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A Monthly International Magazine for the Promotion of the Kingdom of God.

October, November and December.

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Native Missionaries of the North Pacific Coast

Philip McKay and Others

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Indian: A History Since 1500 (1972) and Mission on the Nass: The Evangelization of the Nishga (1860-1890) (1982). His current research is on the history of the Nishga Indians of British Columbia in contact with Europeans during the second half of the nineteenth century.

White missionaries and their native converts.



IN WRITING THE HISTORY of nineteenth century Christian missions the tendency has been to deal primarily with the European and Euro-American or Euro-Canadian missionaries and their exploits — as adventure, devotion, sacrifice, martyrdom, cultural and economic imperialism, and other themes. Much less attention has been given to native missionaries, lay and clerical, commissioned by their white supervisors. Still less attention has been given to spontaneous, informal, or self-commissioned missionary activity by native Christians.

In late twentieth century writings, missionaries are frequently portrayed as destroyers of indigenous cultures. Both friends and opponents of missionaries have taken this position. Sympathizers have congratulated the missionaries on their meritorious work.¹ Opponents of missionaries condemn the destruction wreaked on (perceived) exotic expressions of the human spirit represented by many aboriginal cultures. Missionary expansion

is seen as an example of European or Euro-American/Euro-Canadian cultural expansion and its techniques of dissemination. However, native cultures have not always been destroyed, though they have often been drastically altered. Today, indigenous minorities, the “fourth world,” assert continuity with the past and the validity of aboriginal culture. Contemporary Indians, including Christians, assert cultural continuity with their Indian past.

Native missionaries, spreading Christianity as perceived by them and outside of missionary organizations, represent a dissemination carried out in the context of native society. This is true even though, in the case of northern coastal British Columbia, that society had been altered by intermittent European contact since the last quarter of the eighteenth century or, indirectly, by the impact of European culture for perhaps half a century before that.

One of the difficulties in assessing the impact of missions on the native people is paucity of written accounts by first generation converts. Martin Jarrett-Kerr has attempted to survey a broad range of information on converts and to generalize about patterns of acceptance of Christianity.² The meager records of native response is partially offset by the copious accounts of missionaries. However, biases and lack of knowledge of native cultures often limit the helpfulness of missionary records and require their cautious use. Care must be taken to read them within the context of whatever ethnographic information is available. Paradoxically, this frequently includes ethnographic information provided by missionaries who are often the most extensive source for the early contact period. The present essay explores possible clues for a clearer understanding of Christian expansion through native evangelism, using examples drawn mainly from the Northwest Coast Indians.

A careful reading of missionary sources often shows that for every European missionary among a people there were many more native converts who became missionaries as unpaid lay volunteers.³ In their enthusiastic response to conversion, these people much resemble the anonymous carriers of Christianity in the early “Christian” centuries. The vigor and enthusiasm of their endeavor shed light on the depth of their commitment to their new religion, even if it does not make clear their understanding of the nuances of their new faith. They experience many of the same difficulties as the white missionaries about whom we know so much more. Characteristically



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they experience the dangers of travel, passive and active resistance, ridicule, rejection on the one hand and hospitality, interest, and acceptance on the other.

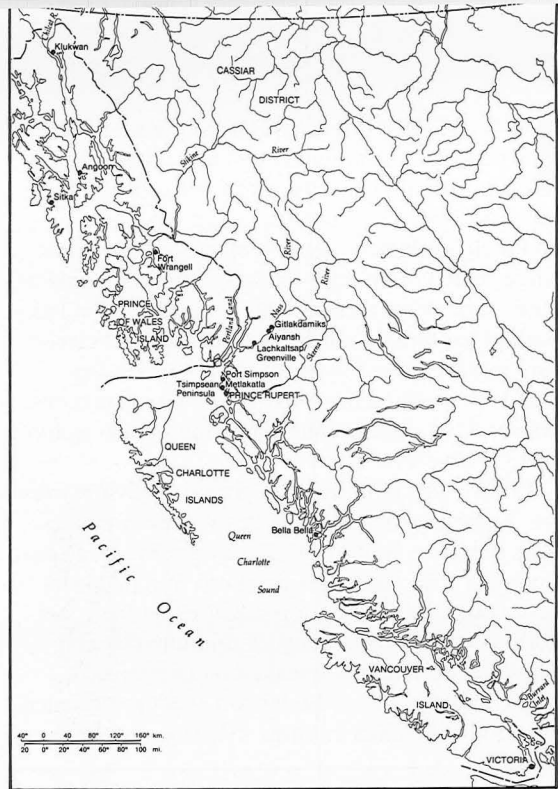
Nishga and Tsimshian missionaries, both Anglican and Methodist, provide examples of this native missionary activity.⁴ They evangelized among their own people, at their home villages and those nearby, and among neighboring peoples with whom they had contacts from pre-historic times. They followed the routes of trade and commerce, attempting to win converts while engaged in their regular economic pursuits. The Christianity they communicated in the absence of white missionaries or white-trained missionaries was likely to reflect their abbreviated training in the new Christian teachings. Some of their work was supervised by Europeans; numbers had European missionary encouragement and support. Some work was largely spontaneous. The native missionary might have undergone much or little religious training. Often he or she had been introduced to Christian teaching only through some Sunday school catechism or preaching by whites.⁵

Beginnings of White Missionary Activity on the North Pacific Coast

ANGLICAN MISSIONS on the northwest coast began at Fort Simpson, British Columbia (1857), and then moved to nearby Metlakatla (1862), which became their focal point. From there, Anglicanism spread to Nishga, Gitksan, Haida, and Kwakiutl peoples. Methodist missionary activity began about fifteen years later: it also started at Fort Simpson (later known as Port Simpson) and radiated out to neighboring peoples — Nishga, Gitksan, Kwakiutl, and Haida. The Tlingit of Alaska were introduced to Methodism by Tsimshian Methodists from Port Simpson.

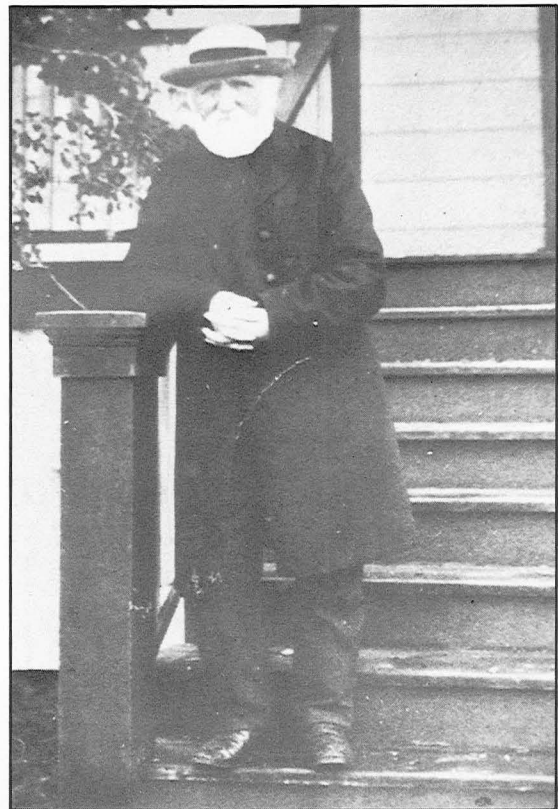
Christian missions on the north coast of British Columbia commenced with the work of William Duncan. Duncan, a young lay missionary of the

William Duncan, noted for founding the missionary colony of Metlakatla and creating a system of missionary work to be followed by other missionaries in the establishment of additional northwest Indian missions. Though qualified for ordination, Duncan was not a clergyman. He believed that the interests of his community could be better served if he remained a lay missionary.



Courtesy of the author

Map of the North Pacific Coast where white and native missionary activity began in British Columbia.



Alaska Historical Society



Indian children assembled in front of the school house at Metlakatla, May 1888. Since all members of the Metlakatla community were required to send their children to school, the building was built to accommodate seven hundred pupils.

Anglican Church Missionary Society, arrived at Fort Simpson, a Hudson's Bay Company post on the Tsimshian Peninsula, in 1857. From there his influence spread to surrounding peoples. Fort Simpson was located in Coast Tsimshian territory, and was a hub of trading for Coast Tsimshian, Nishga, Haida, Tlingit, Kwakiutl, and other neighboring peoples. The Tsimshian were formidable traders. Some became converts to Christianity and settled at the missionary colony, Metlakatla, founded by Duncan in 1862. Most stayed at Fort Simpson and were evangelized by the Methodists in the 1870s. From these two centers, Metlakatla and Fort Simpson, British Protestant Christianity was widely diffused.

Culturally closely linked, these tribes had kinship, clan, and trade ties which pre-dated European contact. Voyages of hundreds of miles in open canoes were common, and in the nineteenth century helped to diffuse European influences. New reasons for travel were added to old: trade and work, adventure and curiosity. Haida and Tsimshian people travelled to Victoria in order to trade and to see the white people's town. Some coastal Indians hired on to Russian, British, and American ships, and travelled to California and even to China.

Anglican and Methodist missionaries — Duncan, Robert Doolan, Robert Tomlinson, William H. Collison, and James B. McCullagh of the Church Missionary Society, and Thomas Crosby, Alfred E. Green, and W.H. Pierce of the Methodist Missionary Society — evangelized among all

three branches of the Tsimshian people (Coast Tsimshian, Nishga, and Gitksan). Some of the earliest Tsimshian converts had been influenced by both Anglican and Methodist missionizing.

Patterns of Native Missionary Activity

IN PRE-CONTACT TIMES, cultural influences from the Tsimshian had radiated to the Tlingit and the Haida, and into the interior Athapaskan peoples, as trade, war, and diplomacy transpired. In the early nineteenth century, religious influences from the interior had spread to Coast Tsimshian and Nishga people, in the teachings of Beni, the Carrier prophet. Other influences may have penetrated from the Russian Orthodox presence at Sitka, Alaska, where Bishop John Veniaminoff (Veniaminov) instructed some Tlingit people in Russian Orthodox beliefs.⁶ Lutheran influences may also have reached the Tlingit from Sitka.

Certain indigenous mythological and religious concepts were widely disseminated among Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian groups, which may have formed a foundation for receiving Christian ideas into the context of traditional culture. Haida and Tlingit tradition regarded the headwaters of the Nass River as the residence of God. Indigenous traditions of the Chief of Heaven (the Chief of the Sky) as living on the upper Nass may have aided the Tsimshian and Nishga missionaries in proselytizing for Christianity. Light was said to have come from the upper Nass: Raven, born of the

virgin daughter of the Chief of Heaven, released the sun, and let light come from the head of the Nass and spread over the earth, according to Haida tradition.⁷ In Tsimshian myth, the culture hero Txamsen (Raven), who was said to have released the light ball, was known as the "light" or "sun catcher."

J.B. McCullagh, veteran missionary to the Upper Nass River Nishga, asserted that the culture of the Nishga made them particularly receptive to the Gospel of St. John. Although McCullagh did not elaborate the point, he may have thought the light/sight/life/enlightenment metaphor of that Gospel was culturally congenial to the Nishga.

Robert Grumet finds that among the Coast Tsimshian, the "holders of the highest and most influential group positions also controlled the most powerful spirits."⁸ Tsimshian people were prominent in the north and south trade, bartering slaves, decorated boxes, rattles, masks, headdresses, and fish oil. The Coast Tsimshian administered "the largest and most important regional trade nexus," and "were the most successful middlemen of the Northwest Coast."⁹ Tsimshian evangelists were thus able to preach in the Tsimshian language and be understood over a wide area. Shared religious concepts and traditions concerning the Chief in the Sky and the bringing of light from the upper Nass may have aided communication on the symbolic level as well.

Traditional history of the Tlingit Wolf clan of Fort Wrangell, Alaska, held that all but one of the Fort Wrangell Wolf families were immigrants from the territory of the Coast Tsimshian. Tlingit history is "explicitly connected to the migration of the tribal crest groups. The group symbol embodied the history of the group and rooted its origins, property rights and accomplishments to its association with a crest."¹⁰ Members of the Wolf clan among both the Tlingit and the Tsimshian were prominent traders and merchants. Clan heads were the people who "served as chief managers of natural resources, human resources, trading expeditions, raiding activities and relations with other clans."¹¹ The role of the chiefs in Tsimshian religious life is suggested by Jay Miller: "With their conversion, the Tsimshian came to publically reject their previous beliefs as pagan, and, as they say, 'low class.'"¹²

As traders, it was the chiefs who, accompanied by spouses, children, other relatives, and slaves, conducted their trading negotiations in person. Both men and women took part in this chiefly activity. Records of the arrivals and departures of

prominent trading chiefs form a staple of the early journals of Fort Simpson. The chiefs had a monopoly on trade and travel, and it is in this context that some early conversions took place. Furthermore, travel was a major element in early native evangelism.

SUCH A PATTERN reflects an earlier model. Wayne Meeks writes of the first-century spread of Christianity: "people of the Roman empire travelled more extensively and more easily than had anyone before them — or would again until the nineteenth century . . . it was not unusual for artisans to move from place to place, carrying their tools with them and seeking out, say, the leatherworkers' street or quarter of whatever town they came to"¹³ and, again, "It is not surprising that the spread of foreign cults closely followed the spread of trade, or that Christianity repeated this already established pattern." Finally, new cults moved with artisans, tradespersons, and migrants. They were "peddled along with their wares or gossiped in their workrooms."¹⁴

Some examples have been documented of a similar Indian transmission of Christianity. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Christianity was diffused among Plateau tribes by the influence of Chief Spokane Garry in the Oregon Territory,¹⁵ and by Roman Catholic Iroquois of Caughnawaga who were engaged in the fur trade in British Columbia and the Oregon Territory.¹⁶ Southern Coastal Tsimshian spread Christianity to their communities when they returned home after a stay at William Duncan's Christian village of Metlakatla, and at Bella Bella, Jim Starr evangelized his own village after contact with the Methodists on Burrard Inlet, where he had ventured several hundred miles from home to work in a sawmill.

Some cases of native evangelism doubtless sprang from travels specifically for evangelizing purposes. Here too indigenous mechanisms may be presumed to have operated. The self-appointed missionary went where contacts existed within the framework of the native culture: friends, kinfolk, clan members, tribe members, and those of a shared trade network. The message that was transmitted would be interpreted by both native missionary and hearers in the light of indigenous culture: creation stories, culture heroes, supernatural sanctions, and theistic concepts. Strong believers in the importance of supernatural power and its control for a successful life, Indians were often curious to understand and perhaps acquire

the spiritual power available in religions other than their own.

As we have seen, the immediate dispersal point for many Tsimshian Methodist missionaries was Fort Simpson (Port Simpson). Several prominent Tsimshian people from Fort Simpson had been converted by Methodist missionaries while on visits to Victoria. The key figure in Methodist Tsimshian evangelization was Elizabeth Deix (Mrs. Lawson). Called the "Mother of Methodism among the Tsimshian," she was of a chiefly family and the wife of a customs official. Her son, Alfred Dudoward, became the senior chief at Port Simpson in the late nineteenth century. Through their influence, the Methodist missionaries were invited to the Coast Tsimshian, beginning with the Rev. William Pollard. The husband and wife team of Alfred and Kate Dudoward, converted at Victoria, were sometime missionaries at Kitimat, B.C. Methodist Tsimshian-Scots William Henry Pierce (educated by William Duncan at Fort Simpson and named for William Henry Collison) and Methodist Tsimshian George Edgar became ordained clergy in 1888 and 1900 respectively.¹⁷

Native traders among the Coast Tsimshian, Haida, and Nishga encouraged the Anglican and Methodist missionaries to come to them too. Two Nishga chiefs, Kinsada and Kadounaha, personally escorted William Duncan to the villages along the Nass River. A Nishga chief of Gitlakdamiks, a village on the upper Nass River (later baptized Daniel Giekqu) had first met the white traders at the Hudson's Bay Company fort at the mouth of the Nass River (1831-1834). Giekqu traded to his own people and to the interior peoples. In the interior he heard of the Carrier prophet, Beni, and accepted his teachings. Two and a half decades later, he heard Anglican missionary Robert Tomlinson at Gitlakdamiks, and some time later, under the leadership of another Gitlakdamiks chief, Tkgaganlakhatqu (baptized Abraham Wright), and in company with three other chiefs and their families, Giekqu resettled at what became the Christian Nishga village of Aiyansh. Giekqu's role in trading had put him in touch with the latest influences penetrating from the outside world, and he accommodated to them.¹⁸ Some time later, Giekqu composed a hymn. The refrain, translated by McCullagh, ran:

Enlarge Thy Word within our hearts,
Increase Thy people, Lord.

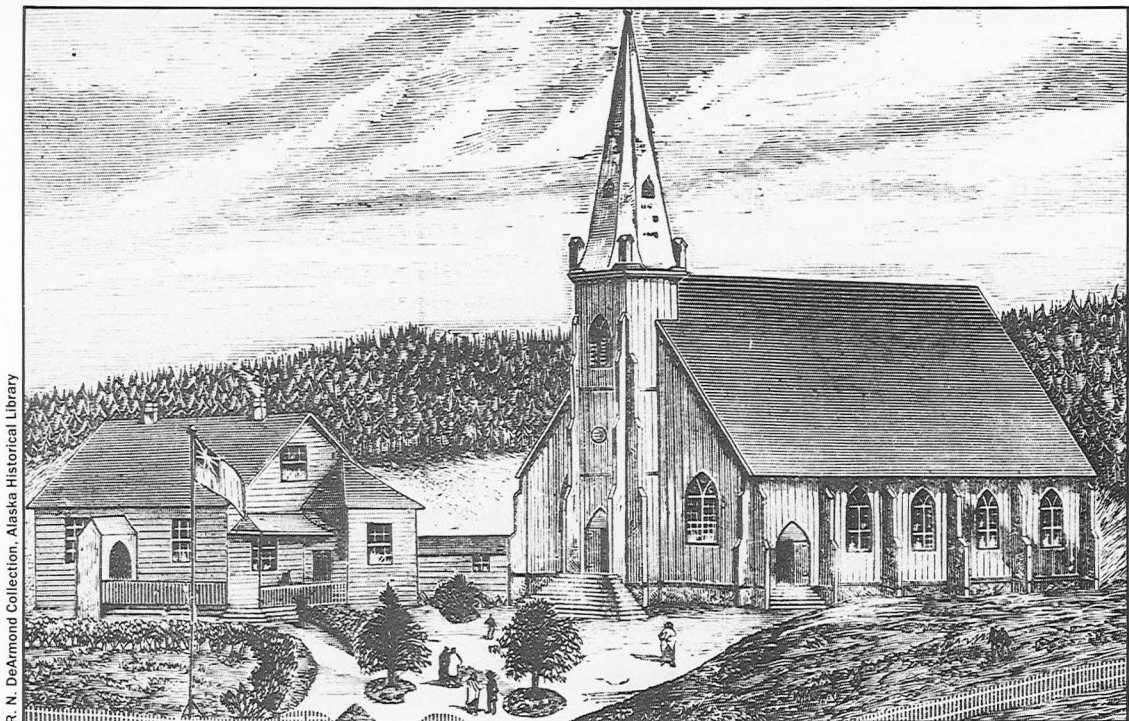
Although the white missionaries were often patronizing to the religious creativity of their native

converts, only the most unimaginative and inexperienced failed to recognize the value of Indian internalization of the new faith.

AMONG THE UPRIVER Nishga people at Gitlakdamiks, a native Christian community developed, presumably influenced by Metlakatla and Kincolith (Tsimshian and Nishga respectively), both of which were Christian villages established by Anglican missionaries. Chief Tkgagalakhatsqu/Abraham Wright led the small group to relocate at Aiyansh, a mile or two from Gitlakdamiks. The community of Aiyansh was in its embryonic stage when James B. McCullagh arrived in 1883 and began at once to bring it in line with Anglican custom.¹⁹ Chief Abraham Wright was a leading native evangelist, self-motivated though also encouraged by McCullagh. He was a leader of a group of Aiyansh native missionaries, called "strong hearts," who conducted services at the mouth of the Nass fishery each spring, and marched to nearby Gitlakdamiks from Aiyansh on Sundays to hold open-air services there. All of the five original chiefly settlers (with their families) of Aiyansh were active evangelists to their fellow Nishga and neighboring peoples, many of whom came annually to the Nass mouth fishery. In this way the aboriginal annual economic cycle was incorporated into the missionary effort.

When McCullagh began his work at Aiyansh, he found that Chief Wright and the others had developed a worship service. McCullagh used both confrontation and diplomacy to bring the Anglican form of worship into the Nishga-initiated church and community. Native Christian worship has been occasionally and briefly described, usually in unsympathetic terms without explanation of the relation between ritual and belief. Dramatic renderings of traditions, including song, dance, and musical accompaniment, were part of the Nishga/Tsimshian culture. In the dramatic portrayal, the boundaries were transcended between pageantry and return to the mythic past.²⁰

E.P. Laycock, Anglican missionary at Lakkalsap/Greenville (1907), noted the importance of the drum in the Sunday afternoon service. A huge drum beat continuously, he reported. People sang hymns, shouting the chorus at the top of their voices. Sometimes, Laycock reported, they would all "jump up" and dance. People clapped their hands as they shouted each chorus. Laycock thought the words were learned by rote but not



Methodist church and parsonage at Fort Simpson.

understood.²¹ Public confession of the sins of the previous week also constituted a portion of the church service.

The second Mrs. McCullagh, not long after her arrival at Aiyansh, in the early twentieth century, described a service under the direction of her husband: a procession, from the vestry up to the altar in the church, was made by two church wardens, two elders (chosen from older members of the community), two readers in surplices, and the missionary priest. Extemporaneous prayers were said by an elder before and after the sermon. McCullagh prided himself on accommodating to Nishga culture in his church ritual. He thought of himself as indigenizing Anglican Christianity. This may be a case where the priest has made some concessions to Nishga forms of ceremonial behavior.

Franz Boas attended services at the Anglican Church at Kincolith, Sunday, October 14, 1894. Of the religious response of the Nishga and their neighbors, the Tsimshian, he wrote,

It interested me greatly to hear services in the Indian language. It is interesting how accessible the Indians are to religious ecstasy. Movements like the Salvation

Army, especially, have a great influence on them. Every few years there are movements in various places where the people have visions and see miracles. The great drum of the Salvation Army exercises a strong influence here and has helped convert whole villages, especially because of their own beliefs the drum is supposed to attract supernatural help. . . . This shows how susceptible they are to religious concepts and how Christianity blends in with their old religion.²²

Boas visited Kincolith not long after a revival had occurred there. The outbreak of religious enthusiasm began in the Easter season of 1893 and lasted intermittently for about a year. It was characterized by frequent and large worship services, late-night meetings, processions, singing, prayer and departures of residents to other communities to spread the excitement. To the Rev. William H. Collison, missionary pastor at Kincolith, this was a visitation of the Holy Spirit, and his job was to channelize it and turn it to the purpose of increasing the depth of spiritual life in the community. In commenting on these events he referred back to an earlier revival of late summer, 1877, at Metlakatla.²³

At that time the excitement had not been properly channelled, Collison thought, and its potential had been lost. That incident occurred when Metlakatla's founder and leader, William Duncan, was away and the mission had been left in charge of a newly arrived young cleric, the Rev. A.J. Hall. Hall's emotional sermons had helped to engender the religious excitement. People began to see angels, witness miracles, hold conversation with the Third Person of the Trinity and discover Christ's cross in the adjacent woods. They conducted their own religious services, processions, singing and praying, and dispersed to other villages to evangelize. Duncan quickly returned when he heard of these events and dealt severely with their leaders. Collison believed that some of the resentment created by Duncan's rebuke lingered on until the time of his departure to Alaska (1887) and the rupture in the Metlakatla community which resulted.

The Metlakatla excitement may have been linked to a religious revival which occurred at Fort Simpson in November, 1876. The Rev. Thomas Crosby, pioneer of Methodist Indian missions on the north coast of British Columbia, described the upsurge as the "First Pentecost" among the Tsimshian at Fort Simpson. People fell on the floor of the church and cried for mercy. Singing and praying were widespread and hundreds gathered at the church. Crosby noted the great change in the life of the community as a result of this revival: "No one could doubt the mighty change that had taken place in these hearts when he saw how earnest they were and witnessed their anxiety to carry the good news to other tribes."²⁴

What we seem to be witnessing in all three of these cases is the Indian acceptance of evangelical Christianity and its spontaneous incorporation into forms which combine native and European elements. The prominence of singing (especially choral or group singing), processions, late-night or all-night ceremonies, all accord with traditional practice. In these various Tsimshian "Pentecosts," the Indians responded by travelling to other communities to evangelize.

THE ANGLICAN NISHGA CHURCH Army illustrates twentieth century indigenization of Christianity. Collison had introduced the Church Army (an Anglican organization modelled upon the Salvation Army, including the use of the drum and the brass band) in the early 1890s to channelize the religious enthusiasm described above. The Church Army then

spread to neighboring Nishga, and to other communities where Anglicans were present. The Church Army is still a significant element in Nishga life as the following remarks show.

Run entirely by the Nishga, with the white pastor as a guest (if present at meetings and events) the Army works in close harmony with the village community of which it is a part. Leadership in the Army overlaps the political-social leadership of the village. Preaching, praying, public confessions and testimonials form a prominent part of their worship. Services are characterized by heights of emotionalism and speaking in tongues. Music, including the drum, is amplified so that it can be heard outside of the Church Army Hall and at a distance. Processions, with musical instruments and banners, have a prominent place at various services, including religious holidays such as Palm Sunday and Easter. Army members visit the sick and bereaved, give counsel, pray with people, and conduct ceremonies to bless cars, boats, houses and new gravestones. The services and mission work are integrated into the life of the whole community. Activities are sometimes carried out of the Nass valley home of the Nishga, when, for example, Nishga people are hospitalized in Terrace, Prince Rupert, or Vancouver, British Columbia.

Evangelism is part of the Nishga Church Army tradition. They gather as a group on occasion and march to the site of their meeting. Revival meetings last for up to a week with two services a day. Evening services typically last for six to eight hours. Occasionally a party of missionaries has gone as far as another province or territory.²⁵ Since the Rev. Ian McKenzie wrote the essay on which these comments are based (circa 1983), all the Anglican Churches on the Nass have been staffed by Nishga clergy. What implications this will have for the relationship between the clergy and the Church Army among the Nishga remain to be observed.

The Career of Clah/Philip McKay

WE KNOW VERY LITTLE about most of the native Christians who became informal evangelists in the nineteenth century. In the case of Philip McKay, a Tsimshian of Fort Simpson, there is enough material from various sources more or less contemporary with his career to construct a sketch of his missionary activity. His career spans three cultures: Tsimshian, Tlingit, and Euro-Canadian. Clah (Philip McKay) is an example of the native Christian



Courtesy of the author

Philip McKay, a Tsimshian from Fort Simpson and native Christian, who became a key figure in the spread of Christianity in Alaska.

who spread his or her own religion informally as a result of personal enthusiasm and in the course of ordinary social and economic activities.

Wil-um-Clah (Philip McKay) became a key figure in the spread of Christianity into Alaska. Sheldon Jackson called him "the Apostle of Alaska." Clah was born at Fort Simpson, British Columbia, in the 1840s. He was of the Eagle clan and his wife was of the Wolf clan. In the matrilineal Tsimshian system he would have been of his mother's clan. His father was of the Blackfish (Killer Whale) clan. Clah had received some schooling at Metlakatla. Of chiefly family and trained in traditional culture, he had been an initiate of a secret society. He was converted at Fort Simpson by native Christians who had been converted in Victoria. Clah was baptized later (1873) as Philip McKay by the Rev. William Pollard, a Methodist missionary who was sent to fill in until the arrival of Thomas Crosby. His wife was baptized at the same time and named Annie McKay.

In the spring of 1876, Philip McKay and several companions from Fort Simpson — including Andrew Moss, George Weeget, John Ryan, Louis Gosnall, and John Neas-guo-juo-luck — were on their way to work in the Cassiar district. McKay and the others had for several summers previously worked in the Cassiar mining area as packers for white miners.²⁶ They stopped en route, at Fort Wrangell, a settlement of the Stikine people (a branch of the Tlingit). There McKay and his friends took employment cutting wood. As enthusiastic Methodist Christians, they began to hold religious services and found a good response among some of the Stikine and Haida there. McKay then wrote to the Rev. Thomas Crosby, superintendent of Methodist missions for northern British Columbia, asking for help in the evangelistic work which they had informally begun.

The letter from Philip McKay to Crosby, August 27, 1876, gives some details of the circumstances of the Tsimshian evangelization and what McKay and the others thought was the Stikine response:

We reached this place [Fort Wrangell] about the first of June on our way to Cassiar mines. We stopped on Sabbath and found the people in utter darkness as regards the Savior and His love. We held services on the Sabbath Day and, as we found employment here for our party, we decided to remain and work for the name of Christ, trying to lead the Stikines and Hydas living here to the truth. We have held services every Sabbath and twice on

week nights and God is blessing our feeble efforts. Philip (the leader) says, "In July I went way to look for some salmon and stopped all night at a Stikine camp. I read some out of the Bible and the poor Stikine thought, when they saw me pray, that some great monster was about to come up from the ground." In our first service George Weeget opened the Bible and at our Sunday school Philip McKay opened the service. Our first meeting was led by Andrew Moss and John helped him. We all send out love to our friends.²⁷

Lewis Gosnall, one of the young Tsimshian evangelists, gave a brief account of these events:

. . . at that time there was no gospel in that land lying still to the north of us, known as Alaska. . . . We began at Fort Wrangle and some of them heard the word. We brought back our report that the people heard our message, and that the whites also would welcome a messenger who might be sent to them. At this Dr. Crosby could delay no longer so the next week, with ten of us, he started out for Fort Wrangle. On arriving there, a meeting of both whites and Indians was called. After the service was held, he asked them if they wanted a church or a school. They replied, "we want both." . . . Phillip McKay and I remained to keep the fires burning throughout that long winter until the Missionary arrived. From this small, but consecrated beginning the good work spread all through that great North land.²⁸

When Crosby visited Fort Wrangell, he was received by Chief Toy-a-att of the Wolf clan, one of the Clah's first converts. Chief Toy-a-att and Chief Shakes Shu-taks, both of Fort Wrangell, had visited Fort Simpson, where they had come in contact with the Methodist influences there. These men were thus already disposed to listen to McKay's evangelizing message. Crosby reports the speech of greeting by Toy-a-att:

We welcome you, missionary to our place. Your friends, the Tsimshians, used to be the worst people on the whole coast. On account of their fighting and blood-thirstiness, we counted them as our enemies. [There is some exaggeration here since they also traded regularly.] Now your young men are here teaching about Jesus, the great king of Peace. Since you have come, you must stay with us.²⁹

When Crosby indicated that he could not stay, Toy-a-att remarked, "How many snows shall we

have to wait? We have waited a long time: and not only we Stikine people but there are thousands to the north and west of us who need the light. How long do you think we will have to wait? I am getting old: my people, many of them, have gone down into the darkness. My heart is sick with fear that if a missionary does not come soon many more will be gone."³⁰

WILLIAM HENRY PIERCE, the Tsimshian-Scots convert alluded to earlier, also from Port Simpson and schooled at Metlakatla, was sent to assist Clah/McKay and his companions. He was about twenty years old at the time. The group taught day school six days a week, held prayer meetings on Tuesday and Friday evenings, and preached in Tsimshian. Three services were held on Sundays. The long tradition

In the summer of 1877 Sheldon Jackson and Amanda McFarland arrived in Wrangell to set up the first Presbyterian mission in Alaska. Not long after their arrival Mrs. McFarland rescued two native girls from the hands of witch doctors and brought them to her home. Soon more girls were on her door step begging to be taken in, thus was the origin of the McFarland Girls' Home. In this photograph of the McFarland Girls' Home is also the wife of Philip McKay, Annie (#11), who had come to Wrangell with her husband to help establish the first school and lead Sunday worship.

of trade contacts between Tsimshian, Tlingit, and Haida made the latter two groups familiar with the Tsimshian language.³¹

A detailed view of the school under the direction of Clah is given by Sheldon Jackson as it was seen when he arrived with Mrs. McFarland, the new white teacher who was to take Clah's place:

Upon landing at Wrangell and passing down the street, I saw an Indian ringing a bell. It was the call for the afternoon school. About twenty pupils were in attendance, mostly young Indian women. Two or three boys were present; also a mother and her three little children. As the women took their seats on the rough plank benches, each one bowed her head in silent prayer, seeking Divine help on her studies. Soon a thoughtful Indian man, of about thirty years of age, came in and took his seat behind the rude desk. It was Clah, the teacher. The familiar hymn, "What a friend we have in Jesus," was sung in English; a prayer followed in the Chinook jargon, closing with a repetition in concert of the Lord's prayer in English. After lessons were studied and recited, the school arose, sang the longmetre doxology and recited in concert the benediction. Then the teacher said, "Good-afternoon, my pupils"; to which came the kindly response, "Good-afternoon, teacher."³²



Courtesy of Presbyterian Historical Society

When the Fort Wrangell mission was turned over to the Americans, Pierce was sent to Lakkalsap on the Nass River, to prepare for the coming of the Rev. A. E. Green, and stayed on to act as Green's interpreter.³³

The young Tsimshian evangelists' efforts led to the conversion of several Stikine chiefs and leading men — including Toy-a-att, John Kadishan, Moses Louie, and Aaron Kohanow (the latter two of whom were brothers). Toy-a-att and Kadishan became missionaries to the Tlingit. Toy-a-att evangelized the Hootznoo of Angoon, and together with Kadishan (who was the chief informant of John R. Swanton's study of the Tlingit) evangelized among the Chilkat of Klukwan. Kadishan was a kinsman of Chief Shotridge of Klukwan,³⁴ who was the most prestigious chief of his village, a Tlingit Wolf clan member and the leading merchant and trader of the area.³⁵

Comments made by John Ryan on the Tsimshian mission work to the Tlingits may refer to one of the missionary tours to Tlingit people living beyond Fort Wrangell. He wrote:

Last winter we went far off, and carried God's word wherever we went. We did not go to make money or get great names, but to carry the word of God to others. We visited four large villages that asked where the missionary was. We had no authority to tell them, Tell God your hearts. Pray to him to send a missionary, and one will come.³⁶

TWO OTHER OBSERVERS provide information on the Tsimshian evangelistic work and its impact. One of these is S. Hall Young, an American Presbyterian who was stationed at Fort Wrangell after the Methodists were unable to send a permanent white missionary. Crosby had approved of the work of the Tsimshian apostles and believed that the Presbyterians concurred with him on this. Young, however, expressed skepticism about the conversions and the Stikine understanding of Christian teachings after being evangelized by Clah/McKay and his friends. He was much less sanguine in his assessment than was Crosby: "He [McKay] . . . gathered together a little company of nominal Christians," he wrote. Of Toy-a-att and his "tribal family," Young said that they were "pronounced adherents of McKay and were called Christians." Again, he referred to the "alleged" conversion of another man.³⁷

A contrasting assessment was made by John Muir, the noted naturalist, who was a member of the party on one of the evangelistic tours from

Fort Wrangell circa 1879. He was very impressed with the Stikine converts, and reported speeches and remarks by Chief Shakes (the most prestigious chief of the Stikines at Fort Wrangell) and by Chief Toy-a-att. Chief Shakes spoke at a gathering in his own house after dances had been performed: "Dear Brothers and Sisters, we have been long, long in the dark. You have led us the right way to live and the right way to die. I thank you for myself and all my people, and I give you my heart."³⁸

Two other speeches at this occasion indicate a desire to please the visiting whites, first by performing traditional dances and then by asserting that the old, "undesirable" things were being put away:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, this is the way we used to dance. We liked it long ago when we were blind, we always danced this way, but now we are not blind. The Good Lord has taken pity upon us and sent his son, Jesus Christ, to tell us what to do. We have danced to-day only to show you how blind we were to like to dance in this foolish way. We will not dance any more.



Chief Shakes, the most prestigious chief of the Stikines at Fort Wrangell.

Courtesy of Presbyterian Historical Society

Another man echoed these views: “. . . this is the way we used to dance and play. We do not wish to do so any more. We will give away all the dance dresses you have seen us wearing though we value them very highly.”³⁹

Muir believed that the Tlingit possessed the idea of atonement and gave an example of a Stikine chief who had sacrificed his life for his people. Muir believed that his idea aided them in accepting the Christian concept of the atoning death of the “Son of God, the Chief of Chiefs, the Master of the World . . . worth more than all mankind put together; therefore, when His blood was shed, the salvation of the world was made sure.”⁴⁰

A further speech by Chief Shakes illustrates the impact of European technology on the Indians, and the association of technological superiority with spiritual superiority in the mind of the chief. The sense of the chief’s duty to his people is also shown.

The white man makes great ships. We, like children, can only make canoes. He makes his big ships go with the wind, and he also makes them go with fire. We chop down trees with stone axes; the Boston man with iron axes, which are far better. In everything the ways of the white man seem to be better than ours. Compared with the white man we are only blind children, knowing not how best to live either here or in this country we go to after we died. So I wish you to learn this new religion and teach it to your children, that you may all go when you die into that good heaven country of the white man and be happy. But I am too old to learn a new religion, and besides, many of my people who have died were bad and foolish people, and if this word the missionary has brought us is true, and I think it is, many of my people must be in that bad country the missionary calls “Hell”, and I must go there also, for a Stikine Chief never deserts his people in time of trouble. To that bad country, therefore, I will go, and try to cheer my people and help them as best I can to endure their misery.⁴¹

MUIR WAS ESPECIALLY impressed by a statement of Chief Toy-a-att. The chief, Muir wrote, “stood several minutes without speaking a word. . . . He then explained in detail what his mother had taught him as to the character of God, the great maker of the world: also what the shamans had taught him; the

thoughts that often came to his mind when he was alone on hunting expeditions, and what he first thought of the religion which the missionaries had brought them.” Unfortunately Muir did not elaborate on the specific remarks uttered by Toy-a-att.⁴² The light-sight-enlightenment imagery runs through the Tlingit remarks as reported.

Sheldon Jackson, the organizer of missions to Alaska, shared the opinion of Crosby concerning the accomplishments of Clah and his friends. Jackson’s biographer gives this eloquent assessment of their work:

Thus, in the wonderful ordering of the providence of God, through these humble workmen who had recently accepted the faith of Christ in British Columbia, and were seeking for more light without the aid of any accredited missionary teacher, the kingdom of God came, without observation, to Alaska. They were the honored messengers to whom the holy Spirit gave the privilege of publishing the gospel story to the ignorant and degraded natives in advance of all the churches and missionary societies of our land.⁴³

Chief Toy-a-att and several of his kinsmen, including Moses Louie and Aaron Kohanow, were given some civil authority to keep peace and order.⁴⁴

The Tlingit converts also paid tribute to the contribution which the Port Simpson Tsimshian evangelists had made to them in sending the new teachings. John Swanton found that the Tlingit highly esteemed the Tsimshian as a source of high culture, new ideas, and new customs. He reported that the Tlingit thought more highly of the Tsimshian than of the Haida.⁴⁵ His remarks are particularly provocative, since Kadishan (also spelled Kadachan, Katishan), his informant, was linked to the Tsimshian by the evangelizing of McKay and his companions, and was himself a convert and sometime evangelist. Kadishan publicly credited the Port Tsimshian evangelists with bringing Christianity. God, he said, had sent Clah, Mrs. McFarland and S. Hall Young.⁴⁶

Clah/Philip McKay stayed with the family of Mrs. Kadishan, perhaps a kinswoman, while he was in Fort Wrangell. After about one and a half years at his evangelistic task at Fort Wrangell, Clah died, in December, 1877, of tuberculosis. He was about thirty years of age. Chief Toy-a-att was killed in January, 1880, by a drunken opponent, while trying to arbitrate a dispute between Angoon and Fort Wrangell Tlingits.⁴⁷

Conclusion

THE CAREER of Clah/Philip McKay illustrates the phenomenon of spontaneous evangelism which characterized the behavior of the new convert in many cases among Northwest Coast Indians. These were not ordained clergy nor were they lay workers commissioned by a denomination (Anglican or Methodist in the early days, 1850s-1880s), though they might become more formalized in time, or be replaced by authorized native evangelists. Rather, their everyday business took them to places where they had connections reaching back into pre-contact times, links based upon aboriginal ties and contacts: kinship, clan, trade, hunting and fishing. In their enthusiasm for their new faith and in the regular round of their travels — for economic and social activities — they spread the new religion to which they had become converts, at Fort Simpson, Metlakatla, Victoria, and elsewhere. Had they not been interrupted by the coming of the orthodox and organized denominations, as represented by the white missionaries, perhaps they would have developed indigenous Christian churches. As it happened, they and their embryonic Christian groups were co-opted into the mainstream of Euro-American and Euro-Canadian denominations.⁴⁸

Clah/McKay and his Tsimshian companions became “native agents” of the Methodists, and their pioneering work was taken over by the Presbyterians, though McKay was asked to stay on by them and did so for the brief period before his death. The American Presbyterian missionaries introduced the forms and customs of European Christianity and placed pressure upon the Tlingit to make drastic changes in their lifestyles. The

Methodists had been willing to see the workings of the Holy Spirit in the native evangelism and religious enthusiasm of Clah and others. The Presbyterian S. Hall Young was more skeptical of the depth and quality of Christianity introduced by the Tsimshian evangelists and their Tlingit disciples. Not surprisingly, Young’s view was also Anglican Bishop William Ridley’s view of Methodist conversions among Nishga and Tsimshian people at about the same time.⁴⁹

Response and motivation of the individual converts no doubt differed. For some, the material advantages may have dominated over the ideological and spiritual side, but in the native culture, spiritual and practical power were one. Conversion did not threaten loss of independence to the chiefs; as traders and merchants, and as cultural leaders, they were the most knowledgeable and informed segment of the native society. They were in closest contact with the white newcomers, and the most likely to respond to innovation. Some of these leaders and their families accepted Christianity under the influence of the Tsimshian evangelists.

It may be that too much emphasis has been placed upon viewing the convert as “sincerely or completely Christian” versus “only nominally or formally Christian.” This kind of dichotomized analysis, based on an exclusivist understanding of conversion, may be erroneous in its assumptions about the nature of the acceptance of new religion.⁵⁰ More studies of the early native Christian evangelists might shed light on what they believed and what they taught to their own converts. Their experience and beliefs, whatever they were, are a valid and significant subject for inquiry and an expression of the Christian ideal of universality.

NOTES:

1. For a discussion of the arguments for and against missions see Walbert Buhmann, *The Missions on Trial* (1979). Many Christian writers recognize that missions and missionaries were destructive and harmful to the peoples evangelized. For an Indian critique of missions see the books of Harold Cardinal *The Unjust Society* (Edmonton: M.E. Hurtig, 1969) and *The Rebirth of the Canada's Indians* (Edmonton: M.E. Hurtig, 1977).

2. See Martin Jarrett-Kerr, *Patterns of Christian Acceptance* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

3. John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 133-34. For another example of native missionaries see the chapter by Ken Campbell, “Hartley Bay, B.C.: A History,” in

Margaret Seguin, ed., *The Tsimshian — Images of the Past: Views for the Present* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984).

4. See the *Western Methodist Recorder* and the *Methodist Missionary Notices* for examples in British Columbia. David Sallosalton’s story is told in a booklet by the prominent Methodist missionary Thomas Crosby, *David Sallosalton* (Toronto: Department of Missionary Literature of the Methodist Church, Canada, n.d.).

5. An introduction to Anglican and Methodist missions to the Nishga is to be found in E.P. Patterson *Mission on the Nass* (1982). For an ethnographic survey of Nishga culture, see Stephen McNeary, *Where Fire Came Down* (Ph.D. Thesis, Bryn Mawr University, 1976). In the last few pages of his thesis, McNeary

makes some telling observations about Nishga incorporation of Anglican and Salvation Army influences and the compatibility of Nishga culture and the forms of Christianity introduced into it.

6. Ernst Benz, *The Eastern Orthodox Church — Its Thought and Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1963) contains a brief life of Bishop Veniaminoff. He is frequently mentioned in books on the Tlingit and Alaska in the nineteenth century. See also Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), pp. 442-45.

7. Marius Barbeau, *Tsimshian Myths* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1961), Bulletin 61, p. 85. See also Aurel Krause, *The Tlingits*, translated by Erna Gunther (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1956), pp. 212-13. See Marjorie Halpin, "Seeing in Stone: Tsimshian Masking and the Twin Stone Masks," pp. 269-88, and Robin Riddington, "For Wilson: As a Contribution to the Conversation," pp. 265-68, in *The World is Sharp as a Knife: An Anthology in Honour of Wilson Duff*, Donald N. Abbott, ed., (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1981). One's initial inclination may be to interpret the symbolism of light-sight-life in quotations from Indians as echoes of the language of the missionary. The work of Halpin, however, reveals an indigenous dimension in the missionary accounts of Indian response.

8. Robert S. Grumet, "Changes in Coast Tsimshian Redistributive Activities in the Fort Simpson Region of British Columbia, 1788-1863," *Ethnohistory* 22 (1975): 300-01. See also Margaret Seguin, "Introduction," in Seguin (1984), for a discussion of the role of the chiefs among the Tsimshian.

9. Grumet, p. 296.

10. Kenneth D. Tollefson, *The Cultural Foundation of Political Revitalization Among the Tlingit* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1976), p. 150. See also John R. Swanton, *Social Conditions, Belief, and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 26th Annual Report, 1904 [New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1970]), p. 150: the Wolf phratry people at Kuiu were called "People of the Nass." Swanton's informant told him that the Tlingit traced the origin of nearly all their clans to the Tsimshian coast, near the Skeena mouth (pp. 399 ff., 476).

11. Tollefson, p. 181.

12. Jay Miller, "Tsimshian Religion in Historical Perspective," in Jay Miller and Carol Eastman, eds., *The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1984), p. 138.

13. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 77.

14. Meeks, pp. 18-19.

15. See Thomas E. Jessett, *Chief Spokane Garry* (Minneapolis, MN: T.S. Denison and Co., 1960).

16. See Henry Warner Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 186, and Alice D. Kehoe, *North*

American Indians (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), pp. 360-62.

17. W.H. Pierce, *From Potlatch to Pulpit*, edited by J.P. Hicks (1933).

18. J.B. McCullagh, *Red Indians I Have Known* (London: Church Missionary Society, n.d.), pp. 19-21.

19. McCullagh, pp. 5-11.

20. For a similar example see *The Passover Haggadah*, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 49: "In every generation let each man look on himself as if he came forth out of Egypt. As it is said: 'And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt' (Exod. 13:8)."

21. *Aiyansh Notes*, April 1908, p. xiii.

22. Ronald P. Rohner, *The Ethnography of Franz Boas* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 188-89.

23. William H. Collison to Church Missionary Society, April 6, and 26, 1893; June 1, 1894 (Church Missionary Society Records, Microfilm Reel A124).

24. Thomas Crosby, *Up and Down the North Pacific Coast* (Toronto: The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1914), p. 48.

25. John A. (Ian) McKenzie, "Evangelism in the Nass Valley," unpublished essay.

26. Crosby, p. 167.

27. Crosby, p. 169.

28. Louis Gonnell [sic], *Western Methodist Recorder*, March 1914, p. 16.

29. Crosby, p. 169.

30. Crosby, p. 170.

31. Sheldon Jackson, *Alaska* (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1880), p. 158 ff.

32. Jackson, pp. 302-03.

33. F.E. Runnals, *It's God's Country* (Ocean Park, B.C.: Published by the Author, 1974), pp. 58-9.

34. Jackson, pp. 235 ff.

35. S. Hall Young, *Alaska Days with John Muir* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1915), p. 90.

36. Jackson, p. 269.

37. S. Hall Young, *Hall Young of Alaska* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1927), pp. 88-9.

38. John Muir, *Travels in Alaska* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915), p. 16.

39. Muir, pp. 35-6.

40. Muir, pp. 198-200. For an example of atonement according to Muir, see p. 208.

41. Muir, p. 201. Julia M. Wright believed the Tlingit were eager for education: see Wright, *Among the Alaskans* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1883), p. 89. Aurel Krause says that the motivation for change was less religious than material gain. It was "ambition to imitate" the whites and receive reward from whites for doing so. Krause, p. 230.

42. Muir, p. 202.

43. Robert Laird Stewart, *Sheldon Jackson* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1908), p. 291.

44. Jackson, p. 169.

45. Swanton, p. 414.

46. Jackson, p. 107.

47. Young, *Alaska Days*, pp. 127-28.

48. Edward Marsden, a Tsimshian of New Matlakatla, Alaska, became a Presbyterian clergyman. William G. Beattie, *Marsden of Alaska* (1955), is a sympathetic account of this Alaskan Tsimshian figure who clashed with the paternalism of William Duncan.

49. For a comment on the Presbyterian mission in Alaska as compared with the Russian Orthodox, see Sergei Kan, "Russian Orthodox Missionaries and the Tlingit Indians of Alaska, 1880-1900," a paper deliv-

ered to the 2nd Laurier Conference on North American Ethnohistory and Ethnology, Huron College University of Western Ontario, May 1983. Kan finds that many Tlingit people regarded the Presbyterians as intolerant of native traditions and ethnocentric. The Orthodox Church was regarded by them as the "Tlingit Church." 50. For some discussion of the subject as it applied to the early expansion of Christianity, see Ramsay MacMullen *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984).