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# Hymn Texts in the Aboriginal Languages of Canada: Three Historical-Bibliographical Studies

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aids local leaders to ask the right questions, to listen, and to involve the members in responding to what is learned.

Yet this strength also reveals one of the weaknesses: one wonders when the paperwork ever stops! So much time is to be committed to preparing and analyzing and giving feedback, that it may seem there is very little time to do any work. The authors would challenge this assessment by saying the communication described is the work, not just a nice extra. They also provide many surveys that can be used as models or adapted very easily. Further, they caution against pitfalls to avoid in the process and chart clearly how to maintain forward progress. Doing surveys is to become almost second nature.

Craig and Worley challenge the traditional committee and council leadership of the congregation, but with the view to strengthening the congregation's effectiveness, inclusiveness, and activeness. Those pondering whether to write a Mission Statement, use a questionnaire on worship times, or develop a five-year plan would do well to begin by reading this book.

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### **“Hymn Texts in the Aboriginal Languages of Canada” Occasional Monographs, No. 1**

Hugh D. McKellar

Fort Worth, Texas: The Hymn Society in the USA and  
Canada, 1992

50 pp. \$6.00

Hugh D. McKellar is an educator who lives in Toronto and who has published short material on hymnody for many years. This monograph, subtitled “Three Historical-Bibliographical Studies”, is the first effort by the Hymn Society in the USA and Canada to enter the field of scholarly publishing on hymnody. The three studies are “A History of Hymns in Aboriginal Languages of Canada”, “A Bibliography of Aboriginal Hymns in Canada”, and “The Huron Carol *Jesous Ahatonia*”.

In the first study we learn that one-third of all Canadian hymnbooks ever published have been in aboriginal languages! This process of inculturation is documented since 1634, when the Jesuits began translating hymns in Quebec. The Jesuits and Recollets used the natural inclination of aboriginal peoples towards chant to encourage them to sing French and Latin hymns in translation.

Not all the early work was done by French Roman Catholics. In 1772, Moravians who worked with the Inuit people of Labrador, had prepared a hymnbook in German for use in Canada's north.

The translation and indigenization of European hymnody among Canada's aboriginal people continued into the 19th century. We read of the work of Henry Aaron Hill, Peter Jones, and James Evans in Eastern Canada, and John Hordern, Jean Hunter, and John McDougall in Western Canada. These and others were committed to providing access to European hymnody for Canada's native people. In fact, it was a missionary, William Case, who invented a system of Cree phonetics, and who published a booklet of hymns in Cree in 1841 in, of all places, Norway House, Manitoba.

McKellar indicates that this prolific activity in hymn translation began to slow down after 1900, only to pick up again around 1960, with the advent of renewed ethnic and multicultural interest in Canada.

The second study provides bibliographies of aboriginal hymnals under several headings: Moravian collections in Labrador Eskimo; Methodist collections for use in Ontario and Quebec; Methodist collections for use in Western Canada; Anglican collections for use in Western and Northern Canada; Anglican collections for use with Inuit; Roman Catholic collections for use in Western and Northern Canada; Anglican collections in Eskimaleut; Anglican collections for the Micmacs of the Maritimes; interdenominational and independent collections.

The final study, on Brebeuf's so-called "Huron Carol", traces the story of this hymn from its appearance in 1899 in French and 1926 in English, and describes its introduction into the non-aboriginal Canadian hymnic world, and its gradual increase in popularity. Commenting on the enculturation attempted by Brebeuf in this carol, McKellar observes, "He does not present Christ's birth as an event which happened far away and long ago, nor lingers on its details; what matters for him, as well it might for any Christian, is the immediacy of the Incarnation and the difference it can make in the lives not just of Hurons but of Christian believers in any culture. He mentions the wise men rather than the shepherds because, as the *Jesuit Relations* often attest, converted Indians made a point of reaching a church at Christmas even if they had to travel for days. Otherwise he makes no concessions to the Hurons' particular background in this Christmas hymn."

McKellar, although maintaining a scholarly attitude and critical approach to his material, writes in a humorous and entertaining style. The book can be purchased from the Hymn Society in the USA and Canada, P.O. Box 30854, Fort Worth, Texas 76129.

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