

“A Useful Christian Woman”: First Nations’ Women and Protestant Missionary Work in British Columbia

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ABSTRACT

Research on British Columbia’s missionary frontier suggests that women made a vital contribution to the Churches’ proselytization work among the province’s First Nations. However, proselytization was not the work of white women only. Aboriginal women appear to have contributed significantly to the missionary work of the Protestant Churches. Christianity, which imposed European values along with conversion, had a profound effect on aboriginal women’s lives. For some, it offered, as it had to their white sisters, new opportunities for influence and status; for others, it created alienation from their people and culture.

RÉSUMÉ

La recherche sur les missionnaires de la Colombie-britannique révèle que les femmes ont joué un rôle vital dans le travail du clergé parmi les autochtones de la province. L’évangélisation n’a cependant pas seulement été l’oeuvre des femmes blanches; en effet, les femmes autochtones semblent avoir, elles aussi, grandement contribué à ce travail. Le christianisme, qui imposait les valeurs européennes tout en convertissant, a profondément marqué la vie des femmes autochtones. Pour certaines, il leur a offert, comme pour leurs consœurs blanches, une chance d’avoir de l’influence sur leur condition et de l’améliorer. Pour d’autres, cependant, il les a aliénées de leur peuple et de leur culture.

ON THE MORNING OF TUESDAY, JANUARY 25, 1921, the Crosby Girls’ Home at Port Simpson, on the northwest coast of British Columbia, was destroyed by fire. Port Simpson was the site of a Hudson’s Bay Company fort founded in 1831. It was moved in 1834, and the local Tsimshian people had settled nearby. The Crosby Girls’ Home for the protection and training of First Nations girls, which had operated since 1881,

was the first mission work in the province to be supported by the Canadian Methodist Women’s Missionary Society. On this occasion, neither the buildings nor their contents could be saved. Almost immediately, Kate Dudoward, a Tsimshian woman who, with her husband Alfred, worked with the Methodist Church, as well as other First Nations women, collected clothing and money for the mission staff. She tried to ensure the continuity of the

Home's work by reminding the local people — considered by the W.M.S. to be "the most progressive and advanced" First Nations peoples in the province¹ — that they owed their progress to both the W.M.S. and the Methodist Church Missionary Society which had, for decades, supported missionary work amongst them. According to one of the Home's workers, Kate Dudoward "cited the great losses these societies had sustained in the wreck of [mission] boats and the recent fire," and she "urged everybody to be faithful and to teach their children in the same way."² Kate Dudoward was a committed Christian aboriginal woman and, in her devotion, the Methodist Church could read a measure of its success. However, how typical was Kate?

Most accounts of missionary work concentrate on the success or failure of the missionaries' efforts³ and, consequently, little attention has been paid to the nature of First Nations peoples' response to Christianity; their participation in the proselytization process remains largely undocumented.⁴ Not surprisingly, neither the extent of the response of aboriginal women to the gospel message, nor the positive or negative impact of the response is known. Using primarily the records left by missionary personnel, female and male, this article will focus on a number of ways in which First Nations women participated in missionary work and how that participation affected their lives. It will also attempt to reveal how the advent of Christianity itself, which imposed European values along with conversion, made critical changes in First Nations women's culture. While for some, Christianity created new opportunities for influence and status, for others, it alienated them from their own people and caused them new cultural and social problems. By their commitment to their newly acquired faith, First Nations women both assumed a new status and courted ostracization.

Historically, the response of North American aboriginal women to the missionary efforts of various Christian churches has been far from uniform. According to one study in the United States, missionaries experienced their earliest successes among women, notably among female children, adolescents, and "women in their child-bearing years."⁵ It has been argued that, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a number of American First Nations women "turned to Christianity with a fervour and intellectual intensity so convincing as to astound Euro-American missionaries and lay observers."⁶ For her part, in her study of the Tlingit people of Alaska, Laura Klein discovered that the missionaries' most successful converts were women.⁷ However, across North America, the pattern is not consistent. The Montagnais women studied by anthropologist Eleanor Leacock were, because of the egalitarian nature of Montagnais-Nescapi society, openly hostile to Jesuit conversion efforts. Devens argues that Montagnais men "identified women as the major obstacle to the group's conversion."⁸ Ottawa women also proved to be frustrating for these French priests. As one noted:

We found no persons more attached to these silly customs, or more obstinate in clinging to this error than the old women, who will not lend an ear to our instructions.⁹

British Columbia aboriginal women's response to Christianity was also uneven.

Some women, like Kate Dudoward, Jane Cook of Alert Bay, Vancouver Island, and Lucy Sewid and Mary Bell, Kwakiutl of Fort Rupert (both Lucy and Mary are referred to by their grandson, James Sewid, a Kwakiutl leader, as "very religious women"¹⁰) responded positively to the Christian message. While there is no way of knowing what this term

means as far as the depth of conversion is concerned, the comment clearly notes that the family believed the women were committed Christians. Furthermore, a comment by Reverend Thomas Crosby, which described the commitment a Salish of Cultus Lake, Annie Lay-Why-eton, reveals the dedication that a response to Christianity could elicit. According to Crosby, Annie:

used to trudge in feebleness from Kultus [sic] Lake on the Upper Chilliwack, to the church at Skowkale.... She was blind and had to cross the river on a single log.¹¹

There were also, however, women who opposed missionary efforts.

The Anglicans who opened a mission in 1869 at Alberni, Vancouver Island, ran into women's strong resistance. According to the local minister, the Reverend J.X. Willemar:

After the first few weeks, preaching to the heathen was commenced. Forty persons attended the first service. These were all men: the women could not be induced to attend.¹²

Women's reluctance to change was also noted by a female Methodist missionary working among some of the Tsimshian of the Port Simpson area. The women "love their old ways," she wrote;¹³ over a year later, she was still complaining that they "clung more firmly than their husbands to the old heathen customs."¹⁴ Unfortunately, neither of the two missionaries who reported their difficulties pursued the issue of women's reluctance. Yet it is almost solely through such missionary comments that we learn of aboriginal peoples' response to Christianity.

Missionary comments regarding the conversion experiences of First Nations peoples, the impact of the acceptance of Christianity on their lives, and the extent of First Nations peo-

ples' proselytization and its successes must, of course, be utilized with extreme care. Ethnocentricity, combined with the wide cultural gap between the missionaries and peoples "whose sense of self and the cosmos [had] been shaped by different cultural pre-suppositions,"¹⁵ must have led, inevitably, to major communication errors. Not only in the early years, but even, in some cases, into the 1930s and 1940s, missionaries were impeded by the language barrier. For example, even though the Anglican Church had been active at Alert Bay since the 1880s, Church leaders needed the assistance of an interpreter in their discussions with local people at a special meeting called in June 1936 by the Anglican Church at Alert Bay to discuss the continuity of aboriginal peoples' participation in the now illegal Potlatch ceremonials.¹⁶

The Chinook language, which many Protestant missionaries used to some extent, while adequate for trade dealings, proved to be inadequate for mission work. As commented the Reverend Dr. Campbell, a pioneer Presbyterian missionary, "to try to preach the Gospel in Chinook is a farce, an utter impossibility."¹⁷ Consequently, interpreters remained the key to any understanding between Church workers and both prospective and recognized First Nations converts. The accuracy of First Nations peoples' commentary on their conversion experiences and what those experiences meant in their lives depended, most often, on the skills of aboriginal interpreters, both women and men, their command of English — even their trustworthiness.

Missionaries also tended to embellish their accounts of aboriginal peoples' conversion and proselytization efforts in order to promote their own work and to obtain funding. It is easy to be skeptical regarding the following speech said to have been made by a Nanaimo aboriginal woman referred to only as "Mrs. Wesley":

When I go to sleep I think about God. I dreamt I saw my sainted children in heaven the other night but instead of sitting up to wail and lament ... I looked up to God and asked Him to prepare me to go and see Him and my children when He sends for me.¹⁸

Such sentimentality was appealing to a large proportion of *Methodist Notices* readership. However, while the speech may have been romanticized, it may also have indicated a type of emotional aboriginal response.

The historian seeking specifically aboriginal women's experiences must also confront, with regard to sources, the issue of gender. How perceptive could male missionaries be in recounting the experiences of First Nations women converts? Laura Klein, in her article on the Tlingit, focused on this problem. She noted that a local missionary saw "degradation" in the hard work of Tlingit women; he charged that women were imprisoned, tattooed, used as slaves, and sold to men. As Klein pointed out:

work can also imply involvement in the economy; tattooing, high status within the ranking system; "imprisonment" the seclusion and training of puberty; "sale" to men, bridewealth in marriage, and use in slavery an advantage over immediate death for captives.¹⁹

Nevertheless, in spite of the problems inherent in missionary sources, beneath the often flowery, sentimental and sometimes self-serving rhetoric can be found evidence that aboriginal women were not merely passive recipients of Christianity.

The evidence suggests that at least some aboriginal women who converted to Christianity were willing to participate in a variety of missionary activities. By publicly acknowledging their new faith, some simply created an

example for others to follow. Missionary Reverend A.E. Green, who worked extensively in the Nass region, wrote of one First Nations leader who was strongly influenced by his Christian daughter. According to Green, the chief declared, "I heard my daughter sing, read and pray. I want all this [sic] people to do the same."²⁰ Furthermore, Thomas Crosby, an acclaimed Methodist missionary, noted that "the triumphant death" of Suneah, a Sumas Indian, "was the means of stirring up ... Christian Indians to more earnest prayer and holier living."²¹ Most commentary about the roles of aboriginal Christian women, however, indicates their activism and their conscious efforts to convert their people.

Reverend Thomas Crosby drew the Methodist Church's attention to Elizabeth Deex, a Tsimshian woman of some status, who, after allowing the Methodists to conduct a prayer meeting in her Victoria home, "converted to God" and became an active catechist among her people. Crosby claims that, through her influence, forty aboriginal converts accepted Christianity within nine weeks.²² Her greatest success, in terms of Methodist missionary endeavours, was the conversion of her son, Alfred Dudoward. Dudoward and his wife, Kate, became crucial to much Methodist proselytization along the northwest coast. In 1875, for example, Methodist missionary Charles Tate gave equal weight to the successful preaching of both Dudowards. Over a decade later, the Reverend Alfred Green, Methodist missionary to the Nass River region, gave credit to Sarah Russ who "faithfully helped her husband in his mission work ... enduring exposure and privations without a murmur [sic] that they might preach Jesus in distant villages."²³ In 1907, missionaries at the Crosby Girls' Home indicated that some women were actively engaged in mission work. They watched with particular interest the catechetical work of Susan Edgar, a former pupil and the daughter of the

aboriginal missionary at Kitzeguchla, on the Upper Skeena River, who helped her father in his work.²⁴

Equally as vital to Anglican missionary efforts on northern Vancouver Island was the work of Jane Cook and Mrs. Harris at Alert Bay. These two First Nations women appear to have been dynamic Anglican Church workers, undertaking preaching, Bible classes among the women, and interpreting for Church officials.²⁵ In 1914, Anglican Bishop Charles Schofield commented on the “new spiritual efforts” being undertaken among the First Nations people at Alert Bay and praised the work of the two women who, he claimed, were “well qualified for the task.”²⁶ At this point, their work was crucial. The local missionary was in poor health; in addition, he had just taken charge of the aboriginal girls’ school. Consequently, “the evangelistic work among the scattered tribes [could not] be undertaken” by a cleric.²⁷

Jane Cook received particular praise from an Anglican Women’s Auxiliary president who visited Alert Bay in 1928. She noted that Jane Cook’s class for Indian women “was wonderful proof of the value of missionary work.”²⁸ An aboriginal observer agreed. He noted that Jane Cook “took care of all the Indian women’s activities in the Church” and “used to preach in the church,” in the Kwakwala language. Mrs. Harris, he noted, “used to read the lessons.”²⁹

As comments on Jane Cook and Mrs. Harris indicate, the important work of Bible classes was also entrusted to aboriginal women. Bible classes and Sunday schools both reinforced the preaching of ministers and prepared perspective converts for admission to the Church; they provided the continuity essential to the work in a field where missionaries were few. In one of his reports to his superiors,

Reverend Green noted that at Port Essington, a northwest community he could visit only infrequently, “an intelligent Indian woman,” using supplies of books and cards provided by the Methodist Church, held a regular Sunday school among her people.³⁰ While it is difficult, given the lack of data, to assess the extent of the actual missionary teaching activities of aboriginal women, the role was obviously open to them. In fact, Thomas Crosby found the work of Kate Dudoward invaluable in this area, noting that educational work among the Tsimshians “could not proceed” without the help of Kate and her husband.³¹

Another crucial activity for aboriginal Christian women — as well as men — was the work of interpreting the Christian message. Preaching in aboriginal tongues was fraught with difficulties for the newcomers, and women proved to be valuable as intermediaries between missionaries and prospective converts. In the 1870s, one Tsimshian woman, known to history only as “Jenny,” a former prostitute, helped missionaries in Victoria by interpreting for them; she also assisted in translating Methodist hymns into the Kit-a-maat language. According to Thomas Crosby, Jenny “did a great deal of good among her people and remained faithful to the last.”³² In 1901, a missionary at Port Simpson noted that Flora, a pupil at the Home, was helping a male aboriginal preacher to interpret the Bible.³³ For their part, Jane Cook and Mrs. Harris continued into the 1930s the tradition of aboriginal women catechists.

Evidence on the extent of aboriginal women’s active involvement in aspects of missionary work is admittedly slim. We do not know how many women there were like Susan Edgar. Lydia Cushan, Sarah Russ, and Kate Dudoward all travelled missionary circuits with their husbands; we do not know how often they were called upon to actually preach. However, Methodist missionary Reverend Jen-

nings gives an indication that, like their white counterparts (missionary women who preached in place of their husbands), aboriginal women actively proselytized with success when their husbands were ill. In a letter dated October 23, 1883, from Port Simpson, he wrote:

Our native worker [Russ] was ill; his wife on this account had to address the people. While speaking she felt such power, her heart strongly warming within her, she exclaimed, "The Spirit of God I believe is come into my heart." Her words touched the hearts of the people.³⁴

Allowing for the passionate rhetoric of a man intent on impressing potential mission supporters, it is still clear that Sarah rose to the occasion. If the work of aboriginal women in non-traditional fields is to be revealed at all,³⁵ the possibility that they contributed to the extension of Christianity among their own people must be recognized. What *is* clear is that their work for the churches brought some aboriginal women new status, at least among the non-aboriginals.

Beaver, in his study of American mission work, has argued that the aboriginal woman who engaged in evangelical work, whether catechetical or Bible teaching, was "the lowliest employee on the hierarchical ladder of the mission churches."³⁶ In contrast, Jo-Anne Fiske, in her study of carrier women in British Columbia, claims that "women achieved individual prestige as catechists."³⁷ There is no indication in Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian records that aboriginal women workers were considered in any way inferior. As indicated earlier, the Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians recognized the value of First Nations workers. In British Columbia, the First Nations peoples' efforts to proselytize among themselves were applauded. Crosby and Tate were deeply appreciative of the efforts of aboriginal women like Elizabeth Deex and Kate

Dudoward; the Reverend Alfred Green appreciated the devoted work of Sarah Russ, and the Anglican Church was fully cognizant of the debt it owed to Jane Cook.

The status that Christianity could confer on aboriginal women is reflected in the life of Jane Cook, particularly in her relationship with the Alert Bay missionaries — one of whom referred to her as "a great Chieftainess"³⁸ — and at least two Anglican bishops, notably Bishop Roper and Bishop Schofield. All of these Church officials appear to have had great respect for Jane and for her accomplishments for both the Anglican Church and her people. Certainly her concerns were recognized and attended to, and her suggestions were acted upon.

In 1915, for example, Jane Cook was extremely distressed when a man who had married one aboriginal woman according to Kwakiutl custom abandoned her and, under English law, married a second woman. Writing to Bishop Roper, Jane defined herself as part of the Anglican mission. She stated that it was always her "duty as the member of [the] Indian mission to defend the Indian when injustice was done to them";³⁹ however, in this case, there may have been an added familial reason for her concern, as the second woman might have been related.⁴⁰ In her quest to see "wrong righted," Jane was received by Provincial Police Chief Campbell, Vancouver Chief of Police Smith, Department of Indian Affairs (D.I.A.) official Ditchburn, and Lindley Crease, the lawyer representing the Victoria diocese Anglican Church — an uncommon feat at the time for an aboriginal woman.⁴¹

At Jane's request — since she was unable to get satisfaction from these men — Bishop Roper involved himself directly in the case. He entered into correspondence with both Halliday, the D.I.A. official at Alert Bay, and

Chambers, B.C. Packers' manager in the same area, regarding what he called "the sordid and abhorrent" situation.⁴² In a letter to Smith, Jane accused Chambers of being at least partly responsible for the laxity of the D.I.A. agent.⁴³ Bishop Roper also kept Mrs. Cook informed of his actions.⁴⁴ Even after he left British Columbia, Bishop Roper continued to respond to Jane Cook's pleas for help, supporting her stance regarding the elimination of the Potlatch law.

Potlatches were elaborate feasts and ceremonies. They served both political and economic purposes. At the political level, they served to legitimize both a chief's authority and the authority of his successor. What concerned the Churches and Canadian governments, however, was the economic purpose, which they totally misunderstood. To the Indians, potlatch generosity — the act of giving away wealth — was simply the redistribution of wealth; personal poverty being a requirement of leadership, the potlatch was an essential institution. In the eyes of most whites, potlatches led to impoverishment.⁴⁵

Jane Cook's determination to eliminate the Potlatch strengthened her relationship with Church officials but earned her the rebukes of her people. Both the Canadian government and the Churches believed that the Potlatch was a serious impediment to aboriginal advancement. Christian aboriginals also recognized that full commitment to their faith was blocked by adherence to what was commonly referred to as "the Custom." At a June 1936 meeting held at Alert Bay to examine the difficulties the Potlatch created, one Christian aboriginal, George West, explained those difficulties to an audience of missionaries and First Nations people that included Bishop Sexton:

I grew up in this custom to manhood with one ambition, to do my best in my duty to

the custom. It filled my mind. I used to go to Church and attend meetings and tried to learn Christianity but I found that it did not make any headway with me ... but recently the thing that was blocking it has dropped from me. My ambition, my love of the Custom has gone, and something else has taken its place which has changed me and made things altogether different to me. I have publicly renounced the Custom, and have found that my mind has steadied itself on this one idea, to live and witness as Jesus says.⁴⁶

West went on to explain that "in the Custom, it was necessary to practice a supernatural worship which [was] not consistent with worship of God."⁴⁷ Present at this forum and opposed to the Potlatch was Jane Cook. For her, it was a continuation of a fight she began in 1919 to eliminate the custom. For nearly twenty years, she joined Church officials in their efforts to prevent legalization of the custom. She met with the Anglican bishop in April 1919 to discuss First Nations arguments that the anti-Potlatch law be removed from the statute book,⁴⁸ and, periodically, petitioned against any change.⁴⁹

As mentioned earlier, Jane's stance might have brought her the admiration of Church officials but it also brought her criticism from her own people. As one missionary explained, any person who ceased to potlatch was "considered by the rest of the tribe as an outcast and alien."⁵⁰ Jane's activism led the aboriginal people at Alert Bay to accuse her of wrongly interpreting evidence given at a Potlatch trial; although they later apologized, bitter feelings existed. Jane alienated her people again when, in 1922, according to one Kwakiutl, she worked with the police to have Potlatch participants arrested and charged.⁵¹ Although there were compensations for Jane — missionaries and bishops sought her advice⁵² — Christianity brought her alienation—an emotion others felt.

Missionary comment on the difficulties encountered by aboriginal converts is rare, but what comment there is indicates that both women and men who converted to Christianity encountered both hostility and alienation. Even attendance at Christian schools, which apparently signalled to some First Nations people a measure of cultural abandonment, could provoke problems. At Alert Bay, for instance, missionary Alfred Hall noted that those young men who attended his mission school "endured a good deal of persecution from the elders."⁵³ In one case, Hall remarked on a young aboriginal boy that "he could plainly see there would seem to have to be a separation either from his relatives or the school."⁵⁴ Presumably, similar pressure would be placed on girls.

It is not known to what extent the experiences of aboriginal Christian women in British Columbia mirrored the experiences of total rejection suffered by Christian Chinese and East Indian women who, according to Beaver, were considered total outcasts.⁵⁵ However, one Methodist missionary commented that, in early years at least, "the heathens always [did] their uttermost to make those who embrace[d] the Gospel leave the village."⁵⁶

Recognizing the alienation problems facing their converts, Protestant missionaries such as William Duncan, Robert Tomlinson and Andrew McCullagh directed "their" peoples to establish Christian villages removed from traditional areas where they would not be pressured into returning to "their heathen ways."⁵⁷ In these Christian communities, women and men could find companionship which might mitigate against alienation. Other committed Christians had to endure a certain loneliness. A Wekano woman of the Nass River area — she was named Lucy by the local missionary — attempted, after conversion, to return to her people and interest them in Christianity. When her attempt failed, Lucy was

forced to return "with a sad heart" to the mission centre at Greenville, on the Nass River.⁵⁸ Another Christian convert, identified as Che-at-luk, "the daughter of the chief medicine man and conjurer," rejected her father's beliefs. In so doing, she isolated herself from him. Che-at-luk told the missionary: "I want to serve Jesus ... I cannot go with my father but I pray for him."⁵⁹

One of the most poignant expressions of the cultural conflict endured by aboriginal women can be found in the following speech by Lydia Cushan, given New Years Day 1869, to a Victoria Methodist gathering of approximately seventy Indians and twenty whites:

My friends, I am glad that God enables me to be here. I have not often had a chance lately to be in God's home, and to see so many here. I sat in bodily pain, and did not know whether it would do for me, a woman, to speak; but I will, because the Holy Spirit warms my heart so much. I speak to my female friends here. So glad to see you here. Truly I have waited a long time to see you begin to serve God. All my relations are going in the old foolish ways, and I am all alone without one female Christian to walk with.⁶⁰

Many years later, Lydia's isolation from her people was shared by Jane Cook and her family. Jane explained her difficulties to a gathering of local missionaries:

I have tried to live a Christian life amongst my own people, but you all know how they feel toward me and how they have treated us as outcasts. It is only because we have loved the people that we have lived in this place. They cannot be one with us.⁶¹

This alienation could span the generations and result in problems for the children of converts. A good example of this generational alienation

can be found in the experiences of Jane Cook. Because of their complete adherence to Christianity, she and her husband rejected the Potlatch system; consequently, her children were considered, in the eyes of the Nimpkish, her husband's people — non-aboriginal. As Jane expressed it, "for years it was my shame that my children were illegal and would never have been considered in the tribe from which my husband came."⁶² Her sons experienced difficulties obtaining work in local aboriginal industries "because they were illegal in the eyes of the Indians."⁶³

Aboriginal women like Jane experienced difficulties related directly to their rejection of tribal cultural norms, yet that rejection was seen as an essential part of their Christianization process. They had to accept "the Word" and reject any manifestation of past belief systems. It was perhaps relatively easy for some aboriginal women to accept new Christian concepts. Christianity could, as one writer put it, offer women "a solace and sense of control over the unpredictable nature of [their] experiences."⁶⁴ Although it is known that First Nations peoples accepted Christian precepts prior to white population impact,⁶⁵ from the time of early missionary proselytization, aboriginal women in British Columbia did begin to experience the adverse effects of European contact.

Victoria, for example, proved to be a deadly drawing card for aboriginal women. Although one must be wary of missionary statements on the extent of aboriginal prostitution — one Anglican missionary wrote, for example, that "there [was] not a virtuous girl or woman to be found" among the Songhees⁶⁶ — certainly many aboriginal women did choose or, if they were slave women, were chosen to be prostitutes; not only local women but those from along the northwest coast who travelled to Victoria with families participated in the trade. The Kwakiutl women, for instance, were

the first aboriginal group to be infected with venereal disease. According to Helen Codere's study, as early as 1891, the ethnologist Franz Boas expressed "great concern for the future of the Indians of the region and especially for the Kwakiutl of Fort Rupert because of the prostitution of Indian women in Victoria."⁶⁷ Furthermore, whether or not it is recognized that women saw in prostitution new economic opportunities — in 1870, one missionary wrote of an aboriginal prostitute counting out "from twenty to twenty-five dollar gold pieces ... in a white handkerchief spread upon her lap"⁶⁸ — it must be ceded that it was extremely destructive not only to women's individual lives but to the lives of the next generation.⁶⁹

Aboriginal women also experienced increasing child mortality as disease such as smallpox, measles and tuberculosis spread throughout the tribes. These diseases, plus venereal diseases, could not be treated with traditional medicines. They must have led to much despair among aboriginal women and a strong desire to obtain new knowledge, religious or otherwise, to deal with the devastation. Missionaries, however, demanded much in return for the new knowledge.

Acceptance of the new meant rejection of an existing system which had provided a tribal cultural basis for generations; such cultural baggage could not so easily be discarded. Lydia Cushan's people warned her:

The old people say that I am foolish because I don't go in their pagan dance, as I used to go. They say I have been dreaming like them, and have not obeyed the dream; and that I am therefore sick and shall die if I keep in this new way.⁷⁰

These cases illustrate not only the internal conflicts aboriginal women converts could undergo but also the differing nature of their responses to such difficulties.

Writing from the Nass River in November 1884, Reverend A.E. Green informed his superiors of the "uplifting death" of Sarah Russ. Sarah had abandoned the familiar life of an aboriginal wife to work with her preacher husband. Taking their children with them, the couple itinerated among their people for several years. On the surface, Sarah appeared an exemplary Christian and, according to the minister, led "a consistent life." When Sarah became seriously ill, she was taken to the mission centre at Bella Bella in the hope that a rest, combined with medication, might save her life.⁷¹

According to Green, because of Sarah's commitment to Christianity, the local medicine man had previously threatened to harm her. This man claimed to have already caused the death of Sarah's uncle. When Sarah became very ill, local people claimed that it was "the sorcerer's work." In spite of her Christian faith, Sarah, too, began to accept this version of her illness.⁷² Although, according to the missionary, she was finally able to overcome these fears, it is clear that even one who had for years "faithfully helped her husband with his mission work" and had worked towards the conversion of her people was not immune from the belief system she had been forced to publicly reject. This conflict between old and new belief systems was evident also in the life of Lucy Sewid, a Kwakiutl of Alert Bay.

Lucy Sewid had been baptized a Roman Catholic as a young girl while staying with an older sister in Victoria. However, the Roman Catholic Church had no mission on northern Vancouver Island and, when Lucy returned to her people at Alert Bay, she joined the Anglican Church. Mrs. Sewid appears to have had no problem with theological niceties for, in later years, when she became too old to walk as far as the Anglican Church, she attended Pentecostal services held in a little church

"right next door to her house" — even though she did not care for "the shouting, crying, and jumping around."⁷³ Lucy was, in many respects, "a very religious woman." Not only did she teach her grandson Bible stories and the value of prayer, she also urged him to become an active Christian and to preach the gospel to his people.⁷⁴ However, Lucy could not entirely reject her rich cultural heritage.

This Kwakiutl woman also taught James Sewid tribal traditions, particularly as they related to his grandfather, Aul Sewid. He learned how to sing his grandfather's songs, and "everything else" that she felt he needed to know. Lucy appeared to have no personal problem reconciling First Nations beliefs and Christian precepts. For example, according to her grandson, she believed that the most important message in the Bible was the stress on respect for elders; "she told me ... the most important thing was to respect your elders, and to obey them and watch out that nothing harmful happens to them. And according to her that was the first step to Christianity."⁷⁵ In spite of Church and legal restrictions against the Potlatch, Lucy not only attended but also actively participated in a Potlatch in her grandson's honour. According to James, "she was part of it all."⁷⁶

Aboriginal Christian women who became culturally isolated from their people could, and did, find a new solidarity in women's church organizations. Just as these organizations had given white women a sense of sisterhood, an opportunity for socialization and, above all, the opportunity to put to public use the organizational skills they had honed on the domestic scene, they now gave aboriginal women an alternative milieu in which they could affirm their faith, simply enjoy the company and comfort of other alienated women, and provide a forum for discourse. Fiske has argued that church auxiliary meetings also gave aboriginal

women the opportunity to articulate their grievances and influence band political decisions.⁷⁷

These formal church organizations may have been a totally new and empowering experience for some aboriginal women. Haida women, for example, who formed an Anglican auxiliary called “the White Cross *jade*”:

regularly met for Bible readings, hymn singing, sewing, and handiwork, put on basket socials to raise money for the church, tended to the dead, and assisted bereaved families.⁷⁸

According to Margaret Blackman, the group “later evolved into the Women’s Auxiliary of the Anglican Church,” and that experience provided the Haida women with a formal communication network which, Blackman argues, they had not previously had.⁷⁹ However, it must be noted that women’s activities had been communal. They performed their tasks in groups rather than individually. Devens believes that this sense of community was one reason why women opposed a belief system that emphasized individuality.⁸⁰

In spite of some resistance by aboriginal women, even in areas where the Church was particularly active,⁸¹ women’s church auxiliaries could be found across the province. For instance, Kispiox had its Native Ladies’ Aid Society which raised mission funds;⁸² there was an “Indian Women’s Methodist Auxiliary” in Victoria;⁸³ the Skidegate Mission established a Women’s Missionary Society branch;⁸⁴ aboriginal women held regular Anglican Women’s Auxiliary meetings at Alert Bay⁸⁵ and, at Port Alberni, Wednesdays were “ladies day, W.M.S., or Homemakers.”⁸⁶

For some aboriginal women, their first experience of Christian community was not the village W.A. meeting, but the Christian

“Homes” established for their rescue. The Methodists established a girls’ Home for aboriginal girls at Port Simpson because, according to the Methodist W.M.S. — an organization which came into existence because of the perceived plight of aboriginal girls — the Crosbys, soon after their arrival at Port Simpson, “were constrained to open their doors to shelter hapless and hopeless Indian girls.”⁸⁷ The perceived needs of “orphan and neglected girls” persuaded the Anglicans to open an Indian girls’ residential school at Alert Bay, and the Presbyterian Church to provide shelter for local aboriginal girls at Port Alberni.⁸⁸

In Christian residential homes such as the Crosby Home for Girls at Port Simpson, the Presbyterian Port Alberni Home for Girls, and the Anglican Girls’ Home at Alert Bay, aboriginal girls would find Christianity represented by white, middle-class or working-class white women and men who demanded from them commitment to spiritual and material routines aimed at revolutionizing their lives. Although Christianization was a fundamental concern, the primary role for these institutions, at least initially, was to provide the girls with shelter from what were considered unnatural alliances and prepare them for the approved and “natural” alliance of Christian marriage.

In order to evaluate whether Christian marriage offered new opportunities for “positive” change — as it was seen by the Churches — or simply inflicted different hardships on aboriginal women, it is necessary to understand what marriage meant to aboriginal women prior to contact. Unfortunately, the available data are scant and available information relates almost exclusively to the wealthy or noble class. As Jenness discovered, in British Columbia, there is “little information concerning the domestic life of the commoners who made up the majority of the people.”⁸⁹ In addition, early ethnological and anthropological studies

paid little attention to women and, consequently, to ways in which traditional marriage impacted on their lives.⁹⁰ As David Damas has argued in his study of the Inuit people, the scholar who attempts to build a frame of comparison is "drastically handicapped by the lack of data on family structure" in the aboriginal period.⁹¹ This statement holds true for most scholars who focus on aboriginal groups in British Columbia. Historical records, including anthropological works, contain only "elusive and provocative glimpses of the lives of Indian women."⁹² Male anthropologists tended to inquire of aboriginal men regarding the lives and roles of aboriginal women; thus, the "inner essence of female experience simply has not been a major concern of anthropology precisely because males are more comfortable with the public arena where they seem to conduct much of their own lives."⁹³

The evidence that does exist reveals that few generalizations can be made from individual studies or case histories. Marriage customs among the Salish, for example, differed considerably from those of the Haida.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, regardless of varying social norms among First Nations peoples, there are some commonalities.

It can be accepted that marriage was regarded as a strong, stabilizing element. As Cruickshank, who studied the Athapaskan people, explained, when women from one moiety married men from another moiety, mutual distrust "traditionally ... was countered by reciprocal obligations carried out between moieties."⁹⁵ Marriage linked families which could then offer both "protection and hospitality" to one another outside of the immediate area.⁹⁶ As discovered Arima, who focused on the West Coast First Nations peoples of Vancouver Island, "West Coast marriage was an alliance of families rather than a union of the bride and groom alone."⁹⁷ Consequently, mar-

riage did not involve personal choice although, in some cases, marriage was not forced on women who found the alliance distasteful.⁹⁸

Marriage could also confer wealth and status. However, it must be recognized that there were differences among tribes regarding the distribution of the newly acquired wealth and status. Goldman argues that, among the Kwakiutl men, marriage added weight to their rank through acquisition of both wealth and new names. Although a man was required to offer animal skins to his bride's family, this gift paled in relation to the "animal skins, canoes, slaves, coppers, abalone, food, fish oil, feasting dishes, speaking posts of houses, crests, names, and the songs, dances, names, and powers of the Winter Ceremonial" he received in return.⁹⁹ More importantly, according to Goldman, the most vital gift a bride brought to her husband was "the privilege of the Winter Ceremonial," a privilege which conveyed powers "associated with specifically nonhuman supernatural beings."¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, Arima, in his study of the Nootka, found that brides received numerous gifts from their in-laws and "if the groom was of a chiefly family, he or his father endowed the bride with rights to territory, natural resources, ceremonial privileges like potlatch seats, names, songs, and dances."¹⁰¹

Differences also occurred regarding societal expectations. Tlingit men, if wealthy enough, could have several wives; polyandry also existed among these people, although only a brother or a close relative of the first husband was allowed as a second husband.¹⁰² The Nootka chiefs also had more than one wife. According to Arima, "multiple wives, or polygamy, was prestigious for it indicated wealth."¹⁰³ The Tsimshian also practised polygamy, at least among the chiefly class.¹⁰⁴ In fact, speaking of his Kwakiutl grandfather, James Sewid asserted that the man had

married "quite a few times" to acquire "songs, crests and wealth from other villages and other tribes."¹⁰⁵

In contrast, Marjorie Mitchell's study of the Coast Salish revealed that monogamy was more the norm. Among the Saanich Indians, for instance, divorce was infrequent "because of the strong effects of kin on both sides to keep a couple together, magic being employed if necessary."¹⁰⁶ Even if there was clear evidence that a woman had been mistreated by her husband, "the co-fathers-in-law made every attempt to effect a reconciliation."¹⁰⁷ Other Salish people applied similar pressure; among the Salish, couples "were usually urged to re-unite."¹⁰⁸ However, as one scholar noted, "in spite of the mechanisms for strengthening the marriage bonds ... divorce everywhere was easy."¹⁰⁹ It may have been easy but Jenness argues that "for economic reasons," divorce among British Columbia's First Nations peoples was practically unknown.¹¹⁰

Jenness also claims that British Columbia's First Nations "recognized three distinct grades of society, nobles, commoners, and slaves," and that this structure could determine the amount of ritual involved when a couple married.¹¹¹ This class structure could determine the amount of ritual involved when a couple married. Arima claims that, among the Nootka, the degree of ceremonial — more or less elaborate — and the value of gifts exchanged by the families differed according to rank of the participants.¹¹² The Kwakiutl, whose marriage rituals concerned only the chiefly families, denied formal marriage to commoners.¹¹³ Furthermore, studies of the Coast Salish reveal that there was more elaborate ceremonial and gift distribution among wealthy families.¹¹⁴

According to Jenness, the "purchase" of wives while the women were either young girls, small children or even, in some cases,

still in the womb was common to many First Nations tribes in Canada. Jenness claims, however, that only on the Pacific coast were these betrothals sacrosanct.¹¹⁵ In his study of the Nootka, Arima also found that child betrothals were "generally firm," although it was possible to cancel them. Cancellation, however, tended to lead to bitterness.¹¹⁶

While recognizing the tremendous cultural variations, it can be said, in summary, that, for both women and men, marriages created alliances between families and villages and they conferred wealth and status on the participants. Polygamy and polyandry were acceptable (although polyandry was practised only when a crisis had decimated the female population), divorce, although not too common, was easy since there were no legal impediments, elaborate ceremonial accompanied the marriage of high-status families, and child betrothal was widely practised.

Missionary perceptions of these aboriginal marriages led them to believe that the women were in need of "rescuing" and preparing for a better fate. These perceptions were based on their imperfect knowledge of First Nations societies¹¹⁷ and their firmly held conviction that Christian marriage, with its emphasis on "patriarchal notions of wifely behaviour" and on the roles and expectations imposed on women by Scripture and Church teachings, was the perfect system of social regulation.¹¹⁸ Young aboriginal women represented the best hope of the Churches. As one scholar noted:

[women], as wives of men and mothers of children were entrusted with the moral guardianship of society ... they were expected to curb restlessness and rebelliousness in men and instill virtues of civic submission in children.¹¹⁹

They would also have to abandon the concept of communal education for children and accept

the concept of parental responsibility. The Churches of British Columbia held these expectations for girls who came into their care.

Among the first missionaries to pressure for help for girls "condemned" to barter marriages were the Crosbys. Thomas Crosby described how women were "given to the husband as a pledge for property which is given to her people for her." According to Crosby:

Children have been mortgaged for potlatch debts before they were five years of age, and the mortgagee claims his wife when she is probably thirteen to fifteen years of age.¹²⁰

Crosby wanted the First Nations peoples to be compelled to abandon their "barter marriages" and conform to Canadian marriage laws. Because of "the prevalence in this traffic in Indian girls," wrote Crosby, "many of the early missionaries were led to establish 'Girls' Homes for the rescue and further protection of these poor victims of this awful system."¹²¹ Crosby also attacked polygamy. Polygamy was accepted by women because it took care of surplus women. Crosby, like other missionaries, saw it as immoral (biblical polygamy appears to have been conveniently forgotten) and a state of "dreadful misery and degradation" for the women.¹²² The missionary saw the rejection of this custom as one of the Church's earliest successes. Aboriginal women, he claimed, were always "the slave or burden-bearer" until Christianity both caused the peoples to reject polygamy and "lifted [them] into [their] true social position."¹²³ The number of girls who apparently sought the protection of the Crosbys led to the establishment of the official Home (the Crosbys used their own home initially) at Fort Simpson "to shelter hapless and helpless Indian girls."¹²⁴ Another Methodist missionary, the Reverend Alfred Green, apparently took aboriginal wives

into his home; "Indians became angry but Green told them that they could not have two wives."¹²⁵ The Crosbys and Green were not alone in their condemnation of First Nations marriage customs. Caroline Tate wrote of what she and her husband considered a serious problem among the Bella Bella:

Among the Bella Bellas, the custom of infant betrothals and early marriages prevails. One interesting little girl of eight or nine years of age was taken from school last winter, and married to a man living in a heathen village who had already one wife.¹²⁶

The Presbyterian missionary at Ucluelet also expressed his concern over the fact that some men at Ucluelet had two wives each and that young men who were showing some interest in Christianity spoke of "buying" their wives, "according to their own custom." Swartout believed that only by conversion would local aboriginals desist from "changing wives & husbands," a custom which was considered "quite proper."¹²⁷

The Women's Auxiliary of the Church of England in Canada expressed its concern even more strongly. Writing for help to the W.F.M.S. of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Anglican W.A. expressed its concern:

It has been brought to the notice of the W.A. of the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada that great evils exist on the Island of Vancouver in connexion [sic] with the Marriage customs of the Indians. [We] earnestly entreat your society to do all in their power to stamp out this terrible evil, so destructive to the souls and bodies of our fellow countrymen.¹²⁸

The letter was accompanied by a copy of a resolution passed by the W.A. in which the

organization vowed to put pressure on the Dominion government to force it to eradicate the “revolting marriage customs of the Indians relating to the sale of women and girls....”¹²⁹ The situation was not easily resolved. Writing of the situation at Alert Bay in 1912, an Anglican missionary explained that the “selling of the girls in marriage, which is a central point in the Indian social life, is the great obstacle to be overcome....”¹³⁰ The Anglicans condemned the “sale” of aboriginal girls and stated that “every girl taken into their Home [meant] one step towards the abolition of this custom.”¹³¹ Anglican lack of success at Alert Bay can be discovered in a letter written in March 1920 to Duncan Scott at the Department of Indian Affairs. The local missionary wrote:

A woman is always treated as a minor and her life is governed by her guardian to whom she is a great asset. The guardian invariably mortgages the woman to the highest bidder ... We know of cases where a girl has been mortgaged 4 or 5 times.¹³²

Corker also reported that the aboriginal people of Alert Bay rebuked Jane Cook because she had married only once and had consequently “not done her duty as an Indian; by living in a monogamous relationship, she had denied her family glory.”¹³³ Furthermore, the writer of a report on the Potlatch done in 1930 for the Anglican bishop of Victoria had a case of marriage banns being challenged by a man who claimed that “his nephew had paid the father \$150.00 for the girl while the proposed husband had paid nothing.”¹³⁴

Only one Alert Bay missionary, the Reverend Prosser, declared that the “purchase of wives at Potlatch [was] untrue.”¹³⁵ The rest condemned what they continued to call the “sale of girls,” even to the point of pressing charges in court — if they could be sure of winning the case.¹³⁶ However, on at least one

occasion, F. Earl Anfield, principal at the Alert Bay school, rushed to the defense of Indian custom when a newspaper reporter wrote an insulting article on recent Alert Bay marriages. He wrote:

Most of these couples had been married for years under what is known as “Indian Custom Marriage” or “Potlatch Marriage.” In other words they had been married with the immemorial ceremonies and practice of their forefathers, in which marriage custom, divorce was practically unknown and unfaithfulness rare.¹³⁷

As contact with whites increased, missionary Home workers became as much concerned with First Nations acceptance of prostitution of their women as with the “improprieties” of aboriginal marriage. As Emma Crosby saw it, some local aboriginal girls had little choice in their destiny. She expressed the grief missionaries felt when girls they had to turn away because of lack of space “left their homes for a life of dissipation and shame, and only came back, in nearly every case, after a few years, to die a wretched, untimely death among their friends.”¹³⁸ This concern was expressed also by missionary Agnes Knight:

these half-grown girls need the care and protection of the Home so much that I would not keep one out who was willing to come to us. There is so much danger and so much temptations surrounding the girls in these villages that scarcely one escapes.¹³⁹

Like First Nations marriage customs, this was a problem that would persist. In 1908, a missionary at Port Simpson wrote to the readers of *Missionary Outlook*:

Pray that the girls who were discharged may be true Christians, and withstand the many temptations they will meet this summer. It will be harder than ever for

Indian women and girls on account of the proximity of Prince Rupert and the construction camps on the Grand Trunk Pacific.¹⁴⁰

Those who took in young aboriginal girls were very clear about their roles in these young lives. According to Emma Crosby, the aim of the staff of the Methodist Home was to make "capable Indian women" who would "establish Christian homes for themselves where, as wives and mothers, they may show what industrious habits and a Christian spirit can do."¹⁴¹ Miss Jackson echoed Emma's words:

In our work and teaching we keep in mind the future of the girls, which will be that of wives and mothers, the noblest work of all if true to their calling.¹⁴²

What of the response of First Nations girls, however, who had spent some years at the Homes? Writing of girls about to leave the Port Simpson Home, Miss Hudson stated that "The way is hard for their feet; we know they feel most seriously their going from the shelter and care of the school."¹⁴³ "Our girls on the whole have been happy and contented," wrote another missionary in 1907, "and are striving to do what is right."¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, we have very little information on the girls' perspectives; letters written by aboriginal women are very rare.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, the effects of Christian marriage as perceived by aboriginal girls is, in most cases, a matter of conjecture.

Missionaries were convinced that Christian marriages offered girls a preferable option to being "sold" into what they considered to be unnatural alliances. However, pressure on First Nations to conform to Christian marriage rites could pose new problems for women. Where aboriginal women were living with white men, missionaries tried to either formalize the relationship or break it up. In 1876, for example,

a missionary in the Nicola Valley encouraged white male settlers to either marry their aboriginal companions or abandon them. Methodist Reverend Jas Turner found it satisfying that the men who were willing to end "what had been considered a legitimate custom for years"; he pointed out the hardships these breakups caused the men who were now having "to undertake the duties of cook, laundry-maid, and housekeeper, in addition to the toils common to farming...."¹⁴⁶ No thought is given to the problems abandonment must have created for both the women and their children.

Missionaries also worked to formalize, according to Church law, custom marriages between First Nations peoples. However, this presented its own problems. Thomas Crosby performed the first Christian marriage ceremony at Port Simpson in 1871. As he began the service, the bride bolted from the church. After some time, the bride timidly returned. Crosby commented:

So I got hold of her hand and drew her towards him, placed her hand in his, laid my hand over them both, and held on until I had finished the ceremony.¹⁴⁷

Crosby used this method from then on.¹⁴⁸ Other problems were more complex. As wrote McCullagh, the Methodist missionary at Aiyansh, the "Indians are married by Indian custom, but later came to church to marry again, on grounds that they are free to marry."¹⁴⁹ At Alert Bay, Anglican workers grappled for many years with the problem of aboriginal men who had been advised to marry according to Church rites, using the opportunity to abandon wives of custom marriages to marry others. In 1914, a missionary wrote to Bishop Schofield that he had inadvertently married an Indian "whose first wife was still living."¹⁵⁰ Bishop Schofield attested to the widespread and persistent nature of this

problem. Clearly disputing what Anfield had argued, in December 1935 he wrote to a government official that “again and again Indians who have been married under Indian custom have thrown over the wife so married and have presented themselves at the church to be married to another woman.”¹⁵¹ Furthermore, in his autobiography, James Sewid explained how men among his people left wives acquired through First Nations custom and then joined a new church where they could get married to someone else.¹⁵² In at least one recorded case, however, the woman left the husband.

In 1928, Anglican missionary F. Comley wrote to A.G. Manson, the Attorney General of British Columbia:

Last week two Indians came to Alert Bay to be married in Church. The woman had previously been married according to customs of the Kwawkwewth people, and there are two children by the marriage. The woman left her husband sometime [sic] ago, and now comes to the church to be married to another man.¹⁵³

It is possible that at Alert Bay, women’s rejection of arranged marriages might have been quite common. Writing from Alert Bay to the Department of Indian Affairs in January 1910, Indian Agent William Halliday informed his superiors that the problem of wife abandonment was not nearly as widespread as husband abandonment. Halliday had been informed that men who abandoned wives married under Indian custom to marry another could be prosecuted under Section 301 of the *Criminal Code*. He replied that:

in many, or most of these cases, the girl having been given in marriage without her own consent, or one might say in absolute ignorance, she herself usually leaves the man and takes up with another.¹⁵⁴

On the surface, Christianity appears to have offered women choices in regard to marriage; however, in reality, it is possible that the missionaries, too, limited that choice. To reach their goal of providing examples for non-Christian First Nations peoples, Home workers would have used their influence to promote marriages between girls from the Home and young Christian men. There was frequently fear that the girls might, on leaving the Home, slide back into the “old ways.” One way to prevent backsliding was to unite Christian couples. There is missionary comment on these unions: an Indian girl named Flora, a Port Simpson Home inmate, was married, in 1901, to Robert, “the native teacher at Kitlope — an earnest Christian man”;¹⁵⁵ in the spring of 1903, Lilly Jones, who missionaries hoped would make “a very useful Christian woman,” married Mark Edgar, the son of the Reverend George Edgar, native pastor of China Hat;¹⁵⁶ and, in 1907, there is reference to the marriage of Ella to “Moses Gray, son of Louis Gray, native missionary at Rivers Inlet.”¹⁵⁷ There is no way of knowing how much pressure was put on the girls (or indeed the young men) to marry those thought appropriate, but it is likely that some pressure was used. The Anglicans, for instance, saw the establishment of the Alert Bay Home as a way of removing “the difficulty with regard to the marriage of the boys who pass through [their] Industrial School.”¹⁵⁸ Moreover, it is not known how many failed marriages were a result of Residential School institutionalization. Forcibly separated, girls and boys who were inmates of the Homes until their teens “often married without precedent for male-female relationships.”¹⁵⁹

One aspect of Christian marriage — the ceremonial part — offered some of these young women the opportunity to experience a certain status. As noted earlier, young aborig-

inal girls who were not of the chiefly class would not ordinarily have ceremonials to mark their marriages. However, as far as the Church was concerned on the issue of First Nations marriage, class was immaterial. All women, regardless of status, could marry with elaborate ceremonial. The white dress (sometimes provided by women's missionary organizations),¹⁶⁰ the formal Church ceremony and the wedding feast were available for all.¹⁶¹

Christianity also offered new economic opportunities. According to missionary workers, as contact opportunities with white society increased, pressure was placed on aboriginal girls to supplement family income through prostitution. The Homes, therefore, looked for alternate forms of work for the girls and helped to place some of them in service.¹⁶²

Under the influence of Home workers, girls were taught to aspire to a Christian marriage based on personal choice and approved by white society. There is no evidence that thought was given to the social and cultural disruption such marriages would bring. Choice involved not only rejection of parental rights in regard to marriage but also to disintegration of carefully balanced tribal alliances. Missionaries regarded the girls' families as protagonists and a battle of wills often ensued over the girls' futures. While working among the Bella Bella in 1881, Caroline Tate exhorted promises from them that they would protect their girls by discontinuing infant betrothals; however, the Bella Bella were insistent that "the old promises must be kept."¹⁶³ Keeping the old promises continued into the twentieth century, as missionaries like Elizabeth Long continued "over and over again to try and convince the parents, and the would-be bridegrooms, that the girls [were] much too young" to marry.¹⁶⁴ Over the years, the Port Simpson Home was the scene of conflict over marriages

as missionaries struggled to hold on to girls they considered too young for marriage. According to Lavinia Clarke, the Home's idea of a suitable age "[did] not co-incide with those of the Indians by any means."¹⁶⁵

In 1904, after more than twenty years of missionary efforts, the conflict continued. Miss Carroll wrote that she was having "considerable trouble" with some of the parents who wanted to remove their daughters.¹⁶⁶ According to Elizabeth Long, the missionaries' only weapon against intransigent parents was moral persuasion.¹⁶⁷ The Presbyterians, too, had trouble with parents who demanded that the girls be allowed to leave. Girls were allowed home for vacations and parents prevented their return.¹⁶⁸ An Indian agent in charge of the Kwakiutl Agency on Vancouver Island commented on the antagonism of the Kwakiutl "towards the schools and religious teaching for their children."¹⁶⁹ According to one Anglican missionary commenting on the Home at Alert Bay, "the older people strongly object to the entrance of the girls and do what they can to prevent their coming or to entice them away when they have entered."¹⁷⁰

There are only fragments to suggest the stress and chaos that followed the efforts of missionaries to change marriage customs. In 1910, W.M. Halliday, Indian agent at Alert Bay, wrote to his department in Ottawa that few Indians "feel their inferiority to the whites" and, as a result, to an Indian, Christian marriage "constitutes no marriage at all and they impress upon the girls this fact."¹⁷¹ Halliday, who was promoting the establishment of an Anglican Home, notes that "old people are afraid that if the girls are educated they will wish to exercise the right to choose for themselves."¹⁷² More than twenty years later, Jane Cook stated that, in spite of Church and government efforts to eradicate custom marriages:

no respectable Indian man [would] live with a woman without a price being paid ... It would be a disgrace to them if there was no price paid; there must be a contract.¹⁷³

Two significant comments underline the cultural devastation which Christian marriage could bring. One was made by Methodist missionary Reverend D. Jennings. At New Kitzelash in April 1901, he found an Indian couple "with weak hearts" because their daughter had married within her own crest. According to Jennings, this marriage was considered "almost an unpardonable act." The couple was rebuked, not by Jennings, but, according to the missionary, by another Indian who told the distressed couple:

Now we are living according to the new way. The white man has no crest; nor is the crest taught in the Bible. We have left our old way of life and since there is no blood relationship between your daughter and her husband, you ought not longer stand out against their marriage.¹⁷⁴

The other comment was made by Lavinia Clarke who had recently visited the home of a former Home inmate. She noted:

The house was clean and the bed comfortable — in striking contrast to former days when the old grandmother ruled the home, and all was dirt and confusion.¹⁷⁵

Here is clear indication of generational conflict between women — a conflict so destructive to a culture. The traditional role of older women

was undermined by young girls who now held different ideas about what created a home environment.

Missionary workers expected Home girls to provide role models for the non-Christian communities to which they returned. As role models, the girls were crucial to missionary success. To the Home workers, both the success of the Christianization process and First Nations women's devotion to their newly acquired faith were measured not so much in church attendance as in quality of home life. "A very useful Christian woman" was not simply one who prayed frequently or assisted in catechetical work,¹⁷⁶ she was also one who, by her example, promoted cleanliness and hygiene in her own home.¹⁷⁷ Christianity was equalled not with doctrinal knowledge and piety but with housework and childcare.

There is still much to uncover with regard to the impact of Christianity on First Nations women's lives. The ramifications of the early mission work might remain largely speculative. Perhaps a sense of what was lost and gained in later years might be uncovered through extensive interviews with older women. However, these women would be remembering lives already irrevocably altered by white contact. The fragments we do have seem to indicate that First Nations women, like their white counterparts, found in Christianity both new options and old restraints. We may never know, however, how typical Kate Dudoward actually was...

NOTES

1. Gagan 1987, 396.
2. *Missionary Outlook* 41.3, Mar. 1921: 71.
3. In British Columbia, see, for example, Mulhall 1986; Usher 1974; Whitehead 1981a; Whitehead 1988.
4. For three exceptions, see: Whitehead (1981b), 98-106; Bolt (1983), 38-56; Bolt (1992).
5. Peterson and Druke 1988, 9.
6. Peterson and Druke 1988, 10.
7. Klein 1980, 101.
8. Leacock 1986, 27; Devens 1986, 461.
9. Peterson and Druke 1988, 24.
10. Spradley 1983, 45.
11. Crosby 1907, 230-231.
12. *Mission Field* XIV.CLVIII, Feb. 1869: 49.
13. *Missionary Outlook* 22.12, Dec. 1902: 287.
14. *Missionary Outlook* 24.2, Feb. 1904: 67.
15. McDonough 1979, 164.
16. Special Meeting held at Alert Bay, 1 June 1936.
17. *Presbyterian Pioneer Ministers* 1924: 215.
18. *Missionary Notices of the Methodist Church of Canada* 4 Dec. 1877: 278.
19. Klein 1980, 99.
20. *Missionary Notices of the Methodist Church of Canada* Aug. 1878: 312.
21. *Wesleyan Missionary Notices* 1 Nov. 1869: 76-77.
22. Crosby 1907, 233.
23. *Missionary Notices of the Methodist Church of Canada* June 1875: 55-56; Keenleyside 1987, 9-12; *Missionary Outlook* 5.4, Apr. 1885: 61; *Missionary Outlook* 9.8, Aug. 1889.
24. *Missionary Outlook* 27.1, Jan. 1907: 16.
25. Spradley 1983, 49.
26. Bishop Charles Schofield, letter to the Secretaries of the Church Missionary Society, 11 Dec. 1914.
27. Bishop Charles Schofield, letter to the Secretaries of the Church Missionary Society, 11 Dec. 1914.
28. Columbia Branch Women's Auxiliary, Minutes, 15 June 1928.
29. Spradley 1983, 49.
30. *Missionary Notices of the Methodist Church of Canada* Feb. 1878: 272.
31. *Missionary Notices of the Methodist Church of Canada* Apr. 1875: 36.
32. *Missionary Outlook* 3.3, Mar. 1883: 45.
33. *Missionary Outlook* 21.6, June 1901: 142.
34. *Missionary Outlook* 27.1, Jan. 1907: 16.
35. Latham and Kess 1980, 286.
36. Beaver 1980, 211.
37. Fiske 1981, 103.
38. Reverend O.T. Hodgson, letter to Bishop Charles Schofield, 27 Mar. 1936. Jane Cook was a Metisse — her father was white and her mother was an aboriginal of the Seattle area, probably Coast Salish, although her exact lineage is not mentioned in the records. If she was Coast Salish, it is likely that she was a "Chieftainess" in the traditional sense of the word. According to the research of anthropologist Marjorie Mitchell (1976), there were no women chiefs among the Coast Salish.
39. Jane Cook, letter to Bishop Roper, 15 Dec. 1913.
40. A.W. Corker, letter to Bishop Roper, 9 Dec. 1913.
41. Jane Cook, letter to Bishop Roper, 15 Dec. 1913.
42. Bishop Roper, letter to Chambers, Dec. 1913; William Halliday, letter to Bishop Roper, 2 Mar. 1914.
43. Jane Cook, letter to J. Smith, Vancouver Chief of Police, 10 Nov. 1913.
44. Bishop Roper, letter to Jane Cook, Dec. 1913.
45. Bishop Roper, letter to Bishop Charles Schofield, 2 Feb. 1919; Tennant 1991, 7-8.
46. Special Meeting held at Alert Bay, 1 June 1936.
47. Special Meeting held at Alert Bay, 1 June 1936.
48. Corker, letter to Bishop Charles Schofield, 22 Apr. 1919.
49. Bishop Roper, letter to Bishop Charles Schofield, 2 Feb. 1919; Corker, letter to Duncan Scott, D.I.A., 6 Mar. 1920.
50. Corker, letter to Duncan Scott, D.I.A., 6 Mar. 1920.
51. Corker, letter to Bishop Charles Schofield, 18 Mar. 1919; Loo 1992: 127.
52. Bishop Charles Schofield, letter to Reverend Prosser, 20 Jan. 1931.
53. Gough 1982-84, 84.
54. Gough 1982-84, 84.
55. Beaver 1980, 121-22.
56. *Missionary Outlook* 5.4, Apr. 1885: 61; see also Corker, letter to Duncan Scott, D.I.A., 6 Mar. 1920.
57. See Usher 1974; Whitehead 1981b.
58. Knight, Diary 10 July 1885 to 27 Oct. 1887, Entry 19 Aug. 1885.
59. *Missionary Notices of the Methodist Church of Canada* 4 Dec. 1877: 278.
60. *Wesleyan Missionary Notices* 1 Feb. 1869: 25-26.
61. Special Meeting held at Alert Bay, 1 June 1936.
62. Special Meeting held at Alert Bay, 1 June 1936.
63. Special Meeting held at Alert Bay, 1 June 1936.
64. Anderson and Zinsser 1988, 181.
65. Whitehead 1981c.
66. *Mission Field* 1 June 1871: 177.
67. Codere 1950, 54.
68. *Mission Field* 1 June 1871: 177.

69. Codere 1950, 54. According to Anthropologist Marjorie Mitchell, as other economic opportunities presented themselves, First Nations women left prostitution (Interview given 3 May 1993).
70. *Wesleyan Missionary Notices* 1 Feb. 1869: 26.
71. *Missionary Outlook* 5.4, Apr. 1885: 61.
72. *Missionary Outlook* 5.4, Apr. 1885: 61.
73. Spradley 1983, 45.
74. Spradley 1983, 57, 137, 168.
75. Spradley 1983, 57.
76. Spradley 1983, 18.
77. Fiske 1981, 99. In her article on the Montagnais women, Devens 1986, 470, suggests that women converts "tended to interpret and manipulate Christianity to serve their own needs." As evidence she focuses on a cult of the Virgin Mary which developed at some mission centres; these women continued, while living in community, "to stress the values of female autonomy."
78. Blackman 1982, 45.
79. Blackman 1982, 45.
80. Devens 1986, 475.
81. According to Miss Powell, a missionary at the Crosby Home in Port Simpson, women who had previously resisted attending church meetings did join a "Women's Patriotic Society" formed for the purpose of knitting for soldiers fighting in World War I. *Missionary Outlook* 37.3, Mar. 1916: 71.
82. *Missionary Outlook* 21.1, Jan. 1901: 78.
83. *Missionary Outlook* 22.7, July 1902: 166.
84. *Missionary Outlook* 41.8, Aug. 1921: 21.
85. Reverend Prosser, letter to Bishop Charles Schofield, 19 Jan. 1934.
86. Elizabeth MacVicar, letter to her family, 21 Oct. 1942.
87. *Missionary Outlook* 1.4, Apr. 1881: 139.
88. McLean, J.D., D.I.A., Assistant Deputy Secretary, letter to Bishop Roper, 22 May 1912.
89. Jenness 1971, 156.
90. Mitchell 1976, 96.
91. Damas 1976, 133.
92. Mitchell and Franklin 1984, 17.
93. Mitchell and Franklin 1984, 29.
94. Mitchell 1976, 96-108.
95. Cruickshank 1976, 113. For further information on the crucial importance of marriage with regards to the socio-economic system, see Suttles 1960: 296-305.
96. Lewis 1970, 122; see also Jenness 1971, 144.
97. Arima 89.
98. Mitchell 1976, 98.
99. Goldman 1975, 77.
100. Goldman 1975, 69.
101. Arima 91.
102. Krause 1956, 154.
103. Arima 90.
104. Fiske 1991. "Colonization and the Decline of Women's Status: The Tsimshian Case," *Feminist Studies* 17.4.
105. Spradley 1983, 35.
106. Mitchell 1976, 98; Lewis 1970, 40.
107. Mitchell 1976, 98.
108. Mitchell 1976, 102.
109. Mitchell 1976, 98; Arima 91.
110. Jenness 1971, 156.
111. Jenness 1971, 140. One has to be careful when generalizing about class structure. The Coast Salish and Nootka peoples had class-based cultures; others, such as the Kwakiutl, had ranked societies and, in the interior of the province, other First Nations had relatively unstratified societies. On the complexities of the class issue with regards to British Columbia First Nations, see Suttles 1958, 497-506.
112. Arima 90.
113. Goldman 1975, 74.
114. Mitchell 1976, 102.
115. Jenness 1971, 154.
116. Arima 90.
117. Adams 1970, 128, 145. Kasakoff Adams argues that certain key words that denote marriage relationships had more than one meaning in the First Nations she studied. For instance, she states that the kinship term "cousin" contains at least two covert categories, both the first cousin and others. According to Mitchell (Personal interview), two other covert categories are obscured by the English kinship term "cousin." These are parallel cousins (children of same sex siblings) and cross cousins (children of opposite sex siblings). First Nations peoples used different terms for these two types of cousins. This means that the statement "we marry our cousins" cannot be taken at face value. This type of subtlety could lead missionaries to misinterpret marriage relations. It could also lead them to misunderstand First Nations customs. As Peter Edward, a Kwakiutl, explained regarding "bride price" (a more accurate term would be "bride wealth"), the people "did not exactly call it 'selling' as the white people would say, we have a special term that is used ... that cannot be put into English" (Special Meeting held at Alert Bay, 1 June 1936). According to Mitchell (Personal interview), "bride price" is wealth given by the groom's family to the bride's family, *not* as a purchase price but to denote the productive

- value of the bride and to compensate her kin group for the loss of both her productive and reproductive capacity.
118. Gailey 1980, 313; Duprez 1983, 68.
 119. Summers 1975, 21.
 120. Crosby 1914, 145.
 121. Crosby 1914, 66.
 122. Crosby 1914, 96.
 123. Crosby 1914, 97.
 124. *Missionary Outlook* 1.4, Apr. 1881: 31.
 125. *Missionary Outlook* 9.5, May 1889: 79-80.
 126. *Missionary Outlook* 1.8, Aug. 1881: 91.
 127. Swartout, letter to McKay, 24 May 1895.
 128. W.A. (Anglican), letter to W.F.M.S. of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, 30 Nov. 1909.
 129. W.A. (Anglican), letter to W.F.M.S. of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, 30 Nov. 1909.
 130. *Across the Rockies* 3.11, Nov. 1912: 294.
 131. *Across the Rockies* 3.11, Nov. 1912: 294.
 132. Corker, letter to Duncan Scott, D.I.A., 6 Mar. 1920.
 133. Report on the Potlatch, author unknown, 30 Apr. 1930.
 134. Report on the Potlatch, author unknown, 30 Apr. 1930.
 135. Report on the Potlatch, author unknown, 30 Apr. 1930.
 136. Reverend Crowley, letter to Bishop Charles Schofield, 12 Feb. 1919.
 137. F. Earl Anfield, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Sun*, 20 Jan. 1934.
 138. *Missionary Outlook* 1.11-12, Nov./Dec. 1881: 140.
 139. *Missionary Outlook* 6.5, May 1886: 74.
 140. *Missionary Outlook* 28.7, July 1908: 166.
 141. *Missionary Outlook* 1.11-12, Nov./Dec. 1881: 140.
 142. *Missionary Outlook* 22.7, July 1902: 167.
 143. *Missionary Outlook* 32.10, Oct. 1912: 239.
 144. *Missionary Outlook* 27.5, May 1907: 119.
 145. Peterson and Druke 1988, 9.
 146. *Missionary Notices of the Methodist Church of Canada* Apr. 1877: 201.
 147. Crosby 1907, 98.
 148. Crosby 1907, 98.
 149. Unknown author, letter to Bishop Charles Schofield, "Notes on Potlatch Views," 3 Apr. 1930.
 150. Corker, letter to Bishop Charles Schofield, 25 Jan. 1914.
 151. Bishop Charles Schofield, letter to C.C. Perry, Assistant Commissioner for B.C., 20 Dec. 1935.
 152. Spradley 1983, 189.
 153. Comley wants legal advice for this situation. Comley, letter to Manson, A.G., 29 Feb. 1928.
 154. William Halliday, letter to J.D. McLean, D.I.A., Assistant Deputy Secretary. 5 Jan. 1910.
 155. *Missionary Outlook* 21.6, June 1901: 142.
 156. *Missionary Outlook* 21.6, June 1901: 142.
 157. *Missionary Outlook* 27.1, Jan. 1907: 22.
 158. *Across the Rockies* 2.11 (Supplemental), Nov. 1911: 6.
 159. Cruickshank 1976, 105.
 160. For example, sometimes the Methodist organization, the King's Daughters — an organization founded primarily for the spiritual enhancement of women's lives — provided wedding dresses for aboriginal girls. *Missionary Outlook* 25.3, Mar. 1905: 94; *Missionary Outlook* 25.10, Oct. 1905: 238.
 161. One missionary made an interesting observation regarding First Nations attitudes to the Christian marriage ceremony. According to Reverend Pierce, the Methodist missionary at Kispiox, a 72-year-old local chief had recently married with full Christian ceremony, including a white dress and bridesmaids for his 62-year-old bride and a best man for himself. Pierce commented, "The anxiety of the chief to follow all the white man's customs in his marriage ceremony may appear somewhat ludicrous, but to this man just emerging from pagan darkness all these customs would be regarded as conforming to the 'new way' on which he was entering, and therefore important as indicating his severance from the 'old way' in which he had walked so long." Viewed from this standpoint, the oddities of the old chief's wedding have a pathos that is all their own. *Missionary Outlook* 23.2, Feb. 1903: 30.
 162. *Missionary Outlook* 27.11, Nov. 1907: 246; *Missionary Outlook* 33.4, Apr. 1913: 95; *Missionary Outlook* 33.10, Oct. 1913.
 163. *Missionary Outlook* 1.8, Aug. 1881: 91.
 164. *Missionary Outlook* 26.10, Oct. 1906: 239.
 165. *Missionary Outlook* 19.4, Apr. 1899: 95.
 166. *Missionary Outlook* 24.10, Oct. 1904: 239.
 167. *Missionary Outlook* 21.10, Oct. 1901: 238.
 168. Bella Johnston, letter to Mackay, 1 Aug. 1893.
 169. Codere 1950, 11.
 170. *Across the Rockies* 3.11, Nov. 1912: 294.
 171. William Halliday, letter to J.D. McLean, D.I.A., 5 Jan. 1910.
 172. William Halliday, letter to J.D. McLean, D.I.A., 5 Jan. 1910.
 173. Special Meeting held at Alert Bay, June 1, 1936.
 174. *Missionary Outlook* 21.4, Apr. 1901: 79.
 175. *Missionary Outlook* 19.8, Aug. 1899: 159.
 176. *Missionary Outlook* 23.6, June 1903: 143.
 177. *Missionary Outlook* 19.8, Aug. 1899: 190; *Missionary Outlook* 21.12, Dec. 1901: 287; *Missionary Outlook* 27.1, Jan. 1907: 22.

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