

"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." — Voltaire

Tundra Times



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Priest Defends Dance

St. James Mission
Tanana, Alaska 99777
May 20, 1971

Dear Howard:

It has been several years since I have written to the TUNDRA TIMES. At that time my family and I were living in Shageluk. After reading the article in your May 19th issue regarding the criticism of teaching Eskimo dancing in the Kotzebue day school I feel I must respond as a Christian and as an Episcopal priest who has lived among and loved Alaska's Native people for ten years.

I am deeply disappointed that any person in the name of Christ would condemn Eskimo dancing and assume that the Eskimo dancing being taught at the Kotzebue school is "witchcraft". The Native people of Alaska have developed many cultural expressions, such as singing and dancing, which are closely related to their daily lives and surroundings. These do indeed express their spirit as a people and provide strength for living as well as express their appreciation of life itself. Human beings all over the world express themselves in relation to their surroundings and their experience of life. This is why in different parts of the world we find different languages, songs, dancing, social systems, and ways of meeting the challenges of life.

It is unfortunate that very often the Christian Church assumes that faith in Jesus Christ and a life lived for Jesus can be expressed only through what has come to be known as "Western Culture". The truth is that Jesus reveals Himself in all cultures. It is through the witness of the Bible and through the witness of individual Christians that we "hear" about Jesus. But the moment must come when each person must accept the message personally and allow Christ to enter into their lives Himself. When this happens a person will express his experience of Christ through his own cultural patterns. This means that Jesus is not limited to any culture. It also means that Jesus does not condemn any culture as such. Loyalty to Christ and living for Christ does not mean tossing away a person's traditional ways of expressing himself.

For example: the most moving praise of God that I have ever heard was in Pt. Hope in the Eskimo language. I did not understand the words being sung, but I knew what was being expressed from the hearts of the singers to God.

It is true that in every culture in the world there are superstitions and rituals which try to give man control over fear, hunger, the weather, and death itself. These rituals reflect the culture of the people and their beliefs about life and death. It is also true that people in different cultures who have found Christ learn to depend on Him rather than many of the rituals which they formerly felt were necessary. This change in a person's belief happens not because someone from outside condemned their former belief and rituals, but because the individual himself, within his own culture, has come to know the power of Christ in his life. The change in the person's life is a voluntary change and is not a change of culture, but a change in TRUST. A person who has changed in this way will express his relationship with God within his own culture, i. e. his own language, songs, dances, art, etc.

Therefore, it seems to me, that our place as Christians is not to condemn any cultural practice, but rather to allow Christ to speak to men through the witness of our own lives. If people who are not Christians see Christ in our lives and desire Him then they, by the power and guidance of God's Spirit, will give up or change the things which they feel they must change in order to follow Christ. Far too often Christianity is seen as merely a system of rules or morality rather than a relationship with Christ, Himself.

During my seven years in Shageluk I had opportunity to see and participate in many Indian dances. These dances were magnificent and full of drama and color. They brought out the vitality, the spirit, and the beauty of the people in Shageluk in a way that did not happen any other time. The dances were fun and drew us all together as a family. I have had similar experiences with the Eskimo dancers at St. Marys and the Indian dances at Minto and here in Tanana. What I saw in the dances were my friends being themselves, I saw them as they really are, and I praised God for what I saw!

It is my hope that the classes in Eskimo dancing will continue in Kotzebue and that there will be more opportunities for similar classes in other communities which desire them. Such cultural expressions make people what they are, and God loves us for what we are. I hope that your readers will understand that the position that some Christian people in Kotzebue have taken against Eskimo dancing does not represent the feeling of all Christian people.

Sincerely yours,
The Rev. Dave Keller

Letters from Here and There

New Yorker Attacks Editor, Editorial

Box 285, Baychester Sta.
Bronx, N. Y. 10469
May 16, 1971

Dear Sirs:

I read your editorials in the May 12th issue and I had to answer. It seems unbelievable that a native newspaper could be so blatantly against the natives. Joe Upicksoun is right you know and all thinking people know it.

The bill, which is a figurative knife in the back, clearly shows the intentions of the people who wielded it. Now once the knife has struck, what difference does it make whether you twist it or pull it out?? You are still done in.

We, in the lower 48 states, have watched what nice talk, solemn treaties by the U. S. Gov't. with the Indians, and concentrations camps for the Indians have meant. It is obvious that Crazy Horse and Osceola were right. What makes you think the U. S. Gov't. has suddenly started giving instead of taking??

1. What the racial policy is in Vietnam (Calley's treatment as contrasted with the treatment given Angela Davis, or the Indians fighting for their fishing rights).

2. World War-2, placing of 3rd and 4th generation U. S. orientals in concentration camps and not bothering 1st and 2nd generation U. S. Germans; even though the Germans had just fought the U. S. two decades previously.

3. What happened to the Peace (anti-war) demonstrators in Washington, D. C., for protesting U. S. Gov't. action.

4. What happened to the Kennedys and Martin Luther King for fostering just and honorable policies.

5. What the U. S. Gov't. did to Cesar Chavez lettuce boycott (Chavez was trying to help the impoverished migrant farm worker—mostly Mexican and Indian).

I guess that since the credibility gap is getting wider every day, it surprises and upsets you when you run across a man who flat out calls a spade a spade. If you had supported him you might have started a movement to force the U. S. to grant Alaskans more consideration. You know that a show of strength is all that produces results in this modern world full of conflict. The weak, the women and children have historically been massacred when talk caused the Indian to lay down his arms. When we Indians stuck together was when the saying was born "Custer had it coming."

Yours truly,
K. M. Young, M. D.

Stickman Invites Aspinall, Haley

Tatalina A. F. S., Alaska
May 20, 1971

Dear Friend:

I would like to know why you put these fellows name in the Tundra Times. These fellows from Colorado and Florida, Aspinall and Haley. They can say anything about Natives and our land. Why don't they come to Alaska and I'll show them how poor we people are. I'll show them how poor we live for years.

God gave us our land and it's about time we get something out

of it. We went through hell all these years, now we should live a little better.

I have a good job, a home here, but I have to pay \$4,000 a year tax, besides I don't know how much I have to pay more if I work a year. In 1964 I had to pay \$464 out of my pocket. That's the one that hurts especially when you are an Indian. You're paying for something you don't know what it's all about.

Anyway I got out of that city tax. I can't get used to pay tax everytime you eat, etc. The best grub don't taste good.

If them Senators from the Lower 48 can say everything about us Indians and Eskimos, what's the difference if I call something myself. Where is the people we vote for. Can they help us? They're trying to jig zag, zig zag and stall us, waiting and see how they're going to get out settlement with us. They know they have to settle sooner or later, what they're waiting for?

Come down to our village Haley and Aspinall and I'll show you how I live. I don't know what to do when I get feeble. Someone have to take care of me. Answer soon.

Fred Stickman

Wm. Paul Attacks Editor, Editorial

GRAND CAMP
ALASKA NATIVE
BROTHERHOOD INC.

May 19th, 1971

Editor Tundra Times:

After reading your May 12th editorial "The Wrong Thrust at the Wrong Time" and your theme that Joe Upicksoun "can cause grave setbacks that might be irreparable", I wondered who was doing the "cause" the greater injury.

We suppose that Tundra Times is on "our side". Is it?

or is it that the editor failed to see the ramifications that are following the hundreds of our native people when it condemns for pointing that Chairman Aspinall and sub-chairman Haley are basically enemies not only of Alaskans but of all aboriginal tribes.

The Honorable Aspinall comes from Colorado where the people think that 160 acres is a lot of ground, plenty for a man to live off. He, Aspinall (and Mr. Haley) cannot understand that it takes 150,000 acres on the North Slope to produce the \$2,000 annual income for each Eskimo family, and no amount of sweet words will change his opinion.

The men control Indian legislation and in spite of weeks and weeks of attentive hearings, neither man understands Indian culture. Nor do they consider the morals of legislation based on federal ownership based on "discovery" expressed otherwise "I saw it first and therefore it belongs to my king". Chief Justice Marshall said such a philosophy was IMMORAL, but says he, "a creature cannot repudiate its creator" although it is in the field of morality in which lies the strength of all Indian claims.

Joe said what has to be said and the Tundra Times does not help the cause by condemning the leader and spokesman of the great area without whom there would be no fight.

Patrick Henry made such a blast in a time when his words were "treason". Who now condemns that speech? "Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope?... Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power."

Whom are you helping when you undermine our spokesmen?

Wm. L. Paul, Sr.

Kotzebue Dance Class Defended

(From Kotzebue News)

The KOTZEBUE NEWS is sorry we missed last week's meeting of the School Board, during which opposition to the dancing portion of the bi-cultural program at the school was discussed.

However, we learned from those who attended, that the meeting was fruitful and moderate, that opinions were discussed, and that at least one misunderstanding was cleared up.

The young people at the school and their parents are under no pressure or obligation. Children who want to participate, and whose parents say they can, may do so. Those who for any reason, don't want to, don't have to.

We are pleased that this point has been made clear, for we believe the bi-cultural program is a very important milestone.

Arts and Crafts might not seem to be all that important in the modern world, and some people think the language itself is of no use.

Yet, the Eskimo people have had a long, a very proud and exciting and interesting history, with some very unusual ways of looking at things.

It's good for young people to be able to look back at this and to feel proud of the ways of their ancestors. Because then, in a way, they feel proud of themselves, too.

And the better you feel about yourself, the easier it is to accomplish things.

Now when do we get an adult class in Eskimo going?

ARTIFACTS WANTED! If you are going to sell old-time objects, please contact the Alaska State Museum first. If you have old-time things that need special care, you can lend them to the Museum for safe-keeping and display. If your things are in the Alaska State Museum, they stay in Alaska. Contact: Jane Wallen Director, Alaska State Museum, Pouch FM, Juneau, Alaska 99801, phone 586-1224.

