

# Longhouses, Schoolrooms, and Workers' Cottages: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions to the Tsimshian and the Transformation of Class Through Religion

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## Résumé de l'article

Le présent article explore la mouvance des frontières des identités de classe au XIXe siècle dans les missions protestantes chez les Tsimshian, un peuple autochtone de la côte Nord-ouest du Pacifique en Colombie-Britannique. En analysant tour à tour la nature des chefs chrétiens, le désir des Tsimshian d'être alphabétisés et scolarisés, et le logement dans les missions, l'auteure démontre comment les notions de classe véhiculées par la religion ont pris des significations fort différentes dans les milieux autochtones et non autochtones. Pour traiter d'un tel sujet, les chercheurs doivent tenir compte des perspectives historiques des Autochtones non seulement sur la conversion, mais aussi sur leur hiérarchie sociale dans les missions chrétiennes ; il s'agit plus précisément de voir comment le rôle des Autochtones au sein même de la mission était déterminé par leur propre notion de classe. Si quelques Autochtones avaient indéniablement utilisé la conversion à la chrétienté comme un moyen de contourner les conventions sociales réglementant le rang, les privilèges et l'accès au pouvoir spirituel, d'autres Tsimshian avaient cherché le changement en se servant de ces nouvelles formes de spiritualité pour solidifier leur position sociale existante.

# Longhouses, Schoolrooms, and Workers' Cottages: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions to the Tsimshian and the Transformation of Class Through Religion<sup>1</sup>

SUSAN NEYLAN

Christianity is an integral aspect of Native history, not simply an external force acting upon it. Nineteenth-century Aboriginal women and men frequently took the initiative and assumed roles of leadership in mission activities and within the churches themselves. While they never entirely directed or controlled their own Christianization, the identities they assumed as part of this process illuminate the extent to which conversion entailed negotiation. The relationship forged between Native and Euro-Canadian missionary was a dialogue of sorts, although not necessarily a mutually beneficial one. One of the pre-eminent themes in this dialogue on Protestant mission work among the Tsimshian of British Columbia's North Pacific Coast in the late nineteenth century revolved around class.<sup>2</sup>

This paper explores the blurring of boundaries among spiritual expressions and identities in Protestant missions to the Tsimshian.<sup>3</sup> It highlights several

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1 This paper draws upon some of my doctoral research: Susan Neylan, "The Heavens are Changing": Nineteenth Century Protestant Missionization on the North Pacific Coast" (PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1999) and my forthcoming book, *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). Thanks to Christopher Roth for his assistance on the intricacies of Tsimshian orthography; any errors in spelling reproduced here remain mine alone.

2 Class issues have been analyzed widely in studies on colonial imperialism. As Cooper and Stoler observed, class issues have been discussed in this context generally in two ways: "through the examination of accumulation by metropolitan capitalist classes (sometimes in conflict with capitalist classes that had taken root in colonial societies), and through analysis of the nature of class formation that capitalist penetration set off among indigenous peoples." Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, "Introduction: Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule," *American Ethnologist* 16/4 (November 1989): 314. I will refer to "class" in this manner throughout this paper, but also will apply Tsimshian definitions of "class."

3 Here I believe my work departs from those older studies that first recognized missionaries as agents of social change, or the importance of Native agency. Rather, I see my research as part of the recent historiography on missionization as a process which emphasizes the fluid and contested nature of power in colonial/post-colonial contexts. For example, Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press,

ways in which the class implications of work and religious association had profoundly different meanings in Native and non-Native milieus. Pre-existing indigenous understanding on class and spiritual transformation informed Native reception to Christianity. The Tsimshian and their immediate neighbours, the Nisga'a and Gitksan, were socially stratified by ranked class-based systems. When Native peoples participated in the missions, they did not entirely forsake this history. A number of religious forms with industrial working-class associations, such as the Salvation Army, the Church Army, and other evangelical forms of Methodism and Anglicanism, flourished in Tsimshian territories, yet those communities were neither working-class nor urban. In fact, several Tsimshian missions were pioneered by chiefly and noble families who firmly rejected the "working class" identity that some missionaries sought to impose upon them. There is some evidence to suggest that certain Native converts utilized conversion to circumvent the usual social conventions surrounding rank and privilege. However, it is also readily apparent that others sought empowerment by using these new forms of spirituality in order to bolster existing social positions, as demands for literacy, Euro-Canadian education, and new styles of village architecture (especially housing) will aptly demonstrate.

### **Class and Spiritual Identities in the Tsimshian Context**

Defining Tsimshian notions of class is a complex matter because of the intersection between class and other important delineations of power, status, and family. Tsimshianic societies were hierarchical and ranked, organized into four matrilineal exogamous clans in a system they shared with their immediate neighbours, the Haida and Tlingit.<sup>4</sup> Among the Coast Tsimshian, these clans

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1993); Clarence Bolt, *Thomas Crosby and the Tsimshian: Small Shoes for Feet Too Large* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992); Brett Christophers, *Positioning the Missionary: John Booth Good and the Confluence of Cultures in Nineteenth Century British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998); Michael E. Harkin, *The Heiltsuks: Dialogues of Culture and History on the Northwest Coast* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); and Martha McCarthy, *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press and Western Canadian Publishers, 1995).

- 4 Throughout this paper, references to Tsimshian refer to the Tsimshian proper (including Canyon Tsimshian), called "Coast Tsimshian" in earlier usage. For thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans, approximately 10-12,000 Tsimshianic speaking peoples (whom anthropologists generally have divided into three or four major cultural-linguistic groups: Coast and Southern Tsimshian, Nisga'a and Gitksan) occupied the North Pacific coastline and Nass and Skeena Rivers. While well-defined boundaries between nations existed, there was a great deal of movement and interaction in terms of goods, people, ideas and customs. Exogamy or marriage outside one's group (in this case one's clan) permitted kinship alliances for the elite classes beyond tribal or village borders, with those groups who shared a similar social system (e.g. Haida and Tlingit). Their economies were built around permanent home villages and a regular, seasonal-round, using different locations in the region to exploit a wide

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were represented by two sets of crests (*pteex*), each with reciprocal obligations to the other in the pair: Killerwhale or Blackfish (*Gispuwudwada*) paired with Wolf (*Laxgibuu*), and Raven (*Ganhada*) linked with Eagle (*Laxsgiik*). Although clan members were responsible for mutual assistance and protection, because they were scattered over large territories, in practice, the main social grouping was the *walp* or *waap* (house).

The house was the core "family unit" for the Tsimshian.<sup>5</sup> The *walp* was a matrilineage that resided in a single or cluster of longhouses.<sup>6</sup> Symbolically, it was a box or container filled with food, wealth, and "real" people. Indeed, social and spiritual divisions within the elite membership in Tsimshian society were based on the degree to which individuals were more or less "real" and constantly striving to become more than human. These characteristics made comprehension of the missionary message of the possible transformation through the saving grace of Christ much easier because of its similarity to these existing notions. The ranked names were the *walp*, not the individuals who filled them. Therefore becoming more than human or a "real person" depended upon participation in the Tsimshian potlatch system.<sup>7</sup> The collection of immortal names is passed through the matriline and the house chief assumes the leading name. This social system remains in place today. The Tsimshian potlatch (*yaawk*) or feast, in which names and positions are assumed and given authority through public recognition, "empties" the house as it simultaneously fills it through the incarnation of new name-holders.<sup>8</sup>

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variety of resources. George F. MacDonald, Gary Couplands, and David Archer, "The Coast Tsimshian, ca. 1750" in *Historical Atlas of Canada. Vol. I: From the Beginning to 1900*, ed. R. Cole Harris and cartographer Geoffrey J. Matthews (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), Plate 13.

5 For a more extensive discussion of how missionization influenced concepts of the family among the Tsimshian, please see Susan Neylan, "Contested Family: Navigating Kin and Culture in Protestant Missions to the Tsimshian, 1857-1896," in *Households of Faith: Family, Religion, and Community in Canada, 1730-1969*, ed. Nancy Christie (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, forthcoming).

6 In the Coast Tsimshian language (*Sm'algyax*), the same word *walp* (called *waap* in southern villages) used for family, also means house or dwelling. John Asher Dunn, *Sm'algyax: A Reference Dictionary and Grammar for the Coast Tsimshian Language* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press and Sealaska Heritage Foundation, 1995), s.v. "family," "house"; Instead of the term family, Viola Garfield uses the term "household," meaning both or either "belonging to the same kinship group or subdivision of a clan" or "includes all those people who live in a single dwelling...includ[ing] people belonging to different clans." Viola E. Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, University of Washington Publications in Anthropology 7/3 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, February 1939): 174.

7 Margaret Seguin, "Lest There Be No Salmon: Symbols in Traditional Tsimshian Potlatch," in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present*, ed. Margaret Seguin (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), 111.

8 *Ibid.*, 125.

Intersecting the clan and *walp* systems were broad categories of class: royals (*smgigyet* or “real people,” who constituted the chiefly class) who held considerable economic, political and spiritual power (this elite class also encompassed the nobles or *’algyagask* who belonged to the chiefs’ lineages); the majority of the people or commoners (*liksgiget*) who supported the “real people” economically and morally; and slaves who, along with marginalized individuals who had lost their status, were considered *’wa’aayin* or unhealed, and thus, literally, outside society.<sup>9</sup> Hence, not all people residing in the long-house were considered family members.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, members of each class were also discreetly ranked within their category. The most prestigious crests were associated with the class of royals who maintained the house system by filling names and powers. Subsidiary crests within the four main ones were likewise ranked through the classes.<sup>11</sup> Competitive potlatches, known as *maxtye’ tsü*, allowed for the re-ordering of social rank within the classes, something that occurred more frequently in the nineteenth century because of the influx of new sources of wealth following the entry of European traders into Tsimshian homelands. However, the convention itself predates contact.<sup>12</sup> This practice of facilitating social mobility would come to utilize Protestant missions and all they entailed in ways that both continued and challenged this custom.

Another ancient concept related to class, which would have a lasting impact on how mission Christianity was received in the nineteenth century, was the relationship between Tsimshian social classes and spiritual power. Guardian helpers were important to Tsimshian culture and were accessed by individuals to assist them in any and all aspects of their daily lives. All free persons thus saw power acquisition and spirit protection as essential.<sup>13</sup> However, aside from shamanic encounters and vision quests, most powers were obtained or consulted through a much more formalized structure in which hereditary sources

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9 Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 177-178; John Cove, *Shattered Images: Dialogues and Mediations on Tsimshian Narratives* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1987), 243-45;

10 Slaves, for example, existed outside the social structure except as property or labour within a particular lineage.

11 Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture: A Light Through the Ages* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 11; and Jay Miller, “Tsimshian Ethno-Ethnohistory: A ‘Real’ Indigenous Chronology,” *Ethnohistory* 45/4 (Fall 1998): 661.

12 Jay Miller, “Feasting with the Southern Tsimshian,” in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past; Views for the Present*, ed. Margaret Seguin [Anderson] (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993), 29-30.

13 Viola E. Garfield, “The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors,” in *The Tsimshian Indians and Their Arts*, by Viola Garfield and Paul S. Wingert (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 39.

and class were paramount.<sup>14</sup> Formalized spiritual leadership in Tsimshian culture could be wielded by chiefs (*smhalaayt*) and shamans (*swansk halaayt*).<sup>15</sup> Membership of all high-ranking Tsimshian in one of the four dancing or secret societies (*wut'aahalaayt*) was socially mandatory and was partly related to power acquisition. These three arenas of superhuman power constitute the backbone of the more formalized of Tsimshian religious practices. While shamans could come from royalty, nobility, or the commoner class, chiefly prerogatives were owned and inherited through one's house. Spiritual power acquired through initiation into the dancing societies, with membership in two groups reserved for the chiefs and nobles, meant that many powers were available only to Tsimshian social elites.<sup>16</sup> In other words, social standing played an important role for holding and exercising spiritual power. The most renowned shamans among the Tsimshian were not of the chiefly class but had acquired considerable status through their use of superhuman skills.<sup>17</sup> While affiliation in lineage and clan with other shamans was an advantage, it was not a requirement. In contrast, the empowerment of chiefs (when *smhalaayt*) and those they initiated in special ceremonies or in the secret societies was contingent upon which gifts of power they were entitled to receive from their house or lineage, or because of their social rank. In this respect, spiritual leadership and expertise were closely connected to class, and specifically to the higher classes (royals and nobles).

14 I have employed the term "formalized" in reference to Tsimshian spirituality, although this is an artificial designation. Supernatural and human domains were not separate in Tsimshian worldview and therefore spiritual power was accessible to nearly everyone. However, there were certain "formal" (frequently seasonal) accesses to supernatural powers prominent in performances, rituals, and displays that also had important social functions. Spiritual practitioners who specialized in communication with the non-human and superhuman aspects of the universe, particularly in the context of healing, and who were trained and/or developed their skills over the course of a lifetime, likewise, merit the categorization of their religious practices as "formal" rather than informal.

15 During the summer months, chiefs were known as *smgigyeyt* or "real people," where their authority centred in the political and economic spheres. In the winter, they became *smhalaayt* or (literally real *halaayt* meaning truly empowered or real power) through their function as spiritual leaders and power holders. The relationship of these categories to Tsimshian culture was very complex and the following explanation is thus a much simplified definition of their spiritual forms. Also, as my discussion of Tsimshian spirituality draws heavily upon academic reconstructions, post-colonial sources, and anthropological works, I acknowledge that accuracy concerning indigenous worldviews may be questioned.

16 Collectively known as *Wut'aahalaayt*, the four societies were *Mitaa* (Dancers), *Nukim* (Dog Eaters), *Ludzista* (Destroyers) and *Xgyedmhalaayt* (Human-Eaters), with membership in the last two reserved for only chiefs and nobles. *Xgyedmhalaayt* is frequently translated as Cannibal Dancers, which is incorrect. The biting and eating of human flesh that characterized some *Xgyedmhalaayt* performances was done by non-human spirits who used humans merely as vessels (i.e. the vessels were not the eaters, and never digested human flesh).

17 Garfield, "Tsimshian and Their Neighbors," 47-8.

The implications for the reception of Christian power within this complex religious system are far-reaching. Conversion to Christianity extended the possibilities of transformative experience to more people, who were neither shamans nor chiefs. Paradoxically, it allowed the empowered shamans and chiefs another potential mode of retaining their roles of religious leadership and specialization, something that historically was true more for chiefs than for shamans. Consequently, the Tsimshian reception of Christianity was informed by this existing culture of spirituality, while it simultaneously created new social identities.

### **Tsimshian and Missionaries in Contact**

The missionaries to the First Nations of coastal British Columbia were not the first Europeans to interact with Native societies there. Indeed, it was a half-century after sustained contact with non-Native peoples before mission work even received any serious interest. What had brought most newcomers into the area concerned material, not spiritual matters. In an age of exploration and mercantilism, the same forces that had sent wave after wave of European ships to the Americas also drove them into the Pacific realm. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the secular interests of fur traders operating in the interior of British Columbia (New Caledonia) brought Christian beliefs and instructors into the region in a more sustained way than had the fleeting contacts of the earlier naval explorers and the coastal ship-to-shore Maritime fur trade of the eighteenth century. Yet this early period of sustained trading contact laid important groundwork for the nature of Native/non-Native interaction for the region. It was within this context that the Tsimshian acquired a utility for these visitors, and in part, accounts for the enduring material attraction of Christian missions.

The first coastal post, Fort Simpson, was established initially on the Nass River in 1831 but moved shortly thereafter in 1834 to its current position where it ensured better trading opportunities not only for the Nass River, but along the coast and the Skeena River to the south.<sup>18</sup> Following the move, the Gispaxlo'ots tribe of Coast Tsimshian established a permanent winter village (*Lax'Kw'alaams*) close to the fort at a site that formerly had been a camping place for Coast Tsimshian groups traveling to the spring fishery on the Nass River.<sup>19</sup> Both voluntarily and involuntarily, several other Native villages were amalgamated or moved to locations more beneficial for trading with the new-

18 This was the first coastal fort in Tsimshian territory. However, the indirect influence of nearby interior posts (Ft. Kilmaurs or Ft. St. James) to the south-east in Gitksan, Wet'suwet'en, and Sekani territories had already begun this process.

19 Miller explains that, although they often settled in neighbourhoods, "the discrete boundaries provided by separate towns did not exist in the new community, and many new solutions to rank, rivalry, and respect had to be negotiated and confirmed by potlatches." Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 133.

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comers. In particular, the new sites permitted the inhabitants to hold a middle-man position, trading European goods with other First Nations. Epidemics continued to be an adverse consequence of sustained contact with non-Natives, and this too altered social structures as villages joined together, unable to sustain a viable existence alone after massive depopulation.<sup>20</sup> This spatial clustering of Aboriginal populations at fewer sites throughout the region facilitated the dissemination of Christianity. However, conversion to this new Christian religion could act to bolster, as well as challenge the existing frameworks of class, status, and power in this period of social reconfiguration.

Christian missions appeared on the coast formally in 1857, when William Duncan, a lay preacher sponsored by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), established the first Anglican mission among the Tsimshian at the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Simpson; he later founded perhaps British Columbia's most famous mission, Metlakatla.<sup>21</sup> Both Metlakatla and Fort Simpson (Port Simpson after 1880), served as epicentres for Protestant mission work in the region. Other missionaries followed Duncan, and by the late nineteenth century, four versions of Christianity were available to the four Tsimshianic speaking groups: Roman Catholicism (generally in the Upper Skeena River region only), Anglicanism, Methodism, and the Salvation Army.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the dominance of four variants of Christianity was very compatible with the "traditional" Tsimshian philosophy that conceived their culture in divisions of four. In his recent book on Tsimshian culture, Jay Miller cites a perfect example of how the denominational structure of Christianity meshed with Tsimshian notions of ranked divisions. A Hartley Bay chief, Louis Clifton, once informed Miller that despite many religious options in the world today, the only valid religions for the Tsimshian were the four aforementioned versions of Christianity: "While reflecting the churches that had missionized among the Tsimshian, his statement draws parallels which confirm the model of Tsimshian culture as a branching system expressed most fully in fourfold divisions."<sup>23</sup>

Metlakatla was founded in 1862, when Duncan moved from Fort Simpson to the recently abandoned village site, with the explicit intention of isolating Native Christians not only from their "traditional" culture, but from the negative influences of Euro-Canadian settlements. From 1862 until 1887,

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20 Robert Boyd, "Demographic History, 1774-1874," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Northwest Coast*, Vol. 7, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1990), 135-48.

21 Russian Orthodox missions in the Aleutian Islands and in Russian Alaska were well established by the early nineteenth century.

22 By the turn of the century, Pentecostal churches (such as the Seventh Day Adventists) had also begun to appear in the area, but their influence was limited and much more significant in the latter half of the twentieth century than in this earlier period.

23 Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 12.



Metlakatla grew from an original group of 50 converts to over 900 Tsimshian Christians and other First Nations from the region.<sup>24</sup> Although Tsimshian chiefs, notably among them, Paul Ligeex, perceived their membership in the mission based on existing social and political criteria, Metlakatla encouraged nothing short of a sweeping reformation of Tsimshian society. As an industrial undertaking, it was designed to promote Victorian “progress” and the merits of European civilization, including work habits and discipline appropriate to a worker class in an industrial, capitalist system. Victorian-style homes patterned upon British workers’ cottages, gardens, schoolhouse, library, weaving house, blacksmith’s shop, cannery, carpentry shop and sawmill, all attempted to convert Tsimshian space as well as souls.<sup>25</sup> Metlakatla lay at the heart of Anglican activity for the region, both as a model of practice, Episcopal See (of the Diocese of Caledonia after 1878), and as a physical base from which to launch new missionary endeavours and regular itinerant circuits. By the end of the nineteenth century, Coast and Southern Tsimshian, Nisga’a, and Gitksan Christians were served by Anglican missions at Kincolith, Aiyansh, Kitwanga, Kitwancool, Hazelton, and Kitkatla.

Other Protestant groups found acceptance among the Tsimshian and, likewise, expanded mission work throughout the entire North Coast region. For the Tsimshian, the maintenance of authority and power had long depended on extensive systems of trade, exchange, and redistribution of material resources. The opportunity to gain access to new sources of both material and spiritual resources was likely one of the strongest appeals of Protestant missions, certainly for the Tsimshian classes who aimed to bolster their existing place in the social order, but also for those who wished to circumvent “traditional” routes for gaining status. Scholars must take into account historical Aboriginal viewpoints not only on conversion, but on their class positions in mission Christianity. One clear example is the role of Christian chiefs. In this region there is ample evidence to suggest that ordinary people tended to follow the example of their chiefs. In some locations, such as Port Simpson, conversion was literally a “top-down” phenomenon, which substantiates the idea of conversion as a shift in religious affiliation for an entire group, not merely the spiritual turning of individuals. The high-ranking and chiefly Tsimshian family of Elizabeth “Diex” Lawson (Diiks) and her son and daughter-in-law, Alfred

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24 As the reserve system was implemented in the North Coast area during the 1880s, Duncan and Tsimshian Metlakatlans also came into conflict with colonial and church authorities over land issues. Unable to resolve them, Duncan and over six hundred Tsimshian left Canada in 1887 to establish New Metlakatla on Annette Island in Alaska.

25 In the summer of 1879 on his first formal tour of the North Coast of the province, Indian Superintendent for British Columbia I.W. Powell was impressed with the scope and variety of industry at Metlakatla. I.W. Powell, Department of the Interior *Annual Report of the Indian Branch*, 26 August 1879 (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger, and Co., Queen’s Printer, 1880), 118.

(Chief Sgagweet) and Mary Catherine "Kate" Dudoward, established Methodism among the Tsimshian. Originally converted to the Methodist church in Victoria, this family carried their new faith home to Fort Simpson. For several years, the Dudowards conducted church services of their own and were instrumental in securing a permanent Methodist mission for Fort Simpson in 1874. The church continued to make extensive use of Native missionaries, catechists, and mission assistants, as Euro-Canadian mission workers were always in short supply. By the close of the century, Methodist missions thrived at Port Simpson, Greenville (Lagalts'ap), Port Essington, Kitamaat, Kispiox, and Kitseguecla.

The arrival of the Salvation Army among the Tsimshian followed a similar pattern to the arrival of the Methodists. By 1890, Native peoples converted to this variant of evangelical Christianity and holiness movement in Victoria, and established their own version of the Army on the North Coast. Official Salvation Army involvement did not begin until 1896, when a representative was sent to Port Simpson. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Salvation Army had also founded missions at Metlakatla and Port Essington, and established a new village called Glen Vowell as their centre of operations in the region.

The presence of the Roman Catholics in Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en territory presented competition for Protestant missions who worked on the Upper Skeena River, but there were no Catholic missions within Coast Tsimshian homelands.<sup>26</sup> Among the Protestant churches, there was much inter- and intra-rivalry. There was a wide variety of denominations competing for Tsimshian souls. And within each mission, variation gave the Tsimshian a choice in Christian form: the Anglican church had a Church Army and Red and White Cross groups, and the Methodists had Epworth Leagues and Bands of Christian Workers. This variation gave the Tsimshian greater ability to retain those aspects of their pre-Christian cultures that they felt were vital, notions of class among them.

### **Christian Chiefs**

One can make the argument that Christianity introduced new forms of power and authority among the Tsimshian. Here, I do not deny that Native individuals gained prestige and status through mission work in ways that circumvented

26 Hazelton and Moricetown were important Catholic mission sites, the former itself becoming an important distribution centre following the Omineca gold rush (1870s); nearby New Kitseguecla, Meanskinisht (Cedarvale) and Glen Vowell were new villages later established and under Protestant influence. Maureen Cassidy, *The Gathering Place: A History of the Wet'suwet'en Village of Tse-kyá* (Hagwilget: Hagwilget Band Council, 1987), 25; R.M. Galois, "The History of the Upper Skeena Region, 1850-1927," *Native Studies Review* 9/2 (1993-1994): 122.

their class positions under the ancient system.<sup>27</sup> Yet the decline of deference to hereditary chiefs was not an immediate or necessary outcome of Christianization, as an examination of Chief Ligeex's role in the founding of Metlakatla will illustrate. The name-title of "Ligeex" was hereditary and several Tsimshian chiefs successively took the name in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>28</sup> Ligeex (historically also Legaic, Legex, Legaix, and Legaik) was a chiefly title of the Gispaxlo'ots Tsimshian and of the Eagle clan (*Laxsgiik*). By the time missionaries entered the colony at mid-century, Ligeex was also an important priest-chief (*smhalaayt*) of the *Nutim* ("Dog-eater") secret society. Unravelling the distinctive histories of the many Ligeex name-holders is challenging for the ethnohistorian, although several individuals who assumed the name-title can be positioned historically by correlating evidence contained in the Tsimshian *adawx* (literally "true tradition," or the oral history of the Tsimshian houses) and the documentary records of Europeans who interacted with these chiefs.<sup>29</sup> For example, it is likely that it was a single Ligeex who was responsible for solidifying an Eagle clan trading monopoly along the Skeena River from the 1790s to 1835, adding considerable wealth to his house through extensive trade with Europeans.<sup>30</sup> When the Hudson's Bay Company moved its fort to the present-day location (Port Simpson) in 1834, this Ligeex moved his entire village from Metlakatla to Wild Rose Point to be closer to the fort. However, it was a different individual leading the Gispaxlo'ots when William Duncan arrived on the North Coast in 1857, who became the first of several Christianized Ligeex title-holders. A number of missionaries and Euro-Canadian writers described him as a "fierce barbarian" and a "proud" and

27 For example, David Leask was a Tsimshian of mixed heritage whose influence at Metlakatla far exceeded his traditional social ranking because of his leadership role in the church. See Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing*, chapter 7.

28 Renowned anthropologist Franz Boas postulated there were at least 6 Ligeex title-holders in the 150 years prior to 1888. Interestingly, it has become a surname among the descendants of the first Christian Ligeex (spelled Legaic). The last chief to hold it did so in the first half of the twentieth century, but apparently by then it had passed through the female line to the Haisla nation at Kitamaat. Most scholars and many of the Tsimshian agree that the Gispaxlo'ots Eagle House led by Ligeex was the most powerful group among the Coast Tsimshian during the contact and fur trade period. Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 134, 168-9 n. 4; Michael P. Robinson, *Sea Otter Chiefs* (np: Friendly Cove Press, 1978), 8; and I.V.B. Johnson, "Paul Legaic," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12: 1891-1900, ed. Frances G. Halpenny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 552.

29 Susan Marsden and Robert Galois, "The Tsimshian, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the Geopolitics of the Northwest Coast Fur Trade, 1787-1840," *The Canadian Geographer* 39/2 (1995): 169-183; and Jonathan R. Dean, "'These Rascally Spackaloids': The Rise of the Gispaxlots Hegemony at Fort Simpson, 1832-40," *BC Studies* 101 (Spring 1994): 41-78.

30 With the marriage of one of his daughters (Sudaak) to a European trader (John Frederick Kennedy), Ligeex formed a powerful alliance with the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Simpson (Nass River). Johnson, "Paul Legaic," 551.

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“powerful” chief who, nonetheless, still struggled to maintain his status among the other eight Tsimshian village-groups that lived in the area.<sup>31</sup> Frequent and elaborate potlatching reveals this power struggle, and it is evident that political reasons lay behind Ligeex’s decision to move to Metlakatla. Apparently, just prior to Duncan’s arrival in the area, two men had vied for the title of Ligeex, and after one won out over the other, there was still much competition to retain and reinforce the prestige which accompanied the rank. An attempt on Duncan’s life by Ligeex, as well as his decision to join Metlakatla, were manifestations of this power struggle. When Ligeex finally converted to Christianity after defying for several years the missionary’s efforts, Euro-Canadian recorders framed it as a great sacrifice and rejection of his past wealth, status, and livelihood:

This brutal murderer, who boasted of the number of lives he had taken – was at length humbled and led like a lamb. He had once...attempted to assassinate Mr. Duncan, and had never ceased to persecute and harass him and his followers, until now, like Saul when stricken, he was transformed into a faithful disciple of him whom he had bitterly reviled, and had mercilessly pursued. Likewise, as Saul, when baptized he chose the name Paul. He became a simple citizen of Metlakatla, an industrious carpenter and cabinet-maker, a truly exemplary Christian.<sup>32</sup>

Adopting the namesake of a disciple of Christ and a trade with a special appeal to Christians, Ligeex was ultimately transformed, both by faith and apparently through a replacement of class.

From the missionary’s standpoint, Ligeex was an ideal candidate for conversion to Christianity with the added benefit that he was a highly influential figure among his people.<sup>33</sup> For the Tsimshian chief, Duncan was a significant addition to the Eagle clan.<sup>34</sup> But did Ligeex, in fact, forsake entirely his title and position after his conversion and move to Metlakatla? Biographer Michael Robinson suggested Ligeex “wanted umbrellas and admission to the Anglican church – not out of a desire to acculturate, but rather to gain the spiritual power of the whites to complement the powers he already controlled.”<sup>35</sup> The umbrella was used on state occasions by several British Columbia First Nations as a symbol of power. Some Tsimshian oral traditions record that an umbrella was offered by Ligeex as a supernatural object owned by the *Nulim* (Dog-eaters)

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31 Henry S. Wellcome, *The Story of Metlakatla* (New York: Saxon and Co., 1887), 39

32 *Ibid.*, 39-40.

33 Jay Miller makes the argument that in hindsight, Duncan may have been so successful among the Tsimshian because he was able to assume the role of “high chief,” replacing Ligeex in this capacity. Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 6.

34 Johnson, “Paul Legaic,” 551.

35 Robinson, *Sea Otter Chiefs*, 8.

Society.<sup>36</sup> It is logical that Ligeex wanted to continue his role as a spiritually empowered leader through his personal association with Christianity. Certainly, many individuals and families who had held politically and economically important positions in the pre-Christian community continued to do so, to some extent even within Metlakatla. The chief of the village police force was Paul Ligeex, and his constables were all former house chiefs.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the chiefs who relocated to Metlakatla benefited in terms of their political and economic power through holding the only permanent positions on the village council, participation in the maintenance of civil justice, and until 1865, receiving half of the village taxes.<sup>38</sup> Although Ligeex resided at Metlakatla by 1868, "his title was still called at Fort Simpson feasts as if he were there, and he was represented by his headman, who spoke for him and received gifts intended for him."<sup>39</sup> He still maintained a home at Port Simpson, with a plaque inscribed: "Legaic, my crest is the Eagle, the King of the Birds, February 27, 1858."<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, there is evidence against missionary claims that Ligeex had given up his title, wealth, and membership in the *Nulim* society. In fact, Paul Ligeex continued many "traditional" Tsimshian practices appropriate for a man of his position as chief of Gispaxlo'ots after his conversion and baptism (in 1863) as a Christian. For example, he continued his participation as a spiritual leader in the initiation of new members into the secret societies, and most remarkably, in 1866 he raised an Eagle pole in the mission village. Chiefs from Tsimshian and neighbouring nations throughout the region attended the pole-raising potlatch, and Ligeex distributed a considerable amount of wealth and property among his guests, including slaves for the most honoured among them.<sup>41</sup> Thus, while the Euro-Canadian missionary's descriptions of this man emphasized persecution, sacrifice, and replacement of old allegiances ("He lost everything – has had to give up everything by his conversion to Christianity. It was with many of them literally a 'forsaking of all things to follow Christ'"<sup>42</sup>), in the case of Paul Ligeex, there is evidence to suggest that the outcome idealized by the missionary was nowhere near the historical reality.

36 In one narrative about Ligeex raiding the Upper Skeena village of Kispiox, Ligeex presents an umbrella as a new power possessed by the *Nulim* society in order to deceive local residents and draw them out of hiding to permit his attack and subsequent destruction of the village. *Ibid.*, 84.

37 *Ibid.*, 69.

38 Madeleine MacIvor, "Science and Technology Education in a Civilizing Mission" (MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1993), 129.

39 Robinson, *Sea Otter Chiefs*, 72.

40 Johnson, "Paul Legaic," 552; and Robinson, *Sea Otter Chiefs*, 72.

41 Johnson, "Paul Legaic," 552.

42 [William Duncan], *Metlakatlah: Ten Years Work Among the Tsimshian Indians* (Salisbury Square, London: Church Missionary House, 1869), 105.

Nor does this Tsimshian chief appear to be an exception. Palmer Patterson reached a similar conclusion regarding neighbouring Nisga'a chiefly roles, and showed how even some mission villages such as Kincolith were founded according to ancient practice, regardless of missionary activity in the area.<sup>43</sup> For at least the first few decades of Christianization, he argues, the impact of missionaries on Nisga'a village life, economic self-sufficiency, and political organization was slight, and that for so-called Christian villages, settlement patterns were "essentially in continuity with Nisga'a culture, practice, and historical sequence."<sup>44</sup> In other words, because of the prior associations between political and economic leadership and spiritual power, and the recognition of the value of missions for securing new sources of wealth and prestige, many chiefs on the North Coast converted to Christianity as a matter of chiefly responsibility, or even chiefly rights. The Dudoward family's role in the founding of Methodism at Fort Simpson provides another clear Tsimshian example.

Self-proselytizing preceding formal denominational involvement seems to have been the rule rather than the exception on the North Coast. Missions at Port Simpson, Kitamaat, Kitkatla, and China Hat were "founded" by First Nations and several were in fact, staffed in their formative years by Native missionaries and teachers. Missionaries preferred to see themselves as the impetus behind mission establishment, and their narratives reflect this egocentric view of the process whereby Native initiative always has its origins in their evangelistic work or through revivals led by Euro-Canadian in Victoria. The missionary version of how the Tsimshian Dudoward family established the Methodist mission at Fort Simpson is one such story. A chiefly Tsimshian woman, Elizabeth "Diex" Lawson who was living in Victoria, converted to Methodism in the dramatic revival meetings that took place in the early 1870s in a former bar-room. According to the Methodist literature, she convinced her son and daughter-in-law, Alfred and Kate Dudoward, to convert to Christianity. Instead of the cargo of whiskey they had travelled to Victoria to obtain in 1872, the Dudowards returned northward with their canoes laden with bibles, and once there, tirelessly lobbied the Methodist church for an "official" mission for their community.<sup>45</sup>

43 Palmer Patterson, *Mission on the Nass: The Evangelization of the Nishga (1860-1887)* (Waterloo: Eulachon Press, 1982), 33-68.

44 E. Palmer Patterson, "Kincolith's First Decade: A Nisga'a Village (1867-1878)," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 12/2 (1992): 230.

45 This narrative is a staple of the Methodist missionary literature (both published and unpublished) on their British Columbia missions to First Nations. See for example, Thomas Crosby, *Up and Down the North Pacific Coast by Canoe and Mission Ship* (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms for the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, The Young People's Forward Movement, 1914); Rev. C. M. Tate, *Our Mission in British Columbia* (Toronto: The Young People's Forward Movement, Methodist Mission Rooms, [1900]); C. M. Tate, "Reminiscences, 1852-1933," typescript, Tate Family Collection, British Columbia Archives Add. MSS. 303, Box 1, File 2, p. 11.

However, when one considers the Dudowards' actions in light of their social class, they provide another instance of how missions were used by the Tsimshian to carry out chiefly responsibilities.

Native oral traditions of the event provide contrasting evidence and points of detail.<sup>46</sup> Both Alfred and Kate were converts to Christianity long before their alleged conversion in Victoria. Kate was the daughter of a Tsimshian mother and a non-Native customs officer named Holmes, although apparently her parents had parted company. Her mother was employed as a domestic servant and for a time Kate lived in Victoria. In 1870, her mother was called back to Fort Simpson to assume a title and rank in her family and Kate was left behind in the care of Roman Catholic nuns. However, after her mother and her traveling companions were killed *en route*, fourteen-year-old Kate was installed as chief instead, as there was no clear male heir. Kate began teaching other Tsimshian (particularly her kinswomen and slaves) what she knew of Christianity. She married Alfred Dudoward in 1871.

Alfred, like his wife, had a mixed Native and European heritage, but was born into the Tsimshian elite social class by virtue of his matriline. Alfred, too, had lived for a while in Victoria while his mother was employed as a domestic. He assumed a chieftainship necessitating his return to the North Coast, while his mother remained in Victoria.<sup>47</sup> He also had prior exposure to mission Christianity as a young man. Duncan's school registry for Fort Simpson in 1857 listed an Alfred Dudoire as one of his pupils.<sup>48</sup>

46 Archibald Greenaway's graduate thesis on the Port Simpson mission gives a little more background on Kate Dudoward, based on the oral history of the Dudoward family. Archibald McDonald Greenaway, "The Challenge of Port Simpson" (B.Div. thesis, Vancouver School of Theology, 1955), 24-26.

47 Carol Williams includes a striking photographic portrait of Elizabeth Diex, circa 1869-70 among the many images she analyzes in her thesis, "Framing the West." Williams has an interesting example that speaks to the ability of Christianity to bolster Tsimshian class. Although her source is unclear, Williams describes how Judge J.D. Pemberton had employed Diex as a servant in his home in the mid-1860s. When he fired her over a wrongful charge of theft, Diex returned to her home on the North Coast, carrying this stain on her character and status. "This unfortunate event at Pemberton's may have caused a re-inscription of her status as a lower-class, disreputable *bad woman* among the socially and numerically dominant White society in urban Victoria." Williams speculates that her conversion to Methodism facilitated the regaining of her social standing. The "authority she garnered in her public association with the Methodists, re-enforced by the conversion of her son, a Chief, may have eased her return." Carol Williams, "Framing the West: Race, Gender, and the Photographic Frontier on the Northwest Coast, 1858-1912" (PhD diss. Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, Oct. 1999), 278, 322-25.

48 Alfred was the son of HBC employee (Fort Simpson) Felix Dudoire. R.M. Galois, "Colonial Encounters: The Worlds of Arthur Wellington Clah, 1855-1881," *BC Studies* 115/116 (Autumn/Winter 1991/98):141, n. 133.

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Clearly, Kate and Alfred Dudoward had been exposed to Christianity as children, and had their own agendas behind their interest in Methodism in adulthood. The couple continued to increase their familiarity with Christian teachings and with the Methodist denomination during their ten-month stay in Victoria when their supposed "conversion" occurred. Over the next year, Kate organized and led classes in Christian instruction, in addition to conducting worship services every Sunday.<sup>49</sup> However, an "urgent" invitation was sent to the Methodists to request formal missionary involvement only after a rival Tsimshian group composed of those who had converted to Anglicanism, had left to live in Metlakatla. Kate's evangelism then sparked widespread interest.<sup>50</sup> According to ethnographer and ranked Tsimshian William Beynon, Alfred Dudoward had been expelled from the mission because he was initiated in the Human-Eating Dancers' Society (*Xgyedmhalaayt*), sometimes erroneously called Cannibals. Therefore, to maintain his prestige, but also in retaliation for the expulsion, Alfred may have had an addition motivation behind his encouraging the Methodists to come to Fort Simpson.<sup>51</sup> These sudden and mass conversions of entire communities do not come as a surprise when "traditional" Tsimshian methods of power acquisition are taken into account. The realization of one's superhuman potential through spiritual transformation commonly belonged within the framework of lineage organization, and new powers could always be added to the ones already owned by the house, even one of foreign origins.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, beyond maintaining existing roles appropriate to one's class and rank, the case of Kate and Alfred Dudoward demonstrates how Tsimshian chiefs sought to augment their positions through continued involvement in daily mission life. Because both Dudowards were from high-ranking families in the community and both were designated chiefs, they already held a socially powerful position. Both would remain active in the Methodist Church throughout their lifetimes. Kate worked for decades as an interpreter, teacher, and preacher for the Methodist mission there, and indeed, as "official translator" for several other denominations.<sup>53</sup> Alfred sat on the village council and both of them were class leaders for weekly study meetings in the early 1870s. However, over the next several decades, the Methodist Church would not

49 Greenaway, "Challenge of Port Simpson," 26.

50 *Ibid.*, 28.

51 William Beynon, "The Tsimshians of Metlakatla, Alaska," *American Anthropologist* 43 (1941): 86.

52 Marie-Françoise Guédon, "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past; Views for the Present*, ed. Margaret Seguin (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), 143.

53 Oliver R. Howard, "Fire in the Belly: A brief introduction to a few of the Methodist Men and Women who presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Natives of British Columbia," *Papers of the Canadian Methodist Historical Society* 8 (1990): 237.



always recognize the Christian status of these chiefs. The politics of missions was played out through the constant inclusion and removal of both Kate and Alfred from the membership rolls in the 1880s and 1890s, at the very height of their most active involvement in mission work.<sup>54</sup> Thus, although missionaries wanted a specific code of conduct from Native converts, even the most active and motivated Tsimshian Christians altered, challenged, and defied these expectations. "Traditional" chiefs who became Christians were rivals to Euro-Canadian missionaries, a role that perpetuated the Tsimshian's class-based systems of authority, but also a role that the missionaries were not prepared to accept. Furthermore, Christian chiefs exemplify Tsimshian defiance of missionaries' attempts to impose a Christian ideal of a class-less society, or rather, more practically, a working class identity for Native peoples.

### **Evangelicalism in the Industrial Age**

It is impossible to comprehend Protestant missionization on the North Pacific Coast without an understanding of evangelical Christianity, with which all the denominations operating in the region (excepting the Roman Catholics) were indelibly marked. An evangelical interpretation of Christianity assumed that Christianity was an emotional and experiential faith marked by a profound awareness of a personal relationship between an individual and God. Just as in Tsimshian ancient beliefs, the spiritual nature of human existence was a given. God was an active force in the world, engaged in rewarding or punishing one's moral behaviour and directing personal salvation through individuals' fears, hopes, and aspirations.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, natural phenomena were seen as indicative of God's personal intervention in the lives of every Christian.<sup>56</sup> Evangelical Protestantism may have found particular resonance among the Tsimshian peoples because of its continuity with their own spiritualities. But the demonstration of conversion to evangelical Christianity in the mission context required that it be phrased as an opposition to one's former life and a constant reflection

54 Reinstatements and removals of both their church memberships continued throughout the 1880s. For example, in 1881, a year after Alfred was placed "on-trial," the church removed Kate from her position as class leader. Alfred was eventually reinstated in 1889, but in the following year was removed once again. Likewise, Kate became a class leader once more, sometime in the late 1880s, only to lose her post in 1890. By 1892, the Methodist church listed Alfred and Kate Dudoward as "on trial." Having had enough, in 1893 the Dudowards, arguably the most influential Methodist family in the village, threatened to leave the church permanently to join the Salvation Army (which Alfred apparently did briefly in 1895). Methodist Church of Canada, British Columbia Conference, Port Simpson District, Port Simpson Church Register, 1874-96, United Church of Canada Archives, BC Conference, Vancouver, BC; Greenaway, "Challenge of Port Simpson," 60, 75; and Bolt, *Thomas Crosby*, 48.

55 David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 26.

56 *Ibid.* and Bolt, *Thomas Crosby*, 31.

on one's spiritual state. This idea was at odds with the Tsimshian conception that adding Christian power to one's house was part of chiefly responsibilities, not necessarily in opposition to them.

Evangelicalism in the industrial age also had a significant class dimension, and this in turn influenced how Native converts were required to manifest their Christian identities. The Victorian obsession with social order was particularly relevant to evangelical Protestantism, which readily identified needy groups both in terms of the salvation of individuals and for the collective good of society. Methodism, for example, from its very inception, preached its message directly to the urban poor of England's industrial working families, stressing values of self-reliance, self-discipline and hard work alongside the need for spiritual transformation.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, the Salvation Army was born from Christian activism in mid-nineteenth century London. It aimed to make Christianity more relevant to the masses and introduced new forms of worship as the way to not only reform society, but wage war on sin and poverty. In the Canadian context, the Salvation Army was almost entirely recognized by mainstream society as a religion of the working classes.<sup>58</sup> More than simply an association of denomination with social class, many evangelical missionaries who worked among North Coast First Nations had come from these missions to the industrial poor in Great Britain and even in eastern Canada. Several were from working-class backgrounds themselves, most notably William Duncan and Thomas Crosby.

Canadian evangelicalism by the middle of the nineteenth century had become more mainstream, conservative, and even according to some historians, "hackneyed" and "losing its power and effectiveness."<sup>59</sup> Regardless of the side one takes in the larger historiographic debate on whether this constituted a crisis in faith in late Victorian Canada, what most historians seem to agree upon was that Protestantism responded to the socio-economic, structural, and intellectual changes in Canadian society in the mid- to late-nineteenth century by re-conceptualizing the individual in terms of social experience.<sup>60</sup> Within evangelicalism, one's personal relationship with God and the desire to recreate

57 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1991), chapter 11, "The Transforming Power of the Cross," 385-440.

58 Lynn Marks, "Working Class Femininity and the Salvation Army: Hallelujah Lasses in English Canada, 1882-1892," in *Re-Thinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, 2nd ed., ed. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1991), 185-86.

59 Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 25-6.

60 See for example, Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); and Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*.

Canada's social order based on the principles of Christianity were integrated.<sup>61</sup> Because evangelical doctrine implied that all people were equal before God, it continued to have great appeal among the working classes, where the opportunity was welcomed to find a voice in religion, and to be assured of salvation in the next world and contentment in this one.<sup>62</sup> Inner changes in individuals produced outward effects on society, resulting in the social and spiritual betterment for all. This dimension may have been particularly appealing to Tsimshian individuals who were attempting to by-pass the usual channels for increasing one's social ranking. These quests were common during the second half of the century when the availability of new sources of wealth and the expansion of potlatching were changing Native societies.

Scholars have noted the multi-faceted impact of the "class baggage" that missionaries brought with them to their evangelistic fields elsewhere on the globe, and I have found the same intricacy in mission work in British Columbia in the nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> The class positioning of several Euro-Canadian missionaries on the peripheries of the British and Canadian lower middle class predisposed them to envision their Native converts in specific ways. Aboriginal converts were conceptualized in terms of European notions of class. Mission enterprises, like the Anglican showpiece Metlakatla, were planned as social engineering and "civilizing" projects, through which Native converts were (re)created into both disciplined Christians and respectable workers. The very discourse of "civilization" espoused by several evangelical denominations entailed teaching a capitalistic ethos, as well as notions of Christian brotherhood (or sisterhood) and the universality of humankind.

Evangelicals could not understand their own society as separate from cultural, economic, and political systems, so it is not surprising that these notions were applied to their interactions with indigenous communities. Restrictions upon First Nations intended to control and alter this racialized group mirrored the conceptualization that evangelicals held of society generally. These requirements were akin to the modifications which middle-class social reformers attempted to make upon working class families or individuals deemed deviant from the recognized social order. My point here is that evangelicals viewed both the working masses and non-Christians ("heathens") as targets in their

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61 Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 29.

62 Bolt, *Thomas Crosby*, 29.

63 For example, Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa, Vol. I* and *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier, Vol. II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 1997); Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

battle against sin and damnation, which in turn was an aspect of their struggle to maintain the hierarchical Victorian social order. Connections between working class evangelism and the missionaries' role(s) in British North American Indian policy were part of attitudes which permeated all of the British Empire in the Victorian period.<sup>64</sup> A few examples of the industrial aspects of missions, especially in regards to worker training through education, and housing standards will demonstrate the contested class dimensions of missionization.

**“The Indians must be taught. Simply being good was not enough; they must be good for something.”<sup>65</sup>**

The Victorian ethos which valued hard work, orderliness, thrift, punctuality, “common sense” and perseverance undoubtedly influenced the Euro-Canadian missionary's vision of how mission work should proceed.<sup>66</sup> William Duncan was a prime example of a man who improved his social standing through self-education and moral betterment. Duncan's own journals reveal the arduous self-improvement and moral strengthening of a working class man.<sup>67</sup> Duncan firmly applied an evangelical agenda, which replicated and reinforced the earthly social order of the mainstream culture while preparing converts for Christian eternity through a strict system of rules and regulations.<sup>68</sup>

From the present-day vantage point, the public missionary discussion about First Nations seems remarkably patronizing, prejudiced, and static; in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was unremarkable in its adherence to the common stereotypes and tropes that extended across nearly all colonial literature. Missionaries saw their Native catechists as recently divorced from an “uncivilized” (by European definitions) past, and yet never entirely removed from it. These images were informed by the general perception of the “missionary's Indian” as warlike, superstitious, cruel, inhumane, devilish, drunken,

64 For example, Susan Thorne examines the rhetorical connections between race and class in the missionary discourse. Susan Thorne, “‘The Conversion of the Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable’: Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in A Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 238-62.

65 Mrs. Frederick C. Stephenson, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Methodist Missions, 1824-1924*, Vol. 1 (Toronto: Missionary Society of the Methodist Church for the Young People's Forward Movement, 1925), 140-41.

66 Jean Usher, *William Duncan of Metlakatla: A Victorian Missionary in British Columbia*, Publications in History No. 5 (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1974), 5.

67 *Ibid.*, chapter 1, 3-10.

68 William Duncan, “A Plan for Conducting Christianizing and Civilizing Missions on the North Pacific Coast: By Mr. William Duncan, based on his own experience, March 3, 1887,” in *The Story of Metlakatla*, by Henry S. Wellcome (New York: Saxon and Co., 1887), App., 379-380.

slavers, debased, and heathen.<sup>69</sup> Like cultural evolutionists, Victorian missionaries conceptualized history as a hierarchy of stages in human development.<sup>70</sup> In general, mission discourse simultaneously emphasized the “savagery” and the humanity of potential converts.<sup>71</sup> After all, if First Nations were so irredeemable, the project of missionization would have been pointless. Hence, missionary accounts of the Northwest Coast temper negative descriptions of indigenous cultures with portrayals of admirable customs, work habits, cleanliness, respect for elders, and other characteristics which frequently allowed the missionaries to decry the decline of such values in their own societies. Duncan’s first reports on the Tsimshian are an excellent example. While he includes some very negative and wildly exaggerated descriptions of Tsimshian rituals, these account for only a small portion of his extended ethnographic portrait of everyday Native life, which was generally quite positive.<sup>72</sup>

Metlakatla was an industrial village, designed to promote Victorian “progress” and the merits of European civilization. Anglo-Canadian traditions were imposed through a number of public buildings that included a reading-room and museum, the mission houses, a jail, boarding and day schools, and a guest-house for visitors to Duncan’s “utopia.” Duncan designed Metlakatla to be economically self-sustaining, and he established a number of commercial enterprises to this end, including a sawmill, soap factory, furniture factory, weaving shop, blacksmith shop, trading post, and salmon cannery. Here, as in other missions, First Nations partly financed many of these projects. They paid for and built the church of St. Paul’s, reputedly the largest church west of Chicago and north of San Francisco and capable of seating over a thousand.<sup>73</sup> The prestige that communities attached to their churches recalled the “traditional” importance placed on a village’s ability to display wealth and property.

Euro-Canadian education was one of the key tools in the missionary repertoire. In the first generation of missionization on the North Coast, the Protestant denominations introduced day and Sunday schools to achieve their goals of conversion, and in these schools incorporated industrial training and curriculum designed to forward the “civilizing” agenda. Eventually the system of residential

69 Stephenson, *Canadian Methodist Missions*, 140-41.

70 Usher, *William Duncan*, 33-8.

71 Thomas, “Colonial Conversions,” 374.

72 William Duncan, “First Report From Fort Simpson,” February 1858, Church Missionary Society Papers, C.2/O. App.C., #A-105; and [William Duncan] *Metlakatlah: Ten Years Work Among the Tsimshiean Indians* (London, Salisbury Square: Church Missionary House, 1869), 16-17.

73 William Henry Collison, *In the Wake of the War Canoe: A stirring record of forty years successful labour, peril and adventure among the savage Indian tribes of the Pacific coast, and the piratical head-hunting Haida of the Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia [1915]*, ed. Charles Lillard, (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1981), 8 and the illustration of church between pp 98-9.

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schools developed from this base, a system which has, among other things, been responsible for a dark and enduring legacy of cultural genocide among Canada's First Peoples. Education throughout nineteenth-century Canada was very much influenced by evangelical Christianity. The potential improvement of each individual through Christian salvation could be achieved on a social level through discipline, regulation, and the development of the higher faculties (moral and intellectual).<sup>74</sup>

Within the first week of his arrival on the North Coast, William Duncan wrote from Fort Simpson to his superior at the Church Missionary Society on how ripe the Tsimshian were for industrial pursuits: "They are a very fine – robust & exceedingly intelligent race. I have already seen specimens of their skill in both the useful & fine arts which would not shame European skills to have produced. The superior industry is universally acknowledged by those who know them."<sup>75</sup> Missionaries hoped that technical training in schools and through cottage and industrial projects in Metlakatla and nearby missions would instil not only a healthy work ethic, but provide Native peoples with employment on site so they would not be attracted by wage labour opportunities elsewhere.<sup>76</sup>

The Department of Indian Affairs was pleased with the industrial initiatives at Metlakatla, and anticipated that further development would be facilitated through westernized education. I.W. Powell, Indian Superintendent for British Columbia, reported: "As industrial pursuits, however, are the foundation of civilization in every Christian and progressive community, the mission which has the necessary arrangements, zeal, and ability, to inculcate and foster them in connection with the day school, will be successful in every respect, and certainly most deserving of much consideration and substantial assistance from the Government."<sup>77</sup> At the nearby Methodist mission at Fort Simpson, the Reverend Thomas Crosby also nurtured what he saw as natural mechanical aptitude among the Tsimshian by sponsoring an Industrial Fair with the explicit purpose of promoting "industry, thrift, and self-reliance."<sup>78</sup> Moreover, mission education was designed to prepare students for their future roles as workers and Christians by instilling Victorian work habits through the routines, discipline and control maintained in the classroom.<sup>79</sup> As other historians have observed,

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74 Allison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), passim.

75 William Duncan to Henry Venn, 6 October 1857, Church Missionary Society Papers, C.2/O. App.C, #A-105.

76 MacIvor, "Science and Technology Education," 107, 146.

77 I.W. Powell, Indian Superintendent for British Columbia, Department of the Interior, Indian Branch, *Annual Report 1877* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1878), 49.

78 Crosby, *Up and Down the North Coast*, 74-5.

79 MacIvor, "Science and Technology Education," 145.

vocational education in mission schools reveals the extent to which First Nations were perceived by colonial society as belonging to the lowest class in the socio-economic order, to be trained accordingly as a working class.<sup>80</sup>

In their studies on British Columbian Native economies, Rolf Knight, Dianne Newell, and John Lutz have explored the class dimension of the wage labour system as it pertained to Native men, women, and families, a process contemporary with the emergence of industrial missions like Metlakatla.<sup>81</sup> Work habits and technical skills acquired through mission schools were translatable into marketable commodities in the wage labour economy. First Nations worked for wages in such jobs as hop-picking, farm labour, coal mining, sawmill work, and in the industrial salmon fisheries, to name a few. But more than merely a labouring class, Native peoples were also important consumers in the colony and province, a characteristic administrators and missionaries alike viewed as something to be further nurtured through the mission environment. "Even as they are," remarked Powell in 1876, "the Indians of this Province are its best consumers, and contribute much more to its wealth and vital resources than we have any idea of; but under the expanding and beneficent influence of civilization how much greater their value would be to us as inhabitants, I believe can scarcely be imagined."<sup>82</sup>

While the integration into the Euro-Canadian capitalist economy meant the configuration of a new social order (in much the same way that the earlier commercial enterprises with Western traders had altered the village geography and economic orientation in the region), ancient social structures and classes did not simply vanish under the influences of capitalistic individualism. Chiefly powers and the Tsimshian corporate identity remained significant in the new industrial age. For example, the first salmon cannery appeared in the region in 1875, and the industry expanded rapidly over the following decades, always heavily reliant on Aboriginal labour. Once again, Tsimshian class structures had a bearing on the nature of this work. The most successful fishers tended to be high-ranking chiefs, as they could afford the costly equipment and support large

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80 This is well illustrated with a non-Tsimshian example. Girls attending a single institution received very different instruction based upon assumptions of racialized class. Jean Barman, "Separate and Unequal: Indian and White Girls at All Hallows' School, 1884-1920," in *Children, Teachers, and Schools in the History of British Columbia*, eds. Jean Barman, Neil Sutherland, and J. Donald Wilson (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1995), 337-57.

81 Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1996); Dianne Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); John Lutz, "After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Class of British Columbia, 1849-1890," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, ns 3 (1992): 69-93.

82 I.W. Powell, Indian Superintendent for British Columbia, Department of the Interior, Indian Branch, *Annual Report 1876* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1877), 33.

crews. Miller points out that chiefs frequently distributed a salmon catch among the members of the community, thus maintaining a chiefly tradition of generosity.<sup>83</sup> Class and social rank also influenced how canneries secured both fishers and plant workers, as Newell explains, and the role played by high-ranking chiefs (typically men) as employment recruiters for this industry cannot be underestimated.<sup>84</sup> The Indian agent confirmed that, decades later, the Tsimshian nation appeared “to earn more money in proportion to their numbers than any other Indians.”<sup>85</sup> One of the benefits of mission life was a Euro-Canadian education that facilitated entry into this wage labour market.

### Mission Schools and Chiefly Prerogative

While missionaries envisioned filling their converts' heads with Euro-Canadian values, industrial skills, and Christian beliefs, Native Christians saw a chance to gain a tool that would be useful in their struggle to retain control over their own political and economic autonomy: literacy in English. The Coast Tsimshian (*Sm'algayax*) verb “to read” is *littsx*, meaning also “to count,” suggesting the significance of the fur trade in establishing a baseline for the explanation of the purpose of writing. “To learn” was literally to store up food for the winter (*luudisk*). Their word for “book” was similar in definition: *sa'awünsk*, related to the verb *sa'awan*, meant “to put into a box, to put more into a box, or to shake down and make settle in a box” (depending on the dialect).<sup>86</sup> These words draw heavily upon the container motif that permeates Tsimshian society and language, explaining texts as something with which one fills the bodily container. Once again, this concept reinforces the idea that certain mission ideas were added to existing social systems, not simply replacing them. Duncan's first pupils were the sons of chiefs and high-ranking heirs, and as such, the Tsimshian expected them “to learn about changing conditions and use this knowledge to benefit their constituents.”<sup>87</sup> The advantages of attending school may have been that it added to the wealth of the house (filling the *walp*). After decades of sustained contact with European traders in their immediate territory, many Tsimshian, like Natives elsewhere, probably viewed the acquisition of the English language as a practical tool for success in the surrounding wage-labour economy. Because mission residential schools also performed what they saw as a “rescue” role for disadvantaged children, there were, among

83 Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 133-34.

84 Newell, *Tangled Webs*, 78-9.

85 The agent also added, likely in reference to how these wages were used for potlatching, that the Tsimshian “have acquired more expensive habits than any of the other tribes of this coast, or anywhere else.” C. Todd, Indian Agent, North-West Coast Agency, Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report 1889* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1890), 118.

86 Dunn, *Sm'algayax*, s.v. “read,” “learn,” “book.”

87 Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 138.



the boarding school student body, low-ranking individuals and perhaps even former slaves who were elevated by virtue of their association with a new religion and training. Yet in the early days of mission schools, Western-style education was also actively sought out as a chiefly attribute.

The general consensus among First Nations people today is that the churches and their education system are largely responsible for the loss of Native languages. Ironically, when missionaries made the writing of Native languages possible through the creation of syllabic alphabets and translations of scriptures, they set in motion an educational imperative that attempted to replace Native languages entirely, once Natives gained literacy in English. Literacy programs among Anglo or Canadian working classes aimed at creating good and orderly citizens, whereas among First Nations cultures they became effective tools of assimilation and marginalization. The legacy of Indian residential schools in Canada is a truly shameful one. While residential schools at Port Simpson (Crosby's schools for girls and boys), Metlakatla (girls' boarding house), and Kitamaat (orphanage) originated during the missionary period focused on here, the Native role of *student* in missionization has been more thoroughly and effectively explored by scholars who give this topic the breadth it deserves.<sup>88</sup> As one historian remarked, "[t]he residential school, with its combination of character formation, elementary education, and the inculcation of habits of industry represented the missionary program of christianization and civilization in its most fully developed form."<sup>89</sup>

However, at Metlakatla, religious instruction still dominated school curriculum.<sup>90</sup> Converts sought out and submitted to Euro-Canadian style education in preparation for baptism and to learn catechisms, gaining fluency in English for a better appreciation of religious texts. After they had obtained a new missionary, day schools were one of the first Tsimshian demands. While many of the schools were run by Euro-Canadian teachers (particularly young women, as was typical in the elementary school system in late nineteenth-century Canada), Native teachers were able to take some initiative within the system.<sup>91</sup> This was

88 J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Elizabeth Furniss, *Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School*, 2nd Ed. (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995); Celia Haig-Brown, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Vancouver: Tillacum Library, 1988); and Jean Barman, Yvonne Hébert, and Don McCaskill, eds., *Indian Education in Canada: Vol. 1, The Legacy* (Vancouver: Nakoda Institute and University of British Columbia Press, 1986).

89 John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 226.

90 Usher, *William Duncan*, 92.

91 In 1874 and 1875 Kate and Alfred Dudoward were both listed as teachers whose salaries were partly or wholly paid by the Indian Branch of the Ministry of the Interior. Other Tsimshian were likewise paid by the federal government as school-teachers. For example, daughter of

particularly true in the case of religious instruction, where class meetings, Sunday school, and less formalized bible meetings were largely conducted by Native catechists and exhorters.<sup>92</sup> For the Tsimshian, there may have been a natural association between schools and chiefly prerogative because of the "traditional" connection between the upper class and spiritual leadership. At Fort Simpson, Duncan accepted the offer to use Ligeex's house as his first schoolroom, which thereby secured him an auspicious sponsor.<sup>93</sup> Chiefs had some say over access to schools. Tsimshian convert (and future Methodist minister) William Henry Pierce, for instance, reported that he had left Duncan's school on the orders of his chief.<sup>94</sup>

Nor were schools or indeed Euro-Canadian teachers accepted uncritically by Tsimshian.<sup>95</sup> For example, Arthur Wellington Clah (a remarkable Tsimshian Christian and self-styled evangelist) recounts how the Greenville Nisga'a refused to accept the teacher sent to them by the Methodist Church because he did not have the prestige and authority of an ordained minister.<sup>96</sup> Aboriginal people evaluated the quality of education in direct proportion to the status and influence of the teacher as a recognizably spiritually powerful individual, clearly reflecting Tsimshian association of spiritual power and chiefly class. Missionaries may have constantly fretted over inconsistent school attendance by students, but the Tsimshian were equally critical about the level of commitment of their resident missionaries to teaching. Criticisms of inadequate pedagogy were numerous and, many, like Clah, recorded their opinion on the failure of missionaries to fulfill the responsibilities of their jobs. Clah provides an interesting statement on the class implications of this problem:

about yesterday [referring to a visit by Rev. J. B. McCullagh]. we Speak about lost our Prayer to God and lost to love our Christ Jesus our saviour. we Blaming all the priest that works like Comon men lazy. But many Come to

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Ligeex, Sarah Legaic [Ligeex] in 1881 and 1882, and Duncan's protégé, David Leask, in 1880 and 1883. Canada, Department of the Interior, Indian Branch and/or Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report 1874, 1875, 1878-1883* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1875, 1876, 1879-1884), Tabular Data: School Returns.

92 [Eugene Stock], *Metlakahla and the North Pacific Mission of the Church Missionary Society* (London: Church Missionary House and Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1881), 69.

93 Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 138.

94 William Henry Pierce, *From Potlatch to Pulpit: Being the Autobiography of the Rev. William Henry Pierce, Native Missionary to the Indian Tribes of the Northwest Coast of British Columbia*, ed. Rev. J. P. Hicks (Vancouver: Vancouver Bindery Ltd., 1933), 11.

95 Understanding the strategies of survival, resistance, and rejection of Euro-Canadian education by First Nations is central to reclaiming the past and allowing healing to begin.

96 Clah wrote that the Nisga'a "wanted no teacher. they wants high Priest to take charge them. they do not want Small man. to teach them. But good wise Priest to teache them..." Arthur Wellington Clah, Journals, Saturday 7 November 1891, National Archives of Canada (NAC) MG 40 F11, #A-1713.

them every day. dont make the indian good. dont teach them right. when indian write letter. writed wrong. that makes my hearts no good. Because lazy teacher and lazy Priest not teach the indian good. But wrong that makes our Gods angry. If we telling lies against Him in writen letter one to another some wrong writen and Priests Post themselves. they make money but indians dont make any work hard like old israel. we know that we work like slave amongs whit [white] people.<sup>97</sup>

### Christian Houses, Colonial Spaces, and Class

One of the most distinctive recurring visual and rhetorical images that permeates the missionary literature is the dichotomy of “before and after conversion.” Conversion frequently appeared in the Euro-Canadian literature in literal or figurative portraits of outwardly changed Native individuals. The same principle also applied to the village space, and like assumptions about schooling, reflects something of the class position of those who applied it. Crosby discussed this phenomenon as “Christian street” versus “Heathen Street.”<sup>98</sup> “Christian street” was characterized by the church, mission buildings, school, neat rows of Euro-Canadian style single family dwellings, perhaps guest house for visitors (as was the case in Metlakatla), streetlights, sidewalks and all other signifiers of “proper” Victorian urban life. In contrast, “Heathen street” was Native long-houses along the beach, spatially ranked to reflect the “traditional” social order, totem poles, smokehouses, and anything else the missionaries identified with Aboriginal material culture. In the minds of non-Native missionaries, like Crosby, “everything of heathenism, is of the devil.”<sup>99</sup> As with the material version of the “before and after conversion” portraits of individuals, missionaries took the physical transformation of an entire village as proof of the community’s acceptance of Christianity and Western modes of civilization. Can missionization alone account for the introduction of what appears to be colonial space into Native territories? While one can describe these colonial encounters in terms of the Tsimshian’s bold resistance or strategic acceptances, it is clear that some important transitions could and did occur without overt confrontation. Because missionaries and Natives each drew upon their own cultural frameworks to interpret mission spaces, each party conceptualized the meaning of changes to family dwellings or village architecture in different ways which again highlight the Euro-Canadian and Tsimshian perspectives on class.

The establishment of Christian missions in Tsimshian villages meant the further introduction of colonial spaces, a process that had been underway since

97 Ibid., Thursday 9 July 1891.

98 Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 136.

99 Thomas Crosby, *Among the An-ko-me-nuns, or Flathead Tribes of Indians of the Pacific Coast* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1907), 104.

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first contact with Europeans.<sup>100</sup> One has only to look at any photographic record of the Christian towns to see the imposing and dominating character of church structures. Equally as important as a signifier of "Christian" (or as it may have been termed in the ethnocentric terminology of the nineteenth century, "civilization"), was the presence of Euro-Canadian style architecture in all buildings and the absence of all "traditional" Native ones. As Crosby declared, "there is no better teaching than the object lesson of a good and well-ordered Christian home." Through direct instruction on Euro-Canadian building techniques, he continued, "this is the only way to win the savage from his lazy habits, sin, and misery...to get them out of the wretched squalor and dirt of their old lodges and sweat houses into better homes."<sup>101</sup>

For First Nations, the distinction between Christian and non-Christian was sometimes made through architecture, but never in ways as clear-cut as the missionaries viewed it. For instance, Clah refused to go to Metlakatla with Duncan, choosing instead to remain in Fort Simpson, a location which never aspired to become an exclusively Christian place, and to prove that not just "heathens" lived in Fort Simpson, Clah helped to organize the building of a bridge from Rose Island to the mainland. From the missionary perspective, the bridge project might have signified a symbolic and physical link between the mission space and the supposedly "heathen village" space. Yet Clah and his fellow villagers likely saw the bridge as a way to maintain communal unity and coherence in keeping with the expansion and modernization of the town.<sup>102</sup>

100 While churches are the most obvious example of "Christian space," the architectural merits of Native churches in this period have been admirably examined by other scholars. See Barry Downs, *Sacred Places: British Columbia's Early Churches* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980); and John Veillette and Gary White, eds., *Early Indian Village Churches: Wooden Frontier Architecture in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977). Tsimshian Christians paid for local church construction and often built the churches with their own hands. After 1890, the Canadian government provided funds for church construction in Native villages. However, unlike housing, churches were considered "additions" to Native villages, not reformulations of existing space. There was no comparable "traditional" Tsimshian building designed as a place of worship and metaphorically "God's house," although certainly they had their own sacred spaces and places that temporarily bridged (or recreated) dimensions between the human and non-human worlds, such as during winter ceremonial complexes. Nor did a local tradition of church architecture exist. Euro-Canadian missionary input into church construction was considerable given the prescribed liturgical and architectural traditions of the various denominations.

101 Crosby, *Up and Down the North Coast*, 74.

102 Wellington Clah (Tamks), "How Tamks Saved William Duncan's Life," Recorded by William Beynon, 1950, in *Tsimshian Narratives 2: Trade and Warfare*, collected by Marius Barbeau and William Beynon, Mercury Series 3, ed. George F. MacDonald and John J. Cove (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1987), no. 58, 212. In a recent article, Peggy Brock also capitalized on the symbolism behind the Rose Island bridge as one representing a new understanding and community cohesion. Peggy Brock, "Building Bridges: Politics and Religion in a First Nations Community," *Canadian Historical Review* 81/1 (March 2000): 67-96.

Missionaries frequently measured their success based on outward signs of Victorian "civilization." Beyond industrial and commercial development, the appearance of single-family dwellings was certainly an important marker by which all missionaries sought to measure their progress. Indeed, a common refrain in the mission propaganda was the description of how "the old heathen lodges have given place to neat, comfortable homes."<sup>103</sup> For the Euro-Canadian missionaries, a house was a building where a nuclear family lived, ideally headed by the husband or father. In contrast to Tsimshian customs regarding inheritance of the property and wealth of each house passed down through the matrilineal group, a Christian house was private property whose title resided with an individual and to which widowed spouses and children had some claim upon the principle owner's death. But was the adoption of Euro-Canadian style housing a sign of conversion and acceptance of non-Native values?

As described earlier, the central social unit in Tsimshian culture was the House (*walp/waap*). In fact, the same word for dwelling was also used to describe the group of lineage relations, their territory, and their wealth.<sup>104</sup> Longhouses within each *walp* belonged to the matrilineage, as inalienable possessions controlled by Tsimshian individuals who had inherited the name and position of house chief.<sup>105</sup> The winter village site was spatially organized to reflect the status and wealth of each house and its chiefs. In this respect, the chief's physical house was a communal asset of the lineage group, and reflected its wealth, prestige, and authority. A chief's house simply could not be a worker's cottage in the eyes of the Tsimshian.

There is no denying the impact of Euro-Canadian architectural style and materials upon the physical space of Tsimshian villages. New ideas regarding house construction, including both interior and exterior design, were readily encouraged by missionaries who saw housing as a means to separate the nuclear family from its larger lineage group within a single family dwelling

103 Thomas Crosby, "Letter to Dr. Winthrow, dated Oct. 1st, 1897, Victoria," in *Up and Down the North Coast by Canoe and Mission Ship*, by Thomas Crosby, (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms for the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, the Young People's Forward Movement, 1914), 402.

104 It was literally the "body of society": "By explicit analogy, a house was like a person (*gyet*). As a house had a central hearth, a person had a mind (*sigootk*), located in the heart (*goot*), like a flame of intelligence. As a personalized building, the house represented the ancestry of the matriline, clan, and moiety. The four support posts were limbs, the ridge-pole was the backbone, the rafters were ribs, the walls were skin. The decorated front was the face, with the door serving as the mouth. Known only to the elite, the secret tunnels, used for staging winter spectacles and for escape, represented digestive functions." Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 52.

105 The building might be unoccupied or even permanently vacated, but no other lineage could use the structure without the owner's express permission, an important requirement when every house had several locations depending on the season and resource territory. Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 290.

home. Indeed, for Christian villages like Metlakatla and Port Simpson, "traditional" plankhouse construction had virtually disappeared soon after Christianization. However, it would be a mistake to interpret this transformation as solely attributable to Christian influence. Seventeen years after missionization, 72 percent of Metlakatlans still lived in lineage or extended family households.<sup>106</sup> While the movement towards single-family dwellings occurred more rapidly in neighbouring Port Simpson (58 percent lived in "nuclear family units" in 1881 and 84 percent in 1891), the principal property-holding group remained the matrilineage, not the nuclear family.<sup>107</sup> Put another way, in 1857 Duncan estimated the Native population at Port Simpson to be 2,300 persons divided into 140 houses. In 1935, William Beynon listed 106 occupied houses at that location.<sup>108</sup> This data would suggest that given the massive population reductions (especially following the devastating smallpox epidemics of 1836 and 1862), the actual number of dwellings did not change as much as the missionaries would have liked.<sup>109</sup> Many buildings remained spatially consistent with class-based and ranked social geography, and house members resided in contiguous sites.<sup>110</sup>

One of the first innovations to occur in Tsimshian building practices following European contact was the introduction of hinged doors and more significantly windows in the front walls of houses.<sup>111</sup> Windows were frequently adopted by high-ranking chiefs as the symbols of prestige and wealth that façade-painting had formerly been. Painted house fronts had long been great symbols of wealth because the crests they portrayed were constantly on display. As Jay Miller explains, windows were associated with crystals, which were significant emblems for chiefs in their priestly guise and for shamans generally. Hence, a "glass window letting in light was doubly wondrous, as an object and as a symbol. Previously, the equivalent in prestige was the multifaceted quartz crystal. The Tsimshian still apply the same word to both."<sup>112</sup> Therefore, rather than eroding social classes, the kind of architecture espoused by missionaries demonstrated wealth and prestige to those who could afford to adopt it. Paradoxically, embracing new styles paradoxically made older forms rarer and therefore potentially more valuable. For example, in the 1870s, the House of

106 Based on 1881 and 1891 census data as interpreted by Carol Ann Cooper, "To Be Free on Our Lands": Coast Tsimshian and Nisga'a Societies in Historical Perspective, 1830-1900" (PhD thesis, University of Waterloo, 1993), 313.

107 *Ibid.*, 314.

108 Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 333.

109 Garfield described how "many of the older frame buildings still in use [in Port Simpson in the 1930s] are very large, two storey affairs containing from eight to twenty rooms and housing family groups resembling the old lineages." *Ibid.*, 280.

110 Cooper, "To Be Free," 314; and Neylan, "*The Heavens are Changing*," chapter 10.

111 Garfield, "Tsimshian and Neighbors," 11.

112 Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 39.

Grizzly Bear or *Walps Midiiks* (members of a raven clan group of the Ginax'angiik tribe of Tsimshian) altered its longhouses by adding European architectural elements such as plank floors, a hinged wooden door, and windows. A potlatch was given in order to name the door "the Wave Door," which was the same procedure by which the lineage predecessors had named and validated for display the house-front painting, now ruined by the new windows. Announcing that there would be no more new paintings, the house then enumerated all the house-front paintings that were or had been on display on lineage dwellings.<sup>113</sup>

The next innovation in house construction was the use of milled lumber.<sup>114</sup> In the late nineteenth century, sawmills were a fixture at major Christian missions and Native peoples frequently found employment at mills up and down the coast.<sup>115</sup> Encouraging industrial self-sufficiency among the Tsimshian was an important agenda for missionaries. Not only would it help to instil a healthy Protestant work ethic among Native labourers, but also they believed it would discourage seasonal migrations and keep the Native converts in one location year-round where church and school attendance would remain constant. However, as ownership and access to resources within Tsimshian territory were challenged by outsiders, it makes sense that many of the Tsimshian themselves would also try to develop and prize these new industries. With the creation of local markets (whether consciously or not) for the products of Native-owned sawmills, the growing Native preference for milled lumber as a building material does not necessarily indicate that the Tsimshian succumbed to missionary visions of Canadian style homes along neat "Christian streets."

The particular timing of changing living space coincided with Christianization, but also with the increasing importance of the wage-labour and cash economy in the North Coast region. Discussing the impact of wage-labour upon Native societies and economies and how this aided in the development of a Christian capitalist society, John Lutz remarked, "new Christians also had new imperatives to work. New houses built with milled lumber, nails, and glass windows, as well as new standards for clothing, contributions to build a church or purchase musical instruments, etc., all demanded cash incomes."<sup>116</sup> Indeed, shingles, doors, and glass windows became emblems of prestige as exotic trade goods that Natives produced as well as purchased. From the 1870s onward, Native entrepreneurs (often of the chiefly rank) engaged in a wide

113 Amelia Susman, Viola E. Garfield, and William Beynon, "Process of Change from Matrilineal to Patrilineal Inheritance as Illustrated in Building, Ownership and Transmission of Houses and House Sites in a Tsimshian Village," *Volkerkundliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft, Alhandlungen*, Heft 26 (Nortorf, Germany, 1979): 5.

114 Garfield, "Tsimshian and Neighbors," 11.

115 Lutz, "After the Fur Trade," 78-80.

116 *Ibid.*, 91, n. 94.

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array of small-scale enterprises as outfitters, traders, shippers, storeowners, loggers, and sawmill operators.<sup>117</sup> The Dudoward family owned and operated a coastal trading schooner, the *Georgina*, and a Port Simpson store, thereby pursuing business interests appropriate to their social class.<sup>118</sup> It makes perfect sense that villages benefited from the fruits of these operations, as both labourers and consumers.

Anthropologists of the Tsimshian identified the next "change in fashion" for home-building in the creation of structures reminiscent of western pioneer homesteads, at least by outward appearances: "The interior floor plan was also modified by some builders to include one large, high-ceilinged room as a family gathering place and several very small rooms as sleeping and storage spaces." A few houses were built without any interior partitions.<sup>119</sup> However, these modifications to lineage residences so that they resembled Victorian homes elsewhere in Canada did not entirely replace "traditional" functions. Although plankhouses were first modified and then torn down to be replaced by these newer frame dwellings, sometimes even incorporating the planks of the original building,<sup>120</sup> they were frequently built on the original foundations of the older buildings, and thus maintained the social geography of the stratified village.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, these frame dwellings may have resembled Canadian homes externally, but certainly in the nineteenth century, the interior layouts of these buildings conformed to the needs of the lineage group. Metlakatla may have been characterized by rows of identical plank homes symbolic of equality before God and reminiscent of "workers' cottages" (see Figure 1), yet the interiors of these homes did not mimic Victorian space. Most of these houses contained only two major partitions: separate bedrooms at the ends of the building and a large communal room in the middle. Some were designed as conjoined houses with a separate second story but connected first floors.<sup>122</sup> This use of interior space demonstrates continuity in use and design with longhouse interiors, which had contained sleeping platforms or cubicles that were set apart from storage areas and general communal spaces. This process may be a good illustration of collusion rather than a contest over physical social spaces. At Metlakatla, Duncan made strategic use of political aspects of Tsimshian culture, and for a while at least, some chiefs were willing to go along for their own reasons. Ligeex had a house noticeably larger than the others, and still maintained

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117 Knight, *Indians at Work*, 161, 163, 208.

118 *Ibid.*, 163.

119 Susman, Garfield, and Beynon, "Process of Change," 6; and Garfield, "Tsimshian and Neighbors," 11.

120 Susman, Garfield, and Beynon, "Process of Change," 10.

121 Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 280.

122 William Duncan to I. W. Powell, 13 August 1881, Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report 1881* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1882), 145-6.



a feast house at Fort/Port Simpson.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, on his first visit to the North Coast in his capacity as Indian Superintendent in 1879, Powell was informed by a group of Tsimshian chiefs that many Metlakatla residents also maintained “traditional” longhouses at Port Simpson and would not remove them, despite community plans for redevelopment.<sup>124</sup> Other chiefs at Metlakatla may have agreed upon Duncan’s housing designs because initially they deemed certain European building materials to be emblems of prestige. Their interpretation of the new houses did not necessarily include an acceptance of Duncan’s intention to create equality through property. When several hereditary chiefs sided with the bishop in the dispute between Bishop Ridley and Duncan (which resulted in the establishment of New Metlakatla), they were favouring the more prestigious man in the religious hierarchy, significant given the importance of rank and privilege in “traditional” Tsimshian society.<sup>125</sup>

In summary therefore, architecturally dynamic lineage housing arrangements remained typical throughout the period. A good example of one such house in Port Simpson was Chief Dudoward’s Eagle House, a veritable mansion that had been built in the late nineteenth century and modeled after grand Victorian houses in Eastern Canada (see Figure 2).<sup>126</sup> In 1890, Dudoward gave a large feast and erected a mortuary pole to commemorate his uncle, so it is unlikely that his preference for a Euro-Canadian style house was an outright acceptance of Western material culture as a replacement of former ways.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, taking responsibility for members of one’s community, reflecting a village’s wealth, and demonstrating diligent industry were indications of a good chief. As prohibitions against the potlatch were enforced in the late nineteenth, but especially in the early twentieth century, contributing to the construction of a chief’s house was still a means to gain prestige for the group and individual chief.<sup>128</sup>

Yet just as with other cultural forms deemed central to Tsimshian survival, Natives also adapted Christian structures to serve their needs. For example, the patterns of reciprocity, gift-distribution, and communal labour were channelled into Christian activities. When Port Simpson Christians opted to build a new church, labour and financial contributions were donated according to potlatch custom. As Viola Garfield explains, the church itself was much larger than the village required, “but the natives have the same attitude toward it as towards

123 Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 141; and Robinson, *Sea Otter Chiefs*, 72.

124 Ap-be-gee-dath, Neash-now-ah, Nee-shot, Paul Scow-geak, Shu-dalth or Victoria Young, and Nish-yag-a-naht, Address to I.W. Powell, Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report 1879* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1880), 119-20.

125 *Ibid.*, 144.

126 Bolt, *Thomas Crosby*, notes for Figure 10, opposite p. 68.

127 *Ibid.*, 88.

128 Susman, Garfield, and Beynon, “Process of Change,” 9.

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*Figure 1: Mission housing, Metlakatla (west of Mission Point), modelled after English workers' cottages. Photographer: E. Dossetter [1881]. Courtesy of British Columbia Archives (C-08099).*



*Figure 2: Once used as a postcard, this photograph of Chief Alfred Dudoward's "Eagle House" at Port Simpson is a good example of housing styles that were Victorian in outward form, but Tsimshian in function. [189?] Courtesy of British Columbia Archives (D-01861).*

their own chief's house, it must be as ostentatious as possible. Pledges of funds were in the hands of a committee of chiefs and the donations made public in the manner of potlatch contributions."<sup>129</sup> Visitors to Christian villages remarked upon the degree to which church buildings reflected upon the community: "They are very proud of their churches and spend large sums of money upon them, either in building new ones or in decorations, &c."<sup>130</sup>

The force of Canadian laws would eventually have a considerable impact on (physical) property ownership and inheritance rights in a way that highlights the clash between the older matrilineal Tsimshian system and Canadian property statutes that favoured patrilineal and patriarchal rights. While the commoner class was the first to embrace individual family home styles, conflict came over succession rights to the homes, of whatever architectural design.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, chiefs increasingly financed the construction of their own homes and thus insisted they had the right to sell, transfer, or will the property to whomever they wanted (although with considerable reluctance to anyone outside the tribe).<sup>132</sup> In addition to introducing a competing legal system with a different concept of inheritance and property title, the missionaries contributed to the decline of co-operative building among members of the same lineage through their prohibitions on the potlatch and emphasis on single nuclear family dwellings and personal ownership.

### Change and Continuity

The prohibition against the potlatch was an attack on Tsimshian class that was not exclusively aimed at the eradication of the ranked system *per se*, but was rather a general attack on Tsimshian culture and values. The *yaawk* (Tsimshian potlatch) functioned as the mechanism to empty and fill house names, wealth, and property. Generally, the potlatch in British Columbia became a key issue around which government, missionaries, settlers, and Native peoples vied for control. Persistent condemnation and lobbying by church administrators and missionaries contributed greatly to the ban, enacted in 1884 as an amendment to the Indian Act.<sup>133</sup> In addition to legal prohibitions, missionaries employed moral suasion to discourage the potlatch, which they regarded as wasteful, unhealthy, and counter to the Protestant work ethic. They believed it promoted

129 Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 319.

130 A. W. Vowell, Indian Superintendent for British Columbia, Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report 1900* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1901), 297.

131 In particular, this extended to "all ceremonialism connected with building activities" for the commoner (or middle) class. Susman, Garfield, and Beynon, "Process of Change," 8.

132 Susman, Garfield, and Beynon, "Process of Change," 8; and Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 49.

133 The original amendment was too vague and authorities found it difficult to enforce. Subsequent amendments to the Indian Act refined the ban on the potlatch in 1889, 1914, and 1918. The prohibition was dropped from the Indian Act (although not repealed), in 1951.

neglect, fostered a communal rather than individualistic identity, and took Native peoples "away" from the influence of the church. Many Native Christians fell in the middle of the debate. Some, like the anti-potlatch petitioners from the North Coast in the early 1880s, associated the potlatch with a past that they felt publicly obliged to denounce as they redefined themselves as Christians. Other "traditionalists" could not see their society, economy, or political structures functioning without it. As a "traditionalist" chief told Thomas Crosby on his first visit to the Nass River in the spring of 1875: "God gave you the Bible, but He gave us the dance and the potlach [sic], and we don't want you here."<sup>134</sup> Caught between the two poles, the common plea of many Natives, Christian and non-Christian alike, was the desire to first pay off their own debts before the potlatch was discontinued. The dialogue over class had heated up to an outright debate. According to one missionary, by the 1890s, the internal divisions between pro-potlatch and anti-potlatch advocates had produced "one seething mass of disaffection and discontent" throughout the area.<sup>135</sup> Yet as I have demonstrated throughout this paper, the shifting alliances and definitions of identity were fluid, and not surprisingly, Christians frequently engaged in the potlatch, despite revisions to the Indian Act and promises of more stringent enforcement of the regulations against it.

As Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler so aptly phrased it, "the question of knowledge and rule is always a political one. Such struggles are not just part of the wider battle, but a conflict over the nature of the battlefield itself."<sup>136</sup> If one examines Tsimshianic conceptions of power acquisition in "traditional" culture, the introduction of Christianity from external sources represents no great break from the past or a radical departure from the typical way new religious perspectives had previously been incorporated into Tsimshian class and society.<sup>137</sup> Mythically and historically, the Tsimshian's transformative power

134 Crosby, *Up and Down the North Coast*, 197.

135 Rev. J. B. McCullagh to Vowell, Letter dated 1 February 1896, Department of Indian Affairs, Vol. 3628, f. 6244-1; as quoted in Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990), 46.

136 Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, "Introduction: Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule," *American Ethnologist* 16/4 (November 1989): 612.

137 Many of the key religious organizations such as the *Wut'aahalaayt* (secret societies) were incorporated into Tsimshian cultural life relatively recently, just prior to contact with Europeans. "Throughout the region," Miller explains, "the cultural hub of the Bella Bella, known to the Tsimshian as the *Wu'tsdaa*, was significant for the dissemination of the secret orders, elite shamans, and priesthoods that constituted membership in the privileged ranks of royalty. Great shamans of the Tsimshian went to Bella Bella to become confirmed in privileged positions." Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 3. The Tsimshian term for Christian priest, minister, pastor or preacher is *lüpleet*, suggesting that an entirely new label was devised for categorizing this post-contact type of spiritual leader. Dunn, *Sm'algyax*, s.v. "priest," "minister," "pastor," and "preacher."

was bestowed or activated through external donors. In essence, the Tsimshian had a tradition of obtaining new religious practices, rituals, and ideas from sources outside their territories or culture. This pattern continued for certain European resources, and hence offers one explanation as to why Christianity may have been sought after as a power, even though "traditional" sources were also available.

Protestant missions provided Tsimshian access to the spiritual power of the Euro-Canadian culture as well as economic, political, and social links. Thus, status derived from those who demonstrated initiative and leadership in the Christian church signified more than merely religious authority. The embrace of mission schooling with its promise of industrial training or literacy, or the adoption of new architectural home-styles speaks volumes about the ongoing negotiation of Tsimshian and Christian identities. Missionaries like William Duncan saw themselves as much more than religious instructors; their self-appointed duty was to uplift and create self-supporting replicas of Victorian social order among their charges.<sup>138</sup> And it was this very evangelical emphasis on Christian transformation, moral uplift, and self-reliance, which ensured that Tsimshian converts, catechists, and evangelists would play a central role in the process of missionization. In so doing, social elites might retain "traditional" roles. On one level, chiefs who converted to the new religion, high-ranking individuals who became evangelists and missionaries themselves, and those Tsimshian who conducted class meetings and Sunday schools, received additional social status and power. Thus, it is likely some used their roles as Christians to circumvent "traditional" methods of acquiring this status. Yet others, like the holders of the name-title Ligeex or the Dudowards, claimed conversion as a further validation of their existing class and rank. Christian power was added to further their potential of becoming more than human and to the wealth of their houses. Broadly speaking, however, Aboriginal people from all classes, ranks, and levels of society added Christianity to their identities as Tsimshian. The potential for the transformation of class through religion was apparent to missionary and convert alike; by their actions, it is certain that the Tsimshian had more in mind than merely becoming a Christianized worker class.

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138 "Now with regard to his physical and temporal affairs. The trouble is, we leave the Indian down in the mud. We do not believe in a missionary as being only a teacher of religion, as such. A missionary should be a man who will look at the Indian as a whole; take him body and soul, and try to lift him up. My endeavors have been to make them self-supporting." William Duncan, "Mr. Duncan's Address before the Board of Indian Commissioners, and the Conference of the Missionary Boards, and the Indian Rights Association, Washington, D.C., Jan. 6, 1887," in *The Story of Metlakahla*, by Henry S. Wellcome (New York: Saxon and Co., 1887), App., 382.