

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG ALASKAN NATIVES



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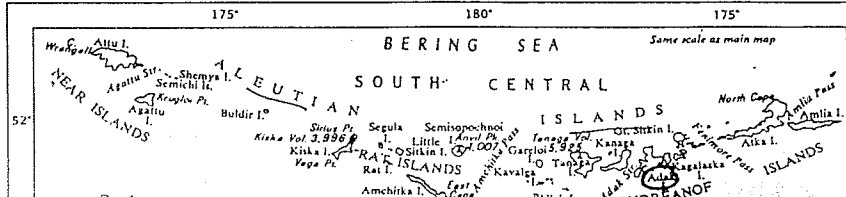
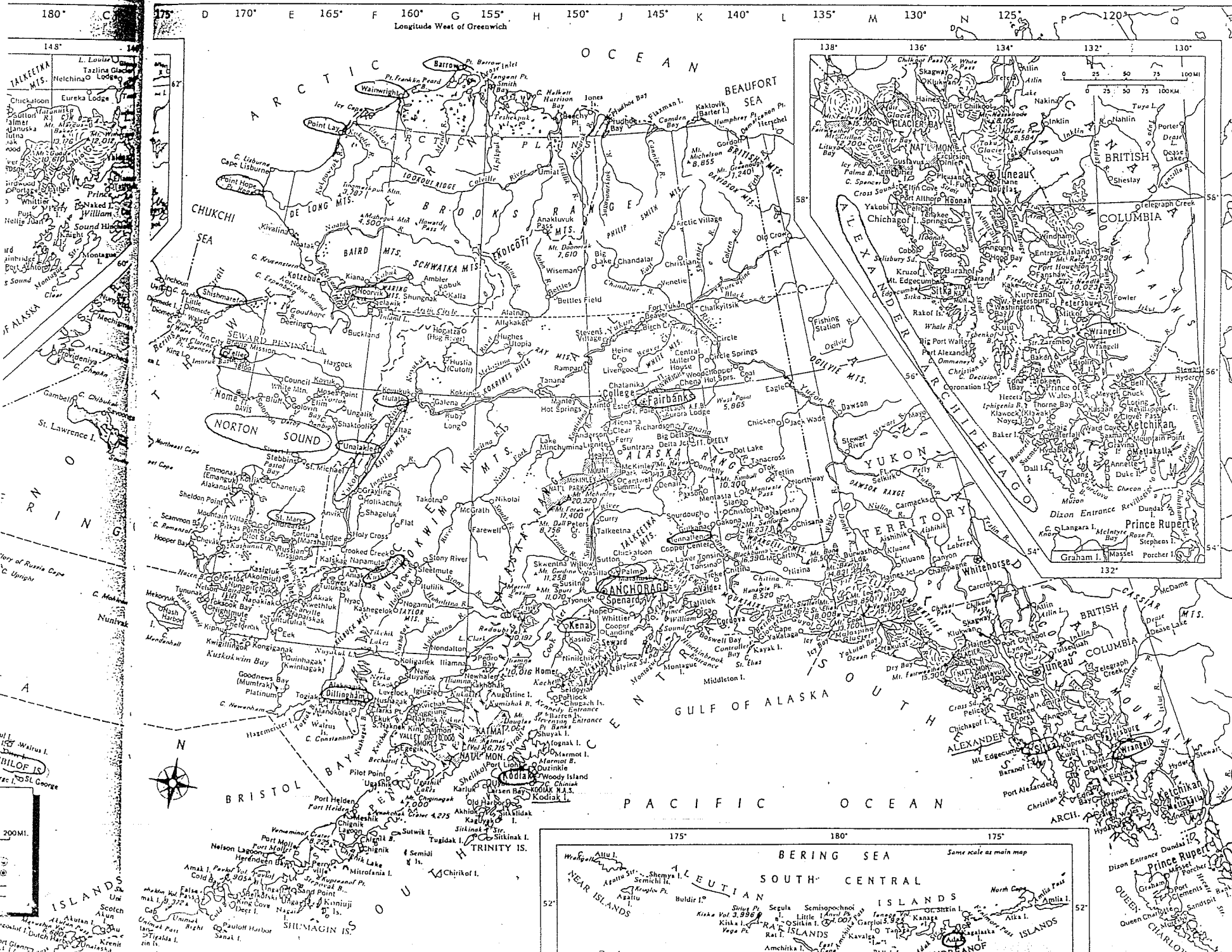
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Despite its deceptively calm exterior, the Vaughan Lewis Glacier is actually a river of ice, hundreds of feet deep, flowing steadily. Ridges (eskers) are formed by streams under the ice.

STATE BIRD YELLOW RAINBOW



Growing up in an Alaskan parsonage far away from the rest of the WELS had its advantages and its disadvantages. One disadvantage I had was not attending a Christian day school like most of my peers. Yet, public schools, Rabbit Creek and Tudar Elementary in Anchorage, (For the location of Anchorage and other places in this paper, see map on page two, Anchorage G-2) where I attended also had their advantages. One such advantage was making friends with all sorts of other kids-- the majority of whom were outside my church family. A few friends I made were also outside my cultural family. They were Alaskan Natives. One such friend I had was Henry Adams. I can't remember how we met, but I do remember being "best friends" from sixth through eighth grades. Since he lived on the way to Campbell Creek, my brothers and I would often pick him up on our way to the fishing hole. Henry was quiet, never outspoken, but usually the better fisherman.

A couple years later, when I attended Service-Hanshaw Junior High School I somehow exchanged my native friend, Henry, for other friends who shared my skin color. Guys like Henry, I learned, were "lower" than we white guys. We labeled them "Salmon crunchers, klotches, and Skimos." We isolated them in their own designated corner of the cafeteria, in class, in sports, in everything. Kids like Henry, Alaskan Indians and Eskimos, from then on we considered social rejects.



Christian education on a higher level, New Ulm, Watertown, and now Thiensville has begun to clear up many of my adolescent hang-ups, like racial prejudice. Knowing that Christ shed his blood for every

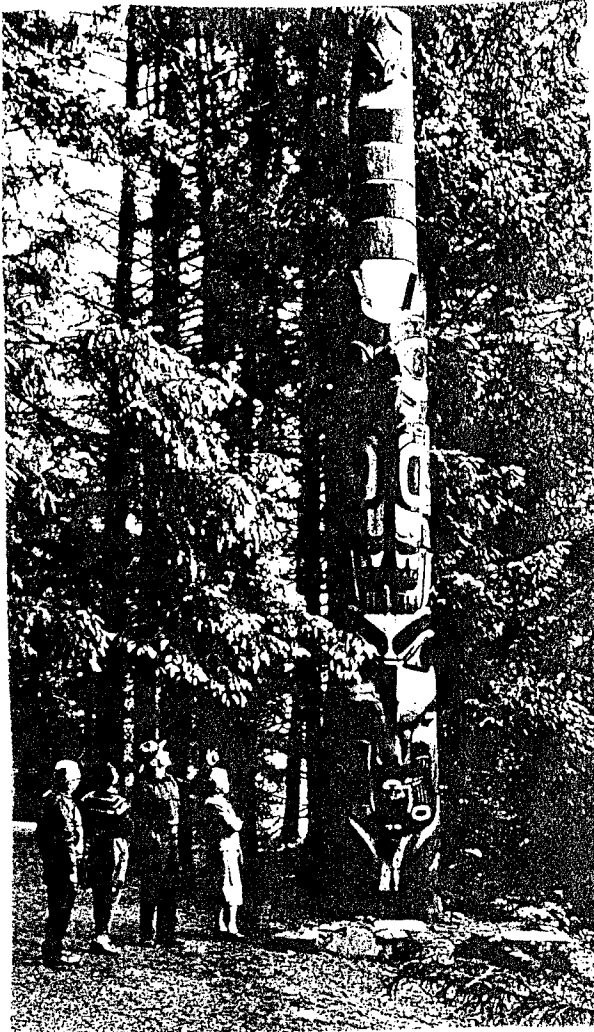
single sinner, Henry included, moves me to ponder my actions as a kid. It moves me to ponder the actions of others, long ago who met guys like Henry. It moves me to ponder my future efforts as a Christian and the efforts of others like me who have the saving message which guys like Henry need. The theme which I will cover in this paper is:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE ALASKAN NATIVES

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Before I begin to describe the spiritual traditions of the Alaskan Natives, I first want to define the term, "native." In the state of Alaska, there are four major distinct tribes of natives, which are generally rooted in separate geographical locations. These are, from north to south, Eskimo, Athapascan, Tlignit, and Aleut. The Eskimo, is historically rooted above the Arctic Circle and to the far western part of Alaska. The Athapascan--central, eastern, and southern Alaska. The Tlignit (or Haida)--southeastern (pan-handle) Alaska. And the Aleut, as you may have guessed--the Aleutian Islands and part of the Alaskan Peninsula. A recent census (1950) marked the Eskimo population of Alaska at 25,000 and the Indian population at 55,000 including Athapascan, Tlignit, and Aleut.

The traditional religion of Alaskan Natives has been a form of animism. Although, according to Roger P. Buliard, a Roman Catholic Missionary among them for fifteen years, in their ancient faith "God was regarded as primary," he was remote and uninterested in human



affairs, "leaving mundane matters entirely in the hands of lesser authorities," i.e., the spirits. "Religion" is hardly an appropriate word to use for their system of beliefs and practices, however, for it contains no worship of God—only the appeasement of spirits. These spirits are thought to be in control of everything. They inhabit birds, beasts, and fish: they animate inanimate objects like rocks and ice; they direct the weather, and they influence the whole of human life, especially birth and death. Moreover, they are mostly malicious.

Hence, they have a felt need for angakuk (medicine man or shaman). Eskimo animism is really a combination of shamanism (placating the spirits by magic) and fetishism (gaining protection by wearing amulets or charms), together with a set of social taboos. Yet all this elaborate procedure for gaining power over the spirits leaves the native ultimately powerless. He "simply accepts things the way they are," explains Raymond De Coccola, another Roman Catholic missionary, "and lets them go at that. If they do not work out for him, he will dismiss misfortune with one word: ayorama, that's how it goes."¹

After digesting a number of authorities on the subject, I offer what I understand to be the spirit world of the Alaskan Native. His world of spirits is divided into five groups:

1. Little Men (Cingssiiks)
2. Wandering souls of the dead
3. Spirits in things/animals
4. Spirits of strangers which have large footprints
5. Sila (pronounced Seelah)

1. LITTLE MEN

Cingssiinks are described as mysterious small magical people, like small elves. They are about a foot tall. They live mostly in the wilderness and hills away from the villages. People are afraid of them. because these little magical people usee to steal their be/ongings. Some magical people are described as being attractive and others have animal looks. It is believed that when a person gets caught by these magical people, the time flies by without the person knowing it. For example, two hours may seem like two minutes and one year seem like one day. It is also believed that these magical people will grant you what ever you wish. ²

In her book, Moonlight At Midday, Sally Carrighar admits her intrigue with the Little People. She also reveals the last "authentic" appearance of these magical little people.

The myths that intrigued me the most were those about Little Men. Everyone says they aren't often seen anymore-- their footprints sometimes and the wide tracks of their sleds, but the Little People are not coming down from the clouds to visit, as once they did. Almost all the Eskimos still believe in them, and when I asked why they stay away, the answer was sorrowful as in the case of the medicine men: "Everything is so different now."

The last "authentic" appearance of Little People that I have heard about was in 1946. It was winter and the people Noorvik, a settlement on the Kobuk River, (F-1) were hungry. They set out with their sleds, hoping to find one of the bands of caribou. After some time, with their food all gone, they became discourgaged. But then on a moonlight night one of the men, looking out of the door of his tent, saw hundreds of Little People running along the slope and beckoning. There were so many"they looked like tall grass when the wind bends it down." Quickly hitching their teams up, the Eskimos followed and came to a huge herd of caribou.

They killed hundreds and took the meat and hides home on their sleds. Back at Noorvik, when one woman unpacked her skins, "a Little Man who had been hiding in them jumped out and ran away."³

Animism of the native influenced nearly every aspect of his life. The third category of spiritism (spirits of animals/things), Hunt comments on in his book Alaska: A Bicentennial History. The natives liked charms representing different animals or parts of animals as a favored means of getting along with the spirits. Belief in the power of the spirits to help or hinder individuals formed the core of Eskimo religious convictions. Even lakes and mountains had spirits who had to be respected on the proper occasions. The people involved these higher powers in song before beginning a hunting journey or other significant event.⁴

The complex spirit world that surrounds the imagination of Eskimos has been disposed only slightly by the Christian teaching of missionaries. Many natives still believe that each person has a number of souls. One soul has an after life and returns again and again ⁱⁿ human or animal form. Minor souls, Weyer reports, that sometimes when an Eskimo sneezes, he exhorts his soul to "come back"--like our *gesundheit*. Both animate and inanimate objects have souls especially animals.⁵



To appease the spirits there were many things the individual native could do. However, if misfortune continued, the Alaskan witchdoctor or "shaman" could be summoned to intervene. Ann Vick, in The Camai Book, remembers an interview with an old sage named Andrew Tsikoyak.

Shamen had varied powers to do certain things. The major powerful thing they did was curing the sick, and removing sicknesses or misfortunes from people. Many parents brought their children to the shamen. There was a belief that shamen removed misfortunes in one's future.



"The shamen were human beings, but they danced and danced and cast spells on people. They did this in the kashim. When they heard of sick people in another village, these shamen danced in the kashim and cast spells on these sick people. They wore a seal-gut parka when they were at work. In doing this, they strengthened themselves and isolated the sickness from passing on to another person."

This dancing and casting spells in Yup'ik is Tuunriq. The shamen also had powers to put bad luck on people they were jealous of or disliked. "Once I watched a little boy being tempted. I heard that his grandfather and a shaman were at war. The shaman was jealous of a new boat that belonged to the boy's dad. The shaman wanted to have his boat; and when the man said he wanted to keep it since it was his first own personal boat, the shaman told the man to keep it until it wore out. The man's son, henceforth, had bad dreams and nightmares. Many times he awoke and told his mother that a large white dog was after him. His grandmother applied holy water to him, and he settled down. This went on for a couple of days. One night, while the women were sewing, he awoke and said that a big man was trying to cover him with a boat. His grandmother saved him through holy water and prayer, and it went away."

People recall that shamen had an ability to fly. One person that we interviewed said that they flew up to the heavens; and another person said that the range in which they flew was from the beds, at the end of the kashim, up to the kashim door. "A shaman flew in my sight when the village of Nanvarnarrlak was still existing. I was a member of his helpers. I used to watch him and run after him when he went out the door. I never caught up with him, even though he wore snowshoes. We never caught up with him. He just got further and further away from us and had a hard time taking off."

Little Men, wandering souls of the dead, spirits of things and spirits of animals; these would seem to make a dense population in the Alaskan Natives' supernatural world. There are also "spirits of strangers" which may be uneasy memories of an extinct or tall northern men. Finally, the list closes with perhaps the most feared of all the spirits: Sila. Sila (pronounced Seelah) is the only one of their spirits that the Eskimoes think of as making requirements of man in his general conduct. One can win favor from other spirits by observing rites and taboos, but that's all very personal; one offends or pleases a being whose interests are selfish in the same way that men's are. But anger, morose, violent feelings, are believed to disturb the finely poised Spirit of the Air, or of the Universe, which the Eskimoes have named Sila. If the bad feelings become extreme, it is thought that Sila takes action. This is a moral concept that must often have checked aggressiveness. It must have helped to promote the Eskimoes' peaceful and tolerant attitudes.



The Eskimo's own description of Sila seems very close to pure spirituality, inasmuch as Sila is "air, weather, all outdoors" and at the same time is thought itself. A Moravian Eskimo dictionary defines the word (There spelled Sla and Tla) as "the world; out of doors" and also as "common sense." Perhaps sanity would be a synonym. The Eskimo word for acquiring understanding, Tlangok, is from the same root.

What he seeks, what is pleasing to Sila, is apparently what the

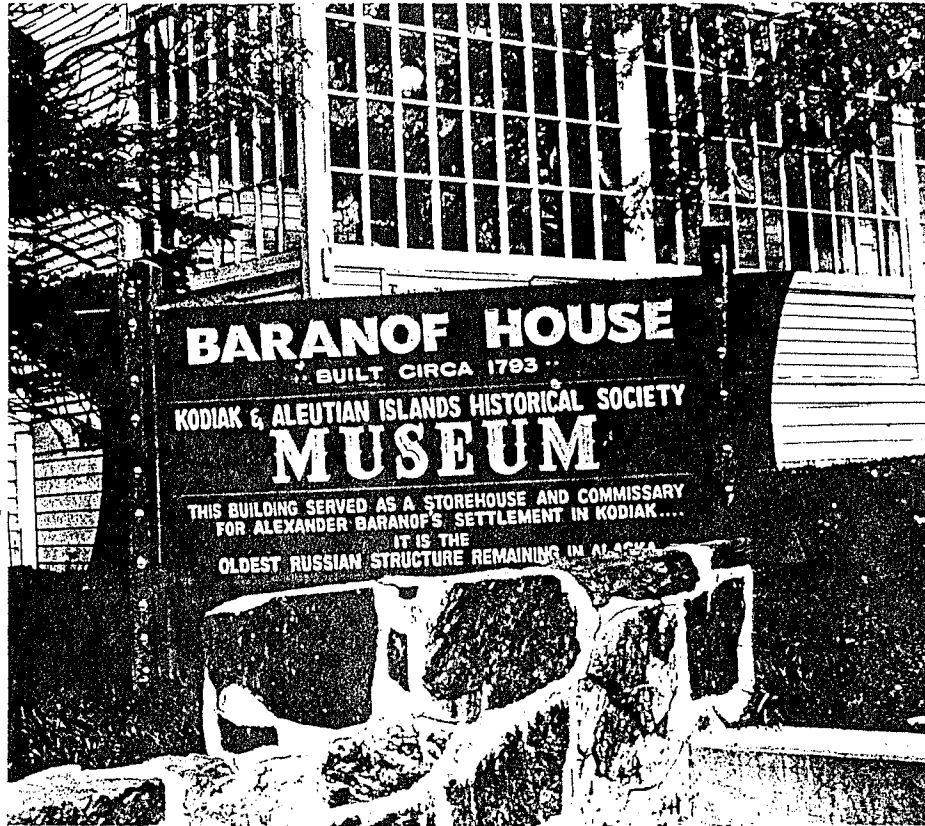
Eskimoes mean when they speak of a quiet mind. With so many angry aggressive minds in the world today, morose minds, it is almost with fear that one thinks of Sila, who has a new tool now for making us, all of us at the same time, vanish.⁷

2. HERE COME THE RUSSIANS!

On July 21, 1741, Vitas Bering, a Danish sea-captain in the service of Russia, discovered land across a body of water that now bears his name. He discovered Alaska. Sailing his ship, the "St. Peter," he first touched North America on a chain of rocky islands we know as the Aleutians. The dangerous uncharted waters, of the Aleutians, however, turned a tremendous discovery into a watery grave. For in Sept. 1743, on his second trip to Adak Island (on map, see inset of Aleutian Is), the "St. Peter" struck a reef and together with Bering and crew was lost at sea.

Both Russian diplomats and businessmen were not slow to stake their claims in Russian Alaska. At first entrepreneurs braved the Bering sea on a individual basis. Gradually they worked their way eastward up the Aleutian chain toward the Alaska Peninsula. Beavers, seals, and bear provided them with the furs they desired.

In the 1760's the czar and the ever-increasing fur-trading industry saw the advantages of monopol-izing their exploits on Alaska. The Shelikov-Golikov Company was soon established and sent to organize the Alaska fur trade industry. By the 1770's Shelikov chose Kodiak Island (H-3) as a base for operations. By 1784 the first permanent Russian settlement in Alaska was established at Three Saints Bay on Kodiak Island. In 1779 the Company shifted its operations to the warmer more productive Alexander Archepelago, the South east panhandle of Alaska. Together with a new location at Sitka (L-3), Shelikov



appointed a new manager, Alexander Baranof.

Senator Ernst Gruening, in his book An Alaskan Reader, describes this important man in Russian American history.

Aleksandr Andreevich Baranov (1746-1819) was the leading figure in the middle period of Russian occupation-- the years 1780-1818--when he was the manager of the Russian American Company and first governor of Russian America. In retrospect he looms up as the outstanding personality in the century and a quarter of Russia's American colony. Baranov was a fur trader rather than an empire builder. He worked for a company that demanded dividends and asked no questions as to means employed. He satisfied the Company by exploiting the country and the natives. In this he was no worse than the average trader. He was superior to most of them, however, in that he succeeded such odds. He had to depend on himself, on his fist and on his brain,

Through the years Shelikov and Baranov met their share of Alaskan Natives both on Kodiak Island and near Sitka. No doubt some trading went on between Russians and Indians and Eskimoes. There were clashes like the massacres at Ft. Saint Michael's, two miles north of Sitka. There a band of Tlignits invaded and killed all Russians in the camp

and burned the fort. A few months later the Russians took revenge and built a second fort at the sight of present-day Sitka. Shelikov, on the other hand, also saw the need to civilize the natives. He saw a need to bring them the gospel. In 1787 Shelikov petitioned the Holy Synod for missionaries to the Aleuts. On June 30, Empress Catherine II issued a ukase granting the petition that clergymen be appointed for mission work in Alaska. The Archmandrate Ivassof with nine companions, arrived in Kodiak in 1794 and from this base they penetrated the Alaskan Archipelago, the Bering Coast, and finally the interior reaching Yukon and Kuskokwim villages. (F-2).⁹

In an interview with Ann Dick, recorded in The Camai Book, Father Kreta marks the arrival of Orthodox missionaries a year earlier. He

speaks of St. Herman of Alaska.



In 1793 Father Herman and seven other monks left the Valaam monastery in Russia. When they arrived in Kodiak no one seemed to care particularly. Someone allowed one of them, Archimandrate Joasaph, to sleep in an old storeroom, but still no one knows what accommodations Father Herman and the others found.

This little band of monks, even though their welcome in Kodiak was less than warm, took their mission of spreading the Gospel seriously. They didn't hesitate to send accurate reports back to the Holy Synod in Russia regarding the treatment of the natives by the Russian American Company. Because they insisted on speaking out, against this treatment, Father Herman and the monks were, at one point, put under house arrest for two years and forbidden to hold services because the Russians felt

felt that every time the monks got together with the people, it only stirred them up.

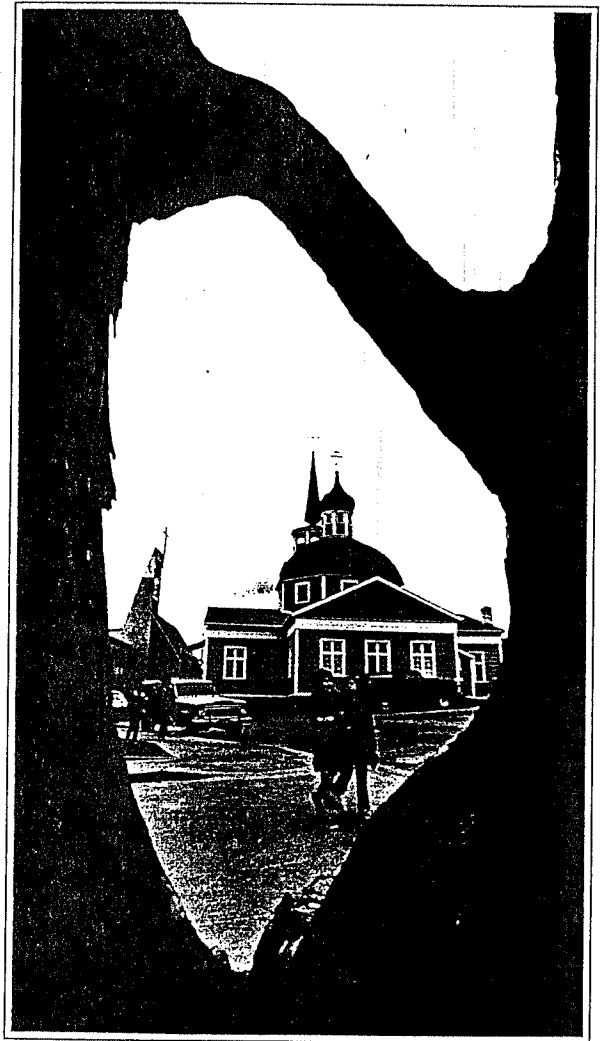
In spite of all this, Father Herman manages in 1796 to establish Holy Resurrection Russian Orthodox Church here in Kodiak. Holy Resurrection, which is still a very lively parish today, was the first church of any denomination established in the state of Alaska. The second was at Sitka in 1817.

Eventually, Father Herman was the only one out of the band of eight monks still left here in Kodiak. The others either died from illness or went back home. Government harrassment became so severe that Father Herman went to Spruce Is. to live. Being used to poor accomodations by this time, he dug a cave in the side of a hill where he lived during his first winter on Spruce Is. Gradually, a small community grew on Spruce Is. where the simple monk made his home.

The University of Alaska credits the monk Herman with making one of the first successgul attempts at farming in the state of Alaska, as well as being the first to discover the value of seaweed as a fertilizer. Among his other works, Father Herman established an orphanage on Spruce Is.

He also began a small school to teach people how to hold services in the church when there was no clergyman available. Students from his school went regularly to different communities on the Island to hold services. So there is a traditional and historical reason for naming the present theological seminary located in the city of Kodiak, St. Herman's.

Besides agricultural innovations and good works, Father Herman was also known for performing many miracles. Once, the people in a little Spruce Is. community were frightened because there had been an earthquake, and they asked Father to pray for them. He took the icon of the theotokos, the mother of God, down to the beach, knelt, and said a prayer. He then informed the people that the water from the coming



Framed by a twisted tree, the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Michael, rebuilt following a fire in 1966, dominates downtown Sitka. Russian influence here still shows in names and architecture.

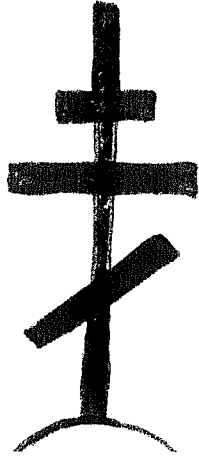
tidal wave (generated by the quake) would not go beyond the point where he had placed the icon. When the tidal wave hit, the water stopped exactly where Father Herman said it would and went no further. Monk's Lagoon is still known to many today as Icon Bay.

In 1970, the Orthodox Church in America, after extensive study of Father Herman's life, including verification of many miracles that occurred before and after his death canonized Father Herman. He is now venerated in the Orthodox Church as a saint. His relics, or remains, were moved from the grave on Spruce Is. to a reliquary in the Holy Resurrection here in Kodiak, the parish that St. Herman established nearly two centuries ago.¹⁰

By 1840, Russian Orthodox missionaries had established four churches and eight chapels in Alaska. Growth came to a close, however, when on October 18, 1867 the United States became owner of "Seward's Icebox" for a steal of two cents per acre. (\$7,200,000) Uncle Sam presented the ultimatum, "Become a U. S. citizen or leave!" Nearly all Russians left for home except a breve few--a handful of Russian Orthodox priests.

Senator Gruening comments on the Russian Orthodox influence after 1867 upon Alaskan Natives.





The one remnant of the culture is the adherence of many of the natives to Orthodoxy. The Church in Russia sent funds for nearly fifty years through the missionary organization established by Veniaminov after he was made metropolitan of Moscow the year following the purchase. The Fathers in Alaska were enabled to maintain most of their churches, three or four orphanages, and seventeen schools. In 1887, twenty years after the purchase, according to the bitter comment of the territorial governor, the Russian Church was annually spending more on schooling than the \$40,000 the United States was spending for the education of both whites and natives in the entire territory.

No more money could be sent from Russia after the revolution of 1917. Still the Fathers stayed at their posts, some supporting themselves by laboring with their hands. It was sometime before help came from the North American Orthodox Church, which now has jurisdiction. The Liturgy is still celebrated on the Priblofs (D-3), at Unalaska (F-2), Kenai (H-2), and elsewhere. Sitka still has a bishop. The cathedral retains its old treasures. It is now one of the oldest houses of worship in continuous^{use} on american soil. Three histories meet in this little byzantine fane. Names such as Benson and Mather are borne by the members of the congregation, who are mostly Tlignits. With characteristic tenacity they have clung to the faith they first adopted. English or Tlignit or both may be heard on the parts of the Slavonic Liturgy given in the vernacular. In that part of the ritual where once the czar was prayed for, the petition is now for the President of the United States.

October 18, the anniversary of the transfer, is now called "Alaska Day." The ceremony is reenacted annually at Sitka. Again the old Russian czar's flag flies from the tall staff that still centers the knoll overlooking the town. Again it is hauled down and replaced by the Stars and Stripes, the thudder of the saluting guns reverberating down the mountains and causing grave consternation among the millions of sea birds. Otherwise the reenactment bears little resemblance to the original event. The townspeople are all there. No one is sad. The Orthodox Bishop gives an invocation. He is followed by notables with speeches. Bands play, the Tlignits sing to the beat of their old drums. It is a holiday throughout the state. Alaskans are like their russian predecessors in that they have a great passion for the country. It is thanks to that passion, which drove them to work for statehood long, hard, and consistently, that, in 1959, ninety-two years after the purchase, the President proclaimed that congress had at last agreed to bestow full membership in the union. For the first time in the two hundred years and more since the coming of the Russians, the land was no longer a colony.¹¹

Before concluding this part of my paper, Here Come the Russians, I must share an interesting detail I uncovered. The very first non-Russian Orthodox parish established in Alaska was Lutheran. According to the Encyclopedia Americana, the Swedish Lutheran Church established a parish at Sitka from 1842 to 1867. Other sources I read reported that Shelikov and Baranov hired many Scandinavian and German trappers, furriers, and sailors. Along with Catherine's edict for Russian missionaries to work, she also permitted these Lutherans to have their own pastor. Sometime after the purchase, 1867, the Swedes passed their parish on to American Lutherans. Todd Goldschmidt, a middler at our Seminary, who claims Sitka as his hometown, tells me that the doors of Sitka Lutheran are still open today. It is currently a parish of the Lutheran Church in America. 12

3. NORTH TO ALASKA

On Oct. 18, 1867 Alaska became U. S. territory. Few adventurers headed north at first--a few trappers, a few miners, a few missionaries to fill the void which the Russians left. One of those missionaries, perhaps the most notable, who traveled north to Alaska was Dr. Sheldon Jackson. Missionaries did as much to keep ^{order} among Alaskan natives as did government officials. The first protestant mission and school in Alaska was founded in 1876 at Wrangel (M-3). When Dr. Sheldon Jackson, the ambitious missionary superintendent of the Rocky Mountain Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church, heard about the Alaskan Mission, he determined to bring Alaska within his division. Indian education was only one part of his responsibility, but it



held the highest interest for him. As he put it: "Most hypnotic of all was the persuasive mixture of service and power in the call to lift up the white man's burden."

Jackson's first visit to Alaska in 1877 was a short one, but he soon returned with other missionaries and plans for the establishment of other schools and missions. His efforts received a good deal of U. S. government support after 1884, when he was appointed special agent in Alaska for the Bureau of Education. That role, which in his mind did not conflict with his other position as director of Presbyterian missions schools, enabled him to impose his policies for Indian education.

Jackson was not the most tactful of men and did not tolerate opposition to his methods. At Sitka he clashed with civil authorities who protested that Jackson was rounding up girls for a boarding school despite the disapproval of their parents. For a brief period, Sitka authorities held Jackson under arrest but were not able to curb the man's vision. The development of boarding schools had been initiated at Wrangel by another missionary who wanted to protect school girls from the predatory attentions of amorous miners. Jackson strove for the same goal at Sitka, as well; but, more generally, he focused on day schools that stressed industrial education on the model of the Carlisle school in Pennsylvania.

In 1890, Jackson made his first voyage north of the Aleutians to assist missionaries who were to establish the first arctic school at Point Hope (E-1), at Barrow (G-0), and on the Seward Peninsula at Cape Prince of Wales (E-2). He depended for transport upon the only government agency known in the north--the U. S. Revenue Marine. At every Eskimo village called at by the Revenue Marine ship, the signs of famine and destitution were prominent. Entire villages had been

depopulated because of starvation. Heavy hunting of the caribou for trade with whalers had made the land animals scarce while the number of whales and walrus had been sharply decreased by the whalers themselves. Jackson assumed that the Eskimo's condition was due to starvation alone, but it is more likely that such imported diseases as influenza, measles, and tuberculosis were the chief killers.

Jackson sent the first missionaries to the Arctic in 1890. Harrison R. Thornton and William T. Lopp established themselves at Cape Prince of Wales, a village of five hundred souls located at the extreme tip of Northwestern America. That first contact led to violence, and in that, the encounter was atypical in the missionary experience.

The two young presbyterian ministers tended to brandish their Winchesters nervously when the villagers demanded entry to the little house that had been swiftly erected. It was not the custom to refuse entry to neighbors in Eskimo society and the people were amazed to meet a bolted door when they wished to satisfy their curiosity. Lopp and Thornton hoped to express their trust and affection, but they were wary because of a violent episode in the history of Wales. There had been very few violent encounters between whites and Eskimos in the Arctic, but a few years prior to the founding of the Wales mission, whaling seamen killed some thirty Eskimos. The Wales Eskimos had boarded a ship for trade and frolic--as was the custom--and things got out of hand. Probably the Eskimos imbibed whisky too freely, grew bold, and refused to leave the ship when ordered to do so. The New England whaling men panicked and resorted to force. The result was a massacre of all those who were not able to escape. Thus the apprehensions of Lopp and Thornton. Lopp conquered his fears and proved his capabilities. He was to have a life-long career in religious and educational work in Alaska. Thornton was not so versatile, yet he tried hard at

first. He joined the men in hunting seals and tried to be a good fellow. He managed to contain his rage when the hunters offered him a choice of young girls to complete his mock puberty rites after he had shot his *first* seal. He consented to rub noses with the seal and smear blood on his cheeks, but he "intended to remain loyal to the women" of his own country. Thornton relaxed his fear of the Eskimoes of Wales after a time. His wife joined him there and her company was a great benefit. He was optimistic concerning his endeavor. The Eskimoes would surely accept the Christian message because they had no doctrine themselves to combat it with. For all practical purposes their minds were "fallow for the reception of the good seed." Early missionaries generally downgraded the native culture and strove mightily to eradicate customs that they neither appreciated nor understood, but, considered a threat to their mission. After two years among Eskimoes, Thornton's doubts began to grow. He could not record a single case of conversion, and the Eskimoes seemed to have derived no benefits from the missionary's presence. Thornton reacted by becoming querulous. He grew weary of the Eskimo's pestering, their endless requests for matches, nails, and other trade items, and their insistence upon interrupting him with their demands and conversation.



Two boys brought Thornton's mission to its end. The young Eskimoes were unusual in having a propensity for thievery. Several times they broke into the school house and pilfered things. Thornton could not handle them. He threatened and blustered and declared that he would shoot the thieves if they erred again. He carried his revolver with him at all times and, after a rifle shot was taken at him, he doubted that he would survive.

The boys found a loaded whaling gun and carried it to the missionary's cabin. When Thornton responded to a knock on the door, the boys blew a hole in his chest. To complete this grisly cycle of frontier horrors, the men of Wales, fearing that the guns of the U. S. Revenue cutter "Bear" would smash their hovels, shot the two young murderers and layed their bodies at Mrs. Thornton's feet. To her credit, she asked the commander of the "Bear" to spare the village.

It should be emphasized that the tragic confrontation at Wales was abnormal. Generally, the missionaries, whether Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, were revered. It is not easy to assess efforts of the missionaries. Clearly, they were powerful agents of disruption of the aboriginal culture. Yet disrupting contacts with white traders explorers, or whale men always occurred before missionaries were established in a particular area. They strove to uproot shamanism and any other beliefs and rituals that threatened Christian doctrine; and mostly they tried to eradicate the native language as well. On the other hand, the missionaries were often the only defenders of natives against the exploitation and the debauchery that other whites offered them. Missionaries acted as teachers, and sometimes as physicians, and recorded valuable observations of a changing culture. 13

4. What →
others have
done.

Most historians and church men agree, Presbyterians (like Sheldon) laid the mission groundwork for many other denominations to follow.

Catholics, Moravians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Swedish Evangelists, gradually followed Sheldon's example among the Alaskan natives. By 1900 there were about eighty missions and churches and about half that many schools among the Alaskan Natives. With such rapid growth of missions, some church soon realized that some villages were being saturated with missionaries, while other outposts were unmarred. Consequently, in 1903 denomination leaders met and informally agreed to divide up Alaska among each denomination

according to geographical location: Roman Catholics settled in the lower Yukon River area (F-2); Moravians took the lower Kuskokwim R. (F-2); Episcopalians were assigned the upper Yukon (G,H,J-2) and along the Arctic Coast; the Norton Sound (E,F-2) became the base for the Evangelical

Covenant Church, a fundamentalist church body. By 1903 it was established Unalakleet. Soon after it opened new stations in the surrounding area including one at Nome. The agreed boundaries of influence are somewhat ignored now, especially by the many sects that have come to Alaska.

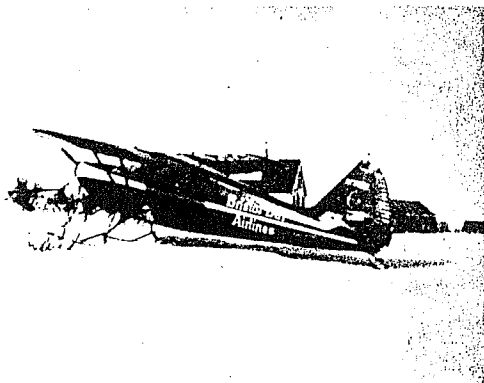
It is so interesting to read about these brave souls--these sourdoughs sent by the Savior to be his witnesses in the Arctic. Two such men I'll share with you: Rev. Roland J. Cox, an Episcopal missionary at Point Hope (E-1), and a Catholic priest at Dillingham (G-3), Father Harold Greif. Both men were active in the early to mid 1900's.

In a newsletter, Rev. Roland J. Cox writes: "To a white man trying to master Arctic life, the Hoper's favorite expression is 'you'll



Fig. 3. Mission of Our Lady of the Snows, Nulato, on the Yukon, founded 1887 (G-2)

learn." This white man has learned that Arctic weather can be exasperating and monotonous and dangerous and you have to wait for it..." With his team of dogs, as Sally Carrighar writes: "Cox traveled more than six hundred miles in his first two years at Point Hope. The Episcopal mission there, St. Thomas, has two outstations, Kivalina (F-1) seventy-five miles away, and Point Lay (F-1) which is twice as far north. Now he more often travels by snowmobile and plane.¹⁴



Dog teams are used extensively, too, by the Roman Catholic priests of the lower Yukon. Typical of them is Father Harold Greif, now stationed at Dillingham. He arrived in Alaska on the same ship that first brought me North. During the next four years I would hear about him occasionally--

how he traveled from one little settlement to another many miles away in what is perhaps the world's bitterest weather. And then one Christmas he came to preach at Nome for two weeks.

I would not have known him, so spare, so ascetic he had become, but also with luminous kindness in face and manner. I attended his Christmas eve mass, and never anywhere have I heard the Christmas story more movingly told, and yet it was told primarily for the Eskimo listeners and in their idiom.

As in preaching to all native peoples, the language barrier is a problem for the Alaska missionaries. Most of the younger Eskimoes can speak English and those who are middle-aged in the larger towns. Few of the elderly can. The missionaries must use interpreters--and are more or less at their mercy! A friend of mine visiting in one village, went to church and noticed that the interpreter seemed to be repeating

the same words every time he spoke, He asked him later what the words were, and the interpreter admitted that he kept telling the congregation: "The missionary has not said anything yet." An Eskimo woman in Nome told me that one Native interpreter there preaches a sermon, but it is not the missionaries sermon. He lets the missionary say a few words, and then he continues with what he himself wants to say. I am sure these are isolated instances, but, at best, preaching through an interpreter must be difficult. 15

Some Christian sects do bring one idea that is new to Eskimoes: this idea of sin and the related concepts of hell and damnation. After a fire and brimstone^{sermon}, some Eskimo asked me, "Maybe you tell us what sin is? We ask the missionary and he talks about things we don't do. But we have to have sins. If we don't stand up in church and tell people about our sins, the missionary says we will burn in the fires of hell forever." 16

The Lutheran Church, too, has been actively involved in bringing the Gospel to Alaskan Natives. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, Scandinavians began a mission in Sitka around 1842. After the purchase in 1867, various American denominations headed north to Alaska. (Just a note: today, Monday, May 21, 1985, as I was writing this paragraph in the Seminary library, I was approached by three men. They told me I had been recommended for a World Mission call to Lilongwe, Malawi, Africa. After prayerful consideration, Laurie and I accepted. We trust the Lord knows what he's doing.) In 1894 the Rev. T. L. Brevig from the Norwegian Synod began the Teller Mission (E-1) on the Seward Peninsula. Together with his family, he came to serve the Norwegian Lapps that had been brought here from Europe, to introduce care of reindeer among the Eskimoes. Soon the Native polar people were part of that mission. 17

Other Lutheran denomination, the American Lutheran Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church entered the native mission field in the early to mid 1900's. The largest church structure in the Arctic is the American Lutheran parish of Nome. Congregational members include Eskimoes, miners, government teachers, and others. There are other ALC missions along the the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean coastlines and can be reached only by plane or dog team. One Eskimo village, under the Arctic circle, Shishmaref, (E-1) is all Lutheran. The Lutheran Ev. Mission is a partner with the Covenant Church in a radio program, "Voice of America." Here the Lutheran Ev. Church produces a weekly religions broadcast in their native, still unrecorded tongue. 18

It is clear from my reading that any ministry among the rural Eskimoes would be difficult. Travel in arctic weather would be harsh and rugged. Communication links, though improving, are still quite limited. However, radio ministry has proved especially helpful. KCAM-- from Glenallen (J-2) sponsored by Central Alaskan Missions and KJNP-- from Fairbanks (J-2) run on an independant basis, and continually broadcast weather, news, and the Gospel in pretaped services. There is also an Evangelical Covenant Station, KICY--broadcasted from Nome along the west coast of Alaska. 19

According to William Hendricks, who writes on Alaska's future in the Moody Monthly, sees training national leaders as the key to the spiritual future of the state. Both Arctic missions and Central Alaskan missions have organized education programs to help meet their needs. Arctic Missions operates Victory High School and Arctic Bible Institute near Palmer (J-2). Central Alaskan Missions offers three and four year programs through the Alaska Bible College in Glenallen. Both send teams of young people to villages throughout the state giving them the chance to share their faith with their people.

Much of mission work in Alaska, at least in past years, has been truly pioneer work. In Wainwright (P-O), an Eskimo village three hundred miles inside the Arctic circle, a native Presbyterian pastor became concerned that the villagers receive the Bible in their language. Most of the people still spoke Eskimo and the older generation *knew* little English.



His concern eventually brought him in contact with Dan Webster of the Wycliff Bible translators. In 1959 they began working on the Eskimo translation. In 1967 the completed Eskimo manuscript was sent to the printer. Although the pastor died before the book was off the press, his work continues today as his people hear God's message in the language they know best.

While Alaska's natural frontiers may be shrinking, many spiritual frontiers remain. It is important that a positive, growing Alaskan church be part of that state's rapidly expanding future.²⁰

5. WHAT CAN THE WELS DO?

In order to answer this question most effectively, about three months ago, I mailed out a six-question questionnaire to the pastors in Alaska. Here follows the six questions and the valuable insight they give as we look ahead to future service to Alaskan Natives.

1. HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY NATIVES WORSHIP AT AT YOUR CONGREGATION?
ARE ANY MEMBERS? ARE ANY BAPTIZED?

Of the five pastors who responded (Pastors Dave Zietlow, Fred Krieger, Tom Liesner, Tom Spiegelberg, and Roy Beyer) only Liesner^{had} any native (half-Aleut) on his church membership list. Both Spiegelberg and

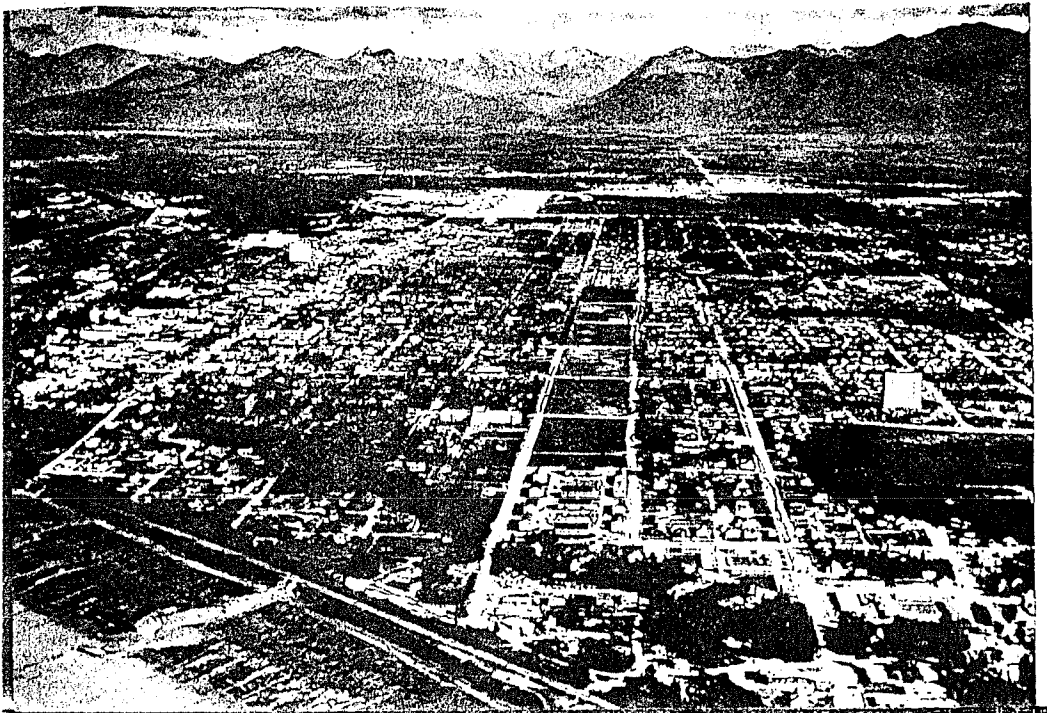
Zietlow report having baptized a few of them. (Zietlow also married and buried them.)

2. DOES YOUR CONGREGATION HAVE ANY PARTICULAR PROGRAM AIMED AT EVANGELIZING ALASKAN NATIVES?

No pastors report any special program, although all are interested.

3. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT MORE CAN WELS DO IN REACHING THE "URBAN" NATIVE?

All agree that the Gospel invitation extends to the entire community.. We can reach them not as a member of a special group but as a member of that community. Liesner writes; "Most people join the church as a result of contact with friends. At present we could encourage any Native members to bring friends and relatives along. Two pastors, Zietlow and Spiegelberg agree that institutional work among Alaskan Natives may be a good place to start. Zietlow writes: "I had my best luck working with them at the Alaskan Native Hospital where I held confirmation classes." Spiegelberg writes; "I became acquainted with Loretta, a Native woman, in the Petersville area. I visited her at the Native Hospital in Anchorage when she was waiting for her baby.



I baptized William Thomas on Jan. 3 at her cabin. Now she's in Anchorage at a "battered women's" shelter. I will bring her to church. Her brother Tommy is in McLaughlin Youth Prison. I'll visit him Feb. 14."

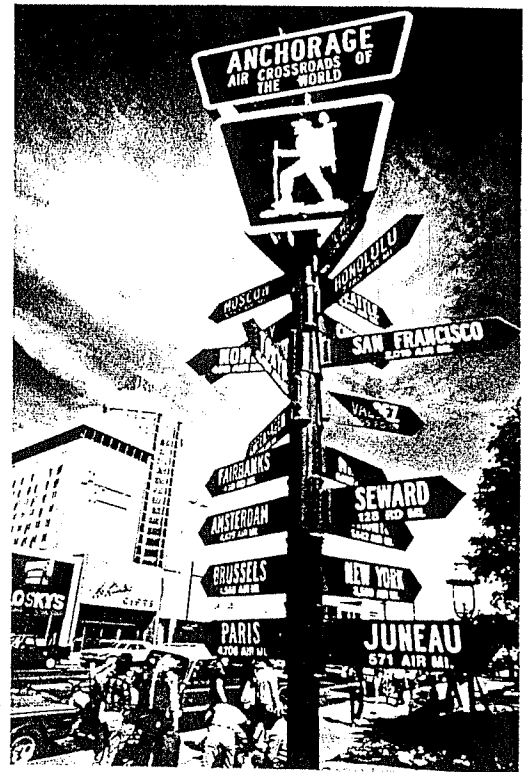
The urban Natives of Alaska present a unique challenge for the WELS pastor.. Take a walk down Fourth Street in Anchorage on a Saturday night and you'll see what I mean. The normal problems of society seem so terribly enlarged among

the Natives of Alaska. But *who* has our Savior come for, the "beautiful people" as in New Testament days, or for the social rejects like those on Fourth Street? The Lord has come for all. He comes through His Church, whether we're on the payroll or not. He comes to give rest to all weary and burdened peoples of Alaska.

4. DO YOU THINK THERE IS ROOM FOR WELS IN THE BUSH AMONG THESE RURAL NATIVES? WHY?

In answering this question all five pastors who responded said yes. Krieger and Liesner offered similar comments. They recognized that the "seed" has already been sown in many Alaskan villages. Liesner admits: "Considering the churches previously involved with the Natives, I wonder how clearly the Gospel has been presented? Maybe canvassing should be done in some prime villages." Krieger writes: "Yes, (there's room) if they would welcome good doctrine and not the 'quick bucks' methodology of Presbyterian and Methodist (churches). We're aiming for a "bush" ministry in '88, I think."

5. WHAT MISSION APPROACH DO YOU THINK WOULD WORK BEST? (ie. establish one congregation--permanent, a number of circuit congregations, or some kind of "part-time" ministry, other?)



Apparently guessing from Krieger's comment, the pastors in Alaska have all at least weighed the possibilities of a "bush" ministry. The questions are "When, and where, and How?" Dave Zietlow writes: "I think a number of circuit congregations would be best and most effective and the man should be full-time. He would have to fly and hence it would be expensive."

All pastors agree a circuit ministry would help the "rider" meet the most people in the most places. Liesner and Beyer see a "part-time" or "modified" bush ministry as the way to begin. Liesner writes: "Because of what I wildly guess to be a limited opportunity and because of distances involved, a 'part-time' ministry would probably be the only practical way to start." Beyer writes: "If one pastor had a vicar who could handle the day to day duties of the congregation for two weeks per month, that would leave an experienced pastor the time to conduct a "modified" bush ministry.

6. DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER COMMENTS ABOUT WELS FUTURE AMONG THE ALASKAN NATIVES?

All the pastors who responded really summarized their thoughts best under this question. Dave Zietlow writes: "I don't think we will have as much success with the Alaskan Eskimo as we did with the Apache Indian. Their personalities are similar--lazy, prone to alcohol, not much incentive to go and get things done. . They are slow and non-industrious. Yet they have souls and we have the Gospel and the command "go into all the world."

Beyer writes: Considering the cost, it would seem that the WELS would not



be attracted to this type of work until large cities in the U. S. are saturated. This is understandable. Perhaps the Lord will show us a more economical way to serve these people. (shortwave, HAM radio, or something on that line)."

Tom Liesner writes: "If there really is a large mission field, among the Natives, it certainly would be an interesting, challenging, and worthwhile mission for the WELS to tackle. I can't verify it, but, there seems to be a higher rate of suicide and alcoholism among the Natives.



They, like all people, merit our love and concern."

Fred Krieger writes: "I'm on hold with any pointed emphasis on any certain mission outreach. After I get established here among the 15,000 "urbanites" in Kenai and Soldotna, then I'll reach out vigorously beyond the peninsula."

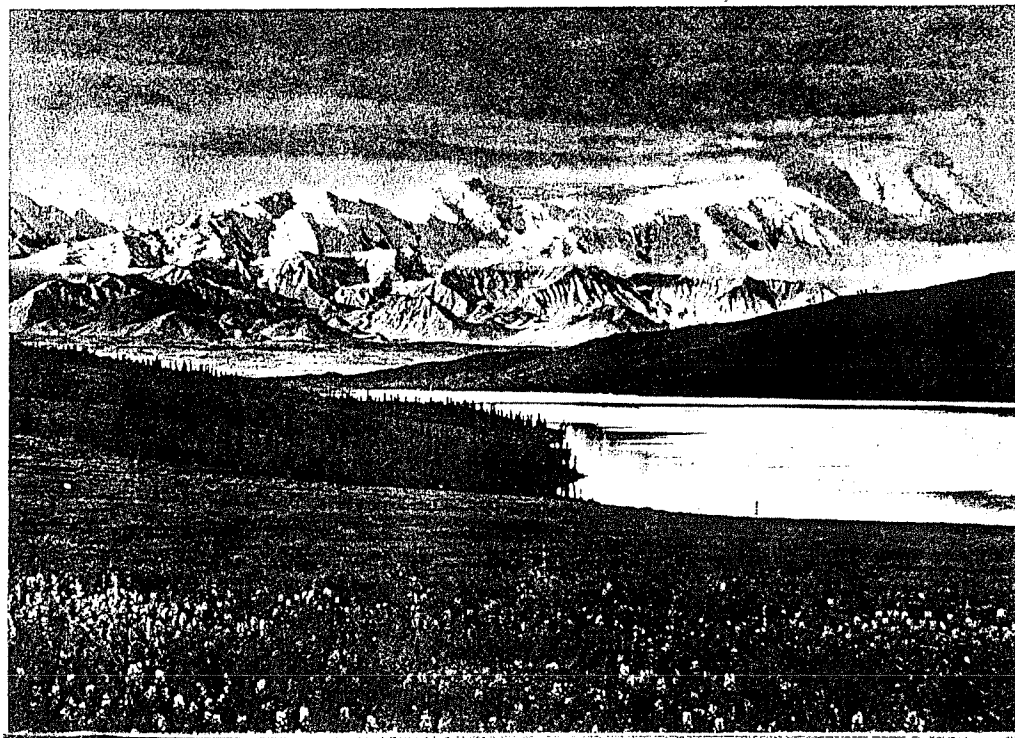
Spiegelberg writes: "Get going on it! Make it a foreign mission field. Plant the trees--don't worry about picking the fruit!"

The Development of Christianity among the Alaskan Natives is an immense theme to cover. I've only begin to touch the tip of the iceberg. However, I do hope that (like I,) you also have learned a little of the past so that now and in the future we may in the best possible way reach out to the Alaskan Native.

TIMELINE

- 1742 - Bering discovers Alaska
- 1793 - June 30, Empress Catherine II issues a ukase granting a petition of Shelikov and Golikov that clergymen be appointed for missionary work in Alaska (also go ahead for Swedish Lutherans).
- 1796 - The first Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska built at Three Saints Bay, on Kodiak Island in July
- 1817 - Russian Orthodox church built at Sitka
- 1840 - Four churches and eight chapels in Alaska
- 1867 - October 18, Alaska sold ^{to} the United States, Russians are urged to stay and become U. S. citizens or go home. The majority leave *except* a few missionaries
- 1877-- Presbyterian mission and school at Sitka
- 1879 - Roman Catholic church and mission started at Wrangel
- 1880 - 1st U. S. census of Alaska: natives - 33,416; whites - 2,045
- 1881 - 1st Presbyterian Church at Haines
- 1885 - Moravian mission and school at Bethel on Kuskokwim River
- 1886 - Evangelical Church at Anvik on the Yukon River
- 1887 - Evangelical Mission Union of Sweden mission and school at Unalakleet
- 1890 - Point Hope school by the Episcopal Church
- Barrow, Presbyterian mission and church
 - Census: 23,531 natives, 4,298 whites, 1823 mixed breed
- 1916 - The U. S. Bureau of Education reported it was operating seventy schools for Natives in Alaska with an enrollment of 4,000.
- 1920 - Census: 55,036 total population, 26,558 Natives
- 1939 - " 72,524 " " , 32,458 "
- 1959 - Alaska become the forty-ninth state of the Union on Jan. 3
- 1960 - Census: 226,167 total pop., 43,081 Natives
- 1964 - A widespread earthquake on Easter Sunday, March 27 damaged many homes and cities and wiped out a number of native villages
- 1966 - Alaska Federation of Natives, a statewide organization was organized. They filed claim to more than 372 million acres of the state based on aboriginal rights

- 1968 - Oil was struck on the North Slope of Alaska. Atlantic Richfield, Humble, and British Petroleum oil companies begin to plan the Trans-Alaska Pipeline
- 1970 - Census: 300,882 total Pop., 51,962 Natives
- 1971 - Congress passes Natives Land Claims Settlement Act which granted 40 million acres of land and nearly a billion dollars to the claimants
- 1972 - The Episcopal Church's first Native deacon is ordained- Beth Dementi of Shageluk
- 1973 - President Nixon okays construction of Trans-Alaska oil Pipeline
- 1975 - First Eskimo to be ordained into the permanent membership in the diaconate of the Roman Catholic Church in February
- 1976 - James Munagana Nageak is the first Eskimo to become a Presbyterian minister - graduated from college and seminary
- 1977 - 1st oil runs through the pipeline and reached Valdez on July 28



ENDNOTES

¹Stott, John R.W., "Freeing a Stalwart People From Fatalism," Christianity Today, Oct 5, 1979, p. 42.

²Vick, Ann, The Camai Book, (Garden City, NY:Anchor Press and Doubleday, 1983) p. 336.

³Carrighar, Sally, Moonlight At Midday, (New York:Alfred A. Knopf, 1958) p. 172.

⁴Hunt, William R., Alaska:A Bicentennial History, (New York:W. W. North and Co. Inc., 1976) p. 14.

⁵Carrighar, p. 174.

⁶Vick, p. 289.

⁷Carrigher, pp. 178,179.

⁸Gruening, Ernest, An Alaskan Reader, (New York:Meredith Press, 1966) p. 19.

⁹McDonald, William J. The New Catholic Encyclopedia, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967) p. 242.

¹⁰Vick, pp. 8,9.

¹¹Gruening, pp. 57,58.

¹²Keithahn, Edward L., The Encyclopedia Americana, (Danbury, CN: Grolier, Inc., 1983) p. 460.

¹³Hunt, pp. 45-48.

¹⁴Carrigher, p. 179.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 180.

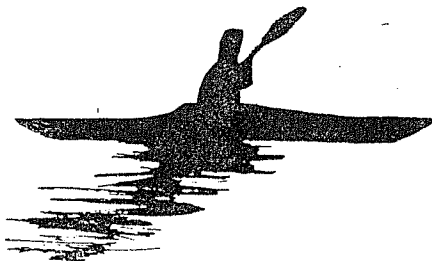
¹⁶Ibid., p. 181

¹⁷Bodensieck, Julius, The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, (Minneapolis, MN:Augsburg Publishing House, 1965) p. 1122.

¹⁸Loc.cit.

¹⁹Hendricks, William, "Alaska:America's Changing Frontier" Moody Monthly, July-Aug. 1974, p. 35.

²⁰Ibid., p. 58.



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1. "At Age 91, Henrietta Lund looks to new Challenges," The Lutheran Standard, Aug 7, 1979.
2. "Alaska: Americas Changing Frontier," by William Hendricks, Moody Monthly, July-Aug 1974.
3. "Freeing a Stalwart People From Fatalism," John R. W. Stott Christianity Today, Oct 5, 1979.

Interviews:

1. With a questionnaire: WELS Pastors in Alaska, Rev. David Zietlow, Rev. Thomas Spiegelburg, Rev. Roy Beyer, Rev. Fred Krieger, and Rev. Thomas Liesner.
2. With personal interview: Todd Goldschmidt, a middler at WLS who makes his home at Sitka, AK.