

## The birth of a Catholic Inuit community. The transition to Christianity in Pelly Bay, Nunavut, 1935-1950

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Article abstract

The transition to Catholicism in Pelly Bay is usually described as a successful conquest of a pagan *terra nullius*, a process in which Inuit played only a passive role. In fact, there was already a nucleus of Catholics in Pelly Bay when the first missionary arrived. Inuit invited him to come and stay with them. This article describes the early years of the transition to Catholicism, as well as some religious, political and economic factors that played a part in this process. Missionary sources reveal that Inuit were by no means passive consumers, but active participants with their own interests and agendas. The missionaries appear to have been more concerned with the containment of the westward expansion of Anglicanism than the survival of paganism. Although the missionaries assumed leadership roles in many fields, they were often not aware of the extent to which Inuit continued traditional practices outside the scope of the missionaries. Moreover, many traditional practices were integrated into Christianity. Within the context of the Catholic Church, Inuit developed their own form of religiosity responding to their existential and cultural needs.

# The birth of a Catholic Inuit community. The transition to Christianity in Pelly Bay, Nunavut, 1935-1950

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**Résumé:** La naissance d'une communauté catholique inuit. La transition vers le christianisme à Pelly Bay, Nunavut, 1935-1950

La transition au catholicisme à Pelly Bay est habituellement décrite comme une conquête réussie dans une *terra nullius* païenne, un processus dans lequel les Inuit auraient joué un rôle passif. En fait, il y avait déjà un noyau de catholiques à Pelly Bay quand le premier missionnaire y arriva. Les Inuit l'avaient invité à venir rester avec eux. Cet article décrit les premières années de la transition au catholicisme, ainsi que certains facteurs religieux, politiques et économiques qui jouèrent un rôle dans ce processus. Les sources missionnaires révèlent que les Inuit ne furent pas du tout des consommateurs passifs mais plutôt des participants actifs avec leurs propres intérêts et agendas. Les missionnaires semblent avoir été plus concernés par leur désir de circonscrire l'avancée de l'anglicanisme dans l'ouest que par la survie du paganisme. Bien que les missionnaires aient assumé des rôles de leaders dans plusieurs domaines, souvent ils ne savaient pas que les Inuit continuaient leurs pratiques. De plus, plusieurs pratiques traditionnelles furent intégrées au christianisme. Dans le contexte de l'église catholique, les Inuit développèrent leur propre forme de religiosité qui répondait à leurs besoins existentiels et culturels.

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The transition to Catholicism in Pelly Bay is usually described as a successful conquest of a pagan *terra nullius*, a process in which Inuit played only a passive role. In fact, there was already a nucleus of Catholics in Pelly Bay when the first missionary arrived. Inuit invited him to come and stay with them. This article describes the early years of the transition to Catholicism, as well as some religious, political and economic factors that played a part in this process. Missionary sources reveal that Inuit were by no means passive consumers, but active participants with their own interests and agendas. The missionaries appear to have been more concerned with the containment of the westward expansion of Anglicanism than the survival of paganism. Although the missionaries assumed leadership roles in many fields, they were often not aware of the extent to which Inuit continued traditional practices outside the scope of the missionaries. Moreover, many traditional practices were integrated into Christianity. Within the context of the Catholic Church, Inuit developed their own form of religiosity responding to their existential and cultural needs.

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In this article, we will examine the formative years of the Catholic mission post in Pelly Bay. It is part of a long-term project on the history of the Pelly Bay community carried out in the wider context of Inuit re-appropriation of their own history. The paper is based on literary and archival sources, and on interviews with one of the Oblate missionaries who spent twenty-seven years in Pelly Bay, Father Franz Van de Velde<sup>1</sup>. With the exception of some brief autobiographical notes, there are no written sources in Inuktitut for the period under scrutiny. The Inuit views of Christianization we discuss are therefore largely inferred from Qallunaat (non-Inuit) data and research carried out elsewhere in Nunavut. In the next few years, we hope to supplement these data with interviews with older informants from Pelly Bay. Such interviews are indispensable to obtain a more balanced understanding of the transition to Christianity in Pelly Bay.

The *Codex Historicus* of the Pelly Bay mission<sup>2</sup> is an important source for this paper. It was written by the resident missionaries and gives an account of the daily events at the mission post. The missionaries not only recorded their religious activities but also the weather, success in hunting, the state of the food, visits by Inuit, and their travels to other camps. In these respects it is a rich source. But the *Codex* is by no means a private diary. We hear little about the private thoughts and the feelings of the missionaries or their views of the Inuit. Neither is it an ethnographic account. We find hardly any references to conversations with Inuit or descriptions of events in the Inuit camps themselves.

Such information can indeed be found in the journal *Eskimo*, published by the Oblates. As it was primarily geared to raising support for the northern missions among Catholic laymen in Northern America and Europe, these observations have to be used with utmost care. The missionaries often wrote short contributions to the journal describing social life at Pelly Bay and the features they attributed to the mentality and culture of the Inuit. These observations usually inform us more about the mentality of the missionaries than that of the Inuit, emphasizing the primitive nature of the Inuit. In this respect a number of articles by the editor in chief, Father Jean Philippe O.M.I., are instructive.

In June 1947, Father Philippe published a paper on Inuit psychology in *Eskimo*. The image of the Inuit was based on well-known topoi on primitive people. Thus Father Philippe (1947: 5) noted that "the Eskimo does not think" and explained:

We come to know a person above all by the exchange of ideas. But this intellectual interchange can scarcely be carried on with an Eskimo. He is not accustomed to analyse and co-ordinate his thoughts. From different facts and impressions he cannot deduce directive ideas and come to a conclusion. In his mind, far from being close together, the ideas laboriously follow one another, one giving place to the other (Philippe 1947: 5-6).

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<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank Father Van de Velde for his comments on the *Codex*. We also thank the members of Laval University's Community-University Research Alliance "Memory and History in Nunavut" for their comments on a presentation of the paper by the authors.

<sup>2</sup> Referred to as "the *Codex*" in this article.

But notwithstanding their incapacity for intellectual discourse, Father Philippe considered Inuit to be intelligent:

Do not mistake me, however, the Eskimo is intelligent. When the occasion presents itself, he learns quickly. He has a very sure, practical judgement. He knows how to adapt himself and to manage affairs in the most difficult situations (*ibid.*: 6).

Father Philippe concluded his section on intelligence with the observation: "They often have a Christian understanding which is beautiful," and added: "The Eskimo, however, remains a great materialist." Father Philippe explained that attitude by referring to the requirements of nomadic life in the North. Then, apparently contradicting his earlier description of Inuit intelligence, he observed:

These people with so little intelligence are always happy. They soon forget past miseries and ignore the plans and cares for the future. They live from day to day without any worry (*ibid.*: 7).

In the last section of his paper on Inuit psychology Father Philippe evoked the hardship of the missionaries:

By way of conclusion, think for a moment of a missionary living alone with these people, for ten years, twenty years. The father talks with them about hunting, fishing, dogs and other trifling matters. One can never attain a more intellectual level with them. Friendship requires a certain equality, an intercourse of two hearts, of two minds [...]. A moral solitude often more trying than cold and privation (*ibid.*: 7).

In the issues of 1948 he continued his contributions to Inuit psychology<sup>3</sup> and explained their mental state:

Let us not rashly condemn these men whose mentality and ways of life are very near the Stone Age period. Unlike us, they have not the benefits of nineteen centuries of Christianity, and take into consideration what we find in our own civilized countries (Philippe 1948c: 14).

We cannot assume that these views expressed by the chief editor of *Eskimo* are representative for the missionary perceptions of Inuit in the thirties and forties, but they were never challenged in the journal. It is quite clear that the superiority of Christianity and Western civilization was never in doubt for the Roman Catholic missionaries. These ideas about the backwardness of Inuit were quite common at the time, not only among missionaries, but among anthropologists as well. Once the Inuk is perceived as not very intelligent, essentially pragmatic and materialistic, with a happy go lucky attitude towards life, there is little point for the missionaries in recording his views of Christian religion. The missionaries saw it as their most important task to keep him on the right track and protect him from paganism and Anglicanism. Neither in *Eskimo*, nor in the *Codex* do we find many references to Inuit views.

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<sup>3</sup> In the issue of March 1948 Father Philippe (1948a: 8-15) describes the birth and youth of Inuit; in the 1948 issues of June (1948b: 2-7) and September (1948c: 2-8, 14), he describes Inuit marriage.

Missionaries did speculate, though, about how Inuit might perceive them. Thus, Van de Velde wrote in 1956:

In the Eskimo mind, the priest occupies the eminent place formerly held by the sorcerer. Is not the Catholic priest an "alter Christus" and, for this reason, is he not a mediator between God and men? Was not the sorcerer also a similar link between the spirits on one side and the Eskimos on the other? I think that to the Eskimo mentality there is a very close link between their conception of the sorcerer and the priest and that the acceptance of the priest in place of the sorcerer is usually easily accomplished, either consciously or unconsciously. A missionary, an expert on the Eskimo language, one day said that the true translation of the word priest should be "angakok," that is sorcerer, and not "iksirardjuar" the expression actually used and which, when literally translated means "the great writer" (Van de Velde 1956: 8).

Van de Velde may have been right with respect to the equivalence between priest and *angakkuq* in the perception of the Inuit, but he never took recourse to Inuit statements to prove his point. In the paper he preferred to build his argument on rhetorical questions, not on a dialogue with Inuit.

Another important source for our paper are the oral comments on the *Codex* by Father Van de Velde, recorded in 1982 by the first author. These comments provide a wealth of detailed explanations of the entries in the *Codex* of Pelly Bay and of the culture of the Nattilingmiut<sup>4</sup> in general.

## **The spread of Christianity in the Canadian Arctic**

The Moravian Brethren introduced Christianity in Labrador in the 18th century, and in the 19th century, missionary activities gradually expanded to Northern Quebec. In 1894, the Anglican Church Missionary Society founded a Mission post at Blacklead Island. From here the Anglican religion gradually spread north over Baffin Island. The Anglican missionaries attached great importance to the spread of the Gospel. They adapted syllabics, originally developed for the Cree, to the Inuktitut language of the Inuit. The Inuit rapidly adopted syllabics, not only for writing, but also to read the translations of hymns and scriptures by the Anglican missionaries. Soon the little red books of the Anglicans spread over the Arctic. This rapid spread of syllabic writing is really remarkable if one takes into account that Inuit culture was very much an oral culture. At the beginning of the 20th century, the degree of literacy in northeastern Canada was probably not less than in many European countries.

The missionaries entered the scene when whaling was already declining. Inuit had adopted Western materials and technology and were familiar with many aspects of Western culture, mainly introduced by the whalers. They were always open to outside influences and prepared to integrate them into their own beliefs and practices. They may have been quite interested to find out what was useful about the Christian religion. Yet, it took Reverend Peck and his fellow Anglican missionaries many years before the

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<sup>4</sup> In this article we use the term Nattilingmiut to refer to the group classified by Rasmussen (1931) as the Netsilik Eskimos.

first conversions were made in Baffin Island at the beginning of the 20th century. But once they were made, Christianity spread rapidly. Not only did missionaries convert Inuit, but the latter also began to experiment with their own forms of Christianity, often combined with shamanic traditions (Blaisel *et al.* 1999).

In 1912, the Oblate missionaries established the first Catholic mission post at Igluligaarjuk, Chesterfield Inlet. Like the Anglican missionaries, they had to wait several years before the first conversions occurred. Yet, Christianity was by no means unknown, and the Anglican Bible translations had also reached this area via Hudson's Bay Company clerks and other traders. From the very start, the Catholic mission was not only intent on the conversion of the Inuit but also on counteracting the influence of the Anglicans whose sphere of influence gradually extended north. For a long time there was fierce competition between the two religions in the areas where Anglican and Roman Catholic influences met. Strategic considerations to counteract competition often played a decisive role in the foundation of new mission posts and missionary strategies. The missionary policies of the two competing denominations are well documented in the archives of the Oblates and the Church Missionary Society. Much less clear is how Inuit perceived the competition between the two rivalling denominations.

The question why Inuit decided to become Christians is by no means solved. Although missionary activities first focused on women and children as the men were out on hunting trips for most of the time, the mission could only gain a foothold once influential camp leaders decided to convert. We are not just dealing with a process of individual conversion. Clearly, families and even whole camps could make the decision to convert to Christianity. The nomadic life style of Inuit implied that people who had converted and moved out from the mission posts could play an important part in the spread of Christianity. Families and camps could become familiar with Christian creeds and rituals long before the missionaries reached them. In the 1910s and 1920s the North of Canada was teeming with religious activity as Christianity gradually spread over the Inuit camps.

### **Oblate plans and Inuit strategies**

The foundations of this missionary expansion were laid by Father Arsène Turquetil, who established the first Oblate mission in Chesterfield Inlet in 1912, a year after the Hudson's Bay Company had opened its first trading post there. The northern move by the Oblate Fathers was a reaction to the expansion of Anglican missionary activities to the Keewatin district that was encouraged by the Hudson's Bay Company (Archives 1: 4-5). Against what they considered to be an opportunistic "economic exploitation of the childish greed of the Eskimo" (Archives 1: 4), the Oblates adopted an approach that fitted the ultramontane nature of their religious order. They were strong defenders of the central authority in church hierarchy, *i.e.* the Pope, and were in favour of a strict clerical discipline, the revival of Thomistic theology, and the demonstration of popular piety. The Oblates tried to live up to their founder's motto: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me* (He hath sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor),

through adherence to four basic rules: personal poverty, chastity, obedience and perseverance. In the northern Canadian context this meant living a life of moral austerity and unselfish social engagement, realized through full participation in the life of those who had to be converted to the true church of Christ (Archives 1: 5).

It took Father Turquetil great pains to get a religious foothold among the Inuit: the first Inuit were converted and baptized in 1917 only. The Oblates first consolidated their position at Chesterfield Inlet and only expanded their missionary activities in the late 1920s, when Anglican pressure on the Keewatin increased. Their strategy aimed at ensuring control of the land before the Anglicans arrived<sup>5</sup>. In a relatively short span of time, a little over ten years, six new mission posts were established. In 1924, Father Ducharme founded a post in Eskimo Point; two years later, in 1926, Father Duplain erected a mission at Southampton Island and in the following year, 1927, the mission post of Baker Lake was established by Father Rio. In 1929 and 1930, followed the erection of the mission posts at Pond Inlet (founded by Father Girard) and Igloodik (founded by Father Bazin). These two posts were specifically put in place to block the westward expansion of the Anglican missions who had their strongholds on Baffin Island (Archives 1: 10). The establishment, in 1933 and 1935, of the mission posts of Repulse Bay by Father Clabaut, and Pelly Bay by Father Henry, can be seen as further attempts to "occupy" territory before the arrival of the Anglicans.

The Repulse Bay mission soon developed into an important logistic centre for the northern missions of the Hudson Bay vicariate. It was particularly important for Pelly Bay as we will see. In the first two years of its existence, the Pelly Bay mission was a dependency of Repulse Bay. On August 23, 1937, on the occasion of the vicarial synod held in Chesterfield Inlet, it was recognized as an independent mission. On that same occasion Father Franz Van de Velde, a newly arrived Flemish Oblate, was appointed socius of Father Henry (*Codex*, August 1937). He joined the latter in 1938.

The decision to open up a mission post at Pelly Bay was taken after a request by converted Pelly Bay people who resided temporarily in the Aivilik area<sup>6</sup>. They belonged to a substantial group of Nattilingmiut that had migrated south to the area between Lyon's Inlet and Chesterfield Inlet at the end of the 19th or the beginning of the 20th century (see Rowley 1985). This migration of about 40 per cent of the total Nattilik population had far reaching effects. It boosted the female infanticide ratio and made latent factionalism manifest (see Remie 1985, 1993). Such factionalism was quite marked among immigrants from the eastern branch of the Nattilingmiut who had their traditional hunting grounds around Arviligjuaq (Pelly Bay). Within this community existed two groups, the so-called Kukigarmiut and the Irmalingmiut, named after the protagonists of a feud that probably dates back as far as the end of the 18th century (see Mary-Rousselière 1960; Remie 1993; Steenhoven 1962).

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<sup>5</sup> S'assurer le pays avant l'arrivée des protestants" (Archives 1: 9). All translations from French are by the authors.

<sup>6</sup> The first Pelly Bay Inuit to become Catholics were baptized between May 1930 and January 1935. Some of them were baptized at Igluligaarjuk (Chesterfield Inlet) by Father Ducharme, but the vast majority of the early converts were baptized at Aivilik (Repulse Bay) where Father Clabaut had started a mission in 1933.

When Oblate missionaries appeared on the scene, Kukigaq / Irmalik factionalism became manifest once again. Data gathered by Father Van de Velde (1979, 1980, 1981, 1984) indicate that Kukigarmiut attempted to secure the support of the missionaries for themselves to "appropriate" the missionary. Among the thirty-six persons that were baptized prior to the foundation of the Pelly Bay mission, only six were Irmalingmiut, whereas twenty-six were of Kukigaq extraction. Apparently, Kukigaq leaders realized the potential benefit of being Catholic earlier than their Irmalik counterparts and made the tactical move to side with the missionaries<sup>7</sup>. This interpretation of the differential rates of baptisms prior to 1935, the year of the foundation of the Pelly Bay mission, is further substantiated by the behaviour of the leader of the Kukigarmiut, old Qaqsuviq. Not only did he request Father Clabaut to allow a missionary to come and live with them, he also attempted to influence decision where the missionary would reside. Father Henry noted in the *Codex*:

Sudden departure of K'arsuviq for Igluriarjuk. Despite their beseeching, I do not want to follow them. I have found an ideal spot to settle in front of the little hill between the river and the sea. I have decided to build a winter house of stone and clay here. Against the approval of my Eskimos who encourage me to settle down farther North (*Codex*, 3 / 6 / 1935).

The reasons for his decision are clear: Father Henry wanted to be independent whereas his Inuit guides preferred him to go with them. By accepting their advice Father Henry would have settled where a camp leader guided him, thus acknowledging his authority. Moreover, the trading facilities the Oblate missionaries provided would also have improved the economic position of the camp where he settled. By selecting his own spot regardless of the advice of his guides, Father Henry showed himself to be his own man, creating his own camp.

We do not know how Qaqsuviq and the other members of the Kukigaq faction took his decision. A comment by Father Van de Velde suggests that it took them quite a while to accept the independent position of the mission:

Father Henry wanted to be independent in order to be the priest of all and not just the priest of one group. The Father had to be handy, tactful and sometimes firm to express his independence [...]. It is only after my arrival in 1938 that the Father was able to make them finally understand that the Mission was there for all (Van de Velde 1979: 69).

Thus the Oblate missionaries were not the only ones who were planning their moves, Inuit also had their own strategies. Although these plans and strategies might sometimes conflict, they often reinforced each other: when the request for a resident missionary in Pelly Bay was made, it was quickly granted because it fitted in the

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<sup>7</sup> The decision to start following Christianity was often taken independently of the missionaries. In his autobiographical notes, Bernard Irqugaqtuq from Pelly Bay refers to the *siqqitiq* ceremony carried out at Aivilik by the Pelly Bay people. In this ritual of transition to Christianity, developed by Inuit themselves, parts of animals that used to be taboo were eaten collectively. In this way the observance of food taboos was ritually rejected. Irqugaqtuq recalled: "I remember that it was at Aivilik that we began to follow Christianity. Absolutely all the Inuit were gathered. They gave out small pieces of caribou lung and heart and it is there that they began to follow and make their definite commitment. There were only Inuit there. The cut pieces were as large as small berries. I used to know what it was all about, but I've forgotten" (Irqugaqtuq 1978: 15). For an excellent description of the *siqqitiq* ceremony, see Laugrand (1997).



general Oblate strategy of occupying what they considered to be a religious *terra nullius*.

## The founding of the Pelly Bay mission

Jean Philippe O.M.I. gave a vivid account of the founding of the mission of Pelly Bay in *Eskimo* (Philippe 1946a and 1946b). Its founder, Father Henry arrived in Churchill in September 1932. From there he travelled to Repulse Bay to join Father Clabaut, his superior. In 1934, Father Henry expressed the wish to found a mission at Pelly Bay. Father Clabaut was only prepared to let him go if a family invited him for instruction, a family that would supply him with the seal blubber for the lamp needed to survive. Once these conditions were met, Father Henry set out on his journey on April 26th 1935. He travelled with the family of Qaqsuvik, the oldest Christian family at Pelly Bay (*Codex*, 2 / 2 / 1937) that had recently been baptized by Father Clabaut at Kuq&kuk. In *Eskimo* Philippe records a brief dialogue between the old Qaqsuvik and the missionary. One evening Qaqsuvik asked him, "Why are you going to Arviligjuaq (Pelly Bay)?" The missionary answered, "To tell you about the good God, whom you do not know; to teach you how to live well so that you will arrive in that place where there is nothing but happiness. "The old man answered, "You will often be hungry at Ar-vi-lee-goo-ar" (Philippe 1946a: 6).

This brief dialogue reflects the encounter of two worlds: the dreams and ambitions of the missionary and the concerns of the Inuit. Both were concerned with each other's welfare. The missionary with the spiritual welfare of the Inuit, in whose midst he was going to live, the old Inuk with the physical well-being and the survival of the foreign missionary who did not know the land. The dry humour of the answer of the old Inuk seems to have escaped the missionary completely.

After a difficult and tiring journey by dog sled, Father Henry arrived at the mouth of the Kuugaarjuk River on June 1st and decided, against the advice of his Inuit guides, to stay there. Almost immediately Father Henry started building a stone house annex chapel, a project it would take several months to complete. In the mean time he had to hunt and fish for his own subsistence. Life in the new mission was hard the first months. Because he gave priority to his building activities, he missed the run of the arctic char that was caught in August at the *saputit* (stone weirs). Food was a continuous problem<sup>8</sup>. By August 25, 1935, he administered his first baptism in the new chapel: Elisabeth, daughter of Taleriktok. After finishing his house-chapel, Father Henry adjusted quickly to the local migratory pattern and spent the end of October and most of November in camps along the Kellett River fishing under the ice. Here, in an incident evoking the foundation of the mission at Pelly Bay, Father Henry insisted on having his own igloo against the wishes of his hosts<sup>9</sup>.

By the end of November, Father Henry returned to the mission. Inuit built an igloo for him, as living in the stone house was impossible because of the cold. Qaqsuvik

<sup>8</sup> Thus he noted in September: "Plus de pain sur la planche. St. Joseph o.p.n." (*Codex*, 2 / 9 / 1935).

<sup>9</sup> On October 21, 1935 Father Henry wrote "Je veux avoir mon iglou seul." (*Codex*, 21 / 10 / 1935) and he gives his rationale in next day's entry: "Atony me construit un petit iglou. Il est mieux que le prêtre soit seul pour être à tous" (*Codex*, 22 / 10 / 1935).

supplied him with oil for the lamp during the winter (*Codex*, 27 / 1 / 1936). Weeks of preparations followed for baptisms that would take place at Christmas when most inhabitants of the area would gather at the mission. At the first Christmas celebration in Pelly Bay, forty Nattilingmiut attended the festivities (*Codex*, 27 / 12 / 1935). A few days later they departed for their seal hunting camps on the sea ice of Pelly Bay.

In January, February and March 1936, Father Henry occasionally visited the Inuit in these camps and instructed his catechumens, heard confessions, celebrated mass and distributed communion. In March, preparations for Easter started. At Easter, Inuit from all over Pelly Bay would gather at Kuugaarjuk, as at Christmas. After that, a period of travelling followed. Some Inuit would travel to the Hudson's Bay Company store in Repulse Bay to trade; others would trade into Gjoa Haven on King William Island, whereas those who stayed behind would engage in various hunting activities.

In 1936, Father Henry used the trading period to visit King William Island where he enlisted a few new catechumens. Back home in Kuugaarjuk, he found a letter from Mgr. Turquetil indicating that it was still too early to move into King William Island. He should wait till his superiors told him to do so, and as far as the superior was concerned the hour had not come yet (*Codex*, 21 / 5 / 1936)<sup>10</sup>. In June and July 1936 Father Henry was engaged in further building activities and, after break-up, in netting seals and fish in the Kuugaarjuk River. In August a new annual round started, with the spearing of arctic char at the *saputit* of the Kuugaarjuk River.

We have described Father Henry's activities during the first year of his mission in Pelly Bay in some detail because it reveals, with the exception of the voyage to King William Island, a basic pattern that would repeat itself in the years to follow.

The presence of a resident missionary in Pelly Bay did have considerable demographic effects. Whereas the total population of Pelly Bay consisted of only 54 individuals in November 1935, a year later their number had risen to 83 (*Codex*, 7 / 11 / 1936) and in February 1937 there were 89 people in Pelly Bay (*Codex*, 4 / 2 / 1937). In subsequent years this number would further expand until it reached an average of about 125 in the early 1950s (see Van de Velde *et al.* 1993: 12). This population development was partly due to re-migration of those who had left around the turn of the century; partly it was the result of natural increase.

## **Intermezzo at Igluligaarjuk**

The Oblate missionaries received their directions from Igluligaarjuk where Mgr. Turquetil was in charge of the Catholic mission in the North. The vast distances of the Arctic implied that it was not easy to control what was happening at the mission posts, and missionaries in remote missions often had to improvise or follow their own judgment in dealing with difficult and controversial issues. Father Turquetil devised strict guidelines for his missionaries, and in 1937 Father Henry was called back to

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<sup>10</sup> When asked by the first author what the motives of Bishop Turquetil were, Van de Velde answered that he had no idea.

Chesterfield Inlet to participate in the first synod of the Hudson Bay vicariate. The purpose of the synod, organized on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the first Oblate mission, was to evaluate the results of missionary activities, to unify the method of evangelization, and to close the ranks so that a more united front could be made against the Anglicans. The synod was opened with much pomp and circumstance to underline the Catholic presence in Canada's North. Bishop Turquetil led it with an iron hand. Father Henry's commentary in the *Codex* of Pelly Bay describes the proceedings:

Around August 28 great sessions. I do not know what they symbolize. Monseigneur read long typed pages and we all had to say "placet" to every paragraph. Two secretaries registered gradually our approvals on voluminous manuscripts. Monseigneur said: "If you have any objections, we will solve them in ten years at the next synod" (*Codex*, August 1937).

And he added: "We all hastened back to our respective missions." Even though Father Henry's scepticism is obvious, the conclusions of the synod had far reaching implications for the mission posts. In the preliminary resolution their approval is emphasized and it is clearly stated that the directives of the synod will apply to all missionaries in the field and those who will come to assist them to convert the Inuit<sup>11</sup>.

The resolutions adopted at the synod dealt with the general principles of the evangelization in pagan countries, with the application of the dogmatic principles with respect to baptism, with the administration of sacraments (baptism, penitence, Eucharist, confirmation, marriage, extreme unction) and with good governance of the missions (Turquetil 1937). All these resolutions together constituted a kind of handbook for the missions of the vicariate. At the synod it was also decided that Pelly Bay would become an independent mission named St. Peter Mission. Father Van de Velde would join Father Henry at Pelly Bay the next year.

The ranks closed and the spirit invigorated, the missionaries were sent home. After an absence of more than ten months, Father Henry arrived in Kuugaarjuk on January 31, 1938 and resumed his missionary work.

## **The growth of the mission**

Back in Pelly Bay, Father Henry visited the seal camps out on the sea ice. In line with the trend set at the vicarial synod, one of his first actions was to undertake a voyage to Iktuaqturvik in the northern ranges of the Natilik territory. In the summer of 1937, the Hudson's Bay Company had established a post at Fort Ross on the south end

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<sup>11</sup> Tous les Pères du Synode qui ayant voix consultative ont étudié pendant six mois le texte proposé à leur examen, non seulement affirment leur adhésion entière aux Directives générales du St. Siège contenues dans ce texte, et tirées des Collectanea de la S.C. de la Propagande, du Droit Canon, du Statutum, du Rituel Romain, etc. mais expriment le désir qu'après discussion et acceptation des conclusions pratiques qui en découlent pour eux, le Révssme Vicaire Apostolique rédige une "Circulaire compte-rendu" laquelle sera comme le "Directoire des Missions du Vicariat" et servira de guide autorisé pour les Pères qui sont déjà en ministère actif, et pour ceux qui viendront dans la suite les aider à convertir les Esquimaux (Turquetil 1937: 14).

of Somerset Island. It was manned by an HBC man and by Anglican Inuit who had been relocated from Baffin Island (see Heming, ed. 1986: 210). To counter possible Anglican influence, Father Henry visited the Inuit at Iktuaqturvik and Ikpik (Thom Bay) and quickly instructed and baptized a sick Inuk whom he had met earlier in Pelly Bay. The man died a month later, having made the sign of the cross and having instructed the members of his family to keep to the Catholic faith (*Codex*, 13 / 2 / 1938). After his return to Kuugaarjuk, Father Henry immediately prepared for a trip to King William Island where he visited the Inuit living around the HBC post at Gjoa Haven. Result of the trip: one catechumen.

He was barely back in Kuugaarjuk when his socius Father Van de Velde arrived. Father Henry expressed his joy in the *Codex* at having a fellow missionary after almost four years of solitude (*Codex*, 23 / 4 / 1938). Father van de Velde was a young Flemish missionary. His energy and skills proved a great help to Father Henry at the mission. Together they started new building activities and took turns in visiting Inuit camps to baptize older catechumens and new-born children. Being a good hunter and an excellent organizer, Father Van de Velde quickly became responsible for the logistics of the Pelly Bay mission. In the next twelve years, Father Henry and Father Van de Velde worked together to develop the mission. Both of them were sometimes absent because of sickness or leave<sup>12</sup>, but the mission was always manned.

### **The struggle against the Reds**

The entries in the *Codex* suggest that the missionaries did not consider shamanism and superstition, but the Anglicans or "Reds" (thus called after the red colour of the Anglican prayer book) as the greatest threats to the development of the mission.

In March 1939 the "competition" knocked at the doors of Pelly Bay when Canon Turner, the Anglican minister from Arctic Bay, called in for a visit. Father Henry noted: "Siuinnuark is his guide. I admonished him" (*Codex*, 10 / 3 / 1939). The encounter was formal and cool (for a description, see Choque 1985: 99-101) and Turner left after a few days. Father Henry immediately left for Iktuaqturvik and Ikpik to visit the people there. On his way back to Pelly Bay he met Canon Turner again (*Codex*, 21 / 3 / 1939) and a third meeting took place when Father Henry visited the northern part of King William Island (*Codex*, 10 / 4 / 1939).

The fact that the Inuk who had enrolled as a catechumen the year before was now following the Anglican minister made Father Henry decide to make yet another journey up north. On May 27, 1939 he left Kuugaarjuk to spend the summer at Ikpik in the south of Boothia Peninsula. On November 25 he was back in Kuugaarjuk. Leaving the Pelly Bay mission to the care of his socius, Father Henry left once more for a trip

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<sup>12</sup> Father Henry was sent South because of his health in May 1940 and returned in November of that year. Father Van de Velde left in November 1942 because of a dental problem and a broken foot-bone and returned in May 1944. In the beginning of 1945, Father Henry left Pelly Bay for medical treatment. He had a kidney operation and returned to Pelly Bay 30 months later in November 1947. Then Father Van de Velde left for leave in Belgium and returned in December 1948. In 1949 Father Henry left Pelly Bay for Ikpik (Thom Bay) to found a new mission post.

north in February 1940, this time to the HBC trading post at Fort Ross, a ten-day journey by dogsled. At Fort Ross he baptized one Inuk and on his way back, at Iktuaqturvik, six more. All these activities affected his health. He returned to Pelly Bay sick and exhausted. His physical condition left much to be desired and he was sent south for a medical check-up.

Now Father Van de Velde was temporarily in charge of the mission. He followed the routine developed by Father Henry. In May 1940 he travelled to Ikpik in the north to maintain contact with the local Catholics and enrol more Inuit as catechumens. But as Ikpik was deserted he had to turn back to Kuugaarjuk where he resumed building activities and picked up the daily work of fishing, hunting and caring for the spiritual needs of his parishioners. On November 11, 1940, Father Henry returned to Kuugaarjuk.

The main danger was perceived to come from South Baffin Island, the stronghold of Anglicanism. In the *Codex* summary of 1940 it is stated:

Two Oqomiut families came to Iktuaqturvik (Nukkaar) for the season. One of the two is Missisiterapik (Simoneark). All this in order to convert the Netsilik more and more to Protestantism.

At the beginning of 1942 Father Henry started out to Ikpik and Iktuaqturvik again, baptized five Inuit there and returned to Pelly Bay with a favourable impression of his voyage (*Codex*, 2 / 2 / 1942). At Easter that year, sergeant Henry Larsen and constable Pat Atunt arrived from Pasley Bay, Boothia, where their ship, the *St. Roch* was locked in ice. They came to ask the assistance of the mission in a burial service for one of the crew, sergeant Frenchie Chartrand, who had died on February 13 (*Codex*, 31 / 3 / 1942). Father Henry agreed and travelled to Pasley Bay on the west coast of Boothia Peninsula. He used the opportunity to visit the Catholics at Iktuaqturvik on the way back. After Father Van de Velde left for Repulse Bay because of dental problems and a broken foot-bone in November 1942, Father Henry undertook a new journey to Iktuaqturvik. He was concerned about the Anglican influence emanating from Fort Ross and wanted to see his Catholics again. He spent some time at Ikpik with old Alakkannuaq and his three sons, Niptajuq, Kajaittuq and Iksivalitaq.

Early in 1944 Father Henry travelled to Boothia again, but this time he met only Anglican Inuit. The Catholics were hunting elsewhere and he was forced to return to Pelly Bay without having met them. After a journey by dogsled all the way up from Churchill, Father Van de Velde returned to Pelly Bay in May 1944. A few days later, Father Henry set out for Ikpik to visit the Catholics there, but he had to return: he had started off too late and found his way north blocked by the absence of snow on the land.

When Father Henry departed for Boothia in early April 1948, bad news awaited him. Five of his catechumens had defected and now followed the Anglicans. April 11, 1948 he wrote: "Five of our catechumens have lapsed and returned to the Reds: that is, Ikotisluk, and Katarjuk with their wives and Arnatnar and his children. All these defections are the result of Protestant pressure." On top of that, he learned that the

HBC post at Fort Ross had been closed and that the Anglican Baffin Islanders who had worked there would be relocated to Spence Bay where a new HBC store would be opened the next year. Back in Kuugaarjuk he characterized the religious conditions of the people he had met at Thom Bay:

Spiritual state of the Eskimos at Thom Bay in 1948: Deep ignorance of religion. Waiting for the end of the world next summer (prophecy of Nauyark). They only use prayer for pragmatic purposes. I have been asked twice whether Jesus was a man or a woman. Many prejudices with respect to priests, confessions etc. Superstition. On top of that, activities of the Oqomiut to win all the Netsilik to Anglicanism (*Codex*, 2 / 4 / 1948).

The Catholic missionaries attributed the rise of parousial movements that referred to the end of the world to Anglicanism and saw it as one of the negative implications of Protestantism.

What the vicarial synod of 1937 had attempted to prevent (*i.e.* the westward expansion of Anglicanism) now seemed to become reality. It convinced Father Henry once more of the need for concerted action and on May 18, 1948 he travelled to Ikpik with a sled loaded with materials necessary to build a 12 by 16 feet chapel to house the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The chapel built and the image installed, he returned to Pelly Bay, leaving behind a powerful symbol of Catholicism. At Tuga, south of Thom Bay, he passed through a large camp consisting of 17 tents and 91 Inuit, of which three baptized and three catechumens. Here he secretly baptized a dying child.

Father Henry now began to prepare the next step in his struggle to counter the Anglican expansion: the erection of a mission outpost at Thom Bay. The plan materialized in 1949, shortly after Father Van de Velde had returned from his journey to Europe. After two trips north in the first months of 1949<sup>13</sup>, he left again for Ikpik on April 6, this time to stay there.

On April 26th, Bishop Lacroix arrived by plane in Pelly Bay and administered confirmation at Kuugaarjuk and in a seal camp out on the sea ice of Pelly Bay. After his return to Repulse, he visited Father Henry at Ikpik the next day. Although the bishop stayed no longer than an hour and a half at Ikpik, the visit was of great importance, conveying a clear message that Father Henry's undertaking had the full support of his superiors and consequently that the Catholics were there to stay. And that is what Father Henry did, assisted by Father Papion who had arrived by plane in Pelly Bay on April 26. He and Father Van de Velde travelled to Ikpik on May 11.

After his return from Ikpik, Father Van de Velde found many of his parishioners ill with flu. When the epidemic subsided, life resumed its normal rhythm with the exception of an unexpected visit by the Magnetic Survey Expedition that left behind a considerable amount of food and other useful materials. At the end of November, Father Papion returned to Pelly Bay from Ikpik with good news from Father Henry. He stayed in Pelly Bay to assist with the Christmas celebrations and left for Repulse Bay

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<sup>13</sup> January 14, 1949 Father Henry first made a trip to King William Island. Back in Kuugaarjuk on February 4, he left for Ikpik and Spence Bay on February 18, a journey from which he returned March 18.

in mid-January 1950. A few days later, Father Van de Velde left for a 1000 km roundtrip to King William Island, Spence Bay and Ikpik, and visited his colleague Father Henry who would soon leave for Europe to visit his parents. Father Papion would take his place at Ikpik.

At the end of May 1950, Father Van de Velde made one more trip to Ikpik to see whether things were in order — and they were — and then returned to Pelly Bay, a mission that over the years had come to such maturity that it could now serve as a base for further missionary activity to the north and the west.

In Pelly Bay itself, Roman Catholicism was never seriously challenged and the Nattilingmiut living there kept faith with Catholicism, and in 1950 it was stated with some satisfaction:

Summary of 15 years of mission at the mission of St. Pierre at Pelly Bay: During these 15 years of St. Pierre Christianity has made a great step forwards in this area. From one Father in 1935, now there are three, the Fathers P. Henry, V.d. Velde, and Papion, all Oblates, in 1950. There are 130 people here, 127 of them Catholics. Krimitsiark, wife and adopted (child) remain dedicated to the red cause (*Codex*, 31 / 12 / 1950).

## **Social and economic role of the mission**

### ***Economic functions***

From its very beginning the Pelly Bay Mission played an important part in local economics. Since Pelly Bay was landlocked and not accessible by boat, the R.C. mission depended entirely upon bulk freighting by dog sled for its own logistics.

In August 1938 the first plane, manned by Father Schulte, landed at Pelly Bay to the surprise of missionaries as well as Inuit. He brought butter and letters. Freighting remained the main way of providing the mission. Freighting trips to Repulse Bay or Gjoa Haven were carried out by Inuit who were paid by the missionaries in credits at the HBC stores there. The credits took tangible shape in the form of "sticks" (*pelus* — *i.e. poilus* — in French, a traditional fur-trade term; *qijut*, "wood pieces" in Inuktitut) issued to the Inuit by the trader. Only full *qijut* and half *qijut* were used as currency, the value of one *qijuk* being \$0.50 (see Van de Velde 1982a).

Freighting was done on a voluntary basis by Inuit who often combined the trip with some trading of their own. The compensation for such freighting trips varied over the years and was regularly adapted to price standards. In 1950, Pelly Bay Inuit received \$60.00 for a round trip to Repulse Bay to bring in 800 lbs of freight (see Archives 2). At that time, this was sufficient to buy 24 average sized seals for dog food, or 400 lbs of caribou meat, or four male dogs (see Archives 3)<sup>14</sup>. In the early years of the mission, Inuit were also compensated for supplying the mission with country food (seals and fish), for assisting in construction work, and for acting as

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<sup>14</sup> At that time, a snow knife was \$2.50, a pair of sealskin boots or caribou skin stockings \$2.00, sealskin lines \$1.00 each, and for one belly skin of caribou one had to pay \$0.50 (see Archives 3).

guides during the missionary's visits to Inuit camps in the area. Compensation was then invariably in the form of tea and tobacco, commodities that were in high demand in Pelly Bay. To what extent the mission's compensation or payments were considered "fair" by the Inuit is difficult to assess. In the first volume of the *Codex* we found only one entry where dissatisfaction over payment to an Inuk is reported (*Codex*, 18 / 6 / 1941).

Apart from freighting, construction work, etc., the mission also introduced the production of small miniature carvings in the early 1940s. In order to open a market, the miniatures were sent as sample mail to destinations in North America and Europe (Van de Velde 1982c). One of the first sales was to Mrs. Margaret Oldenburg, a biologist from St. Paul, Minnesota, who visited Pelly Bay to collect arctic flora (*Codex*, 14 / 8 / 1946). The quality of the carvings was such that it drew the attention of James Houston who visited Pelly Bay in the early 1950s to collect specimens for a Canadian exhibition that would tour the capitals of the world (Van de Velde 1982c). Real opportunities for the sale of Pelly Bay carvings opened up in the mid-1950s when a Distant Early Warning Line radar station near Pelly Bay became operational (1955), facilitating communication with the outside world.

Since its foundation, the Pelly Bay mission operated a small mission store. Through that store, Inuit could obtain scarce commodities when the HBC stores at Repulse Bay and Gjoa Haven were inaccessible as a result of limited mobility, from June till the end of October. Tea, tobacco, flour, sugar, sewing materials, and ammunition were sold at the mission store. Another important product was caribou skins for winter clothing. At the time the R.C. Mission was established, caribou were scarce at Pelly Bay. They had disappeared from Simpson Peninsula and could only be hunted far to the south and southwest of Pelly Bay. To alleviate the problem of deficient winter clothing, the mission bought caribou skins by the hundreds and sold them locally<sup>15</sup>. The mission store sold its produce at prices comparable to those of the HBC store in Repulse Bay (Van de Velde 1982c).

The mission also bought products from the Inuit such as seals for dog food, fish, and pelts of arctic foxes. Trapping was a marginal activity in Pelly Bay, and the number of fox pelts bought by the Pelly Bay mission never exceeded more than two hundred in any of the years under review in this paper. The pelts were transported south and sold to the HBC at Repulse Bay or sent to Churchill, from where the economic affairs of the vicariate were handled (Van de Velde 1982c). In this way, the mission could contribute a little to the costs of its operation.

To help defray its costs, each mission was legally entitled to apply the tithes system<sup>16</sup>. The Chesterfield synod had emphasized the necessity of its application but

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<sup>15</sup> Most of these caribou skins came from Bathurst Inlet, a prime caribou area. From there they were shipped to Gjoa Haven and sold at the HBC store (Van de Velde 1982c).

<sup>16</sup> Resolutions 203 and 204 of the Chesterfield synod referred to the role of converted Inuit in the upkeep of the missions and the system of the tithes. In resolution 203 it said: "Voici maintenant les devoirs des fidèles. Tous sont tenus en conscience de contribuer au support de leurs missionnaires, à l'entretien de leur église et du culte. Et aucun missionnaire n'a le droit de dispenser ses fidèles de cette obligation, ni de la passer sous silence [...]." And resolution 204 stipulated: "On veillera donc à établir la dîme. Pour cela on suivra la circulaire de l'Ordinaire du mois de Mars 1938 relative à la dîme." (Turquetil 1937: 77).



had also stipulated that given the poverty of the Inuit, the tithes were to be applied with some leniency<sup>17</sup>. In the daily praxis of Pelly Bay, this resolution was interpreted in such a way that Inuit would usually pay the tithes in an indirect way only. If an Inuk sold a fox pelt to the mission, Father Van de Velde usually paid the full price (*i.e.* the same price that the Inuk would receive at the HBC store in Repulse Bay or Gjoa Haven). His motive for doing so was that the mission would make a small profit when selling the fox pelts to the HBC store in Repulse Bay or Gjoa Haven and he argued that this was usually enough to meet the terms of the tithes system (Van de Velde 1982c).

The mission store had considerable advantages for the Pelly Bay Inuit. Pricing was fair and in tune with the Repulse Bay prices, and basic commodities were accessible during periods of the year when otherwise they would have been out of reach. But the mission store had some disadvantages too. These did not stem from the store itself, but from the way its fiercest competitor, the Hudson's Bay Company, perceived it. When the HBC trading post at Fort Ross was closed and moved to Spence Bay in 1949, the new post manager did everything to discourage the Nattilingmiut to trade at the mission. He spread rumours that the mission was buying up thousands of foxes, making a huge profit, and therefore guilty of false competition; the mission was there for religious purposes, not for trading (Van de Velde 1982b). According to Van de Velde, the post manager, an Anglican from Scotland, showed undue favour to the Protestant Okkomiut and Nattilingmiut. When Catholics from Pelly Bay came to trade at Spence Bay, they were treated with condescension and their furs were systematically depreciated. Counter slips of their purchases were systematically withheld so that they had no means to complain when items they had ordered and paid were missing when they collected their goods at the post (Van de Velde 1982c). As relations between the Pelly Bay mission and the HBC post manager became more strained, the manager even prevented the mission from purchasing goods at the HBC store in Gjoa Haven. When two Inuit went there in November 1950 to pick up caribou skins for winter clothing ordered by the Pelly Bay Mission, they returned empty handed with the message that the skins had been sent to Spence Bay and could only be collected there at a much higher price<sup>18</sup>. The HBC post manager even called in the assistance of the RCMP to get the Pelly Bay Mission store closed. Father Van de Velde protested vigorously against what he considered to be an injustice. The final result of his protests was that the Pelly Bay mission store received a formal outpost license in 1952.

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<sup>17</sup> In resolution 204 it said: "On se contentera de peu, il est vrai, vu la pauvreté de nos gens, mais on aura établi le principe de la dîme selon les instructions de Rome" (Turquetil 1937: 77).

<sup>18</sup> In the *Codex*, entry of November 20, 1950, Father Van de Velde wrote: "Vers 5 heures arrivée de Julien et Dominique de King W.L. Les peaux ne sont pas là. Expédiées à Spence! Mon ordre était pour King et pas Spence. George Porter m'écrit qu'il a eu défense de me (la mission) traiter quoique ce soit et d'aller à Spence. Suis-je libre ou non d'aller où je veux? Le Père Ferron sera mis au courant de cela. C'est un abus absolument injuste. Nos eskimos sont supposés aller traiter à Spence. Cela ne sera pas vrai. Ils ne veulent pas. C'est trop cher, p. ex. le pétrole coute 2 et demi fois + cher à Spence qu'à Repulse. Un madrier de traine (18 pieds) coute 35.00 dollars!... J'écirai au P. Ferron et Mgr. Cela n'en restera pas là. Stanners veut accaparer tout! 2 sacs (grands) et demi à Repulse pour le même prix à Spence où ils n'en auraient que 1! Police suppose arriver à l'automne, je l'attends de pied ferme" (*Codex*, 20 / 11 / 1950).

## *Taking care of the sick*

Until the early 1950s the Oblate Mission at Pelly Bay was the only Qallunaaq organization that did take care of the sick on a daily basis. The missionaries had received some elementary training in dealing with illnesses; they were equipped with a medical handbook and had some basic medicines at their disposal (Van de Velde 1982b). When the Oblate mission started using a radio in December 1944 (see *Codex*, 16 / 12 / 1944), the missionary could contact the doctor at the mission hospital established in 1931 at Chesterfield Inlet, for further advice. If necessary, the missionaries were entitled to send patients to the mission hospital or, at the end of the 1940s when planes made their appearance on the northern scene, to call upon the RCMP or the Hudson's Bay Company to arrange for a medical evacuation. The first of such evacuations took place in November 1942.

Increased contacts with the South resulted in a quick spreading of diseases. On the 1st of February 1946, a few days after Inuit freighting for the mission had returned from Repulse Bay where they had seen the Hudson's Bay Company plane, Pelly Bay people were ill with flu. "Nice present from civilization" wrote Father Van de Velde in the *Codex*. The epidemic lasted almost four weeks and it cost the missionary quite some efforts to treat his parishioners. It would not be the last epidemic to come to Pelly Bay that way.

External medical attention first arrived in 1948 and 1949 when a doctor accompanied a government party that visited Pelly Bay (*Codex*, 01 / 04 / 1948, 13 / 04 / 1949) but in terms of *de facto* assistance, these visits were negligible. In 1950 and 1951 the doctor from the mission hospital in Chesterfield Inlet visited Pelly Bay, and from 1952 onwards medical parties from the Department of Health and Welfare visited Pelly Bay once or twice a year<sup>19</sup>.

Easter 1950 was celebrated in the company of Mgr. Lacroix. A doctor from Chesterfield Inlet who arrived on a flight to pick up the bishop visited all Inuit that had gathered at the mission for the Easter celebrations. Two Inuit were flown out for further medical treatment in the South, a third one, suffering from a double hernia, refused to leave.

The vast majority of diseases the missionaries had to deal with concerned the respiratory tract (Van de Velde 1982b). Freighting to Repulse Bay, Gjoa Haven and Spence Bay increasingly led to outbreaks of small epidemics of flu, as did contact with outside parties, government and mission alike, that visited the Pelly Bay mission by plane in the 1940s<sup>20</sup>. As communication with the outside world intensified, more epidemics spread. Some were of an increasingly aggressive nature such as the 1949 polio epidemic in the Central Arctic that claimed the lives of many Inuit. In Pelly Bay, only one case occurred, but that same year an influenza epidemic with pneumonia

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of government medical assistance to the R.C. Mission at Pelly Bay see Van de Velde *et al.* (1993: 39-40).

<sup>20</sup> Another source of exogenous microbes were the many in kind gifts that the Pelly Bay mission received from charities in Canada and Europe. These in kind gifts, usually distributed at Christmas, were collected in Montreal and sent North without first being disinfected (Van de Velde 1982c).

complications claimed the lives of five victims (see Van de Velde *et al.* 1993: 13). In 1953 and 1954 eight patients were evacuated because of tuberculosis and two because of Pott's disease (tuberculosis of the dorsal spine). In 1960 two flu epidemics, one of California flu and one of Asian flu, claimed the lives of 14 Pelly Bay people (Van de Velde *et al.* 1993: 5).

### ***The delivery of social welfare***

In 1944, the Canadian Parliament adopted the Family Allowance Act that also applied to the Inuit. The Department of Health and Welfare was to deliver the programs under this act, but it did not have any personnel up North to do so. It asked the Department of Mines and Resources to assume the responsibility for the delivery of family allowances to the Inuit. As this department was faced with the same personnel problems, it called upon the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to carry out the job. Missionaries became involved to the extent that they were asked to supply the vital statistics on the basis of which family allowances could be issued. In Pelly Bay, the missionary would meet once in a while with the RCMP representatives to bring up to date the vital statistics of the Pelly Bay area and to update the list of people who were entitled to family allowances. But unlike other places, where Inuit were free to cash their family allowance checks wherever they pleased, the Pelly Bay Inuit were forced to travel to Spence Bay to do so. The HBC post manager at Spence Bay had arranged with his Repulse Bay and Gjoa Haven colleagues that they would refuse to cash family allowance checks from Pelly Bay Inuit and would refer them to Spence Bay. As prices at the Spence Bay HBC store were much higher than those in Repulse Bay, the value of the family allowance given to Pelly Bay families decreased substantially. Father Van de Velde protested vehemently and eventually succeeded in getting acknowledged the right of Inuit to cash their checks wherever they pleased.

The Pelly Bay mission became involved more substantially in the delivery of social welfare in the late 1940s. Whenever the resident priest considered it necessary, he was entitled to issue rations to those in need of assistance. Thus, he could order the RCMP, as official representative of the Canadian government, to provide those in need (*e.g.*, widows with dependents) with food rations and other forms of social assistance. The rations were issued by the Hudson's Bay Company that billed the government for the goods delivered. In a few cases Father Van de Velde clashed with the RCMP over ration issues, but as a rule the mission's initiatives in the social welfare field were not contested (Van de Velde 1982c).

### **Religious life**

The *Codex* focuses on the religious activities of the missionaries, not on those of the Inuit. We still know little about the religious life of the Inuit themselves. It is clear that many old practices continued (see Remie 1983). The missionaries were aware of it, but opted not to refer to it *in extenso* in the *Codex*, at least not in the mission's formative years. Whereas in the Anglican areas conversion to Christianity might imply

that ideally old beliefs and practices were no longer practised or even discussed, in the Roman Catholic areas the attitude towards the old practices seems to have been more lenient and much knowledge of old beliefs and practices is still preserved in those areas. In our description of religious life we will mainly focus on the missionary perspective as it is documented in the *Codex*. Whenever sufficient information is available, we will discuss Inuit views and reactions.

### *Religious feasts and the celebration of Sunday*

The mission post in Pelly Bay immediately became a religious centre in the area as Inuit began to convene to the mission to celebrate the Christian holydays, notably Christmas and Easter. At the Christmas celebrations in 1935, forty people were present and in 1936, Christmas was celebrated in grand style<sup>21</sup>. A big igloo was built. Sixty people were present. At eight o'clock the vigil started. Every hour, songs were chanted and exhortations made. Games were played. At eleven o'clock the *Veni Creator* was sung, and at midnight six adults were baptized who had been instructed in the autumn. A mass was celebrated followed by grace and a meal. At eleven in the morning, another mass was celebrated, followed by a copious meal of fish, caribou and biscuits. After four o'clock various competitions were organised: shooting with a .22, restraining of laughter. Each person received two bullets to hit a suspended thread (*Codex*, 25 / 12 / 1936).

The combination of Christian rituals, competitive games and great meals was characteristic of Inuit Christmas celebrations in northeast Canada and proved very successful in Pelly Bay. It became the most important religious feast attracting many Inuit. Already in 1941, the *Codex* refers to the traditional meal. That year the festivities took two days, both with competitive games, before Father Henry and Father Van de Velde could retire to enjoy four small caribou tongues and a glass of wine.

In the 1940s, the number of participants gradually increased and at the end of the decade more than a hundred people might be present. At Christmas 1946, 93 Inuit out of 106 were present. Those who were not there were absent because of deficient winter clothing (*Codex*, 24 / 12 / 1946). In 1949 the Christmas meal required 60 fish, 25 gallons of caribou meat and boiled rice, tea and five biscuits for each participant. Games such as *nugluktaq* (thrusting a stick through a small hoop) and archery were practised. Meals, competitions and prizes all added to the festive mood. In many respects Christmas seems to have replaced the traditional Inuit winter feasts, of which drum dances were an essential element<sup>22</sup> (see Dorais 2000).

The celebrations of Easter were less well attended. Each year the *Codex* notes that Easter was celebrated, but in contrast to Christmas it is rarely specified how many people were present. Usually this holiday was also celebrated with competitive games and a meal.

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<sup>21</sup> This style was copied from the HBC traders in Igluligaarjuk (Chesterfield Inlet) and spread to all Catholic missions of Hudson Bay (Van de Velde 1982a).

<sup>22</sup> In the *Codex*, we found two entries where drum dances are mentioned as part of the Christmas celebrations, *i.e.* on December 26, 1930 and on December 25, 1940.

We do not find many references to other feasts. All Saints did not appear to be an important holiday. November 1, 1950, the *Codex* states: "Poor Sunday of All Saints. It is as if it were an ordinary day." For Epiphany it seems to have been the same: January 6, 1941, "Epiphany. Seven people present at Holy Mass." Efforts by the missionaries to turn Assumption (August 15) and Immaculate Conception (December 8) into feast days do not seem to have been particularly successful<sup>23</sup>.

Like anywhere else in the Catholic world, Inuit were expected not to work on Sunday<sup>24</sup>. However, hunting often occurred: *e.g.*, June 2, 1935, "Sunday. After the mass Paul and Charley left for seals [...]" and later on the day Paul returned with a seal. The *Codex* refers to two instances when Inuit were given permission to go hunting or fishing or visit their caches to collect food<sup>25</sup>. That not all Inuit kept their Sunday obligations is also clear from the *Codex*. On Sunday November 12, 1950, Father Van de Velde saw a dog sled pass by the mission in the far distance and he noted in the *Codex*: "Embarrassed [...] because it is Sunday?" In practice, the Roman Catholics were less strict with respect to hunting and travelling on Sundays than the Anglicans. Thus Father Henry arrived at the mission on Sunday, November 25, 1939. Apparently there was no problem in the missionary travelling on a Sunday.

## Sacraments

Baptism had a central place in the program of the Oblates in the Hudson Bay vicariate founded by Father Arsène Turquetil. When ordained bishop, he chose as adage *Ut Convertantur* (That they may be converted). This focus on conversion was expressed in the resolutions of the Chesterfield Inlet synod of 1937 that set the rules for the apostolic work in the vicariate<sup>26</sup>. Of the 216 resolutions that were adopted, 119 referred to the conversion process and the sacrament expressing it: baptism (see Turquetil 1937). Through baptism, if performed correctly, a person was saved. He or she became a new being, and this was expressed in the adoption of a new name. The name already had a central place in pre-Christian Inuit cosmology as it was assumed that a deceased namesake lived on in persons named after him or her. A person could be named after more than one namesake. The Inuit continued this practice and retained their Inuit names beside their Christian names, combining shared identities with their

<sup>23</sup> 15 Août 1940: Le 15 août. Belle fête. Seul à la célébrer; 15 août 1944: Assomption. Nous donnons de quoi festoyer aux esquimaux: le reste de notre caribou et un peu de riz; 15 août 1950: Assomption. Grd. Messe, déjeuner au caribou, biscuits, thé. 21 personnes présentes. 8 Décembre 1941: Cesse de dire le bréviaire que je remplace par le rosaire selon les instructions de Mgr. Turquetil. Fête de L'Immaculée Conception. 14 communions et belle cérémonie le soir. J'offre le thé en l'honneur de l'Immaculée Conception.

<sup>24</sup> The Inuktitut name for Sunday is: *sanattaili*, *i.e.* day on which manual work is forbidden (see Schneider 1985: 339).

<sup>25</sup> See *Codex*, 27 / 9 / 1941 and 27 / 6 / 1948. Father Van de Velde told the first author that the Pelly Bay mission approached the obligatory Sunday rest with some leniency. If, for instance, people could not have gone hunting or fishing for a few days because of bad weather conditions, they were usually given the permission to go out after having attended Sunday mass (Van de Velde 1982c).

<sup>26</sup> The first lines of resolution 1 read: "La fin propre et spéciale de chaque mission et de chaque poste de mission est de convertir les païens. Les Missionnaires Oblats de la Baie d'Hudson n'oublieront jamais que la conversion des païens est oeuvre de longue haleine, de toute une vie parfois, même lorsqu'il ne s'agit que de convertir une poignée d'Esquimaux qui dépendent du poste qui leur est confié" (Turquetil 1937: 14).

deceased namesakes with the new Christian identity. The adoption of a new name was traditionally a cure for disease, and baptism may have been viewed from the same angle. The missionaries may have shared that view. On March 17, 1936, the *Codex* states: "Baptism of the daughter of Kongayayak who is in mortal danger. After a crisis she had lost consciousness. After baptism, she returned to life."

Religious instruction in the preparation of baptism varied in length. In the *Codex* of Pelly Bay we find examples of instruction of adults ranging from one<sup>27</sup> or several days<sup>28</sup> to several weeks<sup>29</sup>. According to Catholic usage new-born children were preferably baptized immediately after birth. Fathers Henry and Van de Velde took great pains to baptize infants once they learned about their birth. Concern about the possibility that infants might be killed, made them act quickly (Van de Velde 1982c)<sup>30</sup>. A child whose life was in danger could be baptized without instruction. It had to be baptized, even if the parents were opposed to this<sup>31</sup>.

According to Catholic belief, baptized children who died became little angels watching and protecting people. We find at least five references in the *Codex*<sup>32</sup> where this idea is expressed. It may have been picked up easily by the Inuit who strongly believed in the efficacy of protective and helping spirits.

To assure that new-born children could become little guardian angels, the missionaries taught Inuit how to baptize. Sometimes an invalid baptism occurred, as in

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<sup>27</sup> See e.g., the *Codex* entry of January 31, 1938: "N.B. Le 14 ou 15 janvier le Père Massé vint me rendre visite à Ivitarortokmi et me confesse avant mon départ pour Pelly Bay. Pendant son séjour nous instruisîmes rapidement la famille Akkiutark, arrivée récemment de Uyaratar. Leur instruction fut couronnée par leur baptême: Odilon et Sophie."

<sup>28</sup> See the *Codex*, entries of March 29 to April 1, 1940: 29 Mars, "Arrivons chez les esquimaux. On organise instructions sur instructions;" 30 Mars: "Des instructions catéchétiques. Plusieurs séances [...]"; 31 Mars: "Les instructions continuent toute cette journée. Les esquimaux sont entièrement libres ces jours-ci." For April 1st the *Codex* mentions the baptism of six adults ranging in age from 18 to 55 years.

<sup>29</sup> On October 24, 1936, Father Henry started the instructions for baptism of six adults in a fishing camp in the south of Pelly Bay (see *Codex*, 25 / 10 / 1936). Instructions lasted till November 10, when fishing through the ice came to an end and the Inuit moved to their sealing camps on the sea ice. The catechumens were eventually baptized at Christmas in Pelly Bay: "Décembre 25: Noël = 60 présences. À 8 hr commence la veillée. Toutes les heures quelques cantiques, exhortations en rapport à la fête. Jeux divers. À 23 hr passons "Veni Creator" et à minuit baptême de 6 adultes instruits à l'automne sur la rivière (cf plus haut)."

<sup>30</sup> It has been suggested that female infanticide quickly disappeared under the influence of the Pelly Bay mission (Balikci 1978: 113). However, Father Van de Velde expressed doubts in this respect. In a conversation with the first author in the summer of 2001, he referred to a possible case of infanticide that occurred in the spring of 1949. His subtle inquiries into the death of a female infant were made impossible by the child's father who prevented the missionary from speaking privately to the child's grandmother who had assisted at the delivery of the child. The child had lived about a week but had not received a name. The incident occurred in an extended family that was known to have practised infanticide earlier.

<sup>31</sup> In such cases resolution 86 adopted at the Chesterfield synod applied. This resolution said: "Le principe général qui gouverne ces cas, est que l'ignorance ou la malice des parents doit céder le pas à la volonté du Bon Dieu qui veut sauver l'enfant. Non seulement on peut, mais on doit baptiser cet enfant" (Turquetil 1937: 47). In volume 1 of the *Codex*, of Pelly Bay we find one entry by Father Henry that refers to such a case: "À Thom Bay j'ai baptisé une petite fille à Tullurealik âgée d'environ 16 mois, malade sans espoir de guérison. Pour ne pas éveiller l'attention je n'ai fait que l'essentiel 'Ego te baptismo in N.P.F.S.Sti, Amen!'" (*Codex*, 2 / 6 / 1948).

<sup>32</sup> See *Codex*, 10 / 2 / 1942, 11 / 12 / 1946, 25 / 2 / 1947, 1 / 7 / 1948, 9 / 12 / 1949.

the case of Kajaittuq who poured water over a new-born child while singing the hymn *Qaigit Anirmiq Ptujjuq* (Come Holy Spirit) (*Codex*, 10 / 2 / 1946). In another case it is stated:

The wife of Paul has delivered a premature boy of seven months, alive, at nine in the evening. Paul has baptized him. The child died this morning at ten. Was the baptism performed well? He has said: 'Kobverivagit Ernernerub Anernealub atingni.' It is a pity (*Codex*, 10 / 11 / 1949).

The fact that Paul baptized the child in the name of the son and the Holy Spirit, but not of the Father, is decisive: the child is lost.

On other occasions baptism was correctly administered, as was the case when Denis Manusiniq baptized his new-born child. The day prior to the birth of his son he had been at the Kuugaarjuk mission where Father Van de Velde had asked him to baptize his hand, which he had done correctly (*Codex*, 5 / 11 / 1950).

This strict adherence to the ritual formulas by the missionaries probably appealed to the Inuit who were well aware of the power of magic words or *irinaliutiit*. Both missionaries and Inuit shared a strong belief in the miraculous power of prayer. The *Codex* gives a good example of this in the entry of May 20, 1936 where Father Henry wrote: "After Mass a little sermon on [...] the power of prayer." In a number of other entries this power is emphasized as a means to heal<sup>33</sup>. Inuit used prayer in much the same way, as can be inferred from the following entry in the *Codex*:

Little Jacques was born in the autumn on the river. Konwaksiut almost lost her life in bringing him into the world. Only the incessant prayers of the Inuit miraculously saved her (*Codex*, 18 / 1 / 1938).

And on April 22, 1948 Father Henry noted with respect to Thom Bay that the Inuit there used prayer only to the extent that it could serve some practical purpose.

Individual confession, another important aspect of the Catholic dogma, did not present a major problem for Inuit in the transition to Christianity. Father Van de Velde argued that Inuit were accustomed to making public confessions during shamanic séances. These confessions were made because *angakkut* were considered to be able to find out whether a confession was sincere or not:

During the general sorcery séances, the sorcerer usually demanded a general confession from all those present. The Eskimos accused themselves of their most hidden failures and omissions as well as of the most intimate faults of which they were guilty. These self-accusations were public, made in the presence of the entire community, young and old alike. They were convinced that the sorcerer was capable of discerning whether or not the confession was correct, whether it was complete or incomplete. No one dared evade a sincere confession (Van de Velde 1956: 8).

Rachel Uyarasuk from Iglulik noted that as a child she believed that missionaries were able to see the transgressions (Oosten and Laugrand, eds 1999: 137). The *Codex*

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<sup>33</sup> See e.g., *Codex*, 4 / 6 / 1935 and 30 / 10 / 1936 where prayer is portrayed as a means to heal illness.

may have referred to similar beliefs in Thom Bay in the entry of April 22, 1948: "Many prejudices with respect to priests, confessions, etc. Superstition."

Confession in the Catholic church is not a public affair. The confessor will not reveal to outsiders what has been confessed. This confidential nature of the confession must have implied a great change in religious life. On one side shamanism became a tradition that was practised in secrecy, on the other side the practice of confession itself became a confidential matter and nothing was revealed to the public. The old traditions of sharing knowledge were changed.

Van de Velde argued that the Inuit accepted the sacrament of penance with ease, not only because they were accustomed to making confessions, but also because under Catholicism the element of fear, intrinsic to the shamanic confession, was absent:

Now that he knows that the priest is unaware as to whether or not his confession is good or bad, he may make an incomplete confession, because he is no longer incited to confess through fear and because he does not clearly understand the consequences of an incomplete confession (Van de Velde 1956: 8).

Confessions were an important part of the religious practices of converted Inuit. They were supposed to confess on a weekly basis, which under nomadic conditions was difficult to put into practice. As a rule confessions were held when Inuit visited the Kuugaarjuk mission to attend Sunday mass, or when the missionaries visited them in their camps to celebrate mass. The missionaries refer to the confessions summarily in the *Codex*, e.g. June 5, 1938: "Sunday in Iglurjarjuk. Almost 20 confessions and communions." But the practice does not figure largely in the *Codex*.

In contrast to confession, communion was a public affair. It is general practice in the Catholic church that young children receive their first communion when they reach the age of reason (*i.e.* when they are about seven years of age) and after having been properly instructed. Pelly Bay was no exception. In the *Codex* we find seven entries referring to first communion and in all cases it concerned the first communion of young children<sup>34</sup>. In accordance with the prescription of the vicariate, adults received their first communion at the time of their baptism<sup>35</sup>.

Those baptized were expected to attend Holy Mass as often as they could, but at any rate on Sundays, *i.e.* if they were within reach of the Kuugaarjuk mission. The *Codex* frequently indicates the number of people present at the celebration of the Mass.

As a rule a bishop administered confirmation<sup>36</sup>. In the case of Pelly Bay, problems of communication with the outside world sometimes called for another solution. Thus,

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<sup>34</sup> See *Codex*, 4 / 1 / 37, 12 / 8 / 45, 9 / 9 / 45, 8 / 12 / 45, 23 / 3 / 46, 18 / 8 / 46 and 12 / 7 / 47.

<sup>35</sup> See resolution 104 of the Chesterfield synod which reads: "Le nouveau baptisé, à moins de raisons graves et urgentes, doit assister à la Messe et recevoir la Ste Communion immédiatement après le baptême" (Turquetil 1937: 54).

<sup>36</sup> According to resolution 181 of the Chesterfield synod, the administration of confirmation by priests was allowed under special circumstances: "Les directeurs de mission, et à leur défaut, leur socius ont la permission d'administrer le sacrement de confirmation, au cas où soit l'adulte, soit l'enfant seraient exposés à mourir avant l'arrivée de l'évêque (see Turquetil 1937: 72 ).



in 1937, Mgr. Turquetil sent Father Clabaut by dog sled to Pelly Bay to confirm 42 Christians. On later occasions, in March 1944, in April 1949 and in May 1950, Bishop Turquetil's successor, Mgr. Lacroix, came by plane to Pelly Bay to administer confirmation. The *Codex* mentions only one case in which the missionary confirmed a dying child. This case may have contributed to the perception that confirmation was a *tuqunaqsiuti*, a "means that makes one die." Remie (1983: 65) refers to two other cases in which confirmation was seen this way. Van de Velde (1982c) confirmed that this Inuit view of the sacrament existed<sup>37</sup>.

We find a few references to extreme unction (*e.g.*, *Codex*, June 1949). Application of the rite was often problematic as many deaths occurred outside the community. In case people died in the vicinity of the mission, they were buried at the nearby cemetery. This gave sometimes rise to avoidance behaviour since Inuit believed that the spirits of the dead would stay around and could cause harm and spread sickness. The frequent occurrence of small or greater epidemics at the mission post was attributed to the spirits of the dead (Remie 1983: 68). The *Codex* mentions only one case of such avoidance behaviour, but it may have occurred more frequently:

Departure of Atark to Sinik. They do not want to stay here because aniarnarluartok<sup>38</sup>. It isn't the first time that I hear this consideration. What's going on, now? Assistance at Mass has been very poor notwithstanding several private and public exhortations [...] (*Codex*, 9 / 8 / 1949).

The missionaries had strict orders not to interfere with marriage arrangements, which were considered to be Inuit business only<sup>39</sup>. When interviewed by the first author, Father Van de Velde repeated this principle and added that there were good reasons for acting so:

If one would bring together two people and marry them, and the marriage didn't work, one would be held responsible. In addition, if the marriage was celebrated in the Catholic church, it could not be broken up anymore. So as a rule, as a principle, we administered the sacrament of marriage if we were asked to do so and if there were no legal objections from the point of view of church law (Van de Velde 1982c).

According to Catholic church law, a girl had to be at least 14 years of age in order to marry. Under Canadian civil law the age was 15 years. As the mission was the only Qallunaaq authority present in the 1930s and 1940s, the Pelly Bay missionaries applied the rule of the Catholic church and married youngsters that were at least 14 years of age (Van de Velde 1982b). According to church and civil law, cross-cousin marriages were also forbidden. Yet, the missionaries married first cousins with dispensation of their bishop (*ibid.*).

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<sup>37</sup> This Inuit view constitutes a remarkable contrast with Philippe's (1946a: 2) characterization of confirmation as a sacrament "which makes strong."

<sup>38</sup> This word means: "it makes one sick too much."

<sup>39</sup> See resolution 183 of the Chesterfield synod which states: "Les missionnaires ne doivent s'occuper que de l'observance des lois de l'église en ce qui regarde les mariages. Dès lors que des contrats sont conformes au droit ecclésiastique, personne ne doit se compromettre en faisant des commentaires pour ou contre. Encore moins pourrait-on se mêler de conseiller telle ou telle alliance. Ce point est très important" (Turquetil 1937: 72).

Mixed marriages were frowned upon. In 1947, on the way back from King William, where he had baptized a child of the HBC store clerk George Porter, Father Van de Velde visited Inuit camping out on the ice of English Bay. Here, an attempt to solemnize a religiously mixed marriage failed because of the unwillingness of the Anglican bridegroom to accept the conditions of the Catholic Church for such marriages (*Codex*, 4 / 4 / 1947). More than two years later (*Codex*, 28 / 11 / 1949) the marriage was celebrated.

## Control of moral attitudes and conduct

As religious leaders, missionaries had to see to it that their parishioners persevered in their conviction and observed the moral standards set by the Catholic faith. The Chesterfield synod was quite specific in this respect. Resolutions 8, 9, and 10 (Turquetil 1937: 22-23) stipulated that missionaries should set an example through the exercise of piety, through charity, and through leading a morally impeccable life. The missionary strategy was to never ridicule native customs. Instead, missionaries should try to point out to Inuit in a benign and kind-hearted way what their shortcomings were and how these could be mended. "In case of effrontery, impudence, immorality inspired by malice, or in case of disobedience by a Christian, one should reprimand the culprit decidedly, but one should do it in such a way that all would understand that the reprimand was not given out of personal vengeance, but uniquely because the sinner hurts the good God and thereby attracts the punishment of the culprit" (Turquetil 1937: 22-23).

The purpose of control of moral attitudes and conduct through encouragement, private and public exhortation, or through benign or less mild reprimands, was to keep the flock religiously on track and prevent them from abandoning the church. But such control, and in particular reprimand, was not always appreciated by the Inuit, as is clear in the case of Iksivalitaq, the son of the famous shaman Alakkannuaq. Iksivalitaq, a shaman who wore the *kigluraq*, a little tattoo between the eye brows that signified that he had slain a *tupilaq* (evil spirit), constantly challenged the religious authority of Father Henry. Finally, he renounced the Catholic faith by saying that he didn't want to be reprimanded by Father Henry (called Kajualuk by the Inuit) and Father Papion: "Suqutigijumangiliqtaakka Kajualublu ataataublu Papion" (Van de Velde 1981: 241; 1982c).

To prevent catechumens and converts from becoming heretics they had to be protected from the Anglican influence. Therefore, followers of the Anglican ministers wishing to become Catholics had to hand in their red prayer books. The *Codex* refers to one case where this happened (see *Codex*, 8 / 5 / 1949). The Chesterfield synod stipulated that in such cases the red prayer books should be burnt or kept by the missionary<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> In resolution 142 it said: "Il faut les brûler. Si on garde ces livres pour usage personnel, en vue de mieux les étudier pour mieux les réfuter, ne pas les montrer, ni les laisser à la vue des chrétiens" (Turquetil 1937: 61).

Even though missionaries did not interfere in the marriage arrangements themselves, they did look after the moral conduct of young people who were engaged. The *Codex* presents at least two cases. The first concerns the premarital cohabitation of a couple of which the girl is only 12 or 13 years of age<sup>41</sup>. The second case concerns a young man who secretly took off with his baptized fiancée before marriage<sup>42</sup>. According to Father Van de Velde the young man knew that Father Henry would not approve. As he knew that he was acting against church regulations, he even refrained from informing his mother and older brother that he was leaving Kuugaarjuk (Van de Velde 1982b).

Missionary attempts to control the moral attitudes and conduct of their parishioners did not mean that the Inuit easily gave up their customs and beliefs. Although we find very few references to religious continuity in the first volume of the *Codex*, we do learn that some Inuit still practiced *sakkajuq*<sup>43</sup> and *tuurngijuq*<sup>44</sup>, used amulets<sup>45</sup>, believed in evil spirits as the cause of illness<sup>46</sup>, and avoided the mission because of that<sup>47</sup>. Testimonies by elders such as Aupilaarjuk from Rankin Inlet, and Victor Tungilik from Naujaat, both of Nattilik origin, reflect Inuit perspectives on the religious changes that occurred. Aupilaarjuk remembers the void created by the rejection of traditional beliefs and customs by the missionaries:

I grew up following Inuit *uppirjangit*, beliefs. That's how I know about them. I don't remember the year I was baptized. It wasn't that long ago that I was baptized and my *uppirjangit* and *maligait* changed. I stopped thinking about them anymore. The Catholic priest said that our Inuit ways were evil, and only the ways of God, Jesus and Mary were good. If he had told us that we had to follow the *maligait* of Jesus, then I would have understood. We were only told to abandon our Inuit *maligait*, but they did not give us anything to replace them. For example, I would no longer *anijaaq*, go out early in the morning. I felt like I was in a void. I no longer wanted to follow what my parents had taught me. If I did something wrong or something shameful, I did not need to tell anyone about it. I did whatever I wanted. I did not tell anyone if I did something wrong. Before that, we had *angakkuut* who could see if we had done something wrong. Even if we didn't want to talk about it, it was impossible to keep a wrong-doing hidden. We had to confess it. If I only confessed part of it he would know there was still some left, and I had to tell everything until there was nothing left. This would not be brought up again. This is how we were. That is how an *angakkuq* would *iqqaqtui*<sup>48</sup>, question you. Now we keep things hidden. Only God knows. These things will all come out on Judgment Day (Oosten *et al.*, eds 1999: 22-23).

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41 Avons agité la question du mariage de Timotée et Lucie, fille de Niptayok. Les 2 conjoints habitent ensemble à notre insu; et cela semble mal puisque Lucie a tout juste 12 à 13 ans. Niptayok est résolu de faire ce que les prêtres commanderont. Nous attendons No 1 pour solutionner définitivement la question (*Codex*, 12 / 15 / 1940).

42 Cf. *Codex*, 11 / 11 / 1941: "Bernard est parti ce matin avec la fille d'Ullik, Agnes (ceci à l'insu de la mission)."

43 *Sakkajuq* means: "performs witchcraft over a sick person" (see Schneider 1970: 308).

44 *Tuurngijuq* means: "invokes the (protective) spirits" (see Schneider 1970: 370).

45 See *Codex*, 8 / 11 / 1950.

46 See *Codex*, 19 / 1 / 1940.

47 See *Codex*, 9 / 8 / 1949.

48 In the past, when dealing with a wrong doing, during the first encounter a person would be *uqalaujau*, told he / she was loved and cared for, by the elders. During the second encounter the person was *iqqaqtuijau-*, reminded by the elders in a more harsh manner, and warned of the consequences of the wrongdoings.

The conversion to Christianity often implied a deprivation of cultural traditions that is still resented by elders. Aupilaarjuk observed:

I had a lot of *aarnguat*. They were taken away by the Catholic missionaries when we were baptized. Now we see a lot of Qallunaat in important positions wearing necklaces. The Qallunaat took them away because they thought they were evil, but they were not evil. Through the help of the *aarnguat* and through the protection provided by my mother, I have been able to live a long life (*ibid.*: 29).

Conflicts between Inuit traditions and the new religions were hard to solve for individual Inuit. Victor Tungilik from Naujaat practised several years as a shaman. In his youth his parents instructed him not to become an *angakkuq*:

When my parents started following the Anglican faith, they told me that I was going to be following the Catholic religion. I was told that when they accepted religion. They told me to let go of the ways of the *angakkuq*, because the ways of the *angakkuq* were not compatible with religion. I was often told to be good to people so people in turn would be good to me. If I was not good to other people, they, in turn, would not be good to me. If there were any of my neighbours who were lacking something, I was to give them whatever I had, no matter how small. If I gave to those in need, then I would gain in return a reward much larger. It turns out that these teachings were from the Bible. I was told that there would be gratitude shown to me. Whenever I was in need, I in return would be helped. There would never be a time that I would be without meat or other things. Those are words that my parents taught me (Oosten and Laugrand, eds 1999: 63).

During his youth Tungilik heard a sermon about Judgment Day in Igluligaarjuk that deeply impressed him:

We went there and there was a mass and the priest was giving a sermon during Mass [...]. He said there would be noise like thunder on the land and the sea, and the end of the world would come. The earth would shatter and everybody would die. This was the sermon the priest was giving. I thought maybe it would happen tonight. And if not that night, it would be the next. I was very scared that night because I was thinking about that. It was only a few years ago, that I read in the Bible that it wasn't going to happen right away. It was through my ignorance that I made myself scared (*ibid.*: 73).

This recollection influenced his decision to let go of shamanism:

If I continued to be an *angakkuq*, I would end up in hell in the great fire. Because I didn't want this to happen I let my *tuurngait* go [...]. I was not told by a minister or a priest. It was through my own mind, through my thoughts. It was my thinking, not because someone told me. It was because I didn't want to go to the great fire. I'd heard of the great fire where Satan resides, and I had read the scriptures. I knew that all those who had clung to wrong-doings would reside there as well, and there would be people thrown into this fire. That's why I let go of my *tuurngait*. When my two in-laws died I regretted having let my *tuurngait* go. Although I knew that I might not have been able to heal them, I still thought that maybe I should have hung on to my *tuurngait* a little longer and not sent them away right away. Part of me knew it was their time to die, and therefore they died. Although I knew that I, myself, did not have the power, I still regretted letting my *tuurngait* go for if I had kept them, maybe, one of my in-laws might still be around for me to see (*ibid.*: 111).

Such testimonies are not preserved in the *Codex Historicus*. However, a striking example of cultural continuity, related in the *Codex* entry of September 8-14, 1944, is the death of old Alakkannuaq, a famous shaman<sup>49</sup>. Alakkannuaq was baptized on February 2, 1937 and learned syllabics in order to read the Catholic prayer books. Yet, he committed suicide with the help of two of his sons in accordance with traditional Inuit customs and beliefs. Father Henry wrote a brief account, which we have translated from the French original:

In the month of June 1944 on the west coast of Committee Bay at a place called K'ikeltanayok, Ovide Allakatnuar, aged 70, suffered a stroke, thus losing the power of speech and part of the use of his limbs. However, his mental capacities stayed intact. At the time Allakatnuar lived in a tent with his wife Nuyakittok and their adopted son Sebastien Aaluk, and his neighbours were the sons of Allakatnuar Niptayok and Kayaitok and their families. Because the camp had to break up and move inland for the caribou hunt, and because the old Allakatnuar had become invalid and an obstacle to break up, Niptayok and Kayaitok decided to make an end to the life of their father, believing that by doing so they would respond to the wishes of their old father. The two sons, aged 50 and 40, prepared a gallows equipped with a rope with a noose outside the tent. Then they brought the sick man there. In a sitting position, he put his head through the noose and let himself fall to strangle himself. The same day, Ovide Allakatnuar was buried at the same place, at K'ikeltanayok.

Public opinion doesn't seem to condemn the co-operation of Niptayok and Kayaitok in the suicide of their father. According to the declarations of Nuyakittok and Aaluk, it was Kayaitok who would have wanted to put an end to the life of his father who had become an impediment, whereas according to the declarations of Niptayok and his brother Kayaitok, they had only helped their father to commit suicide because the latter wished to commit that crime. According to the Eskimo mentality resisting the last wishes of one's parents would call down misfortune over oneself (Archives 4).

When Father Henry learned about Alakkannuaq's death, he exclaimed somewhat desperately: "But what kind of Christians are we raising?" His socius, Father Van de Velde, answered him that he should realize that Alakkannuaq had lived ninety per cent of his life the pagan way and that one could not expect that all of that was simply phased out by baptism (Van de Velde 1982c). In a conversation with the first author in the summer of 2001, the socius of Father Henry went yet a step further when he emphasized that from an Inuit point of view, Alakkannuaq had sacrificed himself. He wanted to end his days so that the younger generation could move inland to hunt caribou and survive. "His deed was in fact an altruistic one. Therefore, we should not judge too harshly." And pointing his finger to heaven, he added: "You will be surprised whom you will see up there!"

## Conclusions

Operating from Chesterfield Inlet where they had established a mission post in 1912, the Oblate fathers attempted to secure the Central Arctic for the Catholic Church and to block the westward expansion of Anglicanism that had its stronghold on Baffin Island in the Eastern Arctic. Missionaries and others perceived the area as a pagan

<sup>49</sup> The entry reads: "Apprenons la mort de Allakatnuar et d'une petite fille à Angutingornerk. Cette petite fille est née avant temps. Ovide Allakatnuar lui est mort aux environs du printemps."

*terra nullius* that had to be quickly conquered. In doing so they appear to have been much more concerned with the containment of the westward expansion of Anglicanism than with the survival of paganism. Whereas preventing the former was seen as an urgent necessity, the replacement of the latter by Catholicism was perceived as a long-term process.

The way the transition to Christianity in Pelly Bay has usually been described fails to appreciate the role of Inuit in this process. A number of Nattilingmiut had already been baptized before the opening of the mission post at Pelly Bay in 1935. These converted Inuit asked for a missionary to come and live with them. The request fitted well into the Hudson Bay vicariate's policies and was granted. The Oblates were not aware that the vast majority of early converts belonged to one of the two major factions of the Pelly Bay community, the Kukigarmiut. The latter apparently had their own agenda and tried to use the missionary's presence to strengthen their own position. But the missionary took an independent stance, chose his own location for the mission post and thereby laid the foundation for what was to become the permanent settlement of Pelly Bay in the late 1960s.

Once the Pelly Bay mission was established, the Oblate missionaries quickly assumed tasks that transcended the boundaries of their religious occupations. In the economic field they incorporated Inuit in the mission post's logistics, introducing paid labour and initiating the production of carvings to be sold on foreign markets. The small mission store facilitated access to Qallunaaq products. When the Hudson's Bay Company, oriented towards the Anglican Church, attempted to acquire control over the trade in the Nattilik area, it found the missionaries on its way. They did all they could to protect their parishioners from what they perceived as unjust exploitation.

The missionaries also assumed responsibility for the treatment of the sick and the delivery of social welfare. In the absence of good and quick means of communication with the outside world, health care had to remain elementary. Outside assistance only arrived around 1950.

The missionaries gave the religious guidance the Inuit had requested. They served the religious community, expanded it in concerted effort, and wherever possible established religious routines. As in most Inuit communities, Christmas became the most important religious feast, in many respects replacing the old traditions of the Inuit winter feasts. In the delivery of sacraments, the Oblate fathers adhered to strict norms of ritual correctness, a regime that may well have appealed to the Inuit who were accustomed to the importance of strictly observing ritual rules.

Like shamans, missionaries assumed leadership roles in many fields. Yet, they were often not aware to what extent Inuit continued their traditional practices. Neither were they aware of the extent to which Inuit integrated these practices into Catholicism, thus developing a form of religiosity that responded to their own existential and cultural needs. The missionary perspectives still have to be complemented by the recollections of Inuit elders participating in the process of transition to Catholicism. Only the Pelly Bay elders can tell us why and how they decided to make the transition to Christianity.

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