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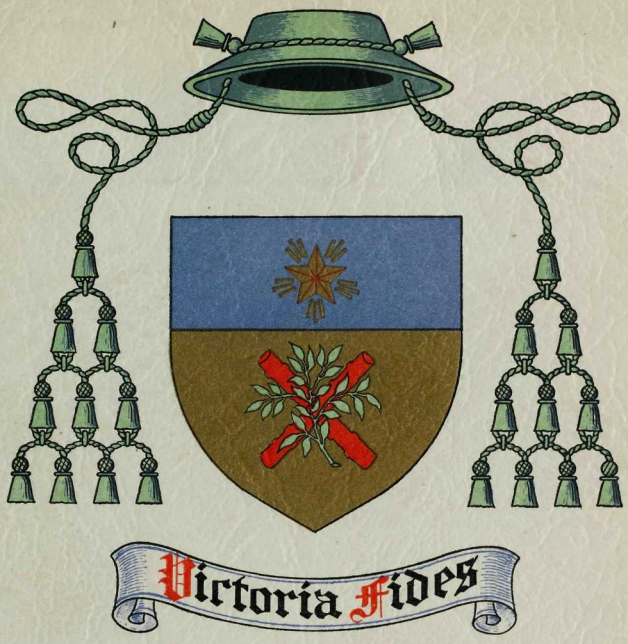


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# Sketch of The Martyrdom of Archbishop Charles John Seghers

*by*
Most Reverend
Joseph Raphael Crimont, S.J., D.D.
*Vicar Apostolic of Alaska*

DECLARATION OF THE AUTHOR

*In the following narrative of the violent death of Archbishop Charles John Seghers, the writer uses the words "holy", "holiness", "martyr", "martyrdom" as applied to his hero, in no other sense than expressing his own private estimation of the character and merits of the great missionary Archbishop, with no intention whatsoever to anticipate the judgment and decision of the supreme authority of the Holy See in the matter.*

+ JOSEPH R. CRIMONT, S.J.
*Vic. Ap. of Alaska.*

"Sanguis martyrum
semen
Christianorum"

*"The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians".*

—TERTULLIAN.

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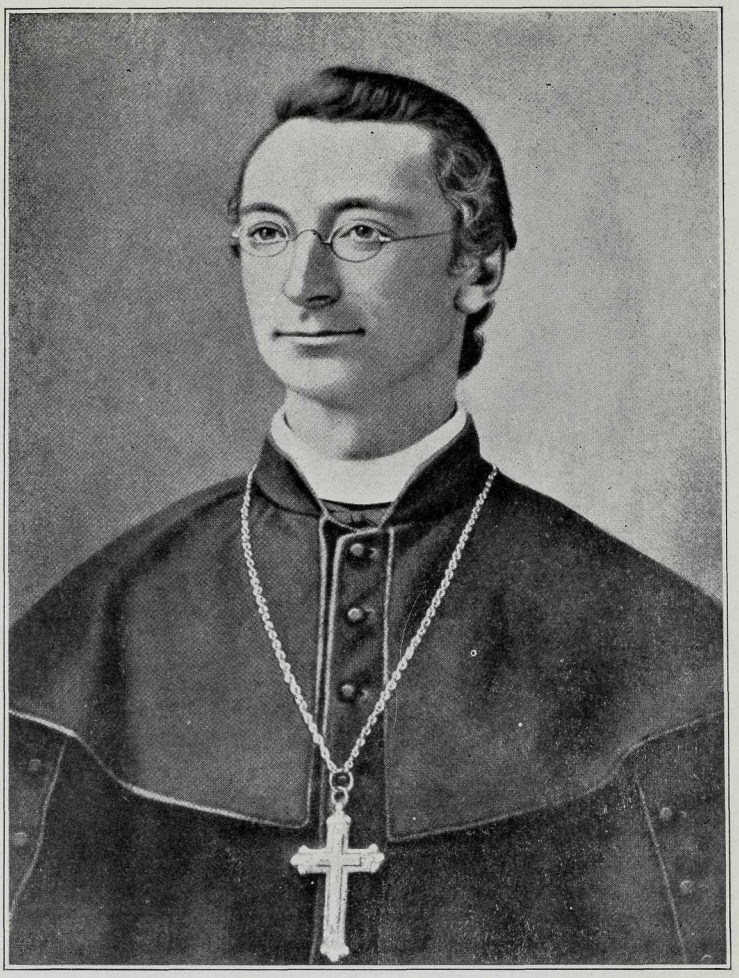
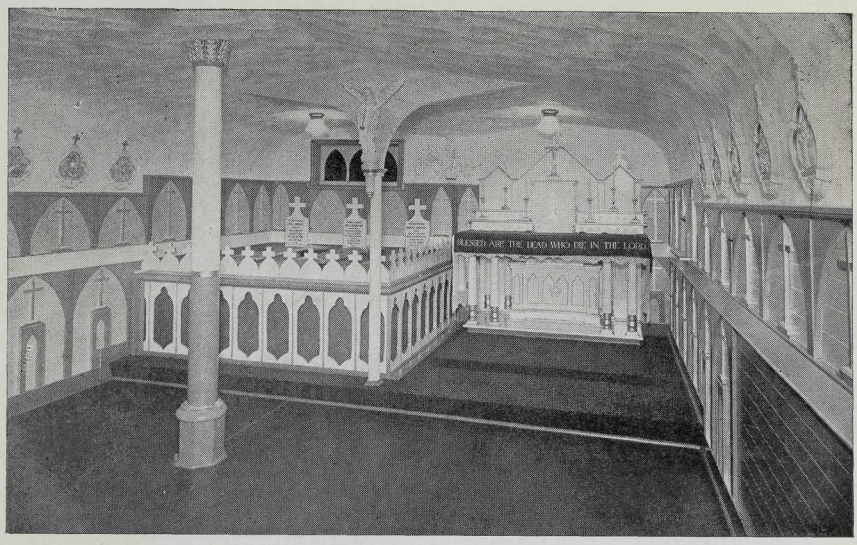


ARCHBISHOP CHARLES JOHN SEGHERS

*The Apostle of Alaska, second Bishop of Victoria, 1873-1879, and Fourth Bishop of Victoria, 1885-1886. Martyred near Nulato, Alaska, November 27th,, 1886, at the age of 47.*




*The Memorial Chapel beneath the high altar of St. Andrew's Cathedral was planned by Mr. Patrick Mahoney at the request of Bishop Cody to enshrine the mortal remains of Bishop Demers, the first Bishop of Victoria, Archbishop Seghers, his martyred successor, and Father Jonckau, the saintly collaborator. This chapel was blessed February 10, 1938, by the late Archbishop Henry J. O'Leary of Edmonton, in presence of the Metropolitan Archbishop, Wm. Mark Duke of Vancouver. The dedication sermon was delivered by Archbishop John Hugh MacDonald, coadjutor of Edmonton, and former incumbent of the See of Victoria. Bishop Martin Johnson of Edmonton was also present.*

# FOUNDATION STONES

## DEMERS, SEGHERS, JONCKAU

## A TRIBUTE

*"Be you also as living stones*
*built up, a spiritual edifice."*
I. St. Peter ii., 5.

BISHOP DEMERS.

Hewn from the quarries of God's faith and love,
O corner-stone of this Victoria See,
Fair to behold and firm on which to build,
O stone of Christ, we kneel and honor thee!

BISHOP SEGHERS.

O ruddy stone!—bedewed with martyr-blood,
More priceless far than all Alaska's gold!
In thy deep veinings trace we God's own plan
To ransom souls with zeal and love untold!

*"Who trust in the Lord shall share in the strength of the Rock which is Christ."* St. Bruno.

FATHER JONCKAU.

Secure and strong to bear the weight of care,
O hidden stone!—so precious in God's sight,
A monument of duty nobly done,
Resplendent dost thou shine in Heaven's light.

DEDICATION.

Foundation stones!—in this Memorial shrine
Victoria honors heavenly wisdom rare
Which built not on the fleeting sands of Time
The work of God on this, our Island fair!

*"Miriam," S.S.A.*

# Foreword

*by the Most Rev. J. Fitzgerald, S.J., D.D.*
*Coadjutor Vicar Apostolic of Alaska.*

IT is but fitting that a sketch on the glorious death of the founder of the Alaska Missions, Archbishop Seghers, should be written by the present Vicar Apostolic of Alaska, Most Reverend Joseph Raphael Crimont, S.J., D.D. It is most appropriate that he who has cultivated the seed of Faith for nearly fifty years in this rugged soil of the Northland, should recount the early efforts of the one who first implanted this seed and watered it with his own life's blood. "Sanguis martyrum semen Christianorum."

The author of this sketch first met the saintly Archbishop shortly after the latter's reappointment to the See of Victoria in 1884 at a conference that was given to the Jesuit students at Liege, Belgium. The Archbishop had just returned from a visit to the Holy Father in Rome; he had obtained the Holy Father's blessing on his plans for the conversion of the natives of Alaska and a promise of help from the Father General of the Society of Jesus to send missionaries into the new field. The glowing words of this zealous Apostle as he described the need of missionaries, fired the enthusiasm of his hearers and it was not long before the seminary student, Joseph Raphael Crimont, volunteered for a missionary's career in the new world. Always of a delicate constitution but being mindful of the words of St. Don Bosco, whom he had met at Lille: "Every day at my thanksgiving after Holy Mass I shall ask God to give you the health to become a priest; you will become a missionary in a foreign land," he presented his petition to go to the Missions of North America and the year 1886 found him a student of Theology at Woodstock, Maryland. Two years later he was ordained to the priesthood by Cardinal Gibbons. With the completion of his studies he spent two years of apprenticeship at St. Xavier's Mission for the Crow Indians of Montana, and then he came to his beloved Mission field of Alaska, where he has spent almost fifty years with the Indians and Eskimos of this vast territory. Ten years after coming to Alaska he was made Prefect Apostolic of the Alaska Missions, March 28, 1904. He was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Alaska, February 15, 1917, by Pope Benedict XV who conferred on him on March 22, 1917, the titular Bishopric of Ammaedera.

During his long tenure of office, Bishop Crimont has seen the Missions of Alaska grow like the proverbial mustard seed. Churches, Schools, a Congregation of Native Sisters, and Hospitals under his energetic guidance grew apace, while missionaries were sent to isolated districts from beyond the Arctic Circle to the lower reaches of Bering Sea. Mission Stations dotted the villages along the Yukon. The Jesuit Missions of the interior of Alaska were dear to his heart, but he did not neglect the care of the Indians and whites of the southeastern part of his huge Vicariate. A valiant band of Vicariate priests were prepared to carry on their work for the salvation of souls in this part of the Lord's vineyard. Ten Vicariate priests, two of whom are now with the armed forces of our country, labor in this district, while the first priest to be ordained in the Vicariate, Father G. Edgar Gallant celebrated this year his Silver Jubilee of Ordination.

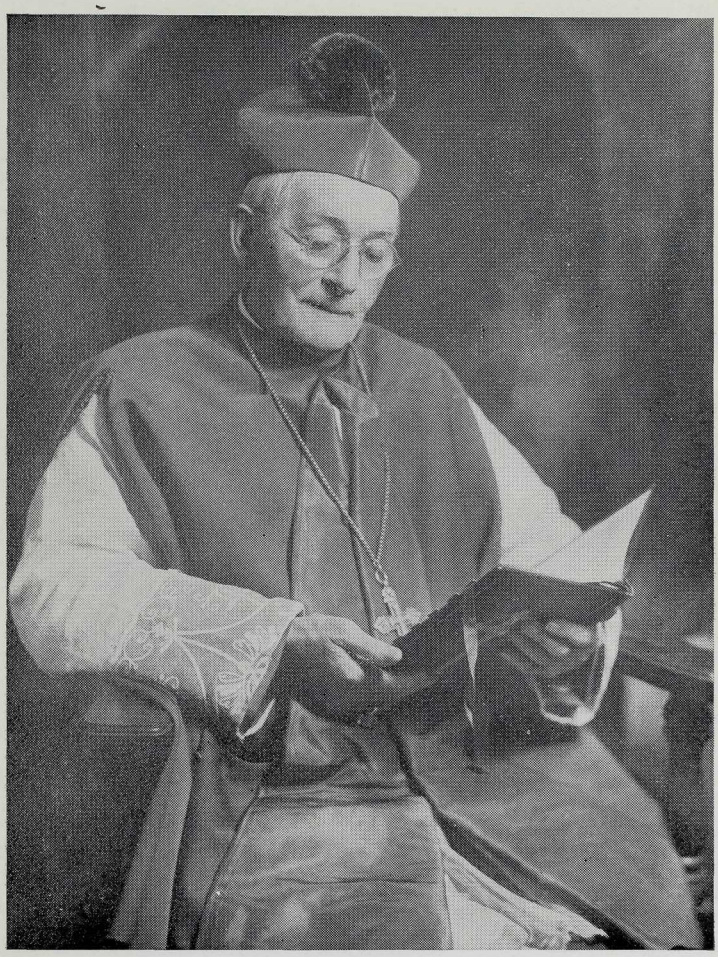
On July 25, 1942, was the twenty-fifth anniversary of his Episcopal consecration; Bishop Crimont, then in his eighty-fifth year and the oldest active Bishop in point of age, of the American Hierarchy, celebrated on July 29, 1942, a solemn High Mass of Thanksgiving in St. James Cathedral, Seattle, Washington, as the guest of His Excellency, Most Reverend Gerald Shaughnessy, S.M., ST.D., Bishop of Seattle. A host of priests and prelates feted the octogenarian Bishop with the wish "ad multos annos."

Truly the prophecy of St. Don Bosco has been fulfilled; Bishop Crimont's ardent devotion to St. Theresa, the Little Flower of Jesus, the patron of the Alaska Missions, has brought God's blessings upon his apostolic work. The seed of the Catholic Faith planted and watered by the blood of the Founder of the Missions, has fructified a hundredfold while generous, zealous and self-sacrificing workers are offering themselves to labor in the Alaska field, which has been styled by our late Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, "one of the most difficult Missions fields in Holy Church." May God's special help and protection watch over and guide this apostolic work which was inaugurated by Archbishop Charles John Seghers.

WALTER J. FITZGERALD, S.J.,
Coadj. Vic. Apost. of Alaska.

Feast of St. James, the Apostle,
July 25, 1943.

*St. Andrew's Cathedral, Victoria, B. C., built by the Most Rev. J. N. Lemmens, D.D., Bishop of Victoria, and solemnly blessed by him October 30th, 1892. In the crypt are the mortal remains of Archbishop Seghers.*



THE MOST REV. JOSEPH RAPHAEL CRIMONT, S.J., D.D.
*Vicar Apostolic of Alaska.*

# The Martyrdom of Archbishop Charles John Seghers

*"Holy Archibshop Seghers, help me to prove that your death by the assassin's bullet was a TRUE martyrdom for the Faith!*

*"Your whole missionary life was an unbloody martyrdom. So many times you exposed your life for Our Lord in your missionary excursions to savage Indians! Your devotion to St. Livinus, missionary martyr of Flanders, made you eager to be yourself a martyr. We believe that through his intercession, you obtained that great boon from God, and we thank Him for it."*

That Archbishop Seghers yearned for martyrdom is the conviction of all who knew him intimately, or who are well acquainted with the high lines of his wondrous missionary career. We shall try to prove his martyrdom with arguments that seem to us unchallengeable, for we are convinced that he suffered *martyrdom of desire* through the ardent yearnings which he so often expressed; and *martyrdom in deed,* through his violent death.

As an introduction, let us begin with his devotion to the Missionary Martyr of the dear Flanders where he was born, St. Livinus, whom he chose as his patron and model. Returning from Rome in February, 1884, he stopped in Belgium to recruit men and resources for the foundation of missions among the Indians and Eskimos of North Alaska. He visits the tomb of St. Livinus where he remains in prayer for hours. What must have been the object of his long prayer? In an address to the faithful that same day he betrays the secret: "St. Livinus is my Patron, the Patron of Missionary Bishops. There is nothing I desire more ardently than to die as he died."[1]

The thought of falling while combating for God inspires and encourages him:[2] "When I shall be established in the place where God wills me to be, I hope to prepare myself to die as a soldier of Christ on the battlefield, weapons in hand."[3] He proclaims this repeatedly.[4]

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1. Maurice De Baets, *Vie de Mgr. Seghers,* p. XLIV.
2. De Baets, *op. cit.,* p. XXXVIII.
3. Letter to Mgr. De Neve, quoted by De Baets, *op. cit.,* p. XXXVIII
4. Ibid.

ALASKAN MISSION FIELD
OF ARCHBISHOP SEGHERS
ARCTIC OCEAN
SIBERIA
BERING STRAIT
BERING SEA
PRIBILOFF ISLANDS
ST. LAWRENCE IS.
ST. MATTHEW IS.
NUNIVAK IS.
ALEUTIAN ISLANDS
BRISTOL BAY
PACIFIC OCEAN
KODIAK ISLAND
GULF OF ALASKA
COOK INLET
ALASKA
DOMINION OF CANADA
ARCTIC CIRCLE
ENDICOTT RANGE
ALASKAN RANGE
Scale of Statute Miles
0 50 100 150 200 250 300
NULATO
KALTAG
UNALAKLEET
FORT ST. MICHAEL
ANVIK
HOLY CROSS
RUSSIAN MISSION
POIMUT
TISSETLATON
NUKLUKAYET
FORT YUKON
FORT RELIANCE
DAWSON
HARPER'S PLACE
FORT SELKIRK
SKAGWAY
JUNEAU
SITKA
WRANGELL
QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS
Yukon River
Koyukuk River
Porcupine River
Tanana River
Stewart River
Pelly River
Lewes River
Kuskowim River
Mt. McKinley
Mt. St. Elias
Mt. Fairweather
Lake Leberge
WHITE HORSE
Lake Marsh
Lake Bennett
Teslin Lake
CHILKOOT PASS
GLACIER BAY

His soul, consumed by the fire of his love for God and zeal for the salvation of souls, does not permit him any rest. Only eight days after reaching Portland to take up his work as Coadjutor to Archbishop Blanchet, he sets out on a missionary excursion and travels constantly for sixteen months through the mountains of Oregon, Idaho and Montana. A religious superior who accompanied him several times, once admonished him that he was fatiguing himself to excess in riding on horseback over mountains and through vales to instruct and assist the scattered inhabitants of these regions. The Archbishop replied with a smile: "When I preach, I rest from the saddle; when I am in the saddle, I rest from preaching."[5]

His keen judgment made him realize and gauge to the full the dangers to which he was exposing himself, but his flaming zeal caused him to meet and face them with determination and an energy which, though calm, possessed an iron-like constancy! "I must!—it is hard, but that does not matter."

It cannot be doubted that on his last voyage to the Northern regions of Alaska in 1886, when he arrived at the confluence of the Stewart River and the Yukon, and determined to leave there his companions, Father Tosi and Father Robaut, and to proceed thence to Nulato with no other companion than the man who was to be his murderer, the Archbishop was clearly aware of the sad risks he was taking. The eccentric and erratic conduct of his servant Fuller throughout the first stage of the journey had revealed his character sufficiently to indicate the danger. The two priests opposed the plan. Still the Archbishop hoped that patience and kindness would win Fuller's attachment and devotion. What he judged his duty was paramount; other considerations bore no weight. The two priests would take care of the Indians at the mouth of the Stewart River; he would go on to Nulato to develop the mission which he had established there with Father Mandart in 1877-1878, in honor of Our Lady of the Snows. This was a typical example of his self-sacrificing devotedness. Father Brabant, a valiant missionary himself, referred to the Archbishop, in a letter, as "the greatest missionary of our century."[6]

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5. De Baets, *op. cit.*, p. XXXVI.

6. "Le plus grand missionaire de notre siecle." De Baets, *op. cit.*, p. XLIX.

**THE ARCHBISHOP AND HIS ASSASSIN**

Archbishop Seghers embarked on the steamer "Anoon" at Victoria, July 13, 1886, with Fathers Tosi and Robaut, S.J., and Francis Fuller. The latter had been employed at De Smet Mission in Idaho; he had heard of the projected expedition and manifested the desire to accompany it.

They followed the ordinary route of the ships serving the southern coast of Alaska, through the islands of the vast archipelago which extends from Victoria to the south of the peninsula. On the 19th, they arrived at Juneau, where Archbishop Seghers, a few months earlier, had installed Father Althoff as resident missionary, and on the morning of the 20th they were at Chilcoot, the terminus of the sea route. There Father Tosi wished to force Fuller to take the boat on its return voyage, for he found the man dangerous, but the latter clung to the service of the Archbishop with seeming devotedness, and so he remained.[7]

In order to reach the head waters of the Yukon, the missionaries, travelling on foot, had to cross glacial streams and defy the awful dangers of the mountains at Chilcoot Pass. On the seventh of September, after severe privations, risks, and difficulties of all kinds, they came to the spot where the Stewart empties into th Yukon River.

At this point it was agreed to separate, the field being too small for three missionaries. Moreover, the Archbishop wished to fulfil his promise made to the Nulato Indians in 1878, and to be there ahead of the Rev. Parker, Episcopalian clergyman, who had arrived in St. Michael and had announced his intention of going to Nulato. Against the remonstrances of Father Tosi, the Archbishop decided to take Fuller as his companion, leaving the two priests together. Father Tosi, calling the man apart, said: "Fuller, great will be your responsibility to watch over a life so precious as that of the Archbishop; if harm comes to him, it will be imputed to you."

"Father Tosi," exclaimed Fuller with enthusiasm, "there is no man in the world whom I esteem as much as the Archbishop; if I could shed my blood to save his life, I would gladly give it to the last drop."[8]

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7. De Baets, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

8. A statement made by Father Tosi to Father Hylebos, quoted by De Baets, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

Four weeks of travel amid floating ice brought the two travelers to Nuklukayet on October 4.

**FRANCIS FULLER AND WALKER**

Fuller had given clear enough signs of a deranged mind by a sickly fear of attempts on his life; extreme impressionability, and excitability; and a disposition to yield to evil influences, melancholy suspicions, and fits of jealousy leading to maniacal anger. "He was subject to hallucinations, and constantly imagined he was pursued by enemies."[9] However, up to the arrival at Nuklukayet he had shown nothing but an apparently sincere devotion to the Prelate, who states the fact to Father Jonckau in a letter which breathes sentiments of sympathy for the "good-hearted brother, ever ready to help and render service."[10] The Archbishop constantly refers to Fuller as "brother" simply from kindness, as he was aware that Fuller was not and had never been a Jesuit Brother.

Nuklukayet was a trading post of the Alaska Commercial Company, in charge of which was a man by the name of Walker. With him were two miners, who intended to spend the winter at the post. Apparently, Walker received Archbishop Seghers and his companion courteously on their arrival.

The Archbishop was anxious to continue on to Nulato after taking a short rest in order to recover from his fatigues and privations; but Fuller refused to accompany him, and they were obliged to remain there for more than six weeks, until the river was frozen solid, and they were thus enabled to travel by sled and dog-team. During this interval, Fuller became very morose. An intimacy was formed with Walker and the two miners. It was at this time that Fuller began to act with the greatest insolence towards the Archbishop.

Walker was bitterly opposed to the establishment of Catholic Missions in the country, because the conversion of the natives to the principles of Christianity would interfere with his immoral habits and his dishonesty in trading with them.[11] The Archbishop, noticing his sinister influence on Fuller decided to move a few miles

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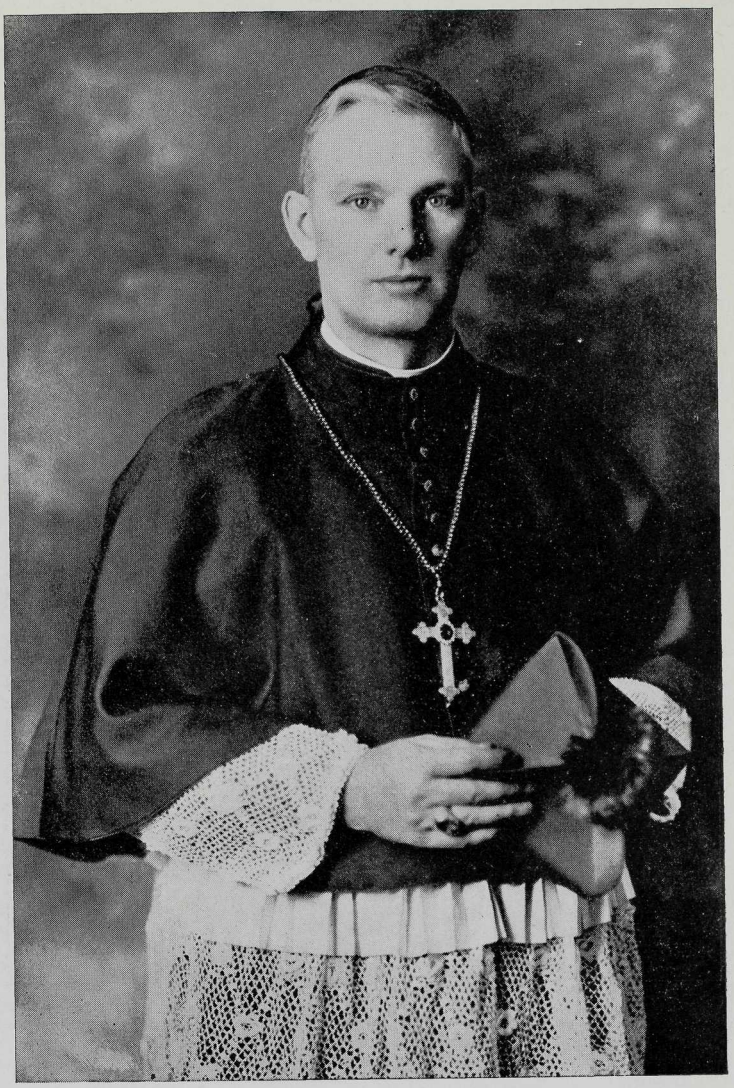
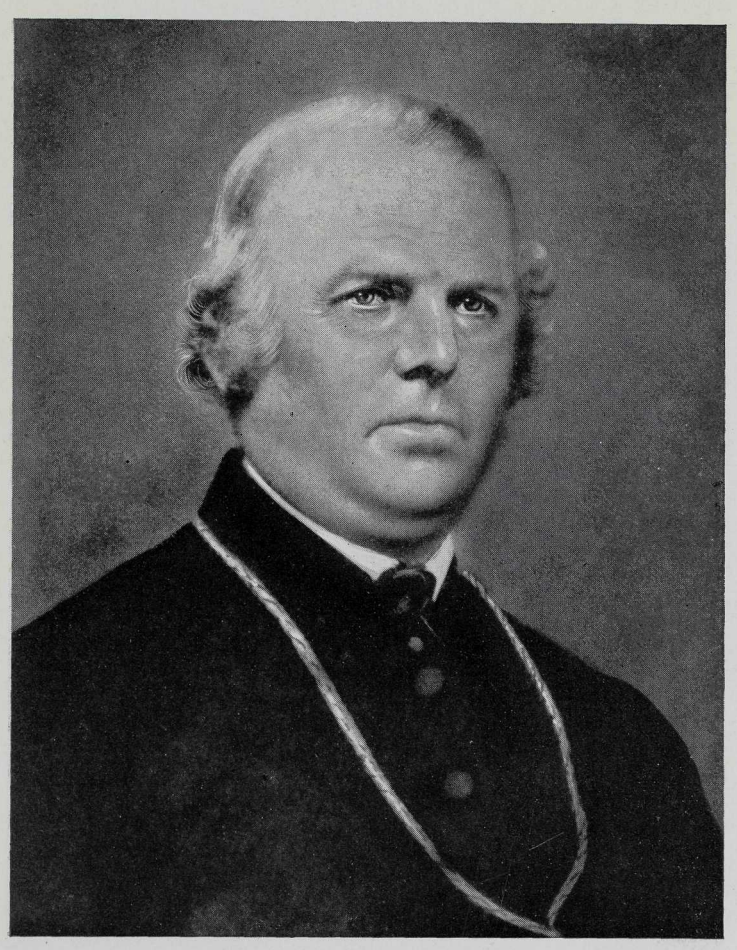
9. De Baets, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
10. De Baets, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
11. Francis Barnum, S. J., "True Account of the Murder of Archbishop Seghers," *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, 1893, p. 159.

SISTER MARY MILDRED

*Provincial of the Sisters of St. Ann, who translated Maurice de Baet's "Vie de Monseigneur Seghers". Her book, entitled "The Apostle of Alaska", was published by the St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, New Jersey.*



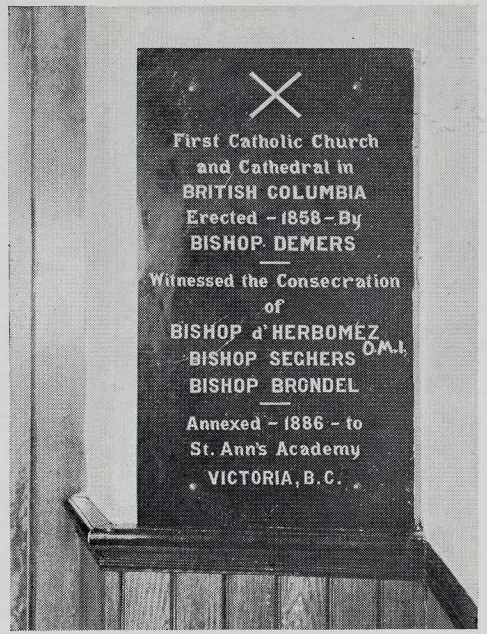
THE MOST REV. JOHN C. CODY, D.D.
*Bishop of Victoria, B. C.*

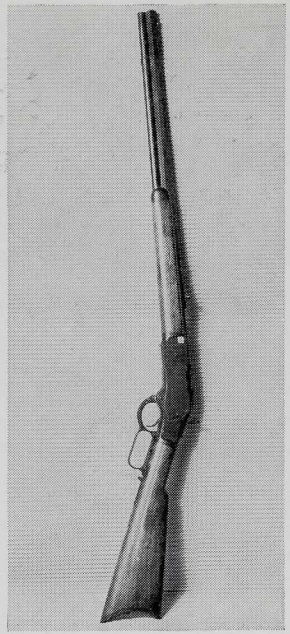


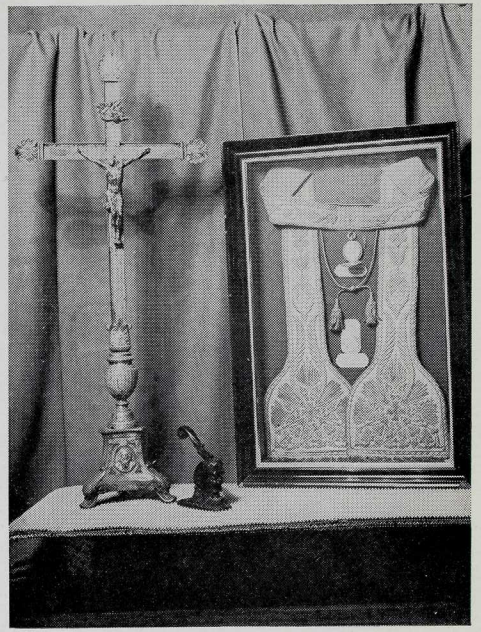
THE MOST REV. MODESTE DEMERS, D.D.
*Born October 11th, 1809, died July 28th, 1871, aged 62.*
*First Bishop of Victoria, 1847-1871.*

FIRST CHURCH AND CATHEDRAL IN VICTORIA, B. C.

*Erected in 1858 by Rev. James Michaud and became St. Ann's Chapel in 1886. It was the scene of the consecration of three bishops—Bishop, D'Herbomez, O.M.I., of New Westminster, Bishop Seghers and Bishop Brondel of Victoria. Three priests were ordained in it—Father Michaud (the architect), Father McGuckin, O.M.I., and Father Maloney.*





*Reading from left to right—Memorial plaque at the entrance of St. Ann's Chapel. The gun from which Francis Fuller fired the fatal charge. Crucifix and stole used at the Consecration of Archbishop Seghers, also his watch and seal.*

back and erect a small log cabin for himself and his attendant at the mouth of the Tosi River. On arriving there, he was thwarted by Fuller, who now obstinately refused to perform the least work. After a sojourn of two weeks, they returned to Nuklukayet. The white men advised Fuller to discontinue working for the Archbishop, and in accordance with this evil counsel, he told the Prelate one day, when he returned to the house, that if he needed wood, "to go out and cut it himself." Then, breaking into a violent passion, he seized his rifle and pointed it at the Archbishop. The latter, with perfect composure, arose, and standing erect with folded arms, fixed his eyes upon Fuller, who lowered the weapon and went out.

During the long stay at Nuklukayet, the idle Fuller was in the habit of spending hours every day with the Indians of the village. The Archbishop, determined to use the enforced delay for the spiritual benefit of the natives, also visited them regularly, to attend to their instruction. Walker and his companions soon observed that Fuller appeared to be infatuated with an Indian woman, and most probably saw in this an opportunity to aggravate his antagonism against the Archbishop by suggesting that the latter's influence would, in one way or another, deprive him of the object of his passion. Thus these hardened conspirators were preparing to use the deranged Fuller as a tool with which to take the life of the great missionary, and in this way to avert from themselves the consequences of the foundation of Catholic Missions on the Yukon.

That the above deduction is much more than a matter of conjecture is supported by the statement of one of the guards of the Sitka prison where Fuller was confined. The writer happened to be travelling later on with that guard and the murder of the Archbishop by Fuller naturally became the subject of conversation. This man informed me that when he had asked Fuller why he had slain the Archbishop, the assassin had made the statement that he had committed the deed because of ill-feeling engendered by the Prelate's attitude towards his dealings with one of the Indian women.[12]

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12. This point is further elaborated in a letter dated May 12, 1941, by the Reverend Joseph Perron, S.J., of Los Gatos, California, who had discussed the matter with Reverend Father Robaut, S.J., companion of the Archbishop on the fateful journey.

At last November 19 arrived and three dog-sleds were ready for the trip to Nulato. Archbishop Seghers, being now certain that he was not safe in the company of his attendant, asked Walker, whom he did not suspect of being his hypocritical enemy, to take him to Nulato; but the latter, although offered quite a sum of money for his services, refused to go. The Archbishop was not more successful with his invitation to the two miners. He therefore started out with two Indians whom he hired, a man and a youth; he told Fuller to stay at Nuklukayet for the winter, but the man insisted upon joining the travelling party. He became increasingly impatient and resentful because the Prelate gave more attention to the suggestions of the Indians than to his own. They finally arrived at Yissetlatch (Wolf-Head-Point) on Friday, November 26, towards evening; there the travellers made camp near the base of a lofty point jutting out from the North bank of the river. "God be praised, Brother," said the Archbishop, "it is the last day." He repeated several times that he must be in Nulato for Sunday. Fuller pretended later that he understood these words of the Prelate to mean that the Archbishop would have him killed on their arrival at Nulato.[13]

While preparing for the night Fuller became bitter and abusive, and voiced his anger more loudly than usual. The hut in which they had to spend the night was one of the poor summer shelters used by the Indians at their fishing camps. It probably consisted of a square pit covered with a rough roof of sod or branches. In such dwellings the fire is made on the floor, and around three sides the ground is left a few inches higher, thus forming the sleeping places. The interior is always dark, damp, ill-ventilated and indescribably filthy.

The Archbishop spread the bearskin which formed his travelling bed on one of the ledges, the two Indians occupied the opposite one, while Fuller was to sleep near the Archbishop. But how could he sleep with his mind engrossed with the plans for the murder of his master? He arose twice very early and was told by the Archbishop to lie down and try to sleep. His restlessness continued and he finally left the cabin, saying he was going for fuel. It was apparently a pretext to get his gun. Re-entering the cabin he found one of the natives already up, and to get rid of him, sent

13. De Baets, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

him out to fetch ice. The other native was awake and peering from under the blanket saw Fuller throw some birch bark on the fire to make a blaze and immediately afterwards he heard him cry out: "Bishop, get up!" At this rude summons the Prelate sat up, and seeing the rifle pointed at him, bowed his head in supreme resignation and self-immolation to God, crossed his arms on his breast, and received the fatal shot. The bullet entered the heart, and death was instantaneous. He had not uttered a word from the moment he had been awakened. The Indian sprang up, his companion ran back, and together fearing for their lives they tried to snatch the gun from the hands of the assassin. But Fuller said: "I only wanted to kill that bad man." Thereupon he took the Archbishop's pectoral cross and ring and trampled them underfoot.[14]

The three men then proceeded on to Nulato. The natives, hearing that their beloved Bishop had been murdered while he was returning to them, decided to kill Fuller; and their fury was such that they would certainly have carried out their intention had it not been for the intervention of a trader named Fredericksen.

**AFTER THE TRAGEDY**

An Indian named Kerilka, in whose cabin Archbishop Seghers had spent the winter of 1877-1878, took his team and accompanied by another friend of the Archbishop named Vanka, rushed to Yissetlatch to bring the body to Nulato. Fuller went with them. The body remained at their village about two weeks while the trader constructed a coffin for it and made preparations to send it to St. Michael, the headquarters of the Alaska Commercial Company. On December 10 it was sent to that destination, where the coffin, enclosed in a zinc casket, was placed in the old Greek Church until the advent of summer would make it possible to transport it to Victoria. However, none of the captains of the steamers would accept the responsibility of transferring the body without a permit from the government at Washington, and at that time no communication with Washington was possible. It was only the following year that, due to the efforts of the American Consul at Victoria, arrangements were finally made for the transportation of

14. De Baets, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

the body of the Archbishop. Meanwhile, it was temporarily buried by Father Robaut, S.J., in the Russian cemetery. The sacred remains repose now in the Memorial Chapel in the crypt of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Victoria, B. C.

During the interval in which Fuller remained at liberty, he wrote to Walker, informing him that he had slain the Archbishop, in accordance with his counsel, expressed in these words: "Get rid of that bad man, and that will be the end of the Catholics in this country."[15] Walker answered by a letter no less imprudent and compromising. He realized it later and repeated frequently that he would "give a thousand dollars to have that letter back."

Walker and Fuller met on the steamer on which one John Beaudoin was engineer and a quarrel ensued between the two. Beaudoin heard Fuller threaten Walker, saying: "Remember that if you do not keep your promise to help me through, I still have your letter!" Walker being alarmed, a compromise was effected and the two men exchanged their incriminating letters and threw them into the furnace of the steamer. Unknown to them the engineer, resting on a couch above their heads, heard their words clearly and saw their actions. Relating the scene to one of the Jesuit missionaries, Beaudoin said: "If I had had a gun, the letters would not have been destroyed and we would know more than we do now about the death of the Archbishop."[16]

At St. Michael, Fuller's statement that he had killed the Archbishop in self-defence was given credence and he was even admitted to the table of the officials of the company. However, one of the clerks, a Mr. Waldron, positively refused to accept Fuller's statements. He said to him: "I do not know you nor anything about this case, but I say that there are not enough goods in this warehouse to bribe an Indian to kill a white man who has never injured him." Nevertheless, Fuller had the effrontery to exhibit a couple of little sacks containing sugar and tea which he declared were bribes given by the Archbishop to induce an Indian to take his life.

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15. Barnum, *op. cit.*, p. 163—Walker showed this letter to Harper and also to a Rev. Mr. Ellington, an Anglican Minister from the Mackenzie. Both declared positively that the letter contained the most damaging evidence. Mr. Ellington asserted that, according to the laws of England, this letter was sufficient to hang Fuller without any other testimony.

16. The missionary referred to above is Father Barnum, who related this incident to the author.

The assassin remained at liberty for some time. The nervousness of certain ladies at St. Michael caused the agent, Henry Neuman, to send Fuller to Andreafsky for the remainder of the winter under the care of the engineer, Beaudoin. This man said later that, every Friday during the night, Fuller had fearful attacks of frenzy, when he would run around the house, crying out incessantly that he "must reach Nulato before Sunday," the words which the Archbishop repeated often during the last days of his tragic journey.

**THE CAUSE OF THE MURDER OF ARCHBISHOP CHARLES JOHN SEGHERS**

Death came to the saintly Charles John Seghers on November 27, 1886,[17] while he was travelling along the Yukon River, Alaska. It was caused by a bullet fired by Francis Fuller, a bullet which pierced his heart.

Why was he the victim of the assassin?

Fuller gave several reasons for his foul deed, varying his alleged motives according to his mood and circumstances. We may mention some of them here.

(1) Hatred and desire for revenge against the Archbishop who, he imagined, was exciting the Indians against him.

(2) Self-defence, in view of his pretence that the Archbishop would cause him to be killed when they arrived at Nulato. This idea was supported by the words supposed to have been addressed by Father Tosi to the Prelate, when they parted at Stewart: "Be sure to get rid of that man Fuller before reaching Nulato."[18]

(3) Fuller often referred to the Archbishop as his "enemy."

Charles John Seghers an enemy?

All who knew the Prelate are unanimous in testifying to his lovable character. Thus a secular newspaper published in Victoria, ("The Daily Colonist") on the occasion of the funeral of Archbishop Seghers extols his peerless qualities of mind and heart: "He was a most amiable man; he had the heart of a little child . . ."

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17. The date of the death of Archbishop Seghers is usually given as November 28. According to De Baets, (footnote on page 203) this is an error. Archbishop Seghers arrived at Yissetlatch the evening of Friday, November 26; he was assassinated the following morning, the 27th. No possible doubt can be held on this point.

18. Barnum, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

Father Curtis, later Bishop A. A. Curtis of Wilmington, Delaware, acted as theologian and secretary to Archbishop Seghers during the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore. We quote from the Life of Bishop Curtis:

> "He was much beloved and greatly revered by his companions in the same field of labor, who styled him "the St. Francis de Sales of the United States," on account of his great meekness and condescension, combined with his priestly zeal and episcopal dignity. Father Curtis was much attracted by his amiable qualities of mind and heart, and spoke most feelingly of him, upon hearing the sad and untimely death of this self-sacrificing apostle, who fell a victim to an assassin's bullet, having been shot by his guide on their journey in Alaska. This occurred in 1886, at the very time the burden of the episcopacy was laid upon the shoulders of Father Curtis.[19]"

The Archbishop's charity and condescension in his treatment of Fuller was evidenced by his addressing him always and referring to him by the title of "brother," in his letters as well as in his diary. This could not help endearing the latter to his master, enkindling the attendant's devotion to him. We note this particularly since it contrasts with the colder treatment by Father Tosi and Father Robaut, who would not yield so readily to Fuller's demands and whims. Moreover, the Archbishop always endured his outbursts of insolence and complaints with meekness and serenity. Therefore, there was no foundation whatever for accusing the Prelate of enmity towards his companion.

**THE TRUE CAUSE OF THE ARCHBISHOP'S DEATH**

A complete view of the whole situation leads us to the direct conclusion that Archbishop Seghers died a victim of the hatred which his betrayers bore to the Catholic Faith.

There is little doubt Fuller was a monomaniac, with the fixed idea he was persecuted, and that the least circumstance provoked him to madness and fury. It was certainly in consequence of the Archbishop's kindness to him and of his reluctance to contradict him, that they were caught by the ice before reaching Nulato. According to the testimony of Father Robaut, Fuller without necessity delayed the trip by loitering here and there to hunt moose and cariboo. It was this delay which caused the six weeks' sojourn at Nuklukayet, where the real drama started through the evil influence on Fuller of the white men of that place. Until then he had shown absolutely no indication of hatred against his master.

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19. Sisters of the Visitation, *"Life and Characteristics of Rt. Rev. A. A. Curtis, D.D.*, p. 90.

A further proof is furnished by the Archbishop's diary which, up to this time, contains no hint of anything unpleasant. On October 21, however, we find: "the brother is angry at breakfast; he accuses me of wanting to ruin him." The very last entry in the diary is particularly significant: "November 25—Fuller says that Walker had told him that I would give him (Fuller) a bad name."

The white men, Walker and the two miners, must be considered as the real murderers of the Archbishop. This is in keeping with the judgment of St. Augustine, who says that Pilate was not the real author of the fiendish crime of condemning Christ to death; but it was rather the people who, by crying, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him," slew Him "gladio linguae," (i.e., by the sword of the tongue). Similarly, Fuller was only the tool, almost like the inanimate gun, in the hands of the evil men who dreaded that the advent of Catholic missionaries would interfere with their immoral relationships and fraudulent bargaining with the Indians. They realized that the priests would instruct the natives in the practice of Christian chastity, thus preventing to a large extent their illicit dealings with them; and moreover that the honest prices these same missionaries would offer for furs and other commodities would expose their dishonesty and thus injure their trade. Hence, they determined to dispose of the Archbishop in some way or other. But how could this be done? Fuller appeared as a suitable instrument.

He visited them often, and the more frequently he did so, the more he appeared alienated from the Archbishop. Things came to such a pass that he would do nothing at all for him and treated him arrogantly. The natives said that, one day, he grew so angry that he levelled his gun at the Prelate, threatening to shoot him. The three white men were aware of all this. It was precisely what they were aiming at. Why did they, despite the offer of ample reward, one after another, refuse to accompany the Archbishop to Nulato over the ice? Accepting his invitation would have militated against their plan to use Fuller as an instrument to do away with the Archbishop, consequently they kept at a distance so as not to compromise themselves. We have seen above how Walker and his companions by calumniating the prelate succeeded in bringing to a white heat the hatred of Fuller for the Archbishop. They noticed that Fuller spent most of his time idling around the village, contracting rather suspicious friendships with some of the Indian women; and that the Archbishop also visited the place assiduously,

instructing the people. The fact that they both frequented the same locality for such utterly divergent aims, was used by the conspirators in order to stir up in the diseased and suspicious mind of Fuller sentiments of apprehension for his own interests. As jealousy engenders intense hatred, this would amply explain Fuller's insane rage against his master. Had the man been normal, he would not have succumbed so easily to such an aversion against the Archbishop, of whose outstanding virtue he was well aware. But he was not a normal man; hence Walker and his companions used his susceptibility to compass their nefarious designs.

The foregoing account, in our opinion, demonstrates with sufficient clarity that Archbishop Seghers died purely and simply for the Catholic Faith. In conclusion we shall merely summarize the salient points, and add the testimony of two notable ecclesiastics on the matter.

First, there was absolutely no other reason to explain the hatred which Walker and his companions bore the Archbishop. The Prelate's noble and generous character excluded any other possibility; nor is there the slightest evidence of any open hostility between them. On the contrary, the high-minded missionary did not in the least suspect them of treachery.

Second, until he came in contact with these men, Fuller manifested an affectionate devotedness towards his master. This is verified by the statements in the Archbishop's diary, and by Fuller's reply to Father Tosi's solemn admonition to take care of the precious life entrusted to him.

Moreover, the incriminating letters which passed between Fuller and Walker were tangible proof of a conspiracy. In addition, during the trial at Sitka, Walker was in constant communication with Fuller, and he appeared to advise the prisoner. During the deposition of the Indian present at the murder, Walker tried to dictate to the witness what he was to say, thus confusing him, evidently making an attempt to shake the confidence of the court in the testimony of the Indian.[20] It is indeed unfortunate that the

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20. De Baets, *op. cit.*, p. 221—The notes concerning Walker's behavior during the trial at Sitka are given by Reverend W. Heynen who was present. (Rev. Father Heynen was for many years a well-known missionary on Vancouver Island, He passed away at St. Joseph's Hospital, Victoria, B. C., in 1939).

correspondence mentioned above was destroyed, as it would doubtless have furnished much evidence, not only at the trial but also in support of our cause.

Finally, we may remark the very attitude of Archbishop Seghers when facing death was that of a martyr. The Indian who witnessed the tragedy declared that when Fuller rudely called: "Bishop, get up!" the Archbishop, seeing the gun levelled at him, simply crossed his arms on his breast in a gesture of sacrificial resignation.

In contrast to the sublime though tragic ending the holy Prelate's life are the miserable deaths of his two persecutors, Walker and Fuller. The former died in San Francisco, in 1891, the victim of an attack of delirium tremens caused by his dissipated life. The latter, not long after he had finished serving his sentence, which had been reduced from ten to nine years, was shot during an altercation with a neighbor, on a small farm near Portland, Oregon. "Omnes enim qui acceperint gladium, gladio peribunt."[21]

We may fittingly terminate these considerations of Archbishop Seghers' claim to the title of martyr, by quoting the words of Bishop Brondel of Helena, and of the Great Cardinal Gibbons.

The former, in announcing the sad news to his people in Montana, exclaimed:

> "We have lost the Apostle of Alaska, sent by Leo from Rome to bring the Catholic Faith to the utmost limits of the earth. We have lost the saint who, imitating St. Livinus who stepped from the Episcopal See of Dublin to bring the Faith to the savages of Flanders, in our own day stepped from the Archiepiscopal See of Oregon to wade as a travelling missionary through the snows of the Yukon to bring the Faith to the Eskimos. His memory is held in benediction, and without anticipating the voice of authority, we will cherish the thought that he died a martyr's death.[22]"

Cardinal Gibbons, writing to the author of the Life of Archbishop Seghers, Mgr. Maurice De Baets, declared: "History may indeed call him the First Martyr of Alaska."[23]

JOSEPH R. CRIMONT, S.J.
*Vicar Apostolic of Alaska.*

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21. "All they who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." (Words of Christ in St. Matthew, XXVI, 52).

22. Van Rensselaer, S.J., "The Apostle of Alaska," *American Quarterly Review* (January, 1888) p. 118.

23. Letter dated September 16, 1894, quoted by De Baets.

*One of the main panels at Victoria's First Diocesan Missionary Exhibition held in St. Ann's Academy on Gaudete Sunday, December 12, 1943. The life story of Archbishop Seghers was a central feature.*

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