

“The Lord Will Provide”: The History and Role of Episcopalian Christianity in Nets’aii Gwich’in Social Development - Arctic Village, Alaska¹

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Abstract

This paper addresses the history and development of Episcopalianism in the Nets’aii Gwich’in community of Arctic Village, Alaska. It is argued that Christianity in the village well represents communal *resistance* to colonial domination, as well as the ability to blend past and present traditions. This development is due largely to the role played by the Gwich’in Reverend Albert E. Tritt, whose efforts, including his building of the community’s first church, were central to the community’s embracing of Christianity. The paper concludes with a discussion of Gwich’in Episcopalianism in the twenty-first century, and its role in the battle against oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Introduction: Christian Evangelism in Native America

The conversion of virtually all of Native America to Christianity has attracted new interest over the past decade. The role that the Christian churches played in the attempt to assimilate and westernize Native American society is well known and has been discussed for several years. Recent literature, however, has emphasized the political role which the evangelizing churches played in the

conquest and colonization of North America, particularly as white European expansion and settlement extended westward in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A philosophy of Manifest Destiny, and the spreading of “civilization” across the North American west, was central to the colonization of the region at both the political and social levels. “The U.S. definition of civilization [at this time], not surprisingly, was a pungent combination of fundamentalist Christianity, unrepentant racism, and economic Darwinism.”²

Missionaries of this period played a crucial role, working hand in hand with those who sought to conquer and “tame” the western frontier and its inhabitants, replacing it with a more “civilized,” sedentary, and thus European/western society and culture. This process included, most significantly, the supplanting of traditional belief systems in the realms of medicine and healing, experiential learning and tutelage, and spirituality with a formalized system of medical care based upon the sciences, formalized classroom education, and of course, Christian religious practice.

The evangelization and conversion of Native Americans to Christianity was a natural, albeit ethnocentric, outcome of the social and cultural aspects of the colonial enterprise. “English justifications for the dispossession of North America from Indigenous Peoples derived from an Elizabethan Protestant doctrine declaring the English in covenant with God to bring ‘true’ (as opposed to Spanish) Christianity to ‘heathen natives.’”³

But native acceptance and embracing of white European culture, it has been argued, came at a high cost to Indigenous cultures and beliefs. As Native Americans took on the value systems of the colonizers, the loss of Indigenous value systems—indeed, of Indigenous culture itself—was inevitable. “The Indians were not only to be controlled and settled but to take part in civilized life by leaving behind their attachments to ‘thralldom’ and ‘superstition’ and learning a new and better language, religion, and means of livelihood.”⁴

And yet, mutual exclusivity—that is, the contention that one is either Christian or not, depending upon whether one still embraces some aspects of traditional spirituality—is no longer accepted as a viable paradigm when applied to many Native American cases.⁵ Indeed, the co-existence of Christianity with native spirituality suggests that the dichotomy that maintains that one cannot be a Christian and maintain and preserve one’s Indigenous culture at the same time is unfounded. In other words, rather than viewing native society as being “Christianized” by the missionaries with one belief system replacing the other, it may be preferable instead to say that Christianity was “Indianized” by the western native communities meshing with, rather than supplanting, existing values and cultures.⁶ Historian Nicholas Griffiths has recently described such a meshing as a “reciprocal, albeit asymmetrical, exchange.”⁷

Thus, the degree to which Native Americans have embraced Christianity should not be construed as acceptance of assimilation or willingness to participate in their own cultural destruction. On the contrary, it is the contention

here that despite their “conversion,” many Native American communities retained traditional spirituality and the identities that these meanings entailed. “The willing conversion to various denominations of Christianity by many native people throughout North America has coexisted with a variety of surprisingly resilient forms of traditional spirituality, despite concerted efforts at suppression and cultural assimilation.”⁸

In part, this also may be seen as a form of resistance to white European conquest. Native recognition and acceptance of the white man’s technological superiority, or of his ability to exercise power, did not in turn engender a willingness to accept his deity as well.⁹ Moreover, refusal to fully accept European ways, or to modify European beliefs and values to those of the native, was to a certain extent an expression of communal empowerment. Further, Christian evangelism was kept at bay especially when communal leadership offered political resistance to European conquest.¹⁰

While Christian religious observance, formal education and healthcare were intended to replace traditional structures, some missionaries attempted to co-opt existing spiritual practices as their own, in order to facilitate the conversion process. “Missionaries [worked] out conversion strategies that would make Christianity somehow analogous to native religion,”¹¹ redesigning rituals in ways that made them appealing (and familiar) to potential native converts.

Modern medicine in concert with western views of healing was largely intolerant of traditional healing practices and yet, this aspect of Christian missionary efforts was particularly problematic. “Paradoxically, the determination to demonstrate the superior effectiveness of Christian healing and other magical techniques, common to priests and missionaries across the hemisphere, implicitly acknowledged the claim to genuine supernatural powers on the part of the very native specialists whom they wished to outwit.”¹²

Thus, it can be said that Christian missionary work was not only connected to “evangelical ambitions,” but also to the “ambitions of the state,”¹³ namely to control, culturally assimilate, and ultimately conquer the whole of Native America. One aspect of the missionary movement that is of relevance to the following case study is that evangelical doctrine did not always take hold by force.¹⁴ Rather, the power of western ways, of which Christian traditions and practice were seen as no small part, made the adoption of Christianity attractive to those wishing to further the interests of themselves and their communities during a period of social and economic transition. Anthropologist Ronald Niezen explains at length:

Christianity and ideas of “progress” also came to native peoples at times of loss and hardship, with new isolation on reservations, and along with racism and dependency in relations with neighboring white communities. Under these conditions, many sought a new understanding of the reasons for their suffering and had new

expectations of moral justice in prophetic movements that combined elements of Christianity with Indian visionary traditions. For others the answers lay in a more uncompromising acceptance of what was being offered by outsiders – formal religion, education, “civilization” — in the hope that even if it did not improve their lives, it might at least provide their children with a better chance in a world of hostile change.¹⁵

In other words, it is certain that some Native Americans converted to Christianity for what amounted to strategic reasons, “for it provided a better answer to the urgent social and religious questions that they were facing at that particular juncture in their cultural history.”¹⁶

A final note about word use and meaning is appropriate here. A distinction in the literature between “Christianization” of native peoples and “evangelization” is significant. While the former term implies an internal process whereby one joins the Christian world, its beliefs, values, and the like, the latter suggests an external process carried out *upon* an individual or community.¹⁷ As will be seen below, the changes brought to the territory of Alaska during the mid-nineteenth century well exemplify a set of conditions that largely exemplify the latter, rather than the former, of the two terms.

Traditional Gwich'in Spirituality and the Coming of Episcopalianism to the Alaskan Interior

One of the most recent examples of American expansion westward was the conquest and colonization of the territory of Alaska, America’s “Last Frontier,” when the U.S. bought Alaska from Russia in 1867. Evangelism among the native populations in this future state in many ways followed the processes developed earlier in the American west.¹⁸ At the same time, the unique circumstances of the territory, its harsh geography, and most especially the role of the Gold Rush in attracting white immigrants, reveal that the colonization of native Alaska and the conversion of its Indigenous populations was a slow process which continued throughout the twentieth century, and to a certain degree, continues to the present day.

The Episcopalian Church in the Alaskan Interior

While the Episcopalian Church had come to the Alaskan Interior following the building of the Hudson’s Bay Post at Ft. Yukon in 1847,¹⁹ it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that the Church penetrated the most distant native communities in the territory, home to the Gwich’in Athabascans of the northeast region. The Gwich’in tribes, comprised of nomadic hunters and gatherers who relied primarily upon caribou, moose, fish, and berries for their sustenance, were spread among several small settlements throughout the region, as well as the northwest corner of the Canadian Arctic. The Episcopalian Church

was awarded this region of North America as a part of an agreement arranged among all of the evangelizing churches in the territory at the time. As Episcopal Archbishop Stuck explains:

A meeting of the secretaries of the principal missionary boards was held at which an informal working agreement as to the allotment of certain regions ... was reached ... It was a wise, statesmanlike thing to do; it has resulted in an almost complete absence in Alaska of the unfortunate, discreditable conflicts between rival religious bodies which have not been unknown elsewhere.²⁰

The region was ideally suited to Anglican aspirations, in part due to geography. The proximity of northwest Canada to northeast Alaska made it an attractive region to Canadian Anglican missionaries.²¹ Thus missionizing in Alaska was initiated at a meeting of clergy in October 1857.²² The first Anglican missionary to Alaska, Rev. W.W. Kirby, was sent to Ft. Yukon in the spring of 1861,²³ arriving on the 6th of July.²⁴ As the fall hunting season was rapidly approaching, Kirby found that he had little time to carry out his mission before the snow fell. "Kirby realized that the people must leave [Ft. Yukon] very soon. They were a nomadic people who had to roam in order to survive. He began the system of appointing Native teachers which was to prove so successful in later years ... so within a few days of hearing the gospel, an Indigenous ministry was begun. This surely has been the secret of the work in the North."²⁵

Rev. Robert McDonald began his work in the Interior the following year,²⁶ and remained there for the next 40 years.²⁷ He is best known for creating "*Takudh*" (sounds like "*Dag'o*"), the name he gave to the Gwich'in language. He devised the orthography for the language in the 1870s,²⁸ using Christian religious texts (the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer) as the primary vehicles of his translation.²⁹ Rev. McDonald made his first visit to the "*Gens du Large*" (Chandalar) Indians (that is, the Gwich'in), in March of 1863. He notes in his personal journal that the people he met were anxious to learn about Christianity and to follow its rules completely. For example, he explained to one of the tribesmen that he should, according to Christian belief, not practice polygamy, the man told him that "he would part with either [wife] that liked to leave him and retain the other."³⁰ Recognizing the potential difficulties which such news might present to the community, McDonald then gave a talk on Christian marriage, telling the Gwich'in that those with children from more than one wife were permitted to remain married, while those without children should separate, except in cases where the women were elderly.³¹

McDonald returned to the region two years later in 1865, this time in order to bring medical aid following the outbreak of an undisclosed illness. Still, it was several years later, in 1895, following the U.S. purchase of Alaska from Russia and the separation of the American Episcopal Church from the Anglicans,

that the first Episcopal Bishop of Alaska, Rev. Peter Trimble Rowe, was appointed.³² In 1896, he made his first trip into the Gwich'in areas of the Interior in an effort to consolidate the Church's hold on the region.

The attitudes of the Church officialdom toward the Indigenous traditions of the Gwich'in during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be described as mixed. On the one hand, personages such as Hudson Stuck, beloved by many in the native community, prided themselves on their tolerance and desire to respect – even embrace – Alaskan native cultures and ways. In 1916, Stuck wrote:

I profess myself a friend of the native tongue because it *is* the native tongue - the easy, familiar, natural vehicle of expression; of the native dress because it is almost always comfortable and comely; of the native customs, whenever they are not unhealthy or demoralizing, because they are the distinctive heritage of a people...³³

And yet, at other times, Stuck's writings come across as highly ethnocentric and imperialist. He criticizes white Alaskans, for example, for not setting a higher standard of behavior towards their fellow natives, an admirable goal to be sure. But he does so as follows:

And, indeed, the spectacle of the *man of the higher race, with all the age-long traditions and habits of civilization behind him*, descending below the level of savage, corrupting and debauching the savage and making this corrupting and debauching the sole exercise of *his more intelligent and cultivated mind*, is one that has aroused the disgust and indignation of whites in all quarters of the world.³⁴

Moreover, his tolerance for native culture clearly does not include traditional spirituality:

The "animism" of the Yukon Indians was a *gloomy and degrading superstition*. It had not anywhere, I think, the horrible accompaniments of human sacrifice and cannibalism found elsewhere, but it lived in a constant dread of the baleful activities of disembodied spirits, and in constant subjection to the *shaman* or medicine man, who possessed the secret of propitiating these spirits and of subjecting them to his own commands ... Many of the thaumaturgic stories told of these conjurors suggest the possession of clairvoyant and hypnotic powers. The people, without exception, cowered under this sordid tyranny, a prey to its panic terrors.³⁵

The simultaneous respect expressed for Indigenous culture and contempt for Indigenous religion is resolved by viewing the Church as the solitary vehicle

of salvation not only at the individual level, but also for Alaskan native communities as a whole. Stuck concludes his 1916 work stating “that the Indian race of interior Alaska is threatened with extinction, there is unhappily little room to doubt; and *that the threat may be averted is the hope and labour of the missionaries amongst them.*”³⁶

Such views may well exemplify official Christian views of traditional native spirituality. But of course, such views were not unique to the Episcopalian community or, for that matter, to the Alaskan experience. Christian missionaries had long regarded native religions in the west as “the work of the devil,”³⁷ and attitudes in Alaska were no exception. As Niezen contends, “America was Christianized by universalist truth-bearers with initially regional ambitions who looked forward to the eventual building of a wider unity of believers.”³⁸ Thus, Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, the first Archdeacon of the Alaskan Diocese, was not alone among Christian missionaries of North America, who portrayed traditional religion as “satanic” and “uncivilized.”³⁹

Indeed, as will be seen below, traditional spirituality was fully embraced by the natives of this remote region of the Interior when Church representatives first arrived. Prior to this period, there existed a belief in forest spirits, lake monsters, giants, bushmen, and reincarnation. That said, religion among the Gwich’in in the pre-European Contact period was neither formally organized nor systematized.⁴⁰ Nor, for that matter, were “full-time” religious practitioners found in the community during this period,⁴¹ though shamans were a part of traditional spiritual life.

Traditional Gwich’in Athabascan Spirituality

Relatively little is known of pre-contact Gwich’in spirituality. What is known is similar to other Alaskan native traditions; Gwich’in tradition traced creation to supernatural spirits in the region. As hunters and gatherers, a connection with the land was especially strong. “In hunting societies, the relationship between humans and hunted animals is mediated by spirits, while the living animals themselves have knowledge of human attitudes and intentions.”⁴²

Among the Gwich’in, Raven played an especially significant role, believed to have created the world, the sun, the moon, and women. Men, on the other hand, were believed to have always existed. Not surprisingly, the Gwich’in also had a particular affinity with the caribou, their primary food source. “The Chandalar Kutchin [that is, Gwich’in], like many other American Indian groups, believe that during this mythical period, men and animals possessed essentially the same characteristics. As the natives put it, ‘in those days all men were animals and all animals were men.’”⁴³ Tradition held that every human heart included a piece of caribou heart, and every caribou heart a piece of the human heart. As a result, humans had partial knowledge of where the caribou were at all times—though the caribou, too, knew where the humans were.⁴⁴

Gwich'in spirituality prior to contact also included belief in a variety of supernatural beings. Most prominent among them was the bushman, or the Nain.⁴⁵ Tradition held that the bushmen were those who were once forced by starvation to resort to cannibalism. As a result, they left the community and lived in the bush.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that belief in such supernatural beings still existed as recently as the late 1930s,⁴⁷ and that outsiders or others encountered in the bush who were not recognized by community members were at times thought to be such creatures.

Shamans played an important role in traditional Gwich'in spirituality. A shaman was said to develop his powers in his mid-teens. In time, once this power was fully developed, shamans would adopt a "companion animal," and would carry various animal-related paraphernalia with them, such as the head of that animal. Shaman also assisted in bringing success to the hunt. "A shaman was asked to conjure in preparation for a coming hunt, since to bring good luck in such a case is a shamanistic function."⁴⁸ In addition, shamans acted as sorcerers, who could bring bad luck or death to their enemies. They also cured sickness, and sometimes helped with difficulties associated with childbirth.⁴⁹ The shaman's ability to treat illness relied upon two theories with regard to the source of sickness: either the spirit had left the body, and only when it re-entered the body would the ill person again be well, or, alternatively, a foreign object had entered the body and needed to be removed. The presumed need to remove such a foreign object or influence entailed a shaman's attempts at "sucking, blowing, or pulling" the miasma from the body using songs and incantations, sometimes with the use of a special knife bearing a wooden blade.⁵⁰

As for the use of magic, this was not limited to shamans alone. Rather, anyone who held a strong grudge or jealousy toward another in the community could, under severe circumstances, put a "curse" on the person or his family. "A belief used to exist ... that any person could make 'bad medicine' [i.e., black magic] against any other person. This magic, made apparently by mere will power, was considered as successful if it harmed any member of his family as if it reached the object himself. This caused much strife and blood feud inside and between the tribes."⁵¹

Since contact and the arrival of Christian evangelism, major changes had been identified by the early twentieth century that suggested a transformation in the lives of Alaska's native peoples, including the Gwich'in. As Archbishop Stuck notes, "little by little the deeply-entrenched influence of the medicine man was overcome. Tenacious of life as a turtle, the old animistic superstition still writhes and wriggles, although decapitated and dismembered, but its power is broken and its days are numbered."⁵² Thus, he notes, that as of 1920, "there ... are, speaking broadly, no unbaptized natives left in Alaska."⁵³

Among the Gwich'in, this transformation could be seen most especially in the family life of the community. "Young people marry more on their own volition [since Contact], swearing vows before the priest in the Christian church, and

divorce, in consequence, proves more complicated. Polygyny, never widely spread, has ceased, and extra-marital relations are tabooed by the church. Finally, at death, a Christian burial is generally performed and the corpse buried in the modern coffin under a cross in the graveyard..."⁵⁴

And yet, the spirituality of the Gwich'in did not fully reject traditional spirituality following conversion to Christianity, but rather embraced elements of both simultaneously. Cornelius Osgood explains:

The Kutchin [Gwich'in] should be considered, psychologically speaking, as an essentially religious people. Their nominal conversion probably offered relatively few difficulties, but it sometimes appears that the Christian theology has been superimposed upon, rather than substituted for, the aboriginal point of view. The objective aspects of the old beliefs, such as shamanism, have become vestigial, however, and whatever there may have been of formulated ideas regarding the spiritual world, have been rather thoroughly crushed by the impact of the new culture.⁵⁵

Thus, the belief system of the Gwich'in has been described as having "a Christian veneer, at least, [which] colours their present religious beliefs ... underneath [the] layer of Christianity, however, a surprising number of aboriginal beliefs and practices still persist. The varying degree of emotional intensity that still surrounds them, probably gives some indication of their relative importance in the religious life of the precontact period."⁵⁶

Spiritual leadership exemplified this meshing of traditions, for "it appears that not uncommonly the shaman and the lay reader for the Christian church are one and the same man. The ambiguity of such a situation seems to disturb no one. It is probably felt that both offices demand much the same characteristics."⁵⁷ But if one can accept that the Gwich'in saw no contradiction here, this dynamic is quite explicable.

Native willingness to respond to Christianity [in the Americas] was genuine but conducted on its own terms; conversion represented not so much a rejection of the old way as a conviction that Christianity offered more ... spiritual power ... for a changed situation. Uniquely equipped to make sense of an unexpectedly expanding new cosmos, Christianity offered a means of reintegrating societies in which old standards had been broken down.⁵⁸

Understandably, there has been some reluctance in the past among the Gwich'in to speak about traditional religion.⁵⁹ Anthropologist Hadleigh-West contends that during his fieldwork in the 1950s, "shamans and shamanistic

practices persist ... to some degree although few people are willing to talk about it.”⁶⁰ McKennan concurs, noting that:

Although Christian beliefs and practices have tended to diminish the importance of shamanism, they have not totally displaced it. A surprising amount of shamanistic lore still persists among the [Gwich'in] natives, and their descriptions of former shamanistic practices are charged with emotion and awe. [A number of elders] were once active shamans. *With the exception of Albert Tritt, all of them still practice occasionally ... [though this is generally] confined to community services such as bringing caribou or good weather...*⁶¹

As will be seen below, Reverend Tritt was unique in many regards. Indeed, Tritt's philosophy appears to represent well the idea that spiritual encounters in colonized America may be seen as what Griffiths⁶² describes as a “conversation” between the traditional ways and Christianity, rather than as a “conversion” from one to the other.

The Reverend Albert Edward Tritt: A Gwich'in Evangelist in the Alaskan Interior

By the turn of the twentieth century, it was clear that the Christianization of the Interior region was well under way, but that Christianity was yet not fully embraced in the more remote communities northeast of Ft. Yukon, that is, the country of the Gwich'in. This situation was to change greatly during the first half of the century due to the singular efforts of one man—Albert Edward Tritt.

Tritt's Evangelism

Rev. Albert Edward Tritt (1880-1955),⁶³ the first Nets'ani Gwich'in Episcopal priest, did not come to embrace Christianity by chance. Indeed, his father had studied under Rev. McDonald's tutelage.⁶⁴ Throughout his journals, Tritt discusses the important role his father played in imbuing him and his siblings with reverence for the Bible and its teachings.⁶⁵

In 1895, at age 15 (the age is traditionally associated with the first sign of spiritual calling),⁶⁶ Tritt saw his first Christian Bible, and it made a great impact upon him. He was determined to learn more, but only in 1914 did he acquire his own copy after having used others' copies over the years.⁶⁷ As Tritt recalls in one of his journal entries, “When I am walking I first think all about the Bible. There [are] not any boys like me [and] that is why I think about it all the time and I am learning it quick[ly]. My father tell[s] me the words that I don't know [and] when Sunday come[s] my father talks [about] the Bible [with me].”⁶⁸

Tritt's conversion came only following his belief that the white man's status came from his ability to read and to write,⁶⁹ and by his embracing of Christianity. It was this belief that then brought him, with great fanfare, to accept the Christian

faith. He told McKennen that after returning from a Christmas service in Ft. Yukon, he went home to Arctic Village with his mind filled with questions about Christianity. "For forty days I wandered crying in the wilderness," he told him, trying to understand the Bible. "During this quest for understanding, in true apocalyptic fashion he was struck by a blinding flash of light and fell in a faint. When he recovered consciousness, he was a new man and was sure that his vocation lay in bringing the gospel to his people together with reading and writing."⁷⁰

Much of Tritt's learning occurred during extended stays in Ft. Yukon.⁷¹ Tritt initially served as a lay reader in Arctic Village until 1925, when he was formally ordained.⁷² The Episcopalian Church's use of community members as unordained lay readers in native regions was not unprecedented; on the contrary, such individuals were extremely helpful to the Church's evangelizing efforts, given their familiarity with the Indigenous cultures and languages of the communities they served.⁷³

The level of Tritt's Christian learning during this time is noted by John Fredson, himself a native Christian missionary, in his documentation of "A Trip to Arctic Village" in December 1922. Village elders Chief Esaias, Chief Christian, and other men of Arctic Village invited Fredson and Dr. Grafton Burke, (a medical missionary from Fort Yukon), to go with them from Fort Yukon to the village.⁷⁴ Fredson tells of his meeting a young man whose name was "Drit" (that is, "Tritt") upon arriving at the village. Tritt told Fredson that he wanted to know more about the Bible.⁷⁵ As Fredson explains, "until long past midnight he asked us questions about the Bible. As he always studied it, he knew quite a bit about it."⁷⁶ Indeed, Tritt had by this time been studying the Bible for eight years, but would seek to further his understanding of its meanings throughout his lifetime.

An ordained priest, Dr. Burke led the services during the five-day stay at the village. A wedding took place and a child was baptized during the visit.⁷⁷ Overall, Burke and Fredson later noted the high level of participation from adults and children alike, further evidence of Tritt's teaching efforts and talents among the congregation. Indeed, the high level of Christian observance in the community attracted the attention of Archdeacon F. B. Drane, who took over Hudson Stuck's duties upon his death in 1920.⁷⁸ As a result, Drane also went to Arctic Village on a visit in 1923.⁷⁹ Drane's reaction to Tritt was similarly remarkable, calling him "an indefatigable Bible student."⁸⁰

Although the visit by Fredson and Burke in 1922 was the first trip by such significant church leaders to the village, it would not be Burke's last visit. In April 1938, he returned to Arctic Village, this time accompanied by Bishop Trimble Rowe. On this occasion, Tritt and the Bishop both preached (Rowe with an interpreter)⁸¹ in the small church known as the Bishop Rowe Chapel. The chapel was unique in many regards and, as will be seen below, played a central role in the development of Episcopalianism in Arctic Village during the first half of the twentieth century.

The Building (and Re-Building) of the Bishop Rowe Mission Church

Perhaps Tritt's most significant contribution to the Christianization of the Gwich'in community at Arctic Village was the construction of the Bishop Rowe Episcopal Chapel, initiated in the mid 1910s and completed in 1917. Tritt explained to F. B. Drane that in order to construct the chapel, "he bought the logs, and hired the young men of the village to help him build an ordinary sized cabin ... he managed to pay those who helped him with the work, [and] only Old Henry [Kwihatyi] worked without pay."⁸² Acquiring the needed materials and assembling them was no easy task. One villager, who was a child at the time, said:

They went downriver – it was closer and easier than going upriver, even though the logs were smaller. The whole village moved down there, even the kids. They all cut logs, and made them into rafts, eight or ten logs tied together. They had no nails in those days. They pulled the rafts from the banks. In shallow water or when going around a bend, they got into the water in order to pull the raft through. They had no rope in those days, so they pulled the rafts with pieces of braided caribou skin sinews. These proved to be easy to make, and were very strong. To build the church they mostly used an ax and a Simon saw.⁸³

Curiously, Tritt did not explain what the building would be while it was being built.⁸⁴ Given that Tritt already had a cabin to live in, some thought it might be a store or coffee shop.⁸⁵ Only after it was completed did he go to Chief Christian, the village leader, and give him its key, explaining that it was to be used as a church, and that it belonged to the entire community for their use. Tritt was then appointed as the church's lay reader.

Despite the completion of the chapel, the Gwich'in remained semi-nomadic during the hunting months, returning to the village only between hunting excursions. "In the summertime, when the people were all scattered, everyone still knew where everyone else was; people watched each other. Albert Tritt would go to each camp – some were 40 or 50 miles apart – and he would make a service for them. Then, before the snow came, they would all come back to stay together for the winter," when the chapel would be used for services and Sunday school. "He taught us quite a bit in Sunday School," explains one elder. "We met twice on Sundays. We learned how to write in Takudh."⁸⁶

In time, the new church became the central focus of the village, and even attracted attention from the mission at Ft. Yukon. When the villagers learned that John Fredson and Dr. Burke were planning a visit for late fall, they voted unanimously in the summer of 1922 to enlarge the building, and to add a steeple to it.⁸⁷ Tritt explained "the first church was different than now. It was hard for [the congregation] to sing - especially when scattered [in the room], and I thought they would be ashamed of it [when the visitors came]. If they sat near each other I thought it would be better, so I made a long table in the Church and long

benches on either side, so they sat facing each other. I did this because when [the] first Church was built they wouldn't sing."⁸⁸

Tritt's friend and colleague Gilbert Joseph led the rebuilding project. The old church was torn down, and a new one erected at that spot (see Photo #1) that was nearly double the size of the first, using logs acquired by Joseph.⁸⁹ While the original building was 17' x 17', this chapel was 17' x 26' in length.⁹⁰ The builders, Old Henry, Jimmie Peter, Joseph, and Tritt also added a belfry. One elder recalls "they used a two-hand saw to cut the planks for the top. They also used a plane, which they called a 'horse foot,' to smooth out the wood. The belfry top was the only part of the church where they used nails."⁹¹ The builders capped the belfry with a carving made by Tritt, which can best be described as an arrow-shaped figure. A number of interpretations of this figure have been put forward. One suggests that the figure is seen "pointing to the four cardinal points of the compass ... to ward off evil spirits."⁹² Another suggests that the arrow pointing upward is in reference to the story of Jacob's Ladder. Arrows then point outward, referring to the sending out the message of the four gospels in every direction.⁹³ When Grafton Burke and John Fredson visited the village, Chief Christian explained to them that the arrow signified "that the house was God's dwelling, not to be used as a roadside shelter by wayfarers."⁹⁴ Chief Esaias told Drane that the arrow was meant "to point straight to heaven."⁹⁵

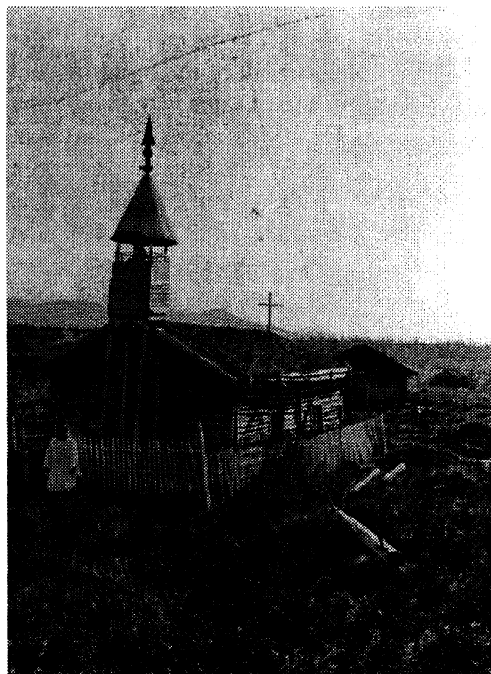


Photo 1: Rev. Tritt stands before the rebuilt chapel in a photo entitled "Old Church in Arctic Village, Alaska in 1933. Rev. A. E. Tritt." Photo Accession #66-61-15, Arctic Village Journals, courtesy of Alaska and Polar Regions Archives, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

But perhaps the best interpretation of its meaning comes from Tritt himself in one of his journal entries. “The furniture [furnishings?] of the church we made it by the way of God’s work. [The] two round wood [forms] ... stand for [the] Sun and moon; 3 round wood forms [are] for the stars. The arrow is God’s words that point out in [a] sword and knife. With this, God’s words, he confirm[s] these men in victory, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephtha, David, Samuel and all the angels (Heb. Chapter 11, 32-34)⁹⁶ ... Then at the point of the arrow the enemy will fall [on] that double blade[d] knife through the earth.”⁹⁷

The rebuilt chapel apparently succeeded in impressing visiting dignitaries. When John Fredson and Dr. Burke came to the village in the winter of 1922, Burke’s wife Clara later related, the chapel made an immediate impression. She writes that when Dr. Burke first saw the chapel from a distance, he “was speechless with surprise and happiness. The sight of that brave little steeple glimmering against the white crags of the polar mountains filled him with deep emotion. It represented an important milestone in the Christian conquest of the arctic wilderness, another flag of Christ planted in the vastness of the polar snows.”⁹⁸ Dr. Burke was also impressed by the fact that the chapel was totally furnished and beautifully built, signs of an incredible amount of effort and labor on the part of the village population.⁹⁹ Fredson and Burke brought vestments, a bell, and other furnishings given to them by the bishop for the church during their 1922 trip. They also brought a sign for the church dedication, made by Fredson, which said “Bishop Rowe Chapel, Episcopal; Albert E. Tritt, Layreader; Nutihsekh ako Ttia tsut tihsyan (Let us go into the House of the Lord).”¹⁰⁰

Clearly, the reconstruction effort proved worthwhile in the end. Tritt, Chief Esaias, and the elders of the village were all very proud of the building, and noted to the visitors that the entire village contributed in some way to building it. “The new chapel was solidly built, and furnished with benches, railing, altar, candle racks, glass for the windows, and a sturdy little woodstove ... the entire project had been completed without a cent from the parent church.”¹⁰¹ The chapel was rebuilt a third and final time several years later (see Photo #2). The rebuilding began in the summer of 1937, but Tritt lacked help in completing the job, and had to abandon it until 1940.¹⁰² The builders who participated in the reconstruction in 1940 largely came from Rev. Tritt’s immediate family.¹⁰³

Like the original church, additional materials for the reconstruction were floated upriver tied together as rafts. The church was totally reconstructed, even though it took only two weeks to complete (although further repairs took place throughout the following winter). The orientation was changed, so that the front door now opened to the south, rather than to the north.¹⁰⁴ The builders used some of the same logs and parts from the previous building, but the overall appearance was changed when they replaced the round belfry and entranceway with a square tower, 7’ wide x 6’ deep at the base, tapering into a pyramidal shape at the belfry some 25’ from the ground. They also added a vestry behind the altar at the rear of the chapel measuring 12’ wide by 8’ deep,¹⁰⁵ something Tritt

had always wanted. This room eventually took on a second purpose, used to store bodies prior to burial.¹⁰⁶



Photo 2: Rev. Tritt (dressed in vestments, standing in the doorway) and the entire village population in a photo entitled “Chapel in Arctic Village Alaska [ca. 1943],” Photo Accession #66-61-11N, Arctic Village Journals, courtesy of Alaska and Polar Regions Archives, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The chapel roof was, like those of its predecessors, comprised of sod on logs. It was supported internally by a large log, which was “spread laterally midway at the room from eve to eve, with a pair of shorter logs rising from its center to a ‘V’ to provide support for the two surfaces of the medium gable roof.”¹⁰⁷

There is no doubt that the Bishop Rowe Chapel helped draw the Arctic Village community together, and served as the centerpiece of the town for many years for villagers and outsiders alike. When Bishop William Gordan visited the village in the summer of 1951, he came away noting “when one has officiated at a service at the Bishop Rowe Chapel – in spite of the difficulties of language and mode of living – one cannot go away except with the feeling that truly God is there.”¹⁰⁸

The building was used until a new chapel was built several meters to the east in the late 1960s and consecrated in 1971.¹⁰⁹ Only at that time, some fifty years after the initial construction, was the old Bishop Rowe Chapel finally abandoned for good.

Reverend Albert Tritt: A Charismatic Leader With Great Expectations

The building (and rebuilding) of the Bishop Rowe Chapel was an exceptional accomplishment for such a small and poor Alaskan native congregation. And yet, in many ways, the building of the church well exemplifies Tritt’s extraordinary

ability to set goals, and then exercise the leadership necessary to accomplish them.

Indeed, numerous stories are told of Rev. Tritt's charismatic leadership style and unique behaviors. The Gwich'in Linguist, translator and folklorist Katherine Peter tells of a number of instances from her youth during the 1930s and 1940s, for example, when Tritt played a key role in helping to bring food to a hungry village (1992):

Some of us lived at Arctic Village. It was here that preacher Albert Tritt alone made great efforts for us. There was no food and he said, 'you guys dance, and while you're holding hands doing a reel, tell the caribou to come!' Meanwhile, he played the fiddle, you see. Then we did as he bid us. Really, there were no caribou, yet the next day Steven [Frank] killed a caribou.¹¹⁰

A story is told of another occasion when, while rebuilding the chapel in summer of 1922, the workers including Tritt were very hungry and discouraged. Tritt and his friend, Gilbert Joseph, took a break and went out hunting. They were sitting reading the Bible, Matthew 13: 1-9 "The Parable of the Sower Sowing the Seed"¹¹¹ and discussing it when they thought they saw caribou. But what they saw were not caribou at all, but dall sheep, rarely if ever seen so close to the village. There were five of them; Tritt killed three and Gilbert Joseph the other two. When they went to dress the animals, they found that each had red bands of their backs from shoulder to hip. Such markings had never been seen before or since. "They all believed, with Albert, that God, to save them from starvation, had sent the sheep, and had marked them so that they would know unmistakably that they were His gift."¹¹² Thereafter, the villagers referred to them as "God's sheep."¹¹³ In fact, in one version of the story, the red bands are described not as bands, but as crosses that lined the sheep's backs.¹¹⁴ To be sure, Reverend Tritt's hunting and trapping abilities and knowledge of the land, all traits associated with Gwich'in men of his time, were nonetheless exceptional. As one of Tritt's descendants explained at length:

I remember once in 1944 or 1945. I was on the mountain in the summertime. We were up high, and I wanted to drink. I was looking for water. There were a lot of caribou tracks in one area, in the deep mud. We saw these deep tracks, and my grandfather dug a hole there. Then he said wait a while for the mud to settle. We waited, the mud settled, and we could drink.

He did some curious things. One time, we were in a place when the ice came up, and you could see there was a place with a lot of muskrats. So he said 'we'll block the entrance, put willows in the water,' where there was an opening with bubbles under the ice. He was setting a

trap. So he blocked the opening, and set a willow snare. When the willows moved, he pulled the snare. He caught about 6 muskrats that way. Another time before then, we were here and there – it was around March, and we were around the willows near First Bend. There were ptarmigan everywhere. He took a caribou sinew, and he set a snare among the willows ... when we came back, we had maybe 10 or more ptarmigans.¹¹⁵

F. B. Drane relates a similar story. During his visit to Arctic Village in late 1922, he describes a hunting trip he took with Tritt:

Albert Tritt took no gun, but about a half doz[en] rabbit snares of picture wire in his pocket. I thought it strange to hunt rabbits without a gun. Yet Albert caught about nine rabbits, while 4 or 5 was the most any of the rest of us killed – he would place his snares where the rabbit would likely be running when we would start the drive, and would catch rabbits that we would never see to shoot.¹¹⁶

As one elder concludes, “He did things in a non-traditional way. He didn’t need the white man to tell him how to do things.”¹¹⁷

In addition to Tritt’s hunting abilities and knowledge of the land, a number of stories are told of Reverend Tritt’s healing abilities: “Then it was 1940. At that time my eyes ached a great deal, and the preacher Albert even made an incision in my eyes [to ease the pain].”¹¹⁸ Interestingly, this process directly follows traditional Gwich’in healing rituals.¹¹⁹

Indeed, Katherine Peter’s description of Tritt during this period well describes a man who was the embodiment of Gwich’in spirituality, and who held a strong and devoted congregational following. She writes: “I tell you, [Albert Tritt] did many things in our presence. Upon occasion he would ask me to write something for him. Then he would say to me, ‘even in adversity, God will help us’... We did nothing at all without his praying. Whatever we did, he would pray for it.”¹²⁰ Tritt repeatedly confirms this contention in his journals, especially with regard to hunting game. He explains the important role his father played when he was a child, setting an example that he himself sought to emulate later in life. “My father use[d] to pray when he travel[ed to hunt] ... and when he kill[ed] something, he pray[ed] again to God and thank[ed] him. He thank[ed] God when I was there with him, [and] I always pray[ed] with him too.”¹²¹ Thus, he too recites prayers in anticipation of the hunt. One such prayer is recorded in his private journals: “There [are] no animals but just let us see something in all ... the sea and world. And now there [are] no animals around mine place and now I am going to go out for mine living and see me with your good eye, just spell some caribou animal for me first if you love me.”¹²² He notes too that he brought his Bible with him whenever he hunted, and would read it and study it while waiting by his snares.¹²³

Tritt's concerns went beyond the immediate needs of the village or of the Gwich'in. He led a collection of some eight dollars cash in 1943, which was sent to the mission in Ft. Yukon along with several muskrat skins, his contribution to the war against the Japanese. His opposition to Hitler's Germany, however, was shown again in the form of a ritual. A village elder relates, "I remember the day Rev. Tritt took up a German rifle. I don't know where he got it from. He called everyone down to the shore of the Chandalar. Then he says he wants to help fight Hitler. The people didn't understand what he meant. Then he winds up like this, and throws the rifle as far as he can into the middle of the river. It's still out there somewhere."¹²⁴

Others who met him, whites and Gwich'in alike, were similarly awed by Tritt's charismatic leadership. McKennan writes of a man who presented himself and his views in an elegant and sophisticated way; he spoke English in a "truly biblical manner,"¹²⁵ as it was through reading the Bible that Tritt had learned the language. "The strength of his ministry," one Episcopalian colleague wrote in the early 1950s, "has found its place in the hearts of hundreds who have gone before and of all people living in the area [of Alaska] today."¹²⁶ His family, too, remembers a man who spoke of his concern for the future, and was especially worried about the children of the community.¹²⁷ He also offered solace to those around him. "He was a prophesizer, he encouraged the people; he told them about what would come."¹²⁸

Indeed, Tritt himself at times reveals in his writings a sense that he is not always well understood, but that he is constantly worried about his community. He writes "I like to go to the wilds and work hard to get away from my past ... I try to go where I can read my Bible all the time. I don't want to go into villages where I am distracted or go for big hunts, but want to work where I can meditate."¹²⁹ This time spent away, he suggests, is confusing to his family, however. "I work so hard for the Bible on earth, in heaven, on the sea between earth and heaven ... I never tell this to the people, the men don't know me either, even my wife [doesn't] know me. When I come back from someplace mine face look[s] different; she [doesn't] know me because I got no voice."¹³⁰

There is no doubt that Reverend Albert Tritt was a unique and extraordinary visionary. His presence was powerful and his goals were, perhaps, before their time. And yet, Rev. Tritt's activities in the village eventually led to controversy, conflict, and schism, for his ambitions for himself and his community were holistic, and were not solely concerned with the activities of the Christian church. Rather, Tritt connected religion with other aspects of village life. He was opposed to the use of alcohol, dice, cards, pool, poison for killing game, and divorce, and he demanded a high level of communal obedience to his expectations.

For example, in 1914 he initiated the building of a caribou fence—a corral-type structure once used to momentarily trap groups of caribou in order to facilitate ease in the hunt.¹³¹ It was built without nails or rope, using only wet roots from along the river to tie the pieces together. And yet, Tritt never completed

the fence, fearing that he might be “jailed” by the game authorities if he did so.¹³² “There was a grudge against him. He feared that some people were going to report him to Fish and Game. So he gave up, he quit before he had finished.”¹³³

It is indicative of Reverend Tritt’s personality that the purpose of the fence was both practical as well as spiritual. Through the use of the fence, Tritt concluded, people would be able to stay settled in one place as they hunted – and they could then pray together more easily.¹³⁴

Tritt also initiated the construction of a road from Arctic Village to Ft. Yukon. Again, the purpose of the road was both practical and spiritual. Tritt’s desire to build a path to the town was based upon Isaiah 40:3, referring to the making of “a highway for God.”¹³⁵ It was his hope too that anyone who crossed it in the winter “would be drawn irresistibly along it until he reached the chapel at Arctic Village.”¹³⁶ The road was started in 1923 but, as the airplane was beginning to replace the dogsled as a primary mode of transport, the project was soon abandoned.¹³⁷

Albert Tritt’s ideas were highly ambitious and yet, his goals eventually became excessive to some, who began to question his directives. His expectations perhaps went too far when, in the early 1930s, he began planning for the building of a two-story schoolhouse in Arctic Village, which would allow the villagers to educate their children locally rather than sending them out, and would encourage more permanent settlement at Arctic Village. The building was never erected. A feud began as the villagers split over the plan, between those who supported Tritt and those who opposed him.¹³⁸ Soon after, those in opposition moved downriver, to a neighboring village. This solution allowed Tritt to maintain his station, and he continued to preach until first Raymond Harrison, and later his son Reverend Isaac Tritt, took over the Arctic Village congregation in the late 1950s.¹³⁹

The Evangelical Legacy of Reverend Albert Tritt

Just as his life was exceptional, so too was the death of Albert Tritt. In 1954, then in his seventies, he returned to Arctic Village knowing he would not have many years remaining. One day in June of 1955, he disappeared, creating panic among the villagers. They searched for 11 days before finally finding his body atop Dan-Che-Le mountain. He had to be carried down to be buried in the Arctic Village cemetery not far from the Bishop Rowe Chapel where he had devoted much of his life’s work.¹⁴⁰

The legacy that Reverend Albert E. Tritt left behind is considerable. McKennan has suggested that the acceptance of Episcopalian Christianity by the Nets’ aii Gwich’in at Arctic Village as well as many of the surrounding villages was facilitated through the active efforts of Reverend Tritt, and exemplifies a nativistic religious movement.¹⁴¹ He contends that Tritt’s personal transformation and his communication of “the Word” to his community via charismatic leadership was central to this movement. The “adaptation and modification of

the program in the face of the strong resistance it inevitably engenders” writes McKenna,¹⁴² allowed the Christianizing of the Gwich’in community to be realized in a way that may not have been possible had missionaries attempted to convert the community on their own. In other words, Tritt was used as a vehicle by the Church to further Christian interests throughout much of northeast Alaska.

And yet, while this argument has its merits, it is also true that Tritt’s embracing of Christianity may exemplify a Native American leader’s efforts to empower his community *against* cultural assimilation into the white man’s world by using the white man’s tools to *ward off* cultural assimilation. Whether created purposefully or serendipitously, Tritt’s interpretations of the biblical ideal fostered a Christianity that did not eliminate or erase Gwich’in identity or culture, but rather, empowered it.

The Gwich’in embraced Christianity as a means of preserving and maintaining their lifestyle, values, and overall worldview. In other words, it was not Tritt who was co-opted by the Church to do its bidding at Arctic Village, but rather, it may be contended, the Church and its teachings that were taken on by Reverend Albert Tritt and his followers as a mode of cultural preservation and resistance to the cultural assimilation and destruction anticipated by Hudson Stuck and addressed so eloquently in his 1916 writings.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Debate and the Role of the Episcopal Church in Arctic Village in the Twenty-First Century

The role of Rev. Tritt in the development of Episcopalian Christianity among the Nets’aii Gwich’in cannot be overstated. It was through Tritt’s personal efforts that the community embraced the white man’s religion; and as a result, all Arctic Village residents today identify as Christians. Little occurs in the village without Church’s sanction and support. Moreover, the Gwich’in now express their interests and concerns most effectively to white European America through the vehicle of the Christian Church. Most recently, this fact has been revealed through the Gwich’in community’s battle against exploratory oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).

While the question of whether drilling is desirable or not will not be addressed here, what is certain is that the Gwich’in as a community oppose drilling.¹⁴³ It is their contention (and the contention of many others as well) that such action would likely disrupt the breeding cycle of the Porcupine caribou herd given that the proposed drilling would occur in a region where the caribou typically calve. This argument is not surprising as the caribou herd continues to play a key role in the diet and economy of the Gwich’in.¹⁴⁴ In recent years, however, the battle has been expressed not only on cultural grounds alone, but increasingly, on religious grounds.

One well-known Gwich’in activist who has written on the role of religion in opposition to drilling is Faith Gemmill. She notes in a recent article that hunting success relies on the intercession of the “Creator.” But the Creator she refers to

is not necessarily the Creator of the Christian tradition alone but rather, is a Creator to which both traditional Gwich'in spirituality and Christians alike can relate:

We are spiritually connected to the caribou. In the creation stories of our people, there was a time that animals were like humans. Then there was a separation of the two, and humans came from the animals. Our stories say that we came from the caribou; when that happened there was an agreement between us. The caribou would always retain a piece of the Gwich'in heart and the Gwich'in would retain a piece of the caribou heart. *This agreement stands today. We believe that what befalls the caribou will befall the Gwich'in and vice versa.*¹⁴⁵

Thus, ANWR is known as '*Vadzaii googai vi dehk'it gwanlii*,' "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins." And as the birthplace of the Porcupine caribou herd, it is also, in some ways, equivalent to the Genesis story's *Garden of Eden*. Gemmill writes, "We believe that a birthplace is sacred and cannot be disturbed. Even during famine long ago, we wouldn't invade the birthplace."¹⁴⁶

Significantly, the Gwich'in see protection of ANWR not only in such traditional terms, but in specifically Christian terms as well. Gwich'in leaders have stated openly that protection of ANWR is in fact a distinctly *Christian* issue, requiring opposition by all religious Christians.¹⁴⁷ The Episcopalian priest of Arctic Village, Reverend Trimble Gilbert, has also been cited for having a worldview that serves to combine Christian and traditional spiritual values into his perspective of the ANWR and other issues. As *The Christian Science Monitor* recently noted, "Mr. Gilbert has no problem weaving Gwich'in creation stories and tribal values with the Old and New Testaments. 'All these things fit into the gospel,' [Gilbert] says, adding 'this whole country is holy ground to me.'"¹⁴⁸

Representatives from the Episcopal Church realize too that the Christianity of the Nets' aii Gwich'in at Arctic Village has developed into a rich tradition that is unique in its ability to meld and blend traditional and Christian spiritualities. Notes Reverend Mark MacDonald, Bishop of the Diocese of Alaska, "Gwich'in Christianity has become a way to affirm and embrace the old ways and the new ways, without losing cultural cohesiveness and solidarity. The Gwich'in are brilliant theologians. Gwich'in traditional culture is much closer to Christianity and Jesus than the dominating culture – Christian or not."¹⁴⁹

Indeed, the Diocese of Alaska has become increasingly involved in the ANWR debate in recent years, based upon what the Church argues are human rights and environmentalist principles. In the spring of 2001, three Episcopalian priests were among several people arrested in Washington, D.C. during a demonstration against oil drilling in ANWR.¹⁵⁰ As Bishop MacDonald explains:

The church has found ANWR a compelling issue since its General Convention in 1991. This is because it involves both an environmental concern, in the protection of ANWR, and a human rights concern, in the protection of the Gwich'in way of life. The Gwich'in people, *arguably the most Anglican group of people in the world*, are directly dependent upon the Porcupine Caribou herd for survival. A threat to the herd is a threat to Gwich'in cultural and physical survival.¹⁵¹

The Gwich'in community's fight against exploratory oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a particularly compelling example of the role of the Christian Church in the present-day culture of this Alaskan Indigenous community. It well reveals that the Gwich'in have clearly maintained a connection to the earth and its animal inhabitants. At the same time, it shows too that the role of Christianity in Gwich'in life is central, and cannot be overlooked. But further, the use of Christian arguments, imagery, and Church support against oil drilling also reveals the Gwich'in ability to resist neo-colonial activity in Alaska with what was once itself the primary tool of the western colonial enterprise.

From the perspective of the outside observer, the conversion of the Nets'ain Gwich'in to Christianity, carried out largely through the efforts of one charismatic leader, well exemplifies the way in which Native American leaders were co-opted by the Church in its evangelizing efforts. And yet, while Rev. Tritt and his Gwich'in followers embraced Christianity fully, they continue to find empowerment even today in the traditional spirituality of previous generations. They have found a way to blend western beliefs and values with their own in a way which has brought them into the white man's world while still allowing for traditional "Gwich'iness" to prevail.

The contention then that the Episcopal Christian Church will continue to grow, playing a central role in the lives and experiences of the Nets'ain Gwich'in is substantiated by a history of 100 years of active religious practice. That this faith system will evolve and change within the unique context of traditional Nets'ain Gwich'in values, culture and ideals appears to be a certainty as well.

Notes

1. The author wishes to thank the Tritt, James, Peter, Sam, John, Frank and Gilbert families for their generosity and willingness to share personal stories and memories of Reverend Tritt for use in this article. Thanks also to Caroline Atuk-Derrick, Archivist at the Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks, for her assistance in negotiating the University's extensive Archives. Research for the paper was supported in part by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the U.S. Department of Interior National Park Service Tribal Preservation Program, and Philadelphia University.

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 96. Hebrews 11:32-34 "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength, and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies."
 97. Tritt Journals, Box 1, Folder 8, 142-143.
 98. C. Burke, 249.
 99. Grafton Burke, "Northward the Course of the Kingdom: The Church at the Foot of the Arctic Range," in *Spirit of Missions*, 8 (1923): 173-174.
 100. G. Burke, 174; Mackenzie, 112-113.
 101. Mackenzie, 114.
 102. Tritt Journals, Box 1, Folder 8, 133.
 103. *Ibid.*, 134.
 104. Village Elder (C), July 15, 2002.
 105. Poirier.
 106. Village Elder (C), July 17, 2002.
 107. Poirier.
 108. William Gordon, (Bishop), "There's No Traffic Problem At Arctic Village," in *The Alaskan Churchman* 4 (November 1951): 20.
 109. Personal Communication, Episcopal Diocese of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska, July 10, 2002.
 110. Peter, 87.
 111. Matthew 13:1-9 "That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'" Tritt Chronicle, 13; Church Records/Drane, 154.
 112. Drane Collection, personal journals, 165.
 113. Church Records/Drane, 157.
 114. Village Elder (B), July 17, 2002.
 115. Village Elder (A), July 18, 2002.
 116. Church Records/Drane, 143.

117. Village Elder (A), July 18, 2002.
118. Peter, 57.
119. McKennan, 79.
120. Peter, 89.
121. Tritt Journals, Box 2, Folder 17.
122. Ibid.
123. Tritt Journals, Box 1, Folder 3, 27-28.
124. Village Elder (C), July 17, 2002.
125. McKennan, 86.
126. Lambert.
127. Village Elder (E), July 19, 2002.
128. Caroline Tritt Frank – Village scholar and biographer, personal communication, Arctic Village, Alaska, July 16, 2002.
129. Tritt Chronicle, 7.
130. Tritt Journals, Box 2, Folder 17.
131. McKennan, 87.
132. "The Rev. Albert Tritt - In Memoriam," in *The Alaskan Churchman* 3 (August 1955): 12-13.
133. Village Elder (A), July 18, 2002.
134. Village Elder (A), July 18, 2002.
135. Mackenzie, 79; McKennan, 87.
136. McKennan, 88.
137. Tritt Journals, Box 1, Folder 3, 34.
138. Mackenzie, 116.
139. Episcopal Diocese of Alaska, *A Century of Faith: Centennial Commemorative 1895-1995* (Fairbanks: Centennial Press, 1995), 19.
140. Village Elder (C), July 16, 2002.
141. McKennan, 86.
142. Ibid., 88.
143. There are numerous studies and opinions concerning the topic; see for example, the present author's view, S. C. Dinero, "The Real Cost of Drilling," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 8 (1999).
144. See S. C. Dinero, "Analysis of a 'Mixed Economy' in an Alaskan Native Settlement: The Case of Arctic Village," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* (2003; forthcoming).
145. Faith Gemmill, "People of the Caribou Reborn." *Native Peoples* 13 (Fall 1999): 50 (emphasis added).
146. Ibid., 54.
147. Liz Ruskin, "ANWR: 'Thou shalt not steal the future,'" *Anchorage Daily News*, May 4, 2001.
148. Brad Knickerbocker, "Above Arctic oil reserves: old ways, satellite dishes," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 1, 2001.
149. Bishop Mark MacDonald interviewed by Murray Carpenter, "The Gwich'in and ANWR: 'The most Anglican group of people in the world' fight for the right to protect a way of life," *The Witness*, Jan/Feb., 2001, 12-16.
150. Jan Nunley and Jerry Hames, "Episcopalians join protest against drilling in Arctic Refuge [online]," *Episcopal News Service* 112 (2001) (cited July 17, 2003). Available from World Wide Web: <http://ecusa.anglican.org/ens/2001-112.html>
151. Carpenter, (emphasis added).