Armand Tagoona and the Arctic Christian Fellowship: 
The first Inuit church in Canada

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Abstract

Armand Tagoona (1926–1991) was born in Naujaat (Repulse Bay, Northwest Territories) in 1926, from an Inuk mother and a German father. Born as a Roman Catholic, he converted to Anglicanism. In 1969, he founded a new independent religious group affiliated to the Anglican Church in Qamani’tuaq (Baker Lake, Northwest Territories): the Arctic Christian Fellowship (ACF). In this paper, we examine his life briefly as well as this very first “Inuit church” he created. We argue that Tagoona played the role of a mediator encompassing various religious traditions and various cultures at a time when solid boundaries separated all these institutions. In bridging them, Tagoona’s church turned to be very innovative and aimed at more religious autonomy, while being fundamentally guided by the words of God. Tagoona’s church carries conversionist, reformist and utopian aspects at the same time.

Introduction

In the 1920s, religious rivalries were strongly exacerbated in Naujaat (Repulse Bay, Northwest Territories) and Qamani’tuaq (Baker Lake, Northwest Territories), both communities of the Northwest Territories being located in the middle of a battleground. Anglicans had arrived through Baffin Island and from Arviat (Eskimo Point) and Salliq (Coral Harbour). For a few decades, they were the first and only ones to convert families, spreading their Bibles (Laugrand, 2002, p.200). But with the arrival of the Oblate missionaries in the region, their progress seemed to slow down. The Oblates first opened a permanent mission post in Igluligaarjuk (Chesterfield Inlet) in 1912, and then two additional mission posts in Qamani’tuaq (Baker Lake) in 1927 and in Mittimatik (Pond Inlet) in 1929. In fact, the opening of a mission in Qamani’tuaq was not part of the initial plan. Father Turquetil, after learning that the Anglicans were going to open a mission there, decided to pre-empt them.

When fathers Turquetil, Clabaut and Rio arrived in Qamani’tuaq, the local Anglican missionary, Reverend Smyth, was most upset and did his best to hire Inuit catechists to support him. He recruited Louis Tapatai as a lay minister in order to block the Catholics (Laugrand, 2002, p.238). He also forbade any Anglican Inuk to work with the Catholics. On their side, Catholic missionaries worked hard to convince the Inuit and didn’t hesitate to threaten a bit their flock to make sure that their converts would remain in the right path.

It is in this context that Armand Tagoona (1926–1991) arrived in the community.

Tagoona was born in Naujaat (Repulse Bay) in 1926 from a German father, Captain Cleveland, and an Inuk woman, Hanna (Choque, 2011, p.15). He was born and raised as a Roman Catholic. He acknowledged that he never considered his biological father, but rather considered himself to be related to Louis Tapatai, an Anglican lay minister and her mother’s boyfriend. During his childhood, Tagoona and his family moved from Naujaat to Igluligaarjuk and then to Qamani’tuaq. As a young man, at the age of 15, he worked for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Qamani’tuaq. His father was then a constable and Tagoona helped him, not only in cleaning things but also in travelling. With him, Tagoona travelled extensively by dog team to deliver the mail, going from Qamani’tuaq to Arviat and Igluligaarjuk. In 1944, his mother died and, shortly after, Tagoona lost his job in the police force. He then lived on his own by hunting, fishing and trapping, during “three years of good life and fun” (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.; 1984, p.29). From 1947, he worked for the Royal Canadian Air Force, and then for the Department of Transport Radiosonde Station. Busy with these jobs, he stopped having a dog team and going out hunting (Tagoona, 1984, p.30).
During this period, in spite of some misunderstanding with *Qallunaat* (plural of *qallunaaq*, meaning, “white people” in Inuktitut) – such as with the policeman who fired him because he did not want to tie up his house dog (Tagoona, 1984, p.32) –, Tagoona adopted and even incorporated the *Qallunaat* Christian spirituality. Here, he describes his life as being a religious one:

> As long as I can remember, it seems my whole life has been lived within the church, almost as if the Christians took over my life, just as some people are taken over by alcohol and drugs. Ever since I was able to think, I have never doubted the existence of God the Creator. (Tagoona, 1993, p.20) eyes. When I looked away they stayed in my mind for a long time after. In fact they are still in my mind after some 40 years. (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.)

Therefore, in 1958, at the age of 32, Armand Tagoona (Fig. 1) started his religious commitment as an Anglican within the Arctic region. Yet, as we will see, he will later strongly react against *Qallunaat* religious authority.

In this paper, we propose to trace and analyse the story of this Inuk who became an Anglican minister and an evangelist, while appreciating the Inuit values and traditions and developing as an Innummarik (“a real Inuk”) all-in-one man. Through his work, Tagoona acted as a mediator between Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches, and between Christian and Inuit traditions. This work was especially incarnated within the innovative church he built in Qamani’Itaaq, which can be considered as the first and only Inuit Christian church. To support this proposal, we will use a few interviews realised in 2004 and 2011 with people who knew him, including his wife Mary, as well as a few papers written and published by Tagoona and original archival material preserved at the General Synod Archives in Toronto.

### From Catholic education to Anglican priesthood

In his famous art book *Shadows*, illustrated by his own paintings (see also Tagoona, 1993, p.20), Tagoona uses pictures of heaven and hell to exemplify the fascination he has for religion during his early life, at the time he was involved in the Roman Catholic Church:

> There was also a Roman Catholic mission there [in Naujaat], surprisingly. I was a member of that church with its two big, strong black-robed and long black-bearded priests. In their house and in the church there were many things that captivated me, pictures and drawings of heavenly people. Or at least that is what I thought they were. There were also pictures of fire, in that place tuungraaaluk where the great evil one is king. He lived in the fire yet he did not burn or catch fire. But his poor people were suffering as they dropped down into the fire. These pictures became alive before my eyes. When I looked away they stayed in my mind for a long time after. In fact they are still in my mind after some 40 years. (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.)

The notion of hell was introduced by the Oblates missionaries, and particularly, through an image in a book entitled *Ayokertuerek* (see the image in Laugrand, 2002, p.170). In this book, the Oblates used the notion of *tuunngaq* (meaning “shamanic helping spirit”) to represent hell. By adding the suffix –*aaluq* (“very big”), they were expecting that the Inuit would fear it and the shamans would discard their spirits. Later, other words were introduced, such as *ikuma*, *ikumaaluq* or *ikumajjuaq* (“the big fire”), or *kappianaqturik* (“the place that one fears”), which contrast with the notion of *quvianaqtuurjuaq* or *quvianaqtuirkik* (“the place where one find joy”) used to speak of heaven. But with the notion of *tuunngait*, all the *tuunngait* belonging to the shamanic system were placed into the category of evil. For many Inuit including Tagoona, even the ones who became devoted Christians, such assimilation turned out to be excessive.

Nevertheless, at that time, these images of hell were clearly efficient. They definitely encouraged Tagoona to become a religious person. In addition, according to Choque (2011, p.15–16), Tagoona received a religious instruction through his parents. His mother was a Christian but with her own mind. When she died in 1944 while having a baby in the Chesterfield Inlet Roman Catholic Hospital, she refused to see the priest (Codex historicus de la mission de Chesterfield Inlet, May 4, 1946).

Already as an altar boy at the age of seven, Tagoona was sad and surprised to see that Anglicans and Catholics were fighting so violently. In a paper entitled “Churches” and published in *Inuktitut*, he relates a significant anecdote. Tagoona remembers when Mikiniqsaq (Reverend Jack H. Turner) and his assistant Noah Nasook once came in Naujaat from inland, and when he heard the Catholic missionaries stating that these visitors were “ministers of error” (*tammatsiqiijigguaaq*). Yet, when he met them, they looked quite cheerful and played concertina for him.

Several years later, when Tagoona and his family moved to Igluligaarjuk, he went to pray with the Anglicans. He did not know exactly why he did that but he remembers being very shy. He thought there were too many people in the Catholic Church. In an autobiographical account, Tagoona tells about his moves from one community to another and how he became a strong Anglican believer:

> When my mind opened to see and understand and decide things on my own, I became very religious. I was a member of the Roman Catholic Church in Repulse Bay. [...] Later my parents and I moved to Chesterfield Inlet, where I became Anglican, and after that we moved to Baker Lake. And I became a stronger Anglican believer than ever, still very religious. (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.)

The decision of Tagoona to convert to Anglicanism when he moved to Igluligaarjuk is rather unusual. In those days, Inuit were not very fond of going from one church to another. Once they were converted and involved in a church, they rather preferred to keep their religious affiliation, especially when their parents had already chosen a religious group. Conversions just followed the kinship lines and usually families would entirely convert to the same church (Laugrand, 2002, p.333). In the case of Tagoona, it is not clear why he decided to quit the Catholics. One possibility is that he got soon fed up with the teaching he received from the Oblate missionaries. Another possibility is his marriage. In 1945, Armand Tagoona indeed married an Anglican. His wife, Mary Tagoona whom we interviewed in Baker Lake, recalls: “Tagoona was first a Roman Catholic but only
when we married he became an Anglican. [...] I told Armand to believe well because the Anglican minister helped me a lot. Armand told me to pray. As I did not have a mother, I did what he said” (Interview of F. Laugrand and J. Oosten with Mary Tagoona (2004)).

After working for the weather station in Qamanit’uq in 1958, Tagoona moved with his family to Kangiqsitnuiq (Rankin Inlet) to be a missionary among the miners. Two years after, he was ordained to priesthood and sent to Arviat to do missionary work (Tagoona, 1975, n.p).

Tagoona then understood that the next step was to become a Bishop, but he didn’t want to reach this position. Reflecting on his career, he observes:

In 1959, I was ordained a deacon in the Anglican Church in Rankin Inlet. In 1960, I was ordained to the priesthood in Toronto. A Bishop next? I wondered about that. But I have made up my mind that I would refuse to become a bishop. To me a bishop should be an old man. (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.)

In 1960, Armand Tagoona was the only Inuk minister in the Arctic. In 1961, he joined Canon James, Thomas Tapatai and Reverend Marlow to participate to the Anglican Synod in Aklavik. The next figure (Fig. 2) shows Inuit delegates with the Reverend D. Ben Marsh at Forbisher Bay in 1964.

The debate between Armand Tagoona and Jean Ajaruaq

In the early 1960s, in the context of religious rivalries, the Oblates used their journal *Inungut Tamenut* to publish a dialogue between Armand Tagoona and Jean Ajaruaq, a faithful Catholic. Both men had a high reputation, Tagoona as the first Inuk Anglican minister and Ajaruaq as the very first Inuk who had visited the Pope. Thus, both men were respected leaders in their churches.

In the dialogue, although the men disagree with and challenge each other, they speak with great caution and mutual respect. In many ways, the dialogue follows Inuit rules of behaviour rather than qallunaat ones.

Instead of an absolute polarisation, without compromise, the two Inuit debating together are indeed very respectful. Neither one would make agreements and compromise impossible. In this way, the whole dialogue almost became a gentle dance where both parties made their points, but never too explicitly. They tried neither to alienate the opponent nor to prove their superiority. They showed their consideration for the other, treated as a partner who obviously does not yet understand things quite as he should.

The central issue of the dialogue between Ajaruaq and Tagoona is the story of the first Inuit converted in Igluilaarjuk. The story tells that they were converted after Brother Girard approached them from behind and furtively scattered some earth from the grave of Therese of Lisieux (Theresi) on their hair. For the Anglicans who object to the cults of the saints and the Virgin Mary, it was unacceptable that a saint could have played a part in the first conversions. Therefore, Tagoona starts the dialogue by arguing that people could only be saved by Jesus and not by a saint. He challenges Ajaruaq on the question of who really converted the Inuit, Theresi or Jesus. The two religious leaders clearly defend the position of their respective church:

Tagoona: They were baptized at Theresi’s (Tirisi) grave and with sand, and that was the time when Chesterfield Inlet people converted to Christianity and when they were fixed in religion. Do you think that it is through Jesus that this happened in Chesterfield Inlet? Ajaruaq: Yes, through Jesus.
Tagoona: But in the book I read, I did not see Jesus’ name in it, only Theresi’s name is given. Who said Theresi was a believer of Jesus? Ajaruaq: We have never heard about it and we will not find out because we cannot say.
Tagoona: We can see; if you have not heard about Theresi, you don’t know who she is.
Ajaruaq: All of us never heard about it, no wonder if we don’t know. What about our ancestors?
Tagoona: No wonder! Our ancestors were not Christians; Theresi was a white Grey Nun who had received some Holy Spirit.

Both men come to agree on the fact that they cannot know whether Theresi believed in Jesus or not. We understand that Ajaruaq does not wish to claim knowledge that does not come from his own experience. It is also obvious to both that their ancestors could not have any knowledge of this either. However, in the rest of the interview, it becomes quite clear that Ajaruaq thinks that Theresi did believe in Jesus. He agrees that people were saved by Jesus but that did not exclude a role of Theresi in the process of conversion; so he keeps the options open. He points out that there are more mediators between Jesus and human beings such as Matthew. There are more ways than one to come to Jesus. At this stage, he nevertheless avoids all polarisations. He leaves the initiative to Tagoona and he agrees that only Jesus can save people: “You said it right there is no other one than Jesus”.

Both men are clearly very knowledgeable about the Bible, regularly referring to verses, and they agree on Jesus as a central figure. Then, Tagoona and Ajaruaq discuss the fact that many Inuit still did not believe in Jesus or insulted him. The discussion focuses on Rankin Inlet, a community that was growing rapidly at the time of the dialogue:

Tagoona: How many are there in their igloo and outside; we all know we all make mistakes and do bad deeds? There are some people who do not want to believe and they only want to do bad things.
Ajaruaq: Thank you, we will never find out who are sinners because we are converting to believe in Jesus.
Tagoona: There are many people doing that in Rankin Inlet. We can see many people are not saved.
Ajaruaq: Yes, there are many people; even if we find out how many people there are. Maybe talk to one person at a time and tell them how many peo-ple converted ... if we work hard in our lives, using the words of Jesus, and use it properly we will be blessed after we are gone in this world. Tagoona: Rankin Inlet can grow, but only if the people can believe, and at the same time they don’t want to
believe and this is where the problem comes from for the Inuit. Many people in Rankin Inlet are against each other even if they are related, this is from converting to Jesus.

Ajaruaq: Who are the other people making Inuit hate each other in Rankin Inlet?
Tagoona: It is not about Jesus that people are against each other. Jesus does not want that.
Ajaruaq: Thank you for saying that.

Thus, they agree on the fact that Jesus could not be blamed for the strife and troubles in Rankin Inlet. Both agree on the necessity to pursue the evangelisation, and stop the Inuit to do bad things as if they would threaten the whole community. Tagoona continues: “Jesus want us to love one another.” Ajaruaq agrees but points out that Inuit then have to follow the Catholic priests: “if we don’t follow them, we will never be blessed; and they are the only ones who can help us if we listen to them and follow them with our body, soul and mind and do it very hard, if we follow them we will have a better life.”

Both Tagoona and Ajaruaq raise the question of the bad behaviour of some people. They blame pride as one of the causes of strife. People should relinquish pride and instead focus on the love of Jesus. People should also avoid gossiping.

After, both focus again of the central role of Jesus. Here they can be in agreement:

Ajaruaq: Yes, you said it right. Jesus is the only one to understand. Jesus is the one who blesses us, teaches people, and we believed in him. He died for us and he gave his blood for us to believe through his death. [...] He died for the people in the past too, and he said that he would arise after three days and he did that, and we who believe in him, believe it.
Tagoona: Yes, all of us in Rankin Inlet should believe in him to begin a new life through Jesus.
Ajaruaq: Yes it is the only way through Jesus to live a new life and a better life, you are right about this.

However, there is still dissidence on how someone can be saved. Tagoona then argues that people cannot be saved simply through baptism or by observing Sundays or going to church; people can only be saved by Jesus. Ajaruaq responds that baptism, going to church and especially praying and asking for forgiveness help the body and soul. And Tagoona returns to his central point: only belief in Jesus can save.

Thus the debate ends with a strong emphasis on personal experience, the real source of knowledge in Inuit tradition. Why discussing whether Mary can intervene on Jesus’s behalf or not if you have the experience that your life has been saved by her? At the end, both men stood their ground. In this debate, they were given space to develop their points of view and they could easily find points of agreement. The dialogue developed in a way to give space. Both men have shown their mettle and could leave the arena with honour.

This dialogue between Ajaruaq and Tagoona is unique and exceptional. It allows us to see how the churches continued their fight through native leaders. It also shows how well Christianity was established in the early 1960s, a period when new churches began to appear (please refer to Laugrand and Oosten (2018) for a substantial extract of this debate).

A call to return to Qamani’tuaq and a detachment from the Anglican Church

In 1969, after ten years of missionary work and priesthood in different communities, Tagoona decided to return to Baker Lake, his hometown. According to his wife, God told him to move back, and Tagoona requested and obtained permission to move from the Bishop:

His mind was working hard and one day, he said to me: “We have to leave this place to Baker Lake”. He couldn’t sleep because he had this call to come here in Baker Lake. He said: “We have to leave Arviat”. The Bishop was ok. I was unhappy because I did not want to come to Baker Lake. The Bishop finally said: ‘If this is out from a prayer, I will not stop you’. Soin 1969, we came to Baker Lake. [...] Then Armand built the church (Interview of F. Laugrand and J. Oosten with Mary Tagoona. 2004)

When he decided to move back to Qamani’tuaq, Tagoona has a significant project in mind and started to put things in place to make it a reality. From Arviat, he contacted a friend living in Qamani’tuaq in order to find a building that will host his new congregation. Norman Attungalaaq, who later became board member of Tagoona’s church, recalls this period:

He started phoning me and talking to me, and writing letters. We were talking back and forth. Armand asked me if there were any building that he could use for church services. If there were any building around Baker Lake that was available. And back then, my job had a building as an office, and it was probably a kind of freezer storage area for the government. [...] And that building was no longer be used anyway. So I asked if they could take that for church services (Interview of P. Laneuville with Norman Attungalaaq, 2011).

After moving back to Qamani’tuaq, Tagoona decided to resign from Anglican priesthood. However, he pursued his missionary work through his new church. He felt much support coming from the community:

In 1969, we moved back to our old home in Baker Lake. Home sweet home? Many things had been changed, many ways of doing things. The Bishop did not send me back; we just moved on our own. In 1971, I resigned the Anglican priesthood, but I am still a missionary. Our support comes from individuals, Eskimos and Whites, for our work here in Baker Lake, and not from the church. We are Christians, we believe the Bible and try our best to live and work by it. (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.)
Although many people from the community were very supportive of Tagoona’s work, others were against the idea of building a new church because they did not want – or they feared – to oppose the Anglican Church, which they felt very strict and severe. According to Attungalaaq and Tagoona’s wife, oppositions and questions that rose were funded on misunderstanding of Tagoona’s intention. In fact, Tagoona never wanted to antagonise the Anglican Church. He explains:

[Tagoona] did receive a lot of support but there were also many people who were against it. [...] Back then, when you go to church and read the Bible, your knowledge increase, you start growing. At that time, there were many people who thought that when Armand would start his church, there would be a lot of opposition from the Anglican Church. People would be against it. And all this time, you would have the Anglican Minister saying “Repent, repent, for you cannot see God unless you repent, you cannot see God if you have sin, you cannot get closer to God if you have sin”. That was the type of thinking the Anglicans tried to pass on to the people. And there were people hearing that who would not have enough knowledge, so they wouldn’t understand. Many people did not see that. They just thought that Armand Tagoona would oppose the Anglican Church. This was the only thing they had in mind. That was their reason why they would possibly opposed the church (Interview of P. Laneuville with Norman Attungalaaq, 2011).

Even Mary Tagoona was uncomfortable with Tagoona’s decision to leave the Anglican Church, and this is why she continued to attend this church:

I said, I would prefer to stay with the Anglican but Armand preferred to be out. The minister said that as I was his wife and as he was the man, no matter if it was heavy or light, I had to follow him. [...] I don’t understand why Armand tried to get out of the Anglican Church. In my case, I never went to the Christian Fellowship. I always stayed with the Anglican Church (Interview of F. Laugrand and J. Oosten with Mary Tagoona, 2004).

According to Norman Attungalaaq, the project of building a new church was related to, or made possible by the knowledge Tagoona had developed through his life and being a missionary. People who did not have this knowledge, who did not grow enough, could not understand and support him. They were seeing opposition where Tagoona and his followers were seeing growth. Indeed, Tagoona did not wish any confrontation, not even separation, but was looking for more freedom, more religious autonomy that would enable Inuit to deepen their knowledge of God through the reading of the Bible and this, without the authority of the Anglican or Catholic Church. Tagoona indeed considered the Bible as superior to any other rule. This quest for religious autonomy can be better understood at the light of Inuit quest for autonomy in other fields, such as education, politics and housing; this quest does not mean the wish to divide or to break social bonds (see among others Hervé, 2017; Hervé & Laneuville, 2017; Pernet, 2014).

The idea of growing is also marked in Tagoona’s perspective and might be rooted in the Inuit culture. At an individual level, Inuit assume that one has to change and adapt through his life, which does not require abandoning traditions. Thus, if the ACF is well rooted in the Christian tradition, the church hoped to build a new community that would better fit in Inuit culture.

In the correspondence between Tagoona and Bishop Ben Marsh (who are pictured in Fig. 3) dated year 1971, Tagoona made his quest for autonomy and his rejection of Anglican Church authority quite clear. Unhappy with the creation of “Tagoona’s church”, Bishop Marsh accused him of being disloyal and not obeying to his leader citing “Hebrews 13: verse 17 which says: ‘obey your leaders and defer them.’” (Letter March 3, 1971, ACC/GSA/M71-4/16(2) Correspondence between A. Tagoona and D.B. Marsh). Tagoona answered: “You believe Anglican Church’s authority is the only Church of God, all others are out (...). I am not working here because I place myself first and God second, I am merely placing you second to God, though I love you.” (Letter March 31, and October 7, 1971, ACC/GSA/M71-4/16(2) Correspondence between A. Tagoona and D.B. Marsh). In fact, Tagoona and his followers were clearly against many rules imposed by the Anglicans in their church and wanted to break free from them: “Anglican Churches are cold, nothing ever happens during the services, just be good, you’ll be alright”, he writes (Ibid). And in a second letter, he provided an example: “We heard that while you were in Eskimo Point there was a person who went forward in repentance, in 1970, you sent that person back to the seat.” (Letter October 7, 1971, p. 7. ACC/GSA/M71-4/16(2) Correspondence between A. Tagoona and D.B. Marsh, 1971). While repentance of people was crucial to Tagoona, he observed that the Anglican Church was unable to guide them through this way.

In that respect, Tagoona’s church was more adapted to the Inuit ways with less authority and more flexibility and conviviality. In creating the ACF, Tagoona hoped to offer an alternative for those who like to study the Bible more deeply. He was also looking for more understanding of the Inuit traditions of the past, yet he never tried to incorporate shamanism, as we will see. On the contrary, he was seeing himself as an “evangelist”, to use his own wording (Letter October 7, 1971, p. 7. ACC/GSA/M71-4/16(2) Correspondence between A. Tagoona and D.B. Marsh, 1971).

**An unique and encompassing church: the Bible and the value of praying**

In the 1960s, the Anglican Church in Qamanituaq was indeed very strict. Avaalaaqiaq, an elder, remembers Canon James, for example:

*In the church we tried not to make any noises. We wouldn’t even smile. We couldn’t even touch the walls of the church because the minister was very careful of things. We were told not to move so that we could listen to the sermon. We couldn’t even turn our heads and we tried not to let our children make any noises. The children were not allowed to run around. Now in church, the people just talk and the children are running around. When a child cried, Canon James would say to take the child out so that the people can hear properly.* (Nasby, 2002, p.28-29)

Norman Attungalaaq also recalls the rigidity of the Anglican Church: “Back then, the Anglican Church used to be very rigid, very strict, very structured, and you would have to follow this, pray one song, pray this prayer, etc. It was very restricted, very regimented, like the women would sit on one side, and the men to sit on one side” (Interview of P. Laneuville with Norman Attungalaaq, 2011). The question of the position of the women is an interesting detail as it suggests that Tagoona was hoping for a more inclusive church whereas the Anglican Church would be more traditional,
following here a pattern that canbefoundin shamanismwhere menandwomenare notmixed together but supposed to be separated and have their respective position.

Tagoona’s church, which he led from 1969 to 1978, was then different from the Anglican Church to the extent that it was more permissive. Another follower of the ACF, Mr G (Fictitious name), asserts the difference with the Anglican Church and the fact that people would feel more as belonging to the same group with strong moments of sharing:

Yes, it used to be different from Anglican Church too. He used to do almost like Glad Tiding Church, or Pentecost Church. And if someone wants to testify, he is open to that. But God ask them for, not personally, if you have something to say. God ask them, for you are open to say. And share with the people, with the congregation (Interview of P. Laneuville, anonymous, 2011).

Tagoona needed more space and freedom. Moreover, he was clearly aware that he needed a church that would escape to the two traditional ones as well to the Glad Tidings one, a church that was just started in the Keewatin region. This church was more open and would allowed testimonies and expression of emotions, but for Tagoona, the Glad Tidings followers were going too far in this direction. In his paper published in Inuktitut, he explains how all these three churches were somehow outdated for him and too much focused on salvation:

Early in 1960, we began to hear that others [churches] were arriving. The newcomers were saying that the teachings of both the Catholics and the Anglicans were misleading, and that they were not “saved”. The new missionaries were dead against alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes, and said those who use them are not saved; and many of the saved ones gave them up. Unfortunately, households started to fall apart, because some family members were “saved” while others were not. Many Catholics and Anglicans left their churches and began to follow the teachings of this new religion, “Glad Tidings” as it was called in English, and in Inuktitut “Qiajuit” (the ones who cry), “Qaqialigisimajut” (those who want to do good instead of bad), or “Ukipiturjuat” (very religious people). Many who had been baptized in the Catholic or Anglican Church were rebaptized in this new religion. They were immersed in water, and this was done only to adults, not to children. [...] When Glad Tidings came along, they were criticized as believing in their own emotions, and having an exaggerated belief in prediction through dreams (Tagoona, 1993, p.23)

For Tagoona, cooperation, mutual help and sharing, were more important values. The value of repentance was also clearly marked, and this was something in common with the Anglican Church, and with shamanism as well. Indeed, public confession was part of certain rituals and seen as means to expiate sins and misdoings. Shamans were thought capable of seeing wrongdoings, and so were missionaries (see Laugrand & Oosten, 2010, p.61; Laugrand, 2017; Saladin d’Anglure, 2016).

Norman Attungalaaq underlines the role of repentance, prayer and testimonial in the ACF:

The Anglican Church is very regimented in its liturgy. At this time you sing this song, at this time you read this verse. After that verse, you sing this song. Then you sing this song again and read Bible verses. That is it. You are really restricted; you are not allowed to talk outside of whatever the Minister is talking about. It is very structured, very regimented, very locked in a box. And with the Christian Arctic Fellowship, you have freedom to talk; we have freedom of speech, to pass all on your knowledge. One thing that was constantly coming to you is the testimonials, repent, repent. In the Anglican Church, way back then, we couldn’t even go up to the front to ask for prayer, to the layman to lay their hands on you and pray for you. [...] What Armand was doing was totally different. He was teaching repentance, he was teaching praying for people, people going up for help (Interview of P. Laneuville with Norman Attungalaaq, 2011).

The church of Tagoona insisted on praying for people more than on following strict rules. The value given to praying for other people is marked, prayers being credited with a high power of transformation, as this has been noticed in many other contexts (see Laugrand & Oosten, 2010, p.61; Laugrand, 2017; Saladin d’Anglure, 2016).

Concerning the rituals that were taking place in Tagoona’s church, if Mr G. felt that his wedding celebrated there was more open (Interview of P. Laneuville, anonymous, 2011), Norman Attungalaaq explains that many ritual procedures remained similar to the ones of the Anglican Church, as the ACF was rooted in Protestantism:

The ceremonies for wedding are the same. The basis for the Arctic Christian Fellowship is protestant. It could also be viewed as a Pentecostal basis. The basis is closer to Inuit and then only, it would be to Roman Catholic. [...] But for Armand Tagoona, things would have to be done totally differently; you have freedom to pray God, you have freedom in God. [...] You can talk, you can speak, you can pray, you can do things. But when you are in the Anglican Church you have to follow the book and not grow, and just stay in that little box. With Tagoona it was totally different, we would come out of the box, we would give freedom, preaching that you have to repent, you repent, you will be free, you have freedom. That is what we were teaching. And with the Anglican Church they were just followed the book and never change, they never grew (Interview of P. Laneuville with Norman Attungalaaq, 2011).

In those days, Tagoona thought the most important was not the Anglican Church as an institution, as a Qallunaat’s ways of doing things, but the Bible as a spiritual reference. Taking the question of the baptism of babies, he stated in a letter to Bishop Marsh. “You cannot fully use the Bible against me, although you can use Anglican ways against me (…) If I refuse to baptize babies would you agree? It says of babies who are not baptized: “Let the children come to me, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as they” (Mark 10: 14).” (Letter to Bishop Marsh, October 7, 1971, p. 6, ACC/ GSA/M71-4/16(2) Correspondence between A. Tagoona and D.B. Marsh).

The central role of the Bible is evident when we consider the time Tagoona spent translating it in Inuktitut, his wife recalls:

When he moved back to Qamani’tuq in the early 1950s, her wife urge him to write:
I told him: “If you’re going to write in the Bible you will be my favorite husband.” Armand was reading the Bible and then he started sending papers he wrote. He made this Bible. This was his steady job (Interview of F. Laugrand and J. Oosten with Mary Tagoona, 2004).
Mr G remembers that Tagoona spent considerable energy to translate hymns and songs. He did not know Tagoona personally, but he remembers that Tagoona would often ask him about translation of some words. He relates:

> Yes, he wrote a lot of hymns and prayers. I didn’t know that until I saw the songs that he wrote, a majority of the prayers, worship songs. Before that, I thought they were from somewhere, I really didn’t know that until I started seeing his name on the songs. I remember at one time, when I just started going to his church, he used to ask me how to translate from English to Inuktitut some praise songs, or worship songs, but at that time, I didn’t know that he was after translating them or making them up (Interview of P. Laneuville, anonymous, 2011).

Mr G recalls that Tagoona said he was somehow “called” by God to quit his work and build his Church: “Yes, I believe he was, because he was a good minister and all that, finding out how to translate, to interpret those things. I think he was told by God to work on that” (Ibid).

Finally, Tagoona’s wish to encompass the traditional religious oppositions and offer an adapted alternative was successful, as his church rapidly got bigger. His wife Mary remembered how the church needed to be enlarged:

> Around 1970, it was really small. Less than 200 hundred people would fit in there. [...] This building was taken away later and it is not visible now. Armand received a letter from the fire Marshall saying that if we are going to be many; we have to make a bigger church. So my husband started writing letters to the Qallunaat. In 1973, this new building, which you can now see, was built and became the Christian Hall (Interview of F. Laugrand and J. Oosten with Mary Tagoona, 2004).

Today, the Anglican Church has adapted its liturgy and some practices from Tagoona’s church are now allowed, but that was not the case in the 1960s. Moreover, the Anglican Church now uses hymnbooks and songs written by Tagoona, as relates Atungalaaq: “Tagoona also collected songs, even taking them from qallunaq songs and translated them. They had a red cover and even the Anglican Church were starting to use them”,[...] There are some tunes in the Catholic Church which are very catchy tunes, so even in the Anglican Church they have some of these in a separate folder, but they are available” (Workshop of in Baker Lake, unpublished manuscript, 2004).

### Blending Christianity with traditional Inuit religious concepts

In her MA thesis on Inuit Art, Gibson (1998) observed how Tagoona’s ACF is syncretic, blending Christianity with traditional Inuit religious concepts. Such a statement is to some extent true, yet she provides an ambiguous example since confession, as we have seen, is well rooted in both the Inuit and the Christian traditions:

> One way in which the Fellowship is a hybrid of the two spiritualities is the importance it places on repentance or public confession: a practice that was an important part of the traditional Inuit belief system. What were once taboos broken by Inuit following an animist religion have today become sins committed by Christian Inuit. In both cases, public confession must be completed in order to receive forgiveness and restore balance. (Gibson 1998: 47)

More convincingly, Gibson (1998, p.48) explains that Tagoona advocated the indigenisation of gospel songs. And she quotes him:

> [i]t would be much better now, if we Inuit started making our own gospel songs that we could feel. We notice that Inuit sing much better when we sing Inuk song, Ayaa-yaa. I don’t mean that we should start singing Ayaa-yaa in our churches. I mean we should have our own songs written by Inuit themselves. [...] It would be a sign of being Inuit, not having to copy the white man’s way of church services. [...] So my desire is to have our own songs and our own melodies to praise God? (Petrone, 1988, p.216).

Indeed Tagoona valued some Inuit traditions and struggled to integrate them into his Christian perspective. In his paper on Churches, he states:

> All the churches are right in some matters and wrong in others. As for Inuit beliefs before the arrival of the Christians, if there are people who wish to know more, they will have to ask someone else as I was born too late; though I didn’t miss all of it, I have never seen a shaman performing. I do know, however, that our ancestors had their own religion, and had powerful spiritual helpers called tuurngait. (Tagoona, 1993, p.24)

Tagoona was thus very open to some practices and beliefs of the past. In fact, he could not share his heritage, as he could not live without spiritual power that he found in Christianity. He thought, “the historic Inuit were as valuable in the eyes of God as were the Jews” (Eakin & Butler, 1984, p.21).

At first, he was sad to see how the Glad Tidings Church as well as the Catholic Church were deadly against dance, which is so cen-tral to Inuit values. Tagoona (1993, p.24) explains:

> When they first started, their members were forbidden to dance –dancing was only for those who weren’t ”saved”. I also remember that when I was small the Catholic priests also discouraged dancing, saying it was bad because it was done with women. I even remember some Catholics becom-ing Anglicans because they like to dance. (Tagoona, 1993, p.24)

Tagoona went further in his consideration of Inuit beliefs, especially while discussing the case of the deceased people. We find at least three stories referring to Inuit beliefs on deceased people in his art book Shadows. First, he tells a day when he did something against a dead old man’s wish. While this man did not want to be buried under the ground but wanted to be right on the top, with other Inuit, Tagoona buried him in the settlement. Right after, there was a complete and sudden change of the weather; from a nice and sunny day, the wind went up and “[c]louds came over and
Tagoona never tried to incorporate Christianity with Inuit traditional beliefs (Eakin and Butler 1984: 21). Tagoona worried at this point because they were told before “that if [they] disobeyed to the old man’s wish, there would be something unusual will happen, perhaps even all the Inuit would die out”. Not long time after on the same day, two old women came to see Tagoona and the missionary:

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Tagoona thanked God because no Inuit has died out because of what they did. The morning after, he went to see what the ladies did. He was curious to see what was under the canvas. He saw a cigarette pack and a box of matches, which he threw out with the canvas. And then he prayed:

One said, “We want permission from you to go to the old man’s grave. We would cover him with this canvas. It’s raining and he might get wet. The rain might get worse and worse. If we cover him with this the rain might stop.” I said “Go.” They went off. A few minutes later the rain stopped. The sun came out again from the clouds and smiled on us again. “Is it really so?” (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.)

Respect for the deceased ancestors was a fundamental feature of traditional Inuit culture and it was dangerous to go against their wishes. Their belongings also had to be respected. Tagoona thus believed in this. In the same book, he explains this value of respect:

In the old days even in my lifetime, whenever a person died, they buried the body with some of the belongings of that person laid on the side of the grave. They said that the belongings were still his or hers, and that noone else should own them. This taboo wasn’t believed by everyone, but those who believed it usually laid all kinds of things by the grave. After the white men came to the North, some Inuit got canoes and boats and rifles. Sometimes a brand new rifle was laid by the grave, or a brand new canoe, and no-one was supposed to take them. (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.)

He then relates another story where he took the rifle of a deceased man. During a hunting trip, he found a grave that seemed quite new beside which a rifle in good state was lying. And so he brought the rifle back to his home. Here he explains how people reacted:

[In the settlement] I showed it to the Inuit, but nobody was interested and their faces seemed scared. I knew they still believed the taboo. One day I showed it to a man who told me to take it back where I found it. If the dead man’s relatives heard what I had done, he said, they would be very unhappy. So I agreed. And I went back by canoe to the grave. I just put it on the shore of a lake; I didn’t put it right where it had been. Somehow it bothers me a little every time I remember that rifle because I didn’t put it where it was before. That wasn’t really honest the way I did it. (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.)

In breaking the taboo, Tagoona understood that he could have created tension within the community and so he decided to correct his mistake. The fact that he worried about if he has done it properly or not lets see how deeply he believed in the taboo.

Tagoona believed as well that the deceased could appear to the living. In his art book, he also relates the day when his wife Mary saw her deceased mother. On her way back from school, the deceased stood about 30 steps away from Mary for a moment, and then disappeared in the blink of an eye. Mary ran to her father to tell him what she saw, and he answered: “Yes, before your mother died, she said that after she died she would come back to see you for the last time” (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.).

Although Tagoona believed in this knowledge about the deceased, he remained very careful with shamanism. For instance, in his Anglican mind, the use of a drum was closely connected to shamanic performances and he himself never wanted to use the drum in the church:

[d]rum dancing ... in the olden days was not just drum dancing. It always had something to do with the spirits. Oh yes, during the dance the dancer did it for fun and sang his own song or sang with others. But by doing this he was telling others through the song things he could not tell them just by talking. As long as he’s moving around and hitting the drum and dancing on the snow floor his shyness cannot be seen, and usually the singers closed their eyes too. Most of the time, the dance took place because the angakkuaq (a shaman) was going to do something for the good of the camp and for the Inuit in that camp. (Tagoona, 1975, n.p.)

While Tagoona used to appreciate certain Inuit practices and reject other ones, some Inuit and Qallunaat thought he was sometimes going too far in his interpretations of Christianity. According to Eakin and Butler (1984), this is why the Bishop of the Arctic, for whom some Tagoona’s connections between the two spiritualities were unacceptable, relieved him of his congregation:

Tagoona maintained that Elijah was a shaman, that Elijah’s acts, his ascending in a chariot of fire and his passing on of his spirit to Elisha, were part of traditional shaman’s practices. Tagoona’s idea that the historic Inuit were as valuable in the eyes of God as were the Jews was not acceptable to the Bishop. (Eakin & Butler, 1984, p.21)

But to what extent Tagoona really combined the precepts of Christianity with Inuit traditional beliefs (Eakin and Butler 1984: 21) is not clear as Tagoona never tried to incorporate angakkuaq (shamanism) into his own church. In that respect, many Catholic elders, such as Olie Itinuaq from Kangiqsualujjuaq, Felix Kupak from Naujaat, Josie Angutinngurniq from Pelly Bay, went much further. For instance comparing the power of prayer to that of irinaliutitit, shamanic formulas, or the capacity to heal of shamanism and Christianity, arguing clearly that the two systems could be combined (Oosten & Laugrand 2007, p.124), and even stating that shamans were sometimes superior to the priests (Oosten & Laugrand 2002, p.60).
Armand Tagoona was thus not the only one who strongly believed in Christianity without rejecting his own cultural heritage. But he was the only one who created an Inuit congregation, and in such an institutional frame, the reconciliation between the two trajectories may have been trickier.

Discussion: returning to the Anglican priesthood and connecting Inuit traditions to Christianity

Through his own work, Tagoona hoped to take some distance from the Anglican Church, although his wife thought that his church was not that different from the Anglican Church. According to her, Tagoona received two callings, the first one in 1969, resulted in the construction of the Christian hall; the second one occurred much later in 1985, at the end of his life, when he decided to return to the Anglican Church. In our interview with her, she relates this return:

"Wife, tell the Bishop that now we have to return to Rankin". [...] "Now", he said, "we must now return to Rankin so tell the Bishop". I was afraid because I am a woman. But I asked the Bishop. We sat down; my husband left the room because he was thinking too much. He had already established the Christian Hall. Now he wanted to know if it would be possible to return to the Anglican Church. In 1985, August 25 we went back to the Anglican Church. The Bishop said that they had not been removed from the Anglican Church. So on May 13, 1991, we came back to Baker Lake. After that my husband did not live very long. In December 21 he had a sickness inside him. He was sent by plane down to Churchill. He had a very big stomach. It is regrettable but Armand was thinking too much, doing so many things, writing the Bible, writing Hymns ... and he died while doing all this. He has written all this in Inuktitut, in Roman orthography. He wrote Bibles and prayers, hymns. This one is a copy. He wrote those. He wrote all that in 1991, and then he died (Interview of F. Laugrand and J. Oosten with Mary Tagoona, 2004).

From 1983 to the 1990s, Tagoona resumed his work as an Anglican minister but in 1991, he felt sick and died at the Churchill hospital a few days before Christmas. Just before his death, he was charged with four counts of sexual assault (Anglican journal, 1991, p. 13). He was buried in Baker Lake and Reverend Larry Robertson conducted the funerals there (Choque, 2011, p.15). Norman Atungalaaq remembers him very well, not only as a religious person, but also as a fellow hunter: "Tagoona was a real hunter. He had a very good dog team and was a very good hunter." (Workshop in Baker Lake, unpublished manuscript, 2004).

Why Tagoona returned to the Anglican Church is not clear but he may have thought that the synthesis and the religious autonomy he was hoping for did not work as he wished at that time. When Tagoona left, his son, famous artist William Tagoona, took over at the ACF. According to Norman Atungalaaq, both William Noah and Thomas Iksuaq continued holding services in the church and kept it going. Still, in 2004, he mentioned that Tagoona’s church was attracting new followers: “Even in town here and outside of Baker Lake in Nunavut or out there, there’s people who continue this faith” (Workshop in Baker Lake, unpublished manuscript, 2004).

Through his work, Tagoona overcame not only the division between the Roman Catholic and the Anglican faith, but also that between traditional Inuit beliefs and Christian perspectives. He accomplished this through his church, but also through his art book Shadows, where he could connect to traditional Inuit beliefs and practices without compromising his Christian perspectives. Relating to death, silaup inungit (“people of the air”, the deceased), the myth of sun and moon and many other themes interested him. He does not explain the title of the book Shadows, but he presents a nice picture of a butterfly explaining: “The literal translation of ‘tarralikitaaq’ or butterfly is ‘the quickly shadowing’. When they fly very near the ground, the butterflies can only be seen like shadows on the ground”. The notion of shadow (taaq) is closely related to that of tarniq (“miniature image of a being”), also often translated as “soul”, and like other insects, the butterflies can be considered as masters of life and death in Inuit perceptions of animals.

If Tagoona could, in his drawings, freely enter into the world of Inuit traditions, it was not the case when he shared his interpretations of Christianity, which easily raised some opposition from both the Inuit and the Qallunaat. His position sometimes evokes that of many Inuit leaders who, in the past, were described by others as “going overboard,” (that is going too far) in their understanding of the Christian tradition. A famous case is that of Suluk (Laugrand & Oosten, 2018) who combined shamanism and Catholicism, but his reconciliation had been soon considered as excessive.

Like Suluk, Tagoona was not only a preacher, but also an artist. Music and drawings allowed him to connect to the world of the inummariit, the true Inuit that had preceded them. Suluk and Tagoona, each in his own way, tried to transcend and cross the boundaries between the past and the present, Inuit and Christian traditions, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, but they did not find it easy as these boundaries were still very much valorised in the established Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. Their thought and work show how Inuit preachers were trying to integrate different worlds that the missionaries tried to keep separated. For Tagoona, religious practices necessitate a more direct communion with God as well as a more open context for expression of emotions. To what extent an increased emotionalism corresponded better to the shamanic perspective is not clear and probably too easy to assert, as in the past as well, Inuit were asked to control themselves and not to show up too much of their emotions. The angakkutq would perform and the others would accompany him, but everyone was expected to follow some rules and procedures as well.

But as Tagoona stated it clearly a few times, he never really wanted to incorporate the shamanic traditions to Christianity, as he himself never participated to shamanic rituals, those being already on the verge of disappearing when he grew up. In a way, despite its syncretic approach, Tagoona always remained very close to the Anglican Church, discarding angakkutq, shaman-ism. Tagoona’s religious perspective, however, shows that prayer and confession are indeed pillars of Inuit Christianity and clearly key to Christianisation (see Laugrand & Oosten, 1999; 2010; Laugrand, Oosten & Kakkik, 2003; Remie, 1983; Remie & Oosten, 2002). Prayer is closely connected in people’s mind to the use of powerful words or shamanic formulas (irinalilutitit) in pre-Christian traditions. And conversely, words from the elders and the deceased are thought to have power, including the power to effect changes.
Tagoona's church is by no means revolutionist. It combines in a fruitful way some conversionist aspects with reformist and utopian elements. As such, it remains unique in the Canadian Arctic, and an excellent example of how Inuit incorporated Christianity at a time when the North was ruled as a colony.

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Fig. 1. Rev. Armand Tagoona (Photo: General Synod Archives).
Fig. 2. Eskimo delegates with Rt Rev. Donald Ben Marsh at the Frobashe Bay Conference in NWT, 1964 (Photo: General Synod Archives).