai S. Leskov, *Na krayu sveta* (St Petersburg, 1875), translated by A. E. Chamot in *The Sentry and Other Stories* (London, 1922). A new translation with notes by Michael Prokurat has recently been published (Crestwood, NY, 1992).
- ⁴⁹ Quoted from unpublished journals of E. O. Campbell in Carol Zane Jolles, 'Salvation on St Lawrence Island: Protestant conversions among the Sivuqaghmiit', *Arctic Anthropology*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1989, pp. 19–20.
- ⁵⁰ See, as one example, Mary Cundy, *Better than the Witch Doctor* (Crowborough, 1994), chapter 4, which relates events in Nepal. There needs to be a proper study of 'power encounters' between the Christian God and the spirit world of the indigenous northern peoples. See, for instance, the references to Barney Lacendre and Norbert L. noted above;

L. W. Elford, 'Resisting the Devil', in *Attack from the Spirit World: a Compilation* (Wheaton, IL, 1973), pp. 125–29; Timothy Warner, 'Dealing with territorial demons', in C. Peter Wagner, *Territorial Spirits* (Chichester, 1991), pp. 51–54; also his 'Power encounter with the demonic', in Robert E. Colernan (ed.), *Evangelism on the Cutting Edge* (Old Tappan, NJ, 1896), pp. 98–99.

⁵¹ 1 Kings 18.