

**Making Conversation: Opening Dialogues of the Nisga'a Encounter
with the Church Missionary Society, 1864-67**

by

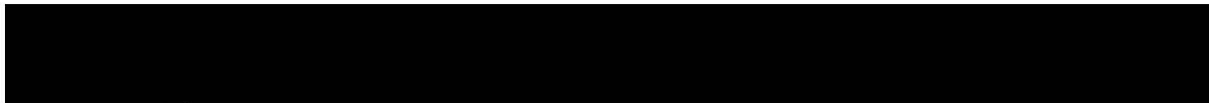
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ABSTRACT

In 1864 the Church Missionary Society established a mission among three Nisga'a villages on the lower Nass River on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia. The mission functioned for three years under Reverend Robert Doolan before being reestablished at the site of Gingolx. This thesis analyses three distinct yet interrelated dialogues that occurred during this initial encounter between the Nisga'a and the CMS churchmen: the corporeal, material, and spiritual. In following these exchanges we see the protracted struggle over particular meanings and the capacity to make meanings that was central to this encounter. Power was negotiated primarily through mundane, quotidian practice, as the missionaries attempted to convert the Nisga'a to the signs and practices of Protestant English culture. The Nisga'a's receptivity to the CMS mission was highly selective, however, as they were more interested in harnessing its power for their own uses than in the explicit message of the churchmen.

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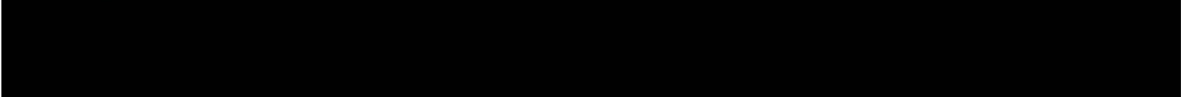

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Editorial Note

I have attempted to follow the original spelling, syntax and punctuation as they appear in the historical sources as faithfully as possible. Any amendments for clarification are noted by square brackets. Important exceptions to this rule are my use of the word “and” where the plus sign has been used as shorthand for this word, and my insertion of an apostrophe to denote ownership in places where only an “s” has been added to the noun. The names of individual First Nations peoples are presented as they appear in the sources. Where applicable, these names are followed at their first appearance by common alternative spellings found in other secondary sources. The latter appear in parentheses. Two notable exceptions to my use of names as they appear in the sources are Neshaki, the Wolf chief from Lakunkedah, and Elizabeth Ryan, a Tsimshian woman. Both are referred to in the sources used as wives of their European husbands—Hudson’s Bay Company fur trader Captain William Henry McNeill and trader and lay missionary Robert Cunningham, respectively—although this was only one dimension of their complex identities.

The names of the nineteenth-century villages among which the first CMS mission was located are spelled as they appear in the historical sources. Names of villages referred to by the missionaries that exist in the present are spelled according to contemporary Nisga’a orthography. I have also attempted to use the contemporary names of the various First Nations referred to in this study, realizing the important role of self-designation in the decolonization process. In keeping with current practice, I have not added an “s” when using First Nations names in the plural sense. When capitalized, Native refers specifically to First Nations, otherwise it refers to indigenous peoples and cultures more generally.

Anglican churchmen had a limited understanding of the nineteenth-century Nisga’a culture they encountered. They used generic terms, such as “Ahlied” or “medicine” work, and “superstitions,” to describe a complex range of concepts and practices rooted in Nisga’a cosmology. Their choice of words reflects their particular prejudices, as well as the challenges inherent in understanding different cultural traditions. The latter problem persists where manifestations of spiritual power cannot be adequately translated into English. This study uses the most current spellings of words in the Tsimshian family of languages, many of which were standardized in agreements-in-principle at the end of 1996. Finally, the relation of Native peoples to the Christian missionaries who worked among them cannot be described without expressing some particular view of this relationship. Although I view the Nisga’a as at best “would-be” subjects of the missionaries, I have decided to use the term “subjects” rather than repeat this cumbersome phrase. Nonetheless, I wish the reader to understand that the qualifier is always implied.

Acknowledgements

This project has benefited from the assistance and support of many people. The staff at the History Department at the University of Victoria have guided me through the administrative aspects of the Master's program with a warmth and enthusiasm beyond anything I could have imagined. In particular I would like to thank Karen Hickton, a fountain of knowledge on many diverse subjects, whose cheerfulness could always be counted on and which became something I looked forward to during my visits; Karen McIvor, for reflecting her belief in the value of a liberal arts education in her work and in her interest in the projects of the many students who pass through her office; and Liz Wick, who dedicatedly walked me through the final steps when bringing this thesis to completion. I would also like to acknowledge the financial support of the University of Victoria and the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society. The latter provided a supportive and stimulating environment in which to pursue my personal and academic interests, and enriched my experience as a graduate student at the university.

In assisting me with the thesis I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with two accomplished and dedicated scholars and teachers. Elizabeth Vibert and Wendy Wickwire brought their respective insights to my project with an excitement about its potential that was infectious. Their engagement with my work—particularly their thoughtful feedback and respectful criticism—exemplified for me the student-supervisor process at its best. As teacher and outside reader, Lynne Marks has stimulated my interest in religious history. She encouraged me to clarify some of my ideas, as well as to consider the complexity of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. John Lutz's excellent graduate seminar on Aboriginal-Non-Aboriginal relations introduced me to many of the ideas explored in this thesis. Susan Neylan and Mavis Gillie generously pointed me to many important sources on my topic, and Maureen Atkinson graciously shared her time and passion for the history of northwestern British Columbia. I was greatly encouraged in my work by the interest shown in it by Patti Angus, Dr. Frank Calder, Nelson Leeson, Patricia Vickers, and other Nisga'a. It is my hope that this work measures favourably with the potential they saw in it.

I owe a special thanks to Sylvia Van Kirk for introducing me to the history of Aboriginal-Non-Aboriginal relations in Canada, as well as for inspiring me with her passion for this subject. As teacher and friend, her encouragement and support have been invaluable and greatly appreciated. Our many conversations have profoundly shaped my sense of history and the historian's relation to social justice. I was fortunate to have many supportive friends who have journeyed with me through the History graduate program at the University of Victoria. I would in particular like to thank Hugh Gordon, Christian Lieb, Natasha Powers and Kathleen Trayner. I would like to pay special tribute to my parents, Paul and Elly May, who have been unfailing in providing me with love and support to pursue the things I believe to be important. Finally, I want to thank Melissa Lem for her patience, perspective, and abiding interest in this project. She carefully read every chapter and provided feedback before anyone else saw them. Her love and belief that I can do all that I hope to do are of immeasurable value and have been a constant reference point on this journey.

For Melissa

Chapter One: Introduction

The responses of indigenous peoples affected by the various European colonizing projects of the modern era were as diverse as the peoples themselves. This study offers an examination of the opening acts of the Nisga'a First Nation's encounter with Anglican Christianity in the mid-nineteenth century, the beginning of a relationship that has continued into the present. More precisely, it explores a number of key dialogues that occurred between missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Nisga'a living along the Nass River in northwestern British Columbia over a three-year period (1864-67) when a mission was established among the three lower villages of Quinwok, Lakunkedah, and Gitix.¹ As with so many missionary encounters, the journals, writings, and correspondence of the churchmen provide a detailed written historical record of quotidian life around the mission. Although not without their limitations, these documents offer a wealth of insights into an early period of sustained Native-European cultural encounter on the North Pacific Coast.

The initial founding of a CMS mission on the Nass was not the Nisga'a's first encounter with Europeans, nor with Christianity. In the early eighteenth century Russian trade goods were arriving on the coast, and by the last quarter of the century ships from Russia, Spain, Britain, and the United States came to explore and trade. Captain George Vancouver met a number of Nisga'a in July 1793 during his first voyage to the area in search of a northwest passage.² In 1829 Jonathan Green, a missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Hawaii, met Nisga'a and other Native peoples while touring the Northwest Coast to assess its potential for American missionaries. He took the advice of a Russian clergyman at Sitka, however, that the prospects for converting the local population were not good.³ The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) established the fur trade post of Fort Simpson on the lower Nass three years after Green's visit, only to relocate it to Tsimshian territory in 1834. Roman Catholic missionaries were evangelizing in the adjacent interior by mid-century, and their visit to the Nass in the 1860s helped to convince the CMS that the time was ripe for evangelization of the Nisga'a. Like the circulation of European goods long before Europeans themselves arrived, the Nisga'a had likely first encountered Christian ideas

and practices through the extensive trade networks with other indigenous peoples in more direct contact with the newcomers.⁴

Indirect and direct contact with Europeans had also brought new diseases to the Northwest Coast in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Nisga'a were affected in varying degrees by the epidemics that swept over the coast. The historical evidence is limited, but does offer a sense of the challenges faced by the Nisga'a in the years leading up to the arrival of the CMS mission. Robert Boyd includes the Nisga'a in what he calls the "North Coast Epidemic Area" in his extensive, if preliminary, study of the available data. Most of the people in this area suffered from the smallpox epidemics of about 1775 and 1836-38 and 1862-63, as well as the measles outbreaks in 1848 and 1868. In the smallpox epidemic of 1836-38 the disease was carried to Fort Simpson, in Tsimshian territory, on board the American coaster *La Grange* from Novo-Arkangel'sk or by a trading party of Stikine Tlingit. On 4 December 1836 fur traders observed that smallpox was on the lower Nass. Boyd estimates a thirty-three percent loss of population for the Nisga'a during this epidemic, a devastating but comparable loss to that experienced by other First Nations on the North Coast.⁵

The 1862-63 smallpox epidemic was introduced in British Columbia by a ship from San Francisco, which came to port at Victoria on 13 March 1862. By late April smallpox was spreading quickly through a temporary settlement of Haida, Tsimshian, Kwakwaka'wakw, Stikine Tlingit and other First Nations gathered for trading just outside Victoria. The colonial government soon restricted the entrance of First Nations into Victoria, and ordered those already present to return to their homelands. Boyd notes that "[b]y this very efficient means smallpox was transmitted to all the peoples of northern British Columbia."⁶ At least five hundred Tsimshian were lost at Fort Simpson. The inhabitants of the missionary settlement of Metlakatla were spared infection, however, due to the vaccinating efforts of William Duncan. The Nisga'a are estimated to have lost forty-three percent of their population in this epidemic. Although staggering, the estimated Nisga'a fatalities were below the sixty-two percent average loss for First Nations on the North Coast during this epidemic. Indeed, Boyd concludes that population survivorship and cultural continuity during the epidemics was greatest among the Tlingit and Tsimshian peoples.⁷

The above-mentioned epidemics influenced postcontact cultural change among Northwest Coast peoples, and provide an important context for the Nisga'a encounter with CMS missionaries. The presence of unusual sickness on the Nass in the years leading up to the arrival of Anglican churchmen likely affected the Nisga'a's responses to them. In one sense the presence of new diseases might have induced a number of Nisga'a to visit the missionaries in search of remedies. When a number of children became sick in the summer and fall of 1865, for example, Eagle (*Laxsgiik*) Chief Agwitlahah (Agwillagah) came down from his village of Gitwinksihlkw for medicine for his little boy. The Nisga'a looked to the churchmen as a possible source for the healing of a range of ailments for good reason. The missionaries purchased medicine in Victoria, and regarded ministering to the bodies of the Nisga'a as providing a good opportunity to tell them about Christianity. Even where medicine was not requested, the missionaries generally administered it when visiting the sick. In an example discussed below, an unnamed sick woman in the village of Lakunkedah who had been to Victoria requested that water be put on her. Seeing no great danger, the churchmen spoke to her on Jesus' death and gave her some medicine. Understandably, many Nisga'a associated the missionaries with medicine and healing. However, illness and death could equally turn Nisga'a away from the missionaries. As we will see, the opposition of Wolf (*Laxgibuu*) Chief Claytha (Klaytah) of Lakunkedah to the missionaries was in part guided by his belief they were conspiring with the shamans to kill the Nisga'a.

Nisga'a contact with European Christianity was intensified in 1857 when the CMS lay-missionary William Duncan established a mission among the Tsimshian at Fort Simpson. A number of Nisga'a heard Duncan's teachings there, and in 1860 the churchman accepted the invitation of Chiefs Kadounaha and Kinzarda (Kinsada) of Lakunkedah to visit them on the lower Nass.⁸ The Nisga'a's request for a missionary, and Duncan's favourable impression of them from his visits, contributed to the founding of a CMS mission among the lower Nisga'a villages in July 1864 under the newly-arrived Reverend Robert R.A. Doolan. We know surprisingly little about Doolan, especially when this is compared to our knowledge of his longer-serving coworker, Duncan. Doolan was a recent graduate of Cambridge University, where he had pursued a "Classical and Academical course of reading." The CMS thought his education would

prove particularly helpful in the translation of the scriptures. During his residence at Cambridge Doolan had apparently visited a district at Moduigley every week for the purpose of distributing religious tracts. In its opening letter to the missionary, the CMS Committee described Doolan as a man experienced in the realities of life. The Committee noted that it was confident that the ordained missionary's "extensive knowledge of men and of the world" from his past life would enable him to appreciate Duncan's value, and to give him a social precedence that Doolan could "well afford to concede."⁹ Doolan returned to England in 1867 after the sudden death of his father-in-law in order to fulfill a promise to his mother to return to her in case of such bereavement. For most of his brief time on the Nass the missionary was assisted by a trader named Robert Cunningham, who was sent with him to the Nass as a helper after no alternative could be found.

Cunningham was seen as being far from ideal for the post. Although familiar with the Tsimshian from trading as well as working on Duncan's vessel, the *Carolena*, the ex-prizefighter had little education or training. In addition, while Duncan was away from the new Christian village of Metlakatla in September 1864, Cunningham's relationship with Elizabeth Ryan, one of Duncan's Tsimshian students, was made clear by Ryan's pregnancy. Doolan married the two, and out of necessity Cunningham was sent to the Nass to assist the new missionary. He remained in the formal employ of the CMS while Duncan and Doolan awaited instructions from the Society. Cunningham continued to be connected to the mission even after the CMS authorized Doolan to dismiss him in the summer of 1866, however. To further ensure that Cunningham was no longer associated with the churchmen in the eyes of the Nisga'a, Duncan and Doolan granted him one hundred pounds "on the distinct understanding that he *at once* left the neighbourhood of the Mission." Nonetheless, the trader found employment with the recently re-established HBC post on the Nass.¹⁰ Doolan was further aided by a young Tsimshian from Metlakatla named Robert Dundas, who came with him to the Nass and assisted in the delivering of sermons in Tsimshian and Nisga'a until he too was dismissed for sexual impropriety.

As this brief description of the agents of the mission suggests, the CMS took very seriously its view of itself as the bearer of a new moral order that should come to extend

over all peoples, Native and non-Native. The roots of this universalizing tendency lie deep within the Christian missionary impulse and help to illuminate the churchmen's complex relationship to nineteenth-century colonialism. The Church Missionary Society, originally known as the Society for Missions in Africa and the East, was founded in England in 1799 by twenty-five members of the so-called Clapham Sect. The organization was born of the evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century, which Catherine Hall has described as "that re-emergence of vital, serious or real Christianity."¹¹ The movement had widespread appeal, inspiring adherents of both nonconformist churches and the Church of England. Evangelicals shared a common insistence on the centrality of individual sin and the conversion experience, and on the individual's capacity to be born anew and to construct a new Christian identity. The progress of each soul towards salvation depended on a close monitoring both by the individual and her or his pastor and congregation.

The evangelicals' missionary endeavours cannot be understood without reference to the dimension of faith that was at their centre. Although formally related to the Church of England, the CMS differed in its theological emphasis. The evangelicals who founded the Society believed the High-Church was not concerned enough with the imperative task before Christians of converting the heathen. Whereas more traditional Anglicans tended to regard society in static terms of hierarchical corporate bodies and social ranks, the evangelical-leaning CMS stressed the dynamic role of the free individual in transforming society. The evangelical impulse was motivated by an acute consciousness of sin as well as the potential for redemption through Christ. Salvation for many evangelicals was not a gradual or plodding process mediated by clergy but rather the result of an intense, emotional experience of being liberated from sin through an encounter with their Saviour. Michael Gauvreau writes that in the nineteenth century the "central core of meaning" of evangelicalism was provided by "a specific moment of personal encounter between the individual, who believed that he or she stood radically convicted of sin and guilt, and Christ, the personal Saviour, whose death and resurrection offered the divine grace of forgiveness and salvation."¹²

Indeed evangelicalism allowed direct experiential knowledge of Christ that continued as the individual sinner progressed along the path of salvation. This emphasis

on the personal, experiential quality of the individual's encounter with God distinguished evangelicalism from other forms of Christian belief and practice that relied on the mediation of church traditions, priests, and sacraments. In the view of nineteenth-century evangelicals, all human beings were sinners in need of redemption through God's grace. Although the latter was freely given, human agents and institutions could help by acting as conduits of this grace to others. Preaching and mission work were integral to this process. Finally, whatever their denominational or other differences, all evangelicals shared a conviction that the only solid basis for this work was the Bible.

The evangelical revival of the eighteenth century had made a religious jargon commonplace among the middle class by the mid-nineteenth century.¹³ A belief in the utter depravity of humankind, and conviction of the absolute necessity of finding a new sense of self in Christ as the only path to salvation were central to an evangelical project that compelled Christian men and women to bring the word to the "heathen" of the non-Christian world.¹⁴ The latter were that great mass of humanity beyond Christendom's traditional borders who had not yet received the benefits of the Christian revelation, but whose presence was increasingly unavoidable to an expanding Europe. The evangelicals, who affected every aspect of English society, had an acute conviction that it was only through the agency of men and women such as themselves that the new moral world would be created. The fervency of these Christians did not necessarily diminish when faced with others who did not share their enthusiasm or differed in belief. In many ways this difference only served to further demonstrate the necessity of their work. Indeed, the conviction with which the CMS missionaries and other evangelicals held their beliefs kept them in a relatively secure framework, one which permitted them to withstand the numerous difficulties arising from their attempts to share the absolutism of their faith with the Other.¹⁵ To the extent that CMS missionaries approached their mission with certainty, this was rooted in what they saw as their superior faith; they were possessed of the truth, *the* reading of the gospel.

As universal as evangelical moral discourse purported to be, the particular concerns of its proponents nonetheless reflected their subject position. In both its founders and the missionaries it dispatched to far-off places, the CMS was an organization of respectable middle-class Englishmen. By mid century an association

between the middle class and a Christian way of life had become foremost among the distinctive identities of communities and classes in English society, such that “adherence to evangelical protestant forms had become an accepted part of respectability if not gentility.”¹⁶ For the CMS missionaries, as for the supporters of the anti-slavery movement and emancipation in the 1830s discussed by Hall, “To be a supporter of the weak and dependent—women, children, enslaved people and animals—constituted a part of the ‘independence’ of middle-class masculinity.” Religious men like Duncan and Doolan forged their identities around the virtues of hard work, duty, diligence, and pride in physical hardship. They also shared with their class a disdain for those who tried to use property or inheritance to attain social standing. A suspicion of displays of wealth or what were deemed excesses in self-presentation stemmed from an aesthetic that sought to reflect a reserved, middle-class respectability, rooted in Christian sobriety. The Christianity of these evangelicals placed an emphasis on the responsible man who encouraged and corrected his dependents, all of whom had the potential to become new men and women.¹⁷

The potential equality of all peoples present in the Anglican churchmen’s rhetoric points to their ambiguous relationship with nineteenth-century British colonialism. Indeed, the CMS missionaries constructed their difference with their subjects in ways that only partially overlapped with other colonizers. Serious Christianity has been described as “profoundly meritocratic,” in the sense that at the heart of the religious community was spiritual equality: any individual could be redeemed through Christ.¹⁸ This inclusive or incorporative conception of the other resembles the temporal distancing characteristic of the medieval, Judeo-Christian vision of time described by Johannes Fabian. According to Fabian, this conception of time as a history of salvation differs from the secularization of time in post-Enlightenment thought, in which perceived temporal gaps are stabilized and rendered absolute.¹⁹ Significantly with respect to missions, this change of dominant paradigms in European discourses of difference gave rise to an important transformation in terms of how temporal relations were conceived. For example, Fabian sees the immutable distancing and separation of modern colonialism as based on this new secular conception of time. Fabian notes, however, that the earlier approach to otherness

would persist in discourses which were not secularized, such as those of Christian missionaries.

Nicholas Thomas has considered these two European approaches to difference and ways of perceiving others with respect to missionary propaganda. His analysis of the propaganda discourses of some early twentieth-century missions supports the view that their construction of difference was distinct from those of modern colonialism. Thus evangelical culture's relation of alterity could be quite distinctive. Yet missions undeniably had much in common with secular colonizers in other respects, as Thomas recognizes. This created "the complex deployment of shared metaphors and 'common ground' in texts arising from distinct interests and practical projects that were in tension if not mutually contradictory."²⁰ Understandably then, missionary enterprises tended to have an ambiguous relationship with the imperial and colonial societies with which they were related.

With respect to Anglican missions in nineteenth-century British Columbia, Brett Christophers has argued that religious belief, rather than racial type, was the main constituent of otherness in Anglican missionary discourse. Nevertheless, he points out that these missionaries could join middle-class Europeans in using a racial grammar for whites with less cultural capital or different moral sensibilities.²¹ Robert Doolan's writings are rife with similar tensions and contradictions as he was affected by prevailing racial discourses yet posited a potential equality with his subjects in Christianity. The churchman shared with other colonizers a view of the "dense darkness and superstition of the heathen." However, his use of such tropes differs from the essentialist understanding of racial types so evident in other projects. This difference lay in the CMS missionaries' particular construction of the supposed inferiority of the Nisga'a. In their discourse savagery was a precondition for their project of conversion. It could not therefore be permanent or immutable.²² The fundamental premise of the missionaries' efforts was an ethic of potential human equality in Christendom.

Still, as Christine Shaw argues in her study of Methodist missionary discourse in Halkomelem territory in the second half of the nineteenth century, the "equality" offered by Protestant missionaries could be restricted to the spiritual realm. Shaw finds that converted Aboriginal people nonetheless remained "Indians," and as such they were

denied equality with Protestant Christians both within the Methodist Church and in the emerging settler society of British Columbia.²³ As we will see, the means through which the Nisga'a were to achieve a state of equality with their Christian brothers and sisters required the complete transformation of their life ways. In addition, this assimilating colonialism contained another contradiction. The missionaries had to reconcile the desirability of proposing human equality with their will to control their subjects, not only as they progressed toward salvation but even after this was obtained.

Thus the missionaries' civilising project may have ultimately paralleled other colonial discourses in its desire to incorporate the other into a hierarchy in a subordinate position. Nonetheless, I would argue that in both the short and long term the churchmen's particular grammar of distancing, hierarchizing, and incorporating was potentially more easily destabilized than those of more secular colonialisms. The narrative of conversion enabled the missionaries to reconcile common humanity and hierarchy. Yet it simultaneously opened their relationship with their charges to the prospect of continual renegotiation, given the anticipated changes—through the process of conversion—in the spiritual deficiency that separated them. All distinctions created by colonizing projects were vulnerable to violation or absorption into those of the colonized, but those that sustained the missionary project were by definition temporary and thus especially insecure. It is perhaps most appropriate to view the CMS mission to the Nisga'a then as one of various colonial projects, with a particular understanding of the civilising process, which both paralleled and diverged from others in interest. As a colonial project it shared the objectives of distancing, hierarchizing, and incorporating, but the distinctive relation of alterity of evangelical culture gave its projects their own particular underlying ambiguities and contradictions. To be sure, the missionaries' representations of difference did not dictate Nisga'a responses. Still, for our purposes their comprehension is important for the profound effect they had on the cultural encounter, and the resources they could provide for various kinds of accommodation and struggle. It is to the subject of how best to examine the initial encounter between the CMS missionaries and the Nisga'a that we must now turn.

The history of the initial missionary encounter between the CMS and the Nisga'a was first attempted by the churchmen themselves. In their writings and correspondence

they attempted to relate their experiences through a genre of narrative realism. Why we cannot accept the missionaries' writings as sufficient accounts of the complex social forces of which they themselves were products will be discussed below in my handling of sources; suffice it to recognize here that the missionaries were prototypical subjects of a modern "history as biography," producing a range of heroic texts whose linear progression gave putatively sufficient accounts of human motives, actions, and consequences.²⁴ The history of Christian missionization in northern British Columbia was taken up soon after its inception by men who were sympathetic to the missionaries' attempts to implement their civilising projects and eager to record stories of their pioneering efforts for subsequent generations. Works taking this approach include those by Eugene Stock (1880), Henry Wellcome (1887), John Arctander (1909) and Joseph Moeran (1923).

The first professional historians who turned their attention to the history of missionization in British Columbia shared many of the aims and interests of their predecessors. Frank Peake's history of the Anglican Church in the province (1959) was produced in part to mark the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the first bishop's consecration, and tells a story of the unfolding of Anglicanism in the province from the earliest pioneering efforts. The life and works of early missionaries has been a subject of enduring interest among historians. Jean Usher (1974) and Peter Murray (1984) demonstrate a continuing fascination with William Duncan. The works of Margaret Whitehead (1981) and Vincent McNally (2000), among others, take up the history of the missions of the Catholic Oblates in the province from a missionary-centred perspective. These works have enriched our understanding of the motives, methods and personalities of the agents of the various missionary societies that proselytized in British Columbia, as well as their successes and failures as they attempted to implement their different projects. Although intellectual descendents of the hagiographical tradition, most works taking a missionary-centered approach are critical and nuanced in their assessment. More recent works acknowledge the agency of the indigenous peoples who interacted with the missionaries, a prerequisite for any satisfactory study of cultural interaction. Nevertheless, such approaches remain overwhelmingly preoccupied with the ideas and activities of those seen as the prime agents of historical change, namely the missionaries.

The history of the missionary encounter entered a new and arguably more comprehensive stage with the advent of monographs that considered the “response” of Native peoples to missionization. These include works by Robert Berkhofer Jr. (1965), Cornelius Jaenen (1976), James Axtell (1985) and Bruce Trigger (1987). Robert Berkhofer’s *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* is a pioneering monograph in its study of the process and effects of Christian missionization on Native societies. At this early stage, however, Native agency was conceived of in somewhat simplistic and even mechanistic terms. In a related article, Berkhofer concludes that “once autonomy is lost, the very nature of contact is determined by the nature of the culture in the dominant position. In other words, the Americans called the tune to which the Indians danced regardless of tribal culture.”²⁵ While novel in their approach, such works tend to generalize over the differing experiences between and within First Nations, presenting them as a monolithic entity in binary opposition to the settler society—another monolithic historical actor—with which they were locked in a fatalistic struggle.

Another early example of this approach, John Webster Grant’s *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (1984) remains the most comprehensive general overview of the history of Christian missionization in Canada. Grant’s chapter entitled, “A Yes That Means No?” examines the varied reasons for Native peoples accepting or rejecting Christianity, and questions the thoroughness of conversion in light of evidence of the continuity of more traditional practices. Significantly, Grant turns his inquiry away from sterile ethnocentric questions of sincerity and authenticity of conversion to an attempt to comprehend Native perceptions of their responses. “What did they conceive themselves to be doing, accepting and renouncing, in becoming Christian?” Grant asks. “How did they understand the relation between their Christian profession and what they had always been?”²⁶ In attempting to answer these questions, Grant raises the important issue of the transmission of a message across a cultural barrier. Grant conceives of his work as a corrective to traditional narratives, with their reduction of Native peoples to the role of passive recipients of missionary actions. Grant also recognizes the active role of Native missionaries and catechists in the missionary encounter, unsettling the difference and

dichotomy that constructed Christian and Native as opposites, and which previous histories had tended to accept from the missionary sources.²⁷ Still, in “round[ing] out the story,” Grant’s conception of power is underdeveloped, leading him to overcompensate in his depiction of Native agency. His conclusion that “[s]ince the Indians were under no direct compulsion to embrace Christianity, there could have been no native Christian communities unless they had voluntarily converted themselves” ignores more indirect forms of coercion and the exercise of hegemony.²⁸

Robin Fisher’s *Contact and Conflict* (1977) marks an equally significant turning point in the historiography of Aboriginal-Non-Aboriginal relations in British Columbia. Fisher takes issue with the dearth of studies on the relationship between First Nations and immigrant Europeans in Canada, and the ethnocentrism of previous historical works. The latter he finds consider Native peoples “only as they respond to the European economic system, accommodating to European demands rather than acting in terms of the priorities of their own culture.” Echoing Grant’s sense of his book as a corrective to the imbalances of previous scholarship, Fisher states that one of his purposes is “to establish the role of the Indians in the history of British Columbia.” This he does by taking an ethnohistorical approach, utilizing anthropological work to partially correct the imbalance created by relying solely on historical records written by Europeans.²⁹ A major premise of Fisher’s study is that there was a sharply definable shift in Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relations from the fur trade to the advent of settlement. The former period was marked by a kind of reciprocity that Fisher finds is best implied by the word “relationship,” whereas with settlement the word “impact” more appropriately “describes the effect of one culture on the other.”³⁰

Thus Fisher’s chapter on “The Missionaries,” whom he sees as part of the settlement frontier, correctly identifies missionaries as agents of culture change who “demanded even more far-reaching transformation than the settlers, and ... pushed it more aggressively than any other group of whites.” Ironically, given Fisher’s aim to demonstrate the role of First Nations in history, the picture that emerges is one of the incredible power and agency of these churchmen. Yet in keeping with his binary model of non-directed/directed cultural change, Fisher argues that on the fur-trading frontier First Nations responded to Christianity as they did to other aspects of European culture.

Namely, they were “free to select and reject as they pleased,” a conclusion echoed by Grant. Only settlement and the missionaries’ improved organization gave Native peoples “more compelling reasons to adopt Christianity in its entirety.” Here we see a consideration of the exercise of power in missionization, but only in its agentive mode, or power exercised in the purposive acts of the colonizer—and the colonized when applicable. Fisher concludes, for example, “The missionaries worked within the framework of governmental coercion established by the settlement frontier.” *Contact and Conflict* does demonstrate some appreciation of the complexity of the agency of all participants in the missionary encounter. This is particularly true in Fisher’s recognition of the various responses of Native peoples to Christianity, including syncretic blending of Christian with more traditional elements, or the observance of the forms, “but not the substance,” of the new religion. Still, Fisher’s assertion that “[i]t was only after the disruptive impact of settlement seemed to render old truths ineffectual that the Indians needed to turn to new ones” confines the undeniably complex and varied Native responses to Christianity to an almost mechanistic reaction to European forces.³¹

Like many students of missions in the Weberian tradition, Fisher chooses to use the concept of conversion as an analytical construct. Studies that do not accept the missionaries’ definition of conversion as being a voluntary transformation have tended to suggest that a rapid explosion of social horizons, such as occurs in situations of culture contact and colonization, often gives rise to a perceived need for a more highly rationalized faith than can be offered by indigenous religions. Whatever the merits of these religions in their own right, according to this analysis, they are “ill-equipped to make sense of the forces unleashed by European modernity.”³² Indeed, Fisher concludes, “Acceptance of missionary teaching by Indians was a sign that they sensed that their culture was undergoing major change and that they needed new knowledge to cope with their new situation.”³³ Changes in spirituality are thus regarded as responses of individuals to crisis. An assumption of this approach is that religions are mutually exclusive systems of belief, and thus spirituality drawing from more than one is “syncretic.” Acceptance of the European concept of conversion as an analytical tool is problematic, and has been seen by many as failing to grasp the varied, implicit, and clearly “syncretic” ways in which various aspects of the lives of missionized peoples

were changed by the evangelical encounter.³⁴ Thus, although intending to “establish the role of the Indians” in the history of their encounter with Non-Aboriginals, works taking this approach tend to present a picture of the overwhelming impact of external forces on Native peoples.

More recent ethnohistorical studies of missions have displayed a more sophisticated conception of Native-missionary interaction. These include works by Clarence Bolt (1992), Kerry Abel (1993), Martha McCarthy (1995), Elizabeth Furniss (1995), Laura Peers (1996), Michael Harkin (1997), Sergei Kan (1999), and Susan Neylan (2003). Bolt questions Fisher’s argument for the decline of Native cultures upon the onset of European settlement. He finds the most fruitful approach to the study of Native responses to European intrusion to lie in attempting to understand Native peoples’ reasons for their behaviour, what he calls “the Native perspective.” Bolt’s use of the singular raises questions of whose perspective from the myriad of interests and positions within Native societies should be elevated to the status of *the* indigenous response to missionaries—and of the wisdom of ignoring particularities of gender, rank, and age. Still, his work represents another important step away from the missionary-centered depictions that once dominated mission history.³⁵ Importantly, these works tend not to axiomatically view Native acceptance or adoption of Christian beliefs and practices as evidence of domination. An example of this is Peers’ examination of Salish perceptions of the Virgin Mary, in particular of the ways in which the Interior Salish “translated” the Virgin into a recognizably Plateau holy woman who could protect them through both Catholic powers and Plateau expectations. Such work suggests a greater complexity in Native responses to Christianity than a simple replacement of traditional religious beliefs and practices.³⁶

Some scholars taking an ethnohistorical approach have borrowed from the Russian semiotician Bakhtin the concept of dialogue to describe this complex interplay of participants in the missionary encounter. McCarthy conceives of aspects of the Oblate mission to the Dene as being a dialogue, but Harkin’s use of the dialogical model in understanding the missionary encounter and cultural change stands out as the most sophisticated use of this concept in a mission history. The concept of dialogue elucidates well the constant negotiation and change of meaning, the interplay among action and

reaction, domination and resistance that characterizes the postcontact histories of indigenous peoples. It also recognizes the reciprocity inherent in all conversation, even in discourses that deny the significance of the other. Dialogue does imply a certain equality that was too often lacking in the power relations between missionary and Native. Nonetheless it also equips us with a means of studying responses or “resistance” to the exercise of power, as Harkin argues. As hegemony is always partly implicit and even unconscious, resistance to dominant ideological structures is more likely to be found in the diverse ways in which those dominated contribute to the reshaping of public discourse, in various “countertexts” that play off, deflect, or reinterpret them, and only rarely oppose them directly.³⁷

A more nuanced understanding of the deployment of power is also reflected in Elizabeth Furniss’s study of the embracing of Catholicism by different sectors of nineteenth-century Secwepemc society. Like Peers, Furniss is interested in Native incorporation of colonial symbols of power. However, her focus is more on the long-term consequences for Native peoples when they employ colonial symbols to represent themselves to non-Native audiences in various contexts of interaction. Furniss also explores the broader circumstances that initially led Native peoples to adopt new cultural symbols. Although recognizing the strategic and creative ways in which First Nations used Christianity, Furniss employs the concept of hegemony to show how the Secwepemc chiefs’ incorporation of colonial symbols of power implicitly legitimated the very colonial regime that they later tried to oppose through their land claims.³⁸ In *Memory Eternal* Sergei Kan continues his focus on the symbolic and ideological aspects of Tlingit Christianization, while giving equal attention to the economic and sociopolitical dimensions of the Tlingit-Russian/American encounters. Kan explains that he now sees this process as “a problem in the interplay of power and meaning.”³⁹ Like Furniss, Kan is interested in not only symbolic appropriation but also its effects. He finds, for example, that Orthodoxy Christianity’s susceptibility to Native reinterpretation (being “Tlingitized”) meant that instead of becoming a hegemony that contributed to greater Euro-American domination, the religion became an institution that helped the Tlingit maintain their “respectability” in the eyes of Americans while also preserving key aspects of the traditional sociocultural order.⁴⁰

Interest in the protracted struggle for control of salient signs and symbols so evident in the history of missionary encounters stems from a more comprehensive understanding of power as a many-sided, often elusive and diffuse force. Works demonstrating this interest have not denied its material dimensions, but have brought to mission history a reminder that power is always implicated in culture, consciousness and representation. Foremost among such works is Jean and John Comaroffs' *Of Revelation and Revolution* (1991), which they describe as a study of "the colonization of consciousness and the consciousness of colonization." The Comaroffs share with other recent works an interest in issues of power, resistance, and agency. Specifically, they address the basic but troubling question of how structures of inequality in the colonial encounter were often created without conventional, coercive tools of domination. In attempting to address this historical problem the Comaroffs build on the insight from postcolonial studies that the essence of colonization lies less in political overrule than in seizing and transforming "others" by the very act of conceptualizing, inscribing and interacting with them on terms not of their choosing. To delineate this distinction in their analysis they divide power into "agentive" and "nonagentive" modes, the latter resembling the concept of hegemony articulated by Gramsci and Bourdieu.⁴¹

Identifying technologies and typologies of power is not new. Yet in turning their attention to the struggles between Native and missionary over such mundane or "external" things as the production of goods, notions of personhood, clothing and the nature of space, the Comaroffs illuminate a key battleground on which the missionaries and their subjects struggled to determine the shape of the indigenous world. This was, namely, the "taken-for-granted surfaces of their everyday worlds," the dominant construction of an increasingly shared reality.⁴² Like the exploration of different dialogues in Harkin's approach, here we are presented with a conversation between Native and missionary working on several planes. In the multiple dimensions of the encounter, the responses of Native peoples to missions are seen as largely a product of the balance of power, broadly conceived.

As the Comaroffs explore technologies of control running from coercion to implicit persuasion, so they conceive of modes of resistance as hovering between the tacit and the articulate. This conception of both power and resistance to power permits us to

better grasp Native peoples' complex responses to efforts to evangelize them. For example, a people exposed to missionization might resist the message of the churchmen, but nonetheless be profoundly affected by the implicit forms of the conversation as they engage with the taken-for-granted tropes of the colonizing culture. The latter included the unremarked ways of seeing and being, of construing and representing the world that accompanied the missionaries' message. The Comaroffs demonstrate this very process for the Southern Tswana, as does Furniss in her study of Secwepemc responses. According to the Comaroffs, the struggle between missionary and Native to determine the apparently established order of things was rarely equal, resulting over time in the diminishing of a colonized peoples' ability to harness the indeterminacies of meaning to their own distinct worldview. The Comaroffs' use of the concept of hegemony also helps us to more adequately comprehend what often appears to be a confusing muddle of elements of acceptance and rejection in indigenous responses to missionization. For hegemony is invariably unstable and vulnerable. Should internal contradictions or alternative meanings emerge in a dominant construction of reality, as was particularly likely to happen in the exchange between cultures, signifiers could be seized, sometimes refashioned, and put to unforeseen symbolic and practical ends.⁴³

Presumably if indigenous peoples proved more capable of imposing their designs on the colonial field—as they often were—they could resist the churchmen's hegemonic forms, and interpret their message largely on their own terms. Indeed Peers' study of Salish uses of the Virgin Mary suggests just this. Thus the Comaroffs' important work indicates the need to consider the operation of at least two planes of conversion or conversation in our assessment of the missionary encounter. To be sure there was much talk of the substantive message of the mission. But underlying this and determining to a large extent how this message would be received was an often quiet struggle between Native and missionary to gain mastery over the terms of the encounter, the particular construction of the shared reality in which the discussion would unfold. Such an approach to mission history allows us to convey a sense of the interplay of structural constraint and situational contingency. It permits us to see how the meeting of two worlds was driven by a logic that both transcended and shaped the explicit intentions of the actors, and how such forces worked themselves out in particular local circumstances.

With respect to the historiography of missions in British Columbia, two recent works should be noted here for their significant contribution. The first is Brett Christophers' *Positioning the Missionary* (1998). Although returning to a focus on the missionary as the title suggests, the book examines the complex and ambiguous relationship of Anglican missionary John Booth Good's civilising project for the Nlha7káp̓mx to other nineteenth-century colonialisms. In so doing, it contributes to a growing body of work that depicts colonialism as less a monolithic movement than a protracted struggle between ordinary people equipped with few resources and only partially coherent motives.⁴⁴ Christophers explores the tensions between secular colonizing discourses and missionary discourse, with their distinct ways of marking difference, as well as the contradictions inherent within the mission project. Significantly, Christophers reveals the uncertainties and anxieties that undercut European assertions of superiority, further nuancing any lingering images of the omnipotent missionary.⁴⁵ Thus from Christophers' approach we are able to see how the churchmen were themselves deeply affected by the encounter. This is a point the Comaroffs recognize occurred to some degree in the uneven balance of power, but do not develop. Christophers' concentration on the place of the missionary, however, comes at the cost of analyzing less thoroughly Nlha7káp̓mx responses to the mission.

Susan Neylan's recent *The Heavens Are Changing* applies many of the new approaches in the growing literature on Christianity in colonial contexts to the Tsimshian encounter with Protestant missions in the nineteenth century. Her work incorporates concepts of cultural hegemony, differing notions about conversion, discourse analysis, and the idea of missionization as a dialogic relationship. Following the Comaroffs' influential approach, here we see an understanding of the particular development of the missionary encounter as a function of the exercise of power. For example, Neylan views the symbolic practices that arose out of the mission context, such as the regimentation of time and space, as clashes of political and cultural hegemony. Her work gives particular attention to Native roles in missionization, and considers how specific processes such as naming practices and mission housing reveal the negotiation of Christian identities. Although employing the term conversion in her analysis, Neylan problematizes it by examining differing conceptions of or discourses about this process, particularly through

a consideration of its meaning to the Tsimshian. Neylan also uses concepts of syncretism, convergence, and dualism to further comprehend the nature of Tsimshian Christianization. The result is a study that skillfully conveys the complexity of Christianization, instead of merely presenting a narrative of oppositional forces, such as Native spirituality and Christianity or shaman and missionary. Significantly, the nature of available missionary sources enables Neylan to supplement the usual reliance on the Euro-Canadian historical record with Tsimshian writings, an obvious strength to her analysis. Finally, Neylan approaches her study of Tsimshian Christianity as an aspect of Native history, not simply an external force acting upon it, reflecting a larger move in the study of indigenous spirituality.⁴⁶

The standard and indeed only mission history on the encounter between the Nisga'a and agents of the Church Missionary Society is E. Palmer Patterson's *Mission on the Nass: The Evangelization of the Nishga (1860-1890)* (1982). The work provides a general overview of the first thirty years of the different Protestant missions to the Nisga'a, chronicling the trials and achievements of the different churchmen as they worked to introduce Christianity. The missionary-centred approach is evident in Patterson's structuring of his history in terms of the different missions and their missionaries. As Patterson puts it, his work contains "narrative descriptions of missionary-Indian interaction, missionary attitudes, actions, and responses to the Indians." To his credit Patterson also states that "[i]nsofar as possible," his work "also attempts to reveal something of the Indians and their response to the missionary from within the context of their own culture."⁴⁷ This is clearly a secondary priority in *Mission on the Nass*, however. Like earlier mission histories, Patterson defines the success or failure of the various missions to the Nisga'a according to missionary terms, accepting their concept of "conversion" as an indicator of Nisga'a acceptance of the Christianity presented to them by the churchmen.

A number of periodical articles Patterson wrote after this initial "exploratory effort" reflect the changing historiography of missions in turning more attention to Nisga'a responses to the encounter with the CMS. This later work emphasizes the agency of the Nisga'a in accepting Christianity. In particular, Patterson seeks to demonstrate the continuity of Nisga'a leadership as well as some of the ways in which

“The new was actively incorporated and synthesized to become part of Nisga tradition, accepted in ways congenial to the Nisga people and at their initiative.”⁴⁸ To be sure, Patterson’s exploration of the adaptive and selective responses of the Nisga’a to the Christian missions marks an important contribution. However, his analysis excludes any consideration of the drawn out, agonizing struggle between missionary and Native over the signs and practices of the Nisga’a world as the churchmen sought to remake them in their image. Rather, the desire to emphasize the Nisga’a’s “active part in securing the presence of missionaries” and their initiative in shaping the Christianity they ultimately adopted removes the missions from their colonial context. As with his contemporaries Whitehead, Grant, and Fisher, Patterson’s discovery of Native agency comes at the cost of depicting indigenous acceptance as an act of voluntary will made outside of unequal power relations.⁴⁹

Carol Cooper’s article on the experiences of Nisga’a and Tsimshian women during the fur trade and mission eras inserts the important question of gender into the debate over the effects that contact with whites and missions had on First Nations in British Columbia. Cooper clearly does not aim to provide an in-depth analysis of Nisga’a responses to Christianity, however, offering instead an economic explanation of how Nisga’a and Tsimshian women were not compelled to accept “the narrow domestic roles and notions of female submissiveness promoted by the missionaries.”⁵⁰ Work by anthropologists on the Nisga’a encounter with Anglican Christianity is virtually nonexistent. Most of the early ethnographies on the “Tsimshian,” which included the Nisga’a and Gitksan, were concerned with capturing an elusive pre-contact Nisga’a culture and society, a task that required identifying and filtering out Christian influences.⁵¹ This approach is not surprising given the dominance of the salvage ethnography paradigm at this time. Viola Garfield’s later discussion of new religious organizations introduced by church missions in *Tsimshian Clan and Society* (1939) is a notable but brief exception to this silence on indigenous Christianity.⁵² More recent anthropological studies of the Nisga’a and Tsimshian have continued this interest in traditional culture, including its modern expressions. An important recent exception is John Barker’s article, “Tangled Reconciliations” (1998), which takes an initial step in filling the gap in our understanding of contemporary Nisga’a Christianity. Given

Barker's exploration of current relations between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Nisga'a and "the politics of religious synthesis in the postmissionary world," he understandably glosses over six decades of missionary encounters.⁵³

This study cannot purport to address more than a fraction of this "long conversation" between the Nisga'a and Christian missionaries. Indeed it was the contemporary legacy of this sustained dialogue, coupled with a desire to understand colonialism "at the subjective, social, and spiritual levels," that first led me to this topic.⁵⁴ Given the energies required to properly engage a subject as rich as the historical roots of Nisga'a Christianity, and the constraints of an M.A. thesis, I decided to narrow my focus to the beginning, a logical place to start. Thus, this study differs from more traditional histories in its focus on a very brief period. My purpose is not to trace change over time, but rather to analyse the "moment" of establishment of the mission among the lower Nisga'a villages by offering a kind of snapshot of some of the events and conversations that shaped the initial encounter.

To be sure, a study of the first CMS mission to the Nisga'a villages on the lower Nass from its establishment in 1864 until it was moved to the new Christian community of Gingolx⁵⁵ three years later has its advantages. A microcosmic study of the opening of a new cultural and social space permits a close reading of the available sources. It also gives prominence to the individual actors who dot the record, allowing us to trace individual motives in the varied responses to the arrival of the mission, as well as to see the role of factors such as age and gender. Finally, focusing on the initial phase of the Nisga'a encounter with Protestant missionaries illuminates a significant dimension of early Nisga'a interaction with European outsiders. In this sense the establishment of the CMS mission can be seen as an extension of what Mary Louise Pratt calls the "contact zone" in an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjunctures, but whose trajectories now intersect.⁵⁶

The most readily accessible sources for this initial missionary encounter remain the journals, letters, and correspondence of the churchmen. Nisga'a oral tradition could potentially provide valuable insights on the opening acts of this encounter. However, my intention to provide a kind of "snapshot" of a narrow period in the mid-nineteenth

century has led me to rely on missionary sources for this preliminary examination of Nisga'a Christianity. Here we have a great deal of indirect evidence of Nisga'a reactions and conversations with the mission, of the ways in which they chose to express themselves. Robert Doolan's journal, consisting of over one hundred and seventy pages of daily events around the mission over a period of three years, provides a detailed account of many of the mundane events that were at the core of the initial missionary encounter. This is supplemented by over seventy pages of correspondence between Doolan, the CMS, and George Hills, Bishop of Columbia.

The historian needs no further reminder than this rich material that s/he is dealing with an encounter between two parties of unequal power. The missionaries conceived of themselves as makers of history, and spoke of and for the Nisga'a they met on the lower Nass, however limited their understanding of Nisga'a motives. The genre of narrative realism in which they wrote aimed to provide undistorted reflections of the world. Yet just as we cannot accept the churchmen's writings as a sufficient account of events of which they themselves were a part, so it would be a mistake to ascribe to them complete control over their texts.⁵⁷ Like all texts, they are polyvocal. Despite the missionaries' intentions, the silent "other" is present, in action, sign, and even their "dense darkness and superstition." Nisga'a "countertexts" can be found in disruptions in missionary discourse, giving lie to the churchmen's explanations of events.⁵⁸ So too do the anxieties and insecurities Doolan expressed in his journal serve to destabilize assertions about the universalism of his message. Indeed, it is the missionaries' particular status as obviously positioned observers in their texts that leads Michael Harkin to assert that they offer a more reliable record of culture change and resistance than early ethnographers, who worked under a paradigm of objectivity.⁵⁹ Missionary records, including those of the CMS, offer detailed descriptions of Native practices. The latter were recorded for a number of reasons, including the desire to convey the pre-missionized state of their charges, pure fascination, as well as to provide material for a metropolitan readership. Equally important for my purposes, the chronicle left by the missionaries reveals the symbolic and material bases of the encounter, the means by which the churchmen attempted to transform these, and the contestation this initiated.

My approach to the initial Nisga'a encounter with the CMS will build on many of the above-mentioned recent developments in mission historiography. Particularly important in framing my subject will be to understand the relation of the missionaries' civilising project with respect to other projects of nineteenth-century colonialism. The tensions and contradictions particular to European colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries identified by Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper can shed much light on the dynamic of the cultural encounter.⁶⁰ My work will also draw rather eclectically from the ideas of other scholars associated with postcolonial studies, including Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry and Gyan Prakash's discussion of the dislocation and transformation of colonial categories.⁶¹ I will also seek to demonstrate the connections between larger forces at play in the encounter and the lives of individual actors, as the trajectories of the former permeated and indeed were enacted through lived lives in a particular context. In this task recent studies of Christian missionization in different historical contexts will be especially helpful.

I see the concept of hegemony as particularly fruitful in enabling historians of missions to move away from a simple dialectic of domination and resistance in their efforts to understand the exercise of power in the mission context. Although, as I will argue below, the CMS churchmen's signs and practices did not become hegemonic in their initial encounter with the Nisga'a on the lower Nass, the concept is still useful in helping us understand the struggle over the forms of everyday life as they became arenas of contestation. The concept of hegemony will further illuminate how this struggle was enacted in the negotiation of Nisga'a identities. This was most evident in the young mission students who fashioned their lives from mission and more traditional ways. In this study I will consider the vulnerability of signifiers—particularly in a context of cultural encounter—and the consequences of this vulnerability for the transmission of meaning. I will give particular attention to the ways in which this uncertainty shaped the churchmen's message and the struggle over both the social and cultural meanings of aspects of daily life.

I concur with the Comaroffs in believing that conversion cannot be isolated as a relevant analytic category. My choice instead is to speak of a process of Christianization, like the adoption of other signs and practices the churchmen tried to inculcate. It is clear

this process was far from absolute, especially in the early period under consideration here.⁶² Still, it would be wise to remember John Barker's point that the coexistence of more traditional and Christian elements in popular religion is not in itself extraordinary—unless we presume that religions form logically coherent systems that must displace one another. Thus I will attempt to make the Nisga'a who interacted with the CMS mission and their religious and other experiences my focus, while not losing sight of the fact that the Christianization of the Nisga'a and other First Nations was inseparably caught up in the power struggle between missionary and Native, above all through the negotiation and contestation of meanings. For those Nisga'a who sought access to the new forms of spirituality and power evident in white society also risked becoming enmeshed in the power mechanisms that had been introduced to reconstruct their everyday lives and gain control over their means of producing social value. This complex interplay of agendas, of action and reaction, was clearly dialogical in its unfolding.

This analysis will examine three distinct yet interrelated dialogues that powerfully shaped the encounter between the Nisga'a and CMS missionaries in the opening years of their long conversation. The corporeal dialogue, that exchange concerning bodily practices, will be looked at through two aspects which were subject to considerable negotiation, namely mortuary practices and dress. From there I will move on to the material dialogue, which primarily occurred through the protracted struggle over the meanings of the many new goods entering the Nisga'a world. The CMS missionaries attempted to put these goods to the service of the word, as well as to inculcate a new set of material relations sympathetic to this task. The Nisga'a, however, used many of these new goods to symbolic and practical ends that buttressed their worldview. Finally, I turn to the spiritual dialogue, examining the desire of many Nisga'a for the education offered by the missionaries, but their rejection of the churchmen's demand that they surrender the socialization of their children to them. I will also highlight some of the fundamental obstacles to the missionaries' attempts to translate and transmit their message to the Nisga'a, as well as the negotiation of identities "in-between" worlds by the translator Robert Dundas and Doolan's students.

In a sense, my choice of these dialogues is quite subjective, reflecting my own dialogue with this subject. As Greg Dening writes, "The texted Past is always beached in

Presents that always re-invent it. It is never absolutely within the time of one culture: there is a joining as well as a division between Past and Present.”⁶³ Perhaps my particular texting of the past reminds us that the making of history is always one-sided and selective. Thus the analysis that follows makes no pretense of exhausting this subject. Indeed, other ways of framing and presenting it could certainly illuminate answers to questions different from my own. In following these dialogues through the opening acts of the Nisga’a’s long relationship with Protestant missionaries, this study will tell us something of the protracted struggle over particular meanings and of the capacity to make meanings in this encounter. It will also reveal the negotiation of power through mundane, quotidian practice. Closely linked to this process of negotiation are patterns of acceptance and rejection, in varying degrees, which merit their own attention. This study will underline the reciprocity inherent in the cultural encounter as well, even when denied. Finally, it also aims to convey the many complexities and contradictions inherent in such colonial projects.

¹ The Nisga’a are a First Nation who have lived in the Nass River watershed on British Columbia’s extreme northwest coast since time immemorial. They have been identified by a number of ethnographers as belonging to a “Tsimshian” culture group, which includes the Tsimshian proper on the coast and Gitksan in the interior, based on similarities of language and culture. See, for example, Viola E. Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, University of Washington Publications in Anthropology 7(3): 167-340 (Seattle: University of Washington, 1939). Marjorie M. Halpin, “The Tsimshian Crest System: A Study Based on Museum Specimens and the Marius Barbeau and William Beynon Field Notes,” Vancouver: University of British Columbia, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1972, writes that the people of the lower Nass called themselves the *g’itxat’i. ’n*, meaning “people using fish traps,” and were divided into two tribes: the *g’itxat’i. ’n* (proper) and the *g’itg’ig’E. ’nix*, who were a small offshoot population that moved a short distance upriver to the village of *antegwale’*. The three above-mentioned villages for the *g’itxat’i. ’n* formed with *g’itlax’a’us*, “people on the sandbar,” what Halpin calls nineteenth-century “totem pole” villages. *Quinwok* (Qwinwoch) meant “where people sleep” (when travelling), *Lakunkedah* (Angida), “where they catch eulachon with rakes,” and *Gitiks* “people of iks!” (an exclamation). The people of the upper Nass, who also interacted with the CMS mission, were the *g’itinwiliks*, or “people staying temporarily,” referring to their movement down the river at eulachon fishing time. They were divided into two tribes, the *g’itwinksilk*, who lived at the canyon, and the *g’itlaxda’.mks*, who lived upriver from them. Their respective villages were *Gitwinksihlkw*, “people of the place of lizards,” and *Gitlakdamix*, “people on the place of springs,” 16.

² George Vancouver, *Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World: Performed in 1790-1795 with the “Discovery” and the “Chatham” Under Captain George Vancouver*, v.2, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968) Originally published in 1798, 338-339.

³ For Green’s account of his encounters with the Nisga’a and other First Nations see Jonathan S. Green, *Journal of a Tour on the North West Coast of America in the Year 1829: Containing a Description of a Part of Oregon, California and the North West Coast and the Numbers, Manners and Customs of the Native Tribes* (New York: Chas. Fred. Heartman, 1915).

⁴ For example, the teachings of the *Wet’suwet’en* (Carrier) prophet or prophets associated with the name *Bini* (Pene), who was active from the 1820s to the late nineteenth century and whose teachings appear to have been influenced by Roman Catholicism, spread among the Plateau peoples and on to the coastal

peoples, including the Nisga'a. E. Palmer Patterson, "Early Nishga-European Contact to 1860: A People for "Those who Talk of the Efficiency of Moral Lectures to Subdue the Obduracy of the Heart,"" *Anthropologica* 25:2 (1982): 202-203; William Henry Collison, *In the Wake of the War Canoe: a stirring record of forty years' successful labour, peril & adventure amongst the savage Indian tribes of the Pacific coast, and the piratical head-hunting Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Islands, B.C.* (London: Seeley and Service, 1915) 10.

⁵ Robert T. Boyd, "Demographic History, 1774-1874," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Northwest Coast*, vol. 7, edited by Wayne Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1990): 141. Boyd estimates a pre-epidemic population of 2,423 and a post-epidemic population of 1,615. For figures for adjacent First Nations see Table 2. "North Coast Mortality from Smallpox, 1836-1837."

⁶ Robert T. Boyd, "Demographic History, 1774-1874," 142.

⁷ Robert T. Boyd, "Demographic History, 1774-1874," 144. The other area least affected by the epidemics according to Boyd was among the Halkomelem, Southern Coast Salish, and Northern and Central Nuuchah-nulth, 147.

⁸ For an account of this visit see Eugene Stock, *Metlakahtla and the North Pacific mission of the Church Missionary Society* (London: Church Missionary House, 1880) 80-83.

⁹ CMS to Robert Doolan. 2 February 1864. CMS C.1./L.3.

¹⁰ Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to Bishop Hills, Bishop of Columbia, at Victoria. 7 July 1866. CMS C.2./O. Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 6 July 1866. CMS C.2./O. Emphasis in original. See Peter Murray, *The Devil and Mr. Duncan* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1985) 95-96, for an account of Cunningham's relationship with Ryan. Duncan reported to the CMS in 1867 that Cunningham was indeed a "foul sensualist." William Duncan, Journal. 20 September 1867. CMS C.2./O.

¹¹ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 86.

¹² Michael Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed: Personal Piety and the Evangelical Social Vision, 1815-1867," *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760 to 1990*, edited by G.A. Rawlyk (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) 51.

¹³ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 25.

¹⁴ Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) notes that the CMS preferred to label anyone not Christian as "heathen," seldom making any further distinction, such as between Native and Métis, for example, 140.

¹⁵ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 93. The strength of evangelical conviction to withstand challenges is suggested by Hall elsewhere when she writes, "The experience of conversion, so central to Evangelical belief, and the consequent commitment to a new life governed by faith, gave men the confidence to insist on their truths, even when this meant fundamental challenges to received wisdoms," *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 207.

¹⁶ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 76.

¹⁷ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 27; 34-36.

¹⁸ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 77.

¹⁹ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 26.

²⁰ Nicholas Thomas, "Colonial Conversions: Difference, Hierarchy, and History in Early Twentieth-Century Evangelical Propaganda" *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* (1992): 369. Thomas notes that this is a theme addressed in a separate work of Fabian's, "Religious and Secular Colonization: Common Ground," *History and Anthropology* 4:2 (1990): 339-55.

²¹ Brett Christophers, *Positioning the Missionary: John Booth Good and the Confluence of Cultures in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998) 43-50.

²² Nicholas Thomas, "Colonial Conversions," writes, "If savages are quintessentially and irreducibly savage, the project of converting them to Christianity and introducing civilization is both hopeless and worthless," 374.

²³ Christine Shaw, "Sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in their right mind": The Convergence of Religion, Culture and Race in Missionary Discourse in Halkomelem Territory, Southern Coastal British Columbia, 1850-1900" (Victoria: University of Victoria, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, 2001) 30.

²⁴ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 35.

²⁵ Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *Salvation and the Savage: An Analysis of Protestant Missions and American Indian Response, 1787-1862* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965); "Protestants, Pagans, and Sequences Among the North American Indians, 1760-1860," *Ethnohistory* 10:3 (1963): 201.

²⁶ John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) 249.

²⁷ Notable exceptions to this in the context of Native mission workers in British Columbia are Margaret Whitehead, "Christianity, a Matter of Choice: The Historic Role of Indian Catechists in Oregon Territory and British Columbia," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 72:3 (July 1981): 98-106, and E. Palmer Patterson, "Native Missionaries of the North Pacific Coast: Philip McKay and Others," *Pacific Historian* 30:1 (Spring 1986): 23-37.

²⁸ John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 239.

²⁹ Ethnohistorical methodology can include much more than anthropological insights of course.

³⁰ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977) x; xiii; xv. Forrest La Violette, *The Struggle for Survival: Indian Cultures and the Protestant Ethic in British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961) makes a similar distinction between social changes introduced by the fur trade, "based upon casual and informal contacts," and those introduced by the missionaries, "based upon an institutionalized mode of cultural dismemberment and reconstruction," 24. A number of scholars are uneasy with this simplistic dichotomy. See, for example, Elizabeth Vibert, *Traders' Tales: Narratives of Cultural Encounters in the Columbia Plateau, 1807-1846* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Daniel Clayton, *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000); and Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997).

³¹ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 145; 123-4; 140-42; 124.

³² Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 249.

³³ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 124.

³⁴ See Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 249-251, for an example of this criticism.

³⁵ Clarence Bolt, *Thomas Crosby and the Tsimshian: small shoes for feet too large* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992) xii.

³⁶ Laura Peers, "'The Guardian of All': Jesuit Missionary and Salish Perceptions of the Virgin Mary," *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, Jennifer H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, editors (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1996) 300.

³⁷ Martha McCarthy, *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995) xxii; Michael Harkin, *The Heiltsuks: Dialogues of Culture and History on the Northwest Coast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 99.

³⁸ Elizabeth Furniss, "Resistance, Coercion, and Revitalization: The Shuswap Encounter with Roman Catholic Missionaries, 1860-1900," *Ethnohistory* 42:2 (Spring 1995): 246; 253.

³⁹ Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1999) xxii.

⁴⁰ Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal*, xxx.

⁴¹ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, xi; 15. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 328, 348 and Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 167.

⁴² Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 313.

⁴³ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 311; 18.

⁴⁴ See Nicholas Thomas, "Colonial Conversions," and Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, editors (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): 1-56 for discussions of the heterogeneity of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialisms.

⁴⁵ Derek Peterson and Jean Allman, "Introduction: New Directions in the History of Missions in Africa" *The Journal of Religious History* 23:1 (February 1999) note the persistence of a similar image in the

historiography of African missions, writing “Whether celebrated as an heroic, civilizing agent in mission accounts or branded as a cultural imperialist in nationalist-era scholarship, the European missionary remained an actor scarcely soiled by the cultural commerce of the people on whom he worked,” 1.

⁴⁶ Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003) 6. For a discussion of the inadequacy of understanding indigenous Christianity solely in terms of the missionary encounter with traditional religions see John Barker, “Introduction: Ethnographic Perspectives on Christianity in Oceanic Societies,” *Christianity in Oceania: Ethnographic Perspectives*, edited by John Barker (New York: University Press of America, 1990): 1-24. For an example of a work examining Christianity as an aspect of Native culture in British Columbia, see Robin Ridington, *Trail to Heaven: Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1988).

⁴⁷ E. Palmer Patterson, *Mission on the Nass: The Evangelization of the Nishga (1860-1890)* (Waterloo: Eulachon Press, 1982) xii.

⁴⁸ E. Palmer Patterson, “George Kinzadah—Simoogit in his Times,” *BC Studies* 82 (Summer 1989): 37.

⁴⁹ In her analysis of conversion among the nineteenth-century Tsimshian, Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, makes the important point that although voluntary transformation is at the centre of evangelical definitions of conversion, “the presence of Euro-Canadian coercion and imbalanced power relations inherent in the process of missionization on the North Coast suggests that ultimately this spiritual shift was not entirely one of free choice,” 21.

⁵⁰ Carol Cooper, “Native Women of the Northern Pacific Coast: An Historical Perspective, 1830-1900,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27:4 (Winter 1992): 44-75.

⁵¹ See, for example, Edward Sapir, *A Sketch of the Social Organization of the Nass River Indians*, Anthropological Series 7, Geological Survey Bulletin 19 (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1915). See Michael Harkin, “(Dis)Pleasures of the Text: Boasian Ethnology on the Central Northwest Coast,” *Gateways: Exploring the Legacy of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, 1897-1902* (Washington, D.C.: Arctic Studies Center, Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 2001) 93-105, for a discussion of the limitations of early ethnographies given this approach.

⁵² Viola E. Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*. Garfield devotes seven pages to this subject under the heading “Modern Social and Religious Activities,” 317-23.

⁵³ The collection of essays in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present*, edited by Margaret Seguin [Anderson] (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984) offers some sophisticated examples of recent ethnographical work on the Tsimshian peoples, including the Nisga’a. John Barker, “Tangled Reconciliations: The Anglican Church and the Nisga’a of British Columbia,” *American Ethnologist* 25:3 (1998): 433-51.

⁵⁴ Erica-Irene Daes, “Prologue: The Experience of Colonization Around the World,” *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000) 7.

⁵⁵ Doolan refers to the village as “Kincaulith” in his journal, and elsewhere it has been referred to as “Kincolith,” both anglicized versions of *Gingolx*, or “the place of scalps,” the Nisga’a name for the site.

⁵⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) defines the contact zone as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict,” 6-7.

⁵⁷ Some works examining European colonizing discourses have come close to attributing this kind of power to these texts, even if unintentionally. For example, Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), writing of the relationship or rather lack of relationship between the accounts of early observers in America and their supposed referent, attributes their construction almost entirely to particular European methods of cognizance. Pagden writes, for example, that “the distance between the kind of explanatory accounts of Indian behaviour current in the sixteenth century and those which had come into use by the beginning of the eighteenth must be measured in terms of historical changes which had little or nothing to do with the presence of the real world of America,” 3. For a firm rebuttal of the idea of the polyvalence of texts see Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), who holds that the colonial subject, so long as he or she remains in the shadow of imperialist discourses, can exist only as a sign of an irretrievable consciousness, 28.

⁵⁸ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 189.

⁵⁹ Michael Harkin, "(Dis)Pleasures of the Text," 94.

⁶⁰ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony." Cooper and Stoler focus on a set of tensions particular to European colonialism/imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the fundamental contradictions inherent in bourgeois projects and the way universal claims were bound in up in particularistic assertions.

⁶¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) defines colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other." From the perspective of the colonizer, this Other is to mirror or mimic the colonizer, yet remain slightly different, 153. Gyan Prakash, "Introduction: After Colonialism," *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, edited by Gyan Prakash (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 3-17, argues that colonial categories were never instituted without their dislocation and transformation.

⁶² Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 249.

⁶³ Greg Dening, *The Death of William Gooch: A History's Anthropology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995) 24.

Chapter Two: The Corporeal Dialogue

However much they may have believed in the transformative abilities of the word as manifested in the gospels, neither Robert Doolan nor other contemporary Protestant missionaries seeking to extend the domain of Christianity along British Columbia's North Pacific coast in the mid-nineteenth century were content to trust in its power alone. Doolan's enthusiasm for rapid and extensive cultural change among the Nisga'a demanded his utmost efforts and diligence in all spheres of daily life. Matters as mundane as personal hygiene and corporeal presentation had to be cultivated as assiduously as the learning of new hymns if conversion was to be total.

The Nisga'a were far from passive recipients of such concerted agency. The range of heroic texts that have come down to us were produced by prototypical subjects of a modern "history as biography." Yet the churchmen denied the same subjecthood to the people with whom they interacted and by whom they justified their vocation.¹ It is precisely silences such as this—present in all accounts of human motives, actions, and consequences, regardless of claims of sufficiency and completeness—that necessitate that others such as the historian, and certainly aboriginal peoples like the Nisga'a themselves, critique and supplement dominant depictions of the past. Although the *raison d'être* for my work rests on the insufficiency of the missionaries' analytic accounts of complex social forces of which they themselves were products, the historian of the initial cultural encounter between the Nisga'a and emissaries of the Church Missionary Society in the 1860s is nonetheless left with these texts as the basis of analysis. Still, we need not despair in our attempt to offer an account of this encounter that can reveal to us something of the complex array of Nisga'a responses to efforts to evangelize them. The profound forces that motivated both Nisga'a and missionary emerge not so much from the content of the stories we have of them as from their poetics—in other words, from their unselfconscious play on signs and symbols, their structures and silences and their implicit references. Special attention must be paid to the actions and gestures of the participants in the conversation, which often speak as poetically as their words. As the Comaroffs observe, "practice is never shaped by utility alone; its form always exceeds its function."² Their point is that the actions of both missionary and Nisga'a often served multiple functions, achieving their ostensible aim but also articulating other desires. This

is seen for example in the churchmen's decision to make the practice of burial into an exercise in moral instruction, a theme taken up below.

This insight regarding the poetics of cultural encounter is particularly appropriate in any attempt to understand the corporeal dialogue between the Nisga'a and the CMS: the exchange of words, symbols and actions concerning the body. As Michael Harkin points out in his study of Heiltsuk responses to the evangelizing efforts of Methodist missionaries, European colonialism coincided with the development of powerful discourses and technologies of the body, making bodily practices a conscious object of colonial and missionary policy. Borrowing from Foucault the insight that power is centrally exercised through the domain of the body, in the most ordinary of bodily practices, Harkin points out that modern institutions such as clinics and prisons reached a peak of efficiency at precisely the moment Euroamericans began overtly to colonize, rather than trade with, Native peoples of the Northwest coast.³ Perhaps not surprisingly then, we see a vigorous exchange over the body between the Nisga'a and Anglican missionary Robert Doolan and the sometime trader and lay missionary Robert Cunningham from the opening acts of their conversation. Each party brought to the dialogue highly developed—and at most only partially overlapping—assumptions about the body's signifying capabilities.

Tracing the corporeal dialogue through its embryonic stages we find, not surprisingly, that the Nisga'a accepted a number of new notions of the body while rejecting and fiercely opposing others. The Nisga'a frequently rejected missionary attempts to reform their world, and just as often deflected them to their own purposes. They were nonetheless powerfully and profoundly affected by the forms by which the colonizing culture attempted to insinuate itself, namely the hegemonic signs and practices of English culture. In their dialogue with the CMS missionary Robert Doolan in the opening years of their evangelization, the Nisga'a who came into contact with CMS missionaries in the lower villages retained much of their traditional understanding of the body and their place in the world. They incorporated and accommodated elements seen as desirable in a rapidly changing material and symbolic order, including almost inevitably some of the very forms of the colonizing culture with which they were engaged in dialogue and in which they found themselves increasingly enmeshed.

Whether some usages insinuated themselves into the everyday world of the Nisga'a, or became the object of contest and conflict, appears to have depended much on how they were perceived according to the internal logic of Nisga'a culture. Yet Nisga'a culture was far from static. Nisga'a and English life ways already had some commonality of horizons at the time of Doolan's arrival on the Nass in 1864, stemming from an almost uninterrupted dialogue that began with initial encounters at the end of the eighteenth century. The changing and expanding elements of this common space in the context of cultural contact changed the phenomenological world of both Nisga'a and English. Knowledge of this pre-existing dialogue, along with an appreciation of the dynamics of the Nisga'a cultural system, helps us to understand the ease with which they could accept such changes as the adoption of English dress or the closely allied ideologies of progress and civilization.

As the primary medium through which all human beings experience their existence, the body serves as a powerful organizing tool for comprehending the world, providing a rich repertoire of metaphors and analogies that derive their power from familiarity. That such familiarity is culturally constituted or created out of shared experience has given rise to very different conceptions of the body across cultures. In her examination of the impact of colonization on Aboriginal health in British Columbia during the first half of the twentieth century, Mary-Ellen Kelm notes that as the forces of society and culture acting on the body are never static, so the body is always changing. Through its permutations the body itself becomes a subject of history.⁴ While not without their areas of commonality, the Tsimshian-speaking cultures of which the Nisga'a were a part clearly conceived of the boundaries between bodies differently than did Robert Doolan, who came from a culture that placed emphasis on the agency of the individual. Two experiences of the Nisga'a in their encounter with Doolan—one dealing with death, the other sickness—help to illuminate Nisga'a understandings of the body at this time. In 1864, during Doolan's first winter on the Nass near the village of Quinwok, the northernmost of the three lower Nisga'a settlements, the body of a young chief who had died while up the river attending a feast was returned to the village. His relatives attributed his death to the workings of a man believed to be a *haldaugit*,⁵ best translated as 'witch,' "as he was seen to walk three times around the dead man's house." Ever the

proponent of burial, Doolan observed that the chief's body was burnt. "Some wanted to bury it but one of his wives strongly opposed it. She had fed him when unable to feed himself, and she was afraid that as she had chewed the food before giving it to him so as his decayed, parts of her body would also decay."⁶ In the spring of 1866, during what appeared to be another wave of sickness sweeping over the Nass, a man caused great excitement by claiming to have found in a canoe down the river what had been the cause of so many deaths. The source, Doolan wrote, was "an old box filled with bones, old hair, rags, +c. These they affirm have been placed there by some enemy of the deceased persons and have worked their death."⁷

These incidents convey both a sense of the links between bodies and of the body being embedded in cosmological power relations, acting or being acted upon depending on its access to supernatural powers. Significantly, the types of relations among people in the Nisga'a life world were wide-ranging, and each required continual management. Doolan wrote with puzzlement of a "strange custom" among the Nisga'a regarding the succession of hereditary titles. "If a big chief dies and leaves no relatives of sufficient wealth and standing to take his place, two of the nearest relatives put together their property, and both take the name. And if two chiefs die with a little property, and the nearest relative is wealthy, he takes their property and both their names."⁸ For the nineteenth-century Nisga'a, human descendants circulated through a series of fixed identities based in a household, whose characteristics were described in hereditary chronicles where these names engaged in specific tasks at specific locations. Through these sacred histories, or *adawx*, people, events, and places were interlinked through successive reincarnations.⁹ In fact the Nisga'a idiom for the transfer of names was that a person (or in this case persons) was given to the name, not the reverse. The eternal names kept by each group were an institution or the soul of a corporation.¹⁰ The importance placed on the filling of these names, and thus on ensuring that the roles in the social order they represented were fulfilled, meant that more than one person could be given to a name. Conversely, one person could be given to several names, depending on the nature of the name and the abilities of the prospective recipients.

The missionary's confusion underscores a significant tension in the dialogue between Doolan and the Nisga'a, one rooted in starkly different conceptions of the body.

The salvationist discourse of the evangelical Church Missionary Society required that the prospective convert have a sense of an individual soul for which he or she was responsible. The key human responsibility was to accept Christ as one's Saviour, an act that Doolan struggled to present as a matter of individual choice. According to this recasting of the Nisga'a body, titles and names could not shift apparently amorphously across bodies. Each individual body possessed a soul in need of redemption from its original state of sin, ordering a new moral responsibility in the subject not so much independent of existing social relations as superceding them by virtue of its basis in personal conscience.

In his efforts to refashion the Nisga'a body into conceptions that would foster individual acceptance of Christianity, Robert Doolan set about juxtaposing Nisga'a practices with those he wished to instill. This construction of a grammar of difference was not unique to the evangelization of the Nisga'a. All colonizing discourses, particularly those that have not yet established a structure of formal political overrule, rely on transforming "others" by conceptualizing, inscribing, and interacting with them on terms not of their choosing. Missionaries initiate a dialogue by presenting a "package" of their own culture, in explicit contradistinction to the indigenous culture. This process causes the latter to think consciously about their own culture. Over time, the juxtaposition of this culture package with the hitherto taken-for-granted contributes to the articulation of a concept of tradition, as long-established cultural practices are more consciously recognized as such and become tools for meaningful action.¹¹ Doolan's presentation of two bodily practices will be considered here. In his three years among the Nisga'a, the churchman struggled to maintain clear distinctions between traditional Nisga'a mortuary practices and forms of presentation through dress on the one hand, and those of the colonizing culture that he wished to cultivate on the other. In the opening drama of the encounter between the Nisga'a and the CMS, these cultural domains became the subject of contest, although taking widely divergent forms. For what was at stake was the deployment and imposition by the colonizer of cultural practices that presupposed the inferiority of existing ones.

For many Tsimshian-speaking peoples in the historical period, upon the death of a community member the house and clan of the deceased distributed marmot skins and

arranged the funeral. The preparation of the body and conducting of the funeral ceremonies was a final obligation of the house of the deceased's father.¹² The body was cremated at a location unique to each traditional village, ideally on a clear day when the smoke could rise in an uninterrupted flow.¹³ Chiefs were particularly likely to be cremated so their heirs could assume the full authority of the title. The form of burial was often related to rank. For example, shamans were taken with their paraphernalia to an isolated place such as a cave. The location would only be known to the family, who would use it to quest for the return of these powers to kin. Corpses could also be eviscerated and then placed in a box that would be secured high in a tree or atop a pole, a practice known as pole burial. However, it appears that the Nisga'a also practised a form of ground burial, perhaps adopted from traders or other missionaries in the first half of the nineteenth century, which Doolan regarded as preferable.¹⁴

Seeing this last practice as closest to the Christian burial he hoped to inculcate in Nisga'a culture, Doolan assumed a prominent place within its performance, from which he hoped to promote its association with Christianity. Susan Neylan has noted how missionaries frequently defined positions in terms of stark dichotomies. That which was most opposed by the missionaries was deemed un-Christian and vice versa, such that Christianity could become synonymous with anti-potlatching, for example.¹⁵ In a similar fashion the CMS missionaries attempted to construct a binary between burial and other mortuary practices such as cremation. The importance of redrawing traditional Nisga'a burial practices lay in the fact that Anglicans had as their main reference the body itself, which became the objectified form of the spiritual state.¹⁶ Numerous entries in Doolan's journal, chunks of which were sent back to the CMS in London as updates on the missionary's progress and to provide material for publicizing the Society's work, mention Nisga'a being buried. The implication seems to be that this practice was being consciously pursued as a move toward Christianity, and not something that was already present within Nisga'a culture.

To be sure the churchmen encountered Nisga'a who through exposure to Christianity elsewhere, particularly at Victoria and Metlakatla, had begun to associate burial with this new source of supernatural power. During his first winter on the Nass, Doolan crossed the river to the village of Lakunkedah (Ankida) to see a sick woman who

had spent some time in Victoria and attended the Roman Catholic chapel while there. Doolan and Cunningham could not understand the woman's husband at first. With the help of their interpreter, a young Tsimshian from Metlakatla named Robert Dundas, the missionaries learned that the woman "wanted water put on her," and did not wish to live. Further, Doolan noted "[s]he wanted when she died to go to Jesus. She also wished to be buried, not as is the usual custom to be burnt after she was dead."¹⁷ Predictably, Doolan spoke to her about the Saviour's death and gave her some medicine, a ritual many Native peoples had come to expect from white missionaries. Believing herself to be near death, the sick woman affirmed before the missionary the hallmarks of the new power he represented as she saw them: baptism, joining Jesus in the afterlife, and burial. Yet, in a recurring pattern of selective Nisga'a acceptance of the Christianity presented to them by the CMS in this initial period, the sick woman's beliefs were not expressed as the churchmen would have liked. Later, after the woman's recovery, Doolan was disappointed to find "her good thoughts have apparently all gone," observing he never saw her at meetings. The sick woman's desire for burial and her association of it with the mission did not apparently extend to wanting to attend sermons.

There is some evidence that Doolan's efforts to recast burial as a Christian practice, and to circumscribe cremation to a heathen past, gained currency among those Nisga'a who found themselves increasingly identifying with his message. For these people the practice of burial became a symbolic step in the Nisga'a's move toward Christianity. This typology took root in Cowcaelth, a young man trained to be a *gits'oonk* or *halaayt* carver but who had from a young age studied with Doolan before deciding to use his skills as a mission carpenter. On the death of Cowcaelth's uncle Doolan wrote that "he is going to bury him, and not, as is the usual custom, burn his body. He has determined after he has distributed his uncle's property, and what is in his possession of other Indians, to relinquish this custom, thus breaking another chain that binds him to heathenism."¹⁸

However, for the vast majority of Nisga'a who interacted with the mission, the missionary's distinction did not insinuate itself into their everyday world. Though forced through their dialogue with Doolan on burial practices to engage with his dichotomization of rites into heathen and Christian, this ordering did not become

hegemonic. The Nisga'a refused to respect a division that denied them control over their cultural priorities, transgressing the system of distinction the missionaries attempted to place over mortuary practices. For example, Doolan noted on 5 June 1865 that a child to whom he had been attending had died that day and was burned, adding "the mother cut her hair close as a sign of mourning."¹⁹ This Nisga'a mother had evidently been willing to turn to the mission for help in curing her sick child, but she did not accept all of the churchmen's practices, as Doolan duly noted. So too traditional ideas about bodies and their ability to transmit power continued to govern the choice of burial. This we have seen in the above-mentioned opposition of one of the wives of the young chief who had died while attending a feast upriver in February 1864. Although as Doolan noted some had wanted to bury the body, the woman had chewed her husband's food when he was unable to feed himself, and feared from this that her body would decay with his. Her insistence on cremation may also have been shaped by the suspicion that the young chief's death had been caused by witchcraft. Indeed, after his body was brought down the river a man kept watch near the mission house all night, waiting to see if a man from the lower village suspected of causing his death would return to circle the dead chief's house once again.²⁰ The body of the deceased clearly retained powers and relations to the living that informed Nisga'a decisions of whether or not it should be buried.

The complex interweaving of Nisga'a acceptance of aspects of missionary authority with their own persistent conceptions of the body is further evident in their response to Doolan's care of Cowdaeg. The young chief was the only survivor in a canoeing accident that took the life of his uncle, Chief Kadounaha of Lakunkedah, and five others while on an expedition to trap martens in December 1866.²¹ Doolan decided to cut off the frostbitten toes from Cowdaeg's left foot, provoking a response he did not expect from such a procedure: "Six or seven old women, who had come in, as soon as the operation was over, began to scream and cry out. As the noise was heard thro' the camps others came in, till the crying was most distressing to hear."²² The toes were carefully wrapped in some cloth, and put away in a box to be buried with Cowdaeg upon his death. Seeing an opportunity to speak to those present on "the frailty of our bodies and the wisdom to take care of our souls," Doolan took up the rotten toes, but was stopped when "an old woman snatched them out of my hand, and put them away."²³ Once separated

from his body, Cowdaeg's toes would remain in need of safekeeping during his life to prevent their being used by someone with evil intentions to harm the boy. Although willing to defer to Doolan's authority in certain matters, the Nisga'a were not prepared to accept as axiomatic a Christian conception of the body.

Both the Nisga'a's acceptance of Doolan's interference in their burial ceremonies and their frustration at his attempt to cast this rite in Christian terms can be attributed at least in part to their own expectations of the missionary. Wolf Chief Claytha of Lakunkedah, a brother of the drowned Chief Kadounaha and a vocal critic of Doolan, caused much distress in Cowaikik. The young man had recently sold his "medicine tools," but Claytha explained to him that Doolan was not what he claimed to be. Doolan wrote that Claytha had noted his absence when the body of Kadounaha was brought up to the village, which, according to the missionary, the chief thought he should have met and prayed over. Claytha had apparently seen the priests further south praying over the dead and was astonished that the missionary who had come to them did not do the same. Therefore, he advised Cowaikik to stay away from Doolan "till the true teachers came."²⁴ Informed by both their understanding of the role of white missionaries elsewhere, and their own experience interacting with Doolan, the Nisga'a opened a place for the missionary within their burial practices. However, Doolan's colonizing discourse precluded him from filling this place in any satisfactory way, insofar as their place for him did not overlap with the role he envisioned for himself.

Doolan had little power to intercede with the burial arrangements of those relatively outside the sphere of the mission, and thus had to content himself with commenting on those Nisga'a practices he witnessed. Such was the case in March 1866 when the missionary went to visit Cowdaeg. After his father's arrival Cowdaeg had moved with him into the house of the late Chief Kadounaha. On arriving Doolan noted with some shock that "The body has not yet been buried, tho' the accident happened last Christmas." The churchman described in detail the circumstances in which he found the chief's body. "I saw it in a box covered with a large blue blanket studded with buttons of mother of pearl," he noted, adding "and at the end of the coffin were instruments used in the medicine work, and at the foot, an old hat box." At the other side of the house Doolan found another box similarly covered, with food near it. He explained, "This

represented his wife, whose body was not found.”²⁵ The missionary’s account suggests the continuing strength of Nisga’a burial practices at this time, as well as his inability to intervene in their execution when a place was not opened for him. Far different was this environment than the one Doolan found in the Christian community of Metlakatla the following January when filling in for Duncan. Shortly after New Year’s Day Doolan buried Agnes Tait, a “female inmate at [the] mission house.” To the visiting churchman, “The bell, sounding across the waters, as we rowed to the burying ground, had a very solemn warning.”²⁶ Here we see how Doolan would have liked to have marked the passing of the Nisga’a but was largely unable to. Death was to be seen as the end of a time imbued with a new moral purpose, the point beyond which one began to either suffer or benefit from one’s actions in life.

Scholars of mission history have been quick to point out the apparent accommodations in doctrines and practices made by missionaries—both consciously and otherwise—in their attempt to get the seeds of their message to take root in indigenous soil. While important for demonstrating the limits to missionary power, such studies should not prevent us from recognizing what remained the essentially monologic quality of the mission. The Church Missionary Society, founded in 1799, shared the universalism of post-enlightenment Europe that led many Christians to believe that they were bringing the exclusive truths of civilization to the natives, truths which could not help but displace heathen customs. As part of the larger imperial thrust of Europe into the non-European world, the churchmen shared Europeans’ curiosity about the indigenous cultures they met. Yet the CMS missionaries’ interest was coupled with a conviction of the need for, and in some respects the inevitability of, change. For the Protestant churchmen conceived of their task of spreading the universal truths of Christianity to the dark corners of the globe as requiring a transformation in the Native peoples’ means of producing social value and material wealth. To be sure, Doolan and other evangelists were themselves deeply affected by the encounter: to deny that the encounter was reciprocal in nature did not negate its effects on the more powerful party. Although monologic and universalizing, the missionary ethos could still be punctured from time to time by the fears, anxieties, and uncertainties so frequently arising from the encounter with the unknown.

The Nisga'a were motivated by quite different axioms in their own taken-for-granted world. They did not equate exchange with incorporation. Although open to change, the Nisga'a were adamant about directing its course and ensuring that it accorded with traditional categories. The contestation of meaning and categories that could arise in the interplay between missionary and Nisga'a is illuminated in the death of Tacomash. One of the young Nisga'a drawn to the mission house at its start by the prospect of acquiring an education, Tacomash was also—at least by Doolan's reckoning—the CMS's first convert on the Nass. He held a revered place within the Anglican telos as the first fruit of the abundant harvest to come.

However significant Tacomash's role as the first convert was to Doolan, he was even more firmly embedded in relations of family and village. The boy was nephew and heir to Agwillagah (Agweellakkah), the highest ranking Eagle chief of the upriver village of Gitwinksihlkw.²⁷ Although consenting to his leaving Gitwinksihlkw to be taken in by Doolan for instruction, Tacomash's relations were not prepared to relinquish explanatory power over his illness, which Doolan believed to be bronchitis, or his death. The scene of the young boy's death reveals Doolan's attempt, as he had done with Cowdaeg's toes, to impose a particular epistemology on the unfolding events. It also reveals the resilience of Nisga'a categories and ways of knowing:

As evening came, [Tacomash] asked me to baptize him, as he had long believed in Jesus, and he trusted alone in Jesus for salvation. I most willingly and with a thankful heart to God, baptised him, naming him Samuel Walker. A great many of his relations were present, and I spoke to them of the happy state of mind he seemed to enjoy, as evidenced by his often smiling, and pointing with his hand to Heaven; and I prayed to God that the scene might lead some of them to repentance.... About the middle of the night he threw up his arm, saying he was dying. His death struggles were very painful to witness, as he seemed to be choking from an accumulation of matter in his throat. Seeing he was nearly dead, his mother and relatives begged him to tell them who it was that was killing him (The Indians believe that if a person has been bewitched by another, that the dying person can, just before he dies, see the person who is causing his death). Again and again, they implored him, roughly shaking his head in hopes he would speak, but he uttered not a word. I implored them to desist, as no one had put the sickness into him, but God was calling him home. Finding he still was sensible, I kept speaking to him of Jesus, and he passed away from us hearing the name of him on whom I trust he had laid his sins. At one time I much feared his mind was

wandering, and in his delirium some name might escape him, which would have been a triumph for heathenism. The scene which followed I cannot describe. The shriekings and wailings of the women were most heartrending, and they continued with few pauses till morning, canoe load after canoe load coming down, as soon as they heard the report of the gun, signalling his death. Poor things, they grieve as those that have no hope. Again and again I spoke to them on the happiness of him who had gone, but my words seemed as idle tales. To me, personally his loss will be very great. . . . But God saw the time was come for him to depart, and we must bow to the stroke and say, It is well.²⁸

In the presence of Tacomash's relations, Doolan offered an account of a young person's death—of which the Nisga'a had seen so much in the string of epidemics preceding and since the missionary's arrival—that he was convinced would ease them, with its superior explanatory power, through this transition. Though engaged in a dramatic struggle that would seem to evince otherwise, the young boy was being called home by his Creator. In timely fashion he had accepted Him in the moments before his death, as symbolized by his new name. Doolan shared in their sense of loss, but it was not the place of humans to question when one of them should die. Rather, comfort was to be taken from the happy state of the one passing, a sure sign of the glorious state that lay before him.

Clearly Tacomash's friends and relatives did not accept this explanation. They had permitted the young boy to live in the mission house to study with Doolan, and even requested his medical assistance when this seemed fruitful, but they rejected Doolan's imposition of a Christian telos onto his death. Tacomash appears to have accepted the missionary's trope, explaining his illness as sent by God to punish him for not attending prayers and being envious of Robert Dundas, Doolan's Tsimshian translator; however, his parents and the community understood his condition with suspicion. Under the influence of alcohol, Tacomash's father had threatened to shoot a certain person who was blamed as causing his son's illness, while the boy's mother induced her son to cross the river to Lakunkedah where he was rattled over by a shaman; the shaman hoped to demonstrate her allegiance with forces for good by removing the evil spirit that was killing him.²⁹

Such an unequivocal reassertion of Nisga'a categories threatens to distort our image of their position with respect to Doolan, presenting a picture of two equally

powerful discourses locked in opposition. The underlying sense of reciprocity that guided the Nisga'a position—and Doolan's misreading of what role they were willing to have him play—becomes more evident when we examine Tacomash's burial. On the day following Tacomash's death, the missionary had a long talk with the boy's relatives about his burial. Doolan wrote, "[t]hey wish, and I believe it was the poor boy's wish, to bury the body at his own village," namely Gitwinksihlkw, some twenty miles upriver. Finding the weeping and lamenting of parties continually arriving at the mission house "quite oppressive," Doolan then canoed across to Lakunkedah. Not long after arriving, he was met by a boy who informed him that the relatives were removing the body, and that they wished Doolan to be present when the body was put into what Doolan described as a "coffin." Taking this request as his cue, Doolan returned and proceeded to take control, noting that "they obeyed all my directions." When Tacomash's uncle told the missionary of his plan to remove the body to a chief's house before starting for his own village in a few days, Doolan, suspicious that he would distribute property before he left, insisted that it remain in the mission house until he was ready to start. Yet, in the face of the uncle's even greater determination, Doolan relented. He settled for praying and reading a portion of the Burial Service, "explaining it as well as [he] could to the people present." Doolan also made the uncle promise him that when he had called the chiefs and people together he would tell them how peacefully his nephew had died.³⁰

The place that the Nisga'a had opened within their society for Doolan was not what the missionary had envisioned for himself. The reasons for Nisga'a acceptance of a Christian missionary are varied and complex, but appear to stem from a desire common to indigenous peoples for access to the supernatural and material power so evident in white society. As this society's most explicit formulation of this power, Christianity would have had a certain appeal to them, augmented by the availability of agents willing to share this knowledge.³¹ Doolan had arrived on the North Pacific with different imperatives, however. In explaining to the CMS why he left William Duncan at Metlakatla for the relative wilderness of the Nass watershed, he wrote, "their desire for teachers from whatever motive it may arise, is exceedingly gratifying. A door seems opened for preaching to them the gospel. The priests have already paid them a visit and should the field not be occupied, they will no doubt next spring return."³² Regardless of

their own motives, the Nisga'a's interest in a teacher was an opportunity for Doolan, an opening through which the word might enter a land lost in darkness.³³

By this accounting such a call could be none other than inarticulate, a request for something the heathen did not yet understand. Furthermore, in this state the Nisga'a were vulnerable to imposters, Roman Catholic priests who were already sowing their seeds in the area. Doolan's colonizing discourse was motivated by a desire to represent a certain relation of difference that conveyed ideas about a social process—namely, conversion—and justified his specific project. Indeed such distancing and separation were characteristic of modern colonialism. The missionary project differed, however, in being incorporative and in ultimately requiring the consent of the subjects to being remade. Yet the churchmen realized that the explicit acceptance of their tenets would be the fruition of years of assiduously cultivating the everyday lives of their subjects. On this other level the missionaries employed more coercive means in their effort to convert the Nisga'a to the signs and practices of Protestant Christianity.³⁴

Doolan's use of the open door provided to him by the Nisga'a as a base from which to launch "attacks on the gross darkness of the surrounding heathen" engendered resentment, which periodically burst forth into open opposition.³⁵ His turning of a request for his presence at the removal of Tacomash's body into an invitation to direct the entire burial was one such occasion. Not surprisingly, this opposition was most clearly articulated in Doolan's journal by the Wolf chief Claytha of Lakunkedah, a self-declared foe of the missionary whose object was to "stop the white man's tongue." Doolan described a "dreadful uproar" taking place when he and Tacomash's relatives arrived with the body at Lakunkedah. Claytha, followed by nearly the whole village, rushed into the old mission house. The powerful chief came up to the lay missionary Robert Cunningham and pushed him, saying "No good, no good the English. What do you stop here for? Go away, we don't want you. You are helping the medicine people [*swansk halaayt* or shamans] kill us." He then cited the recent deaths of eight people, which he blamed on the shamans and missionaries. Claytha likely included his late wife in his count, who had died in July 1865 despite Doolan's efforts to stop her from vomiting blood by giving her medicine.³⁶

The chief also included Tacomash, as he asked Doolan “Where is the cloth you put on Tacomash? Where the blanket to cover the coffin? He died in your house, and you gave him no cloth to cover his face.” Doolan had been requested to attend the removal of the body to perform a specific and important ritual within Nisga’a burial practice: that of placing a piece of white cloth over the face of the dead when placed in the coffin, so that, as Doolan later put it, “the dead person may not be ashamed when they meet the Great Spirit.” Yet what the Nisga’a had perceived as apparent forgetfulness was in fact ignorance of Nisga’a custom, as Doolan explained in his journal. Predictably, Doolan responded as he did to all other serious attempts to reassert the dialogical basis of his relationship with the Nisga’a, by denying their significance. To Claytha’s questions about what had been done at the deaths of Tacomash and with his brother, Chief Kadounaha, the previous winter, Doolan “told him we had not come at his invitation, neither should we leave at his request. That all his talk about the medicine people having killed so many people by their enchantments was all foolish talk, as he could not point to one man who was known to have killed another by witchcraft.”³⁷ Armed with the confidence that came with believing that he carried the truth, Doolan dismissed Claytha’s charge on the basis of his inability to produce empirical proof. To the question of why the missionaries had stopped here, Doolan confirmed that their civilizing mission had little to do with Nisga’a wishes.

Resistance as a concept, Roger Keesing points out in his study of Kwaio ethnic identity and colonialism, is “prototype-based, iconic-image bound and metaphoric.” The concept risks oversimplifying in its suggestion of a kind of populist and collectivist motivation, and reveals little about the degree of conscious agency required in such opposition. These qualities preclude our ability to define resistance precisely, or to specify features common to all circumstances that can be characterized by the term.³⁸ Yet it is perhaps the term’s flexibility and metaphoric richness that gives it utility here. In Nisga’a clashes and confrontations with Anglican missionaries we see an interweaving of personal motivation and private ambitions, as well as perceptions of collective struggle. To be sure, Doolan was partly correct in seeing Claytha’s opposition as being rooted in a perceived threat to his power. The chief used Doolan’s ignorance and unwillingness to partake in Nisga’a culture to challenge the power of both missionary and

shaman. The decidedly antagonistic approach of Doolan to Nisga'a culture leads us to see more than self-interest in Claytha's actions, however. It permits us—when combined with an assumption that the Nisga'a were interested in preserving the integrity of their culture³⁹—to read many less articulate Nisga'a responses as implicit and even unconscious attempts to play off, to deflect, to reinterpret dominant ideological structures as well as directly to oppose them. In examining that part of the dialogue of the body concerning burial, we see that the Nisga'a contested and rejected the very categories Doolan attempted to impose upon them.

Nisga'a responses to missionary attempts to reform dress took a markedly different course. These responses were more clearly oppositional in structure. Owing in part to the influence of dialogues with Europeans that predated Doolan's arrival on the Nass by decades, the Nisga'a, in resisting the missionaries' attempts to control the meaning of English dress and their accompanying sensibilities of personal presentation, invoked and reproduced the very categories the missionaries sought to impose on them. By the time of the establishment of the new mission village of Gingolx just prior to Doolan's departure in 1867, English dress had become to the Nisga'a synonymous with the newly acquired notion of progress, an association vigorously promoted by Robert Doolan. Yet even apparent appropriation of new ideas and practices can ultimately involve their radical transformation: for instance, in their effort to become modern the Nisga'a transgressed and ignored many of the values the missionary tried to inculcate through dress. By adopting English dress on terms that the missionary could only partially control, the Nisga'a demonstrated the contingency of their engagement with this colonizing power, shifting the terrain of engagement by finding another place from which to confront this colonial authority—one that appeared to circumvent the position of subordination ascribed to them by Doolan.⁴⁰

Robert Doolan knew as well as the Nisga'a he encountered that the facial paint they wore was far more than decorative in its function. Through colour, markings, and occasion its signifying potential was wide-ranging, demonstrating the state of the wearer or one of the numerous rituals being observed in the rich ceremonial life of the Nisga'a. At the time of a death, for example, Tsimshian-speaking peoples traditionally held a black feast sponsored by the deceased's house, at which they wore black as a sign of

mourning.⁴¹ These subtleties appear to have been lost on Doolan, as his journal merely notes instances in which he encountered Nisga'a faces marked with paint. For the missionary, a painted face symbolized only the persistence of heathen customs and thus the incomplete state of his work. Doolan emphasized cleanliness in his interactions with the Nisga'a, and in the school, the sphere in which he was most at liberty to use his influence, he took to washing the boys when they first arrived for instruction.⁴² There were clearly limits to this means of culture change; for one, the size of the mission house restricted the number of boys directly under Doolan's supervision to at most four at a time. There is evidence, however, of other washing going on. During the first winter after Doolan's arrival on the Nass, when the feasts and activities of the secret societies (*wut'aahalaayt*) were underway and cutting into attendance at services and school, Doolan noted that "I can see traces on many faces where the paint has been washed off, before coming to school."⁴³ The next winter, and again in the following spring, Doolan confidently asserted that "No child comes now to school with a painted face."⁴⁴

How are we to understand the disappearance of facial paint in the mission school? We know that Doolan opposed it, but this does not sufficiently explain the arrival of faces washed of their paint. In this instance it is unlikely that Doolan had succeeded in inculcating a sign—namely, the clean face as indicative of a worthy student—which then quickly became hegemonic among the Nisga'a. The practice of face painting continued in feasts and other Nisga'a ceremonies throughout this period, and in January 1866 Doolan noted many students suffering from sore eyes, which he attributed, among other things, to the use of red paint.⁴⁵ Rather, Doolan's students appear to have learned the basic rules of the two worlds in which they lived. The appearance of only clean faces before Doolan in school may well be an example of what James Scott calls a "public transcript." Scott argues that short of rebellion, subordinate groups in power relations have a self-interest in conspiring to reinforce hegemonic appearances, adopting a strategic pose in the presence of the powerful. The desire of the Nisga'a that their children be instructed in the knowledge of the white society created an imbalance between them and the missionary, and the conformity with Doolan's demands about dress suggests the existence of a public transcript, especially when we consider that student absences during feasts and other ceremonies continued throughout Doolan's time

on the Nass. This ritual activity, for the most part beyond the gaze of the missionary, formed part of the “hidden transcript,” that critique of power which for various reasons could not be exhibited in open interaction with the powerful.⁴⁶

The students’ behaviour is indicative nonetheless of the growing power of English constructions of difference and distinction over the Nisga’a as the latter sought access to what they saw to be the desirable offerings of white society. The Nisga’a had been involved in complex processes of cultural change before Doolan’s arrival. One Tsimshian scholar suggests that the secret society complex may have been borrowed and adapted from the Heiltsuk and Haisla to the south between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the result of the Nisga’a’s continuous engagement in relations with outsiders.⁴⁷ The Nisga’a were also familiar with cultural imperialism from their interactions with neighbouring First Nations, but as the Comaroffs observe of the nineteenth-century Tswana, in none of these cases had there been an attempt to forge a new universalism that paralleled the one envisaged by bourgeois Europe in the name of its civilization.⁴⁸ Speaking the language of this ethical and cultural universalism, the CMS missionaries introduced the Nisga’a to a new notion of difference. According to its logic, the very things that distinguished the Nisga’a from the English made them and their world inferior, and had to be erased before their incorporation into the socio-moral order of global Christendom. The Nisga’a’s more relativistic worldview gave rise to a highly accommodating and eclectic disposition toward cultural change; as we have seen, they sought the power and knowledge of the whites, while remaining detached from their embrace. This orientation, demonstrated in the Nisga’a adoption of English dress, helps us to understand why they became increasingly enmeshed in certain European ways, despite contesting the explicit message of the mission.

Dress, like cleanliness, was another terrain that Doolan demarcated to help the Nisga’a understand what they should become. The deployment and maintenance of such distinctions frequently produced in Doolan an overwhelming sense of the pervasiveness and persistence of heathenism, which brought him regular bouts of depression and feelings of isolation. Periodic visits to William Duncan at Metlakatla for supplies and a “change of scene” could only temporarily compensate for the “want of Christian love” Doolan perceived in the “gross darkness of the surrounding heathen” on the Nass.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, the distinctions Doolan constructed were integral to his sense of purpose. They were likely also hegemonic, utterly taken-for-granted. The existence of an other in need of salvation was essential to mission discourse. Yet the permanence of this other was threatened by the missionaries' incorporating aims, producing a tension mediated by time and the unlikelihood of the complete conversion of a population. Until that time the as-yet unconverted could be used to remind the elect—that reformed, recognizable other—of their salvation from a miserable past. The other could be depicted in such a way that it would eradicate any hesitation that might remain about abandoning traditional beliefs and practices. This use of distinction was evident when Doolan and Cunningham went to see the ill wife of a chief at the chief's request in December 1865. Describing the scene, Doolan remarked, "It was a great contrast, the scene I had left in the mission house, and this one. Here all was dirt and filth, women in all parts of the house painting their faces, preparatory to the evening's amusements, but no painted faces at church, but all the people nicely and neatly dressed."⁵⁰

Distinctions, be they of bodily presentation or action, were most important in the intermingling of convert and heathen, which was evident when Doolan entered four houses on the "heathen side" of the river in his final spring among the Nisga'a. He found each "filled with people, some working, some gambling, most with painted faces, and some of our people sitting apart, observing the Sabbath." Not only did the convert's new behaviour provide tangible evidence of the changed internal state, observable to all, but as Doolan found on this occasion, such intermingling afforded him an excellent opportunity, when giving tracts to "our people," of telling the rest about the glad tidings they contained.⁵¹ Such apparent juxtapositions could even provide a source of amusement, as Doolan reflected later that winter: "I sometimes think friends at home would be astonished if they could peep into the schoolroom. Dirt and cleanliness sitting close together: On the same form, a young man neatly dressed in pants and coat, and by his side a dirty ragged boy with only a soiled blanket round him."⁵²

The Nisga'a in the 1860s would come increasingly to see this distinction if they happened to gaze into the schoolroom. The ultimate objective of conversion may have been the removal of difference and distinction, a process whereby the Nisga'a would be assimilated into the moral economy of civilized man, in which human worth was

evaluated in the single currency of absolute truth. But, in the long run, this process would not erase human differences but extend the European system of distinction over the North Pacific, drawing its peoples into a single scale of social, spiritual, and material inequality. Here we will focus on the role of those Nisga'a who came into contact with CMS missionaries in the laying of the hegemonic distinction between English dress, which came to represent material mastery, status, progress, and civilization, and traditional clothing, its antithesis, through their desire to access the knowledge and power they saw in white society. Information on Nisga'a uses of English clothing in the decades preceding the arrival of the CMS on the Nass is scarce; however, evidence on their active participation in the nineteenth-century commercial economy of the North Pacific, in particular the land-based fur trade with the Hudson's Bay Company since the founding of Fort Simpson on the Nass River in 1832, suggests that such clothing would have been available if desired.⁵³

Not surprisingly, in Doolan's journal we find him most frequently describing Nisga'a wearing the reserved, middle-class English dress he sought in the context of his Sunday service. On 8 March 1866, Doolan wrote, "It was cheering, to watch the people leaving the service, the women nicely dressed, some in merino gowns, most of them in nice white blankets, and the men wearing coats and pants." During a particularly well attended service a month earlier, roughly one hundred and fifty people had been present, "All neatly dressed, in clean blankets, and good clothes."⁵⁴ As Doolan hoped, the Nisga'a he encountered strongly associated English dress with Christianity, and with white society more generally. The Wolf chiefs Thratcouquats (Thratquoquats) and Cockshoo (Qwochsho) from Lakunkedah queried Ryan on why Doolan did not give them shirts and trousers and other things, like the priests at Fort Rupert. Similarly, Doolan noted in the spring of 1865 that the few who did attend were the same faces, "tidely and cleanly dressed." As the Nisga'a had various "costumes" for their ceremonies, it is possible that they may have perceived English dress as a requisite for church services.⁵⁵ So strong was the connection between church-going and English dress that some people who were with Cowdaeg replied to Doolan's query about why they never came to service by telling the missionary that they were "ashamed to come as they have no clothes."⁵⁶

The Nisga'a's association of English dress with the evident power of white society certainly pre-dated Doolan's arrival on the Nass. The alliance of corporeal practice with the hegemonic ideologies of progress and civilization was soon taken up by the missionary, however, as part of a diffuse process of Nisga'a conversion to the signs and practices of evangelical Christianity. Indeed this was a wise strategy, as the Nisga'a were, in the 1860s and arguably long afterward, more amenable to accessing the power which underpinned this alien culture than to the explicit message of the mission. We see this, for example, in the actions of a Nisga'a chief who seldom attended service but who had on Doolan's first arrival at Metlakatla been very anxious that teachers should come among his people. Wolf Chief Thratcouquats' request for a paper from the missionary before leaving for Victoria which would state his good character and friendship with the mission reveals a strong connection between the missionary figure and those traits of white society seen as desirable. Thratcouquats apparently told Doolan that "he wanted his people to be like the English; he wanted an English village. Before the whites came, they had no clothes, they knew nothing, they were very ignorant; now he rejoiced because they had come."⁵⁷

The chief's actions echo the widespread practice in First Nations communities of adopting a humble stance before a newcomer. Although most often interpreted by various European colonizers as a sign of real need or as a manipulative attempt to get goods, recent scholarship has demonstrated that the practice was far more complex.⁵⁸ Elizabeth Vibert has suggested that for the indigenous peoples of the nineteenth-century Columbia Plateau, and likely beyond, the desire to forge or reaffirm a relationship may have been a more immediate aim than the material benefits that could flow from the adoption of such a stance.⁵⁹ Indeed, Thratcouquats' request for a paper lends itself to such an interpretation. His linking of the missionary with access to white society can be seen in the context of a larger relationship of reciprocity forged with the churchmen that from the chief's perspective legitimized his request. In justifying in his journal why he did give the chief a paper, Doolan reasoned that "He seldom attended service, but was very anxious when I saw him on my first arrival at Metlakahtlah, that teachers should come amongst his people; and, he never spoke ill of the mission, when nearly all the other chiefs were."⁶⁰

The Wolf chief Kinzarda of Lakunkedah also attempted to assert conceptual mastery over the mysterious bases of the European production of value.⁶¹ Another open foe who challenged both Doolan and the lay missionary Robert Cunningham, Kinzarda held a great feast on a Sunday in February 1865. When questioned by Cunningham as to why he persisted in having his feasts on Sunday despite the missionaries' admonishment against this, the chief justified his choice by pointing out that on this day "the people are clean and have their best clothes on." He offered a similar response the following June when asked why he had again chosen a Sunday to gather together property from the houses of the people of his crest, repeating for the missionary "that on that day, the people were better dressed than on the other days." Kinzarda appears to have cleverly seized the powerful symbols of the mission and turned them to his own purposes, resisting the churchmen's attempt to reorganize his people by invoking and reproducing their structures, albeit with different aims.⁶²

Chief Kinzarda's opposition underscores the complexity of resistance to domination, which simultaneously critiques and reflects the effects of the domination it opposes. As part of the dialogue with the colonizer, such utterances are not the business of the speaker alone, but the result of their interaction.⁶³ Opposed to the presence of the CMS missionaries among his people, Kinzarda snubbed Doolan's sermons and challenged his authority to sequester the population on the day of their delivery. However, in appropriating the significance assigned this day by the missionary and the value associated with the dress expected of the attendees, Kinzarda invoked and reproduced the categorical and institutional structures of the missionaries' domination. In a different historical context, Elizabeth Furniss has shown how Secwepemc chiefs, in incorporating colonial symbols of power in the nineteenth century—in this case the exercise of a traditional authoritarianism attributed to them by Oblate missionaries—implicitly legitimated the very colonial regime that they were simultaneously trying to oppose through their land claims. Furniss finds the "ideological accommodation" of chiefs allowed them to take advantage of the apparatus of the colonial government to bolster their authority and to restore social order in communities. Yet it had the unseen consequence of eventual entrenchment of colonial and church hegemony.⁶⁴ Although rejecting the legitimacy of the mission, Chief Kinzarda had greater difficulty shaking the

European system of distinction that was being imposed over the Nass watershed. The attraction of this system lay in its growing ability to justify the choice of feast day, both as an appeal to the categories of the colonizer, and as a subtle way of deflecting their power by turning them to Nisga'a ends, permitting a conversation between ruler and ruled.

Each evocation of the European system of distinction thus carried with it both the potential for the establishment of a hegemonic category as well as its disruption, as the conditions of its reproduction ultimately lay beyond the reach of the colonizer. The Nisga'a adoption of the dress and accompanying system of distinctions introduced by the colonizing society was a key means by which they were drawn into its single scale of social and material value. Yet, within this encompassing scale the Nisga'a could reveal the limits of the colonizers' ideologies by pointing out their contradictions as they combined some elements and allied others with their own priorities. Shortly after his brother Kadounaha's death, Claytha apparently explained to a young man named Wachlee (Wahlee), who had recently been steady in following the missionaries' precepts, that "as soon as any of them became English, meaning by this, as soon as they left off the blanket, and dressed in pants and a coat, they became proud, and were always strutting about to shew themselves."⁶⁵ To the status-conscious Nisga'a, the internalization of the missionaries' distinction between their traditional state and the preferable state of civilization of white society meant that adopting one of the key signifiers of this latter state, or "becoming English" by dressing in pants and coat, could become a new means of displaying status.

The possibilities for pride introduced by the new clothing and associated ideologies were lamented by traditionalist and missionary alike. During Doolan's second winter on the Nass he wrote that he "heard an instance of pride," which he asserted, "shews the hearts of all alike." The wife of Cowcaelth was not of the same mind as her husband to serve God fully. On Sundays she could be found at service "neatly dressed in nice merino gown, and plaid shawl," but her heart was "puffed up with pride." On this particular Sunday she had told Doolan that "she thought it would be good if at church time, I separated the people that wore blankets from those that were nicely dressed. She did not like them sitting so close to her, rubbing their dirty blankets on her clean gown."⁶⁶

In allying her own desire for display with the signs and practices of CMS Protestantism, Cowcaeth's wife revealed the contradictions or tensions of the latter. Doolan promoted the adoption of English dress by encouraging its association with the power the Nisga'a had identified and desired in white society. The Nisga'a did not challenge this construction. Yet according to the telos laid before them, the Nisga'a were to adopt the signs of superiority, civilization, and their own progress towards these goals in a posture of Christian humility, a paradox that exposes the ambivalence of Doolan's colonial discourse.

Two encounters in Doolan's final summer on the Nass illuminate some of the ways in which the Nisga'a negotiated and revealed the contradictions of the colonizer's project, disrupting its hegemonies by revealing their limits. When Doolan met Cowdaeg on his way to fish, the young chief affirmed that he fully intended to join the mission. The missionary noted that not only was Cowdaeg unable to do much work as a result of his earlier frost bite, but also that his father had lately given away property and was unable to assist him; consequently he was in rags.⁶⁷ Cowdaeg's mother-in-law, who was trying to dissuade him from joining the mission and knew the missionaries' own disposition toward clothing, asked him "if he was not ashamed to be seen amongst us in such a state." He replied that "he had learnt that God looks at his heart, not at his clothes," but nonetheless hoped next winter to procure skins and thus be able to buy some "good clothes."⁶⁸ One morning three months earlier Doolan had overheard an angry exchange between his cook and the cook's mother. The young man was going to give away a considerable quantity of marmot skins, having sold most of his clothes to procure them. The dispute arose over a shirt that Doolan had given him when he arrived, which the missionary justified on the grounds that "he was nearly naked." The cook's mother wanted this shirt, but he refused to give it to her. Doolan called him, "and tried to shew him the folly and sin of throwing away his property in the way his mother wished him to do," which would only gratify his pride.⁶⁹

The Nisga'a adoption of English dress and its accompanying ideologies was far from a surrender to the mission of their capacity to define the categories of bodily representation. As this system of distinction became their own, the Nisga'a scrutinized and tested its claims, as well as its ability to further Nisga'a aims. In doing so they

brought into dramatic relief the tensions and ambivalences within the colonizing culture. As Gayan Prakash points out, the contradictions of colonizing projects do not negate each other, but rather reveal the limits of their ideologies.⁷⁰ In juxtaposing and rearranging the colonizer's tensions—the corporeal signification of superiority, a triumphalist civilization, and material abundance on the one hand, humility and the subordination of material to spiritual concerns on the other—Cowdaeg and Doolan's unnamed cook disrupted the hegemony of these contradicting ideologies and the English confidence which underlay them, asserting a space not completely controlled by the colonizer. Colonial categories were never instituted without some measure of dislocation and transformation, compelled as they were to mix with, work upon, and express their authority in repressed knowledges and subjects. In the very constitutive processes of colonial power—here the inculcation of the signs and symbols of English dress—emerges an estrangement and displacement of colonial constructions.⁷¹ The Nisga'a gained limited autonomy within the encapsulating ideologies.

Significantly, in both of the above encounters we see the newly hegemonic conceptions of bodily representation operating in conjunction with both traditional and more recent forms of material economy. Some of the new clothing items the Nisga'a desired inevitably had to be purchased, and to this end the fur trade could provide the necessary income. Yet, intersecting this new economy was another, more vital and well-established means of circulating goods within Nisga'a society: that encompassed by the potlatch ceremonial complex. This evolving system was more than capable of absorbing into its functioning new goods such as “good clothes” and the hierarchies of value and systems of distinction associated with them. For this reason the potlatch was seen by churchmen like Doolan as a bastion of heathenism in need of eradication, if the Nisga'a were to be converted beyond the signs and practices of CMS Protestantism to its explicit message. The material dialogue between Nisga'a and missionary that took as its focus the proper relationship of the body to property is worthy of investigation in its own right, and is a subject to which we will now turn.

¹ The parallels between these early ethnographical accounts and later anthropological works are many, although each colonizing discourse employed different techniques of hierarchizing, distancing, and incorporating to avoid intersubjectivity: the missionary the denial of a legitimate history prior to

evangelization, the anthropologist the denial of coevalness, or the sharing of the same time, Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 30.

² Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 36.

³ Michael Harkin, *The Heiltsuks*, 79.

⁴ Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-1950* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998) xvii. Barbara Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, translated by Thomas Dunlap (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), notes that "One of the historian's most tenacious mental habits is the strict separation of biology as an immutable sphere of life from society and culture as spheres that are variable and changeable over time." In this dichotomy the body is assigned to the category of nature and biology, leading historians to think of the body as a physiologically stable entity, vii.

⁵ See Marie-Françoise Guédon, "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present*, Margaret Seguin [Anderson], editor (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984) 137-159, for a discussion of the important distinctions between traditional Tsimshian concept of *hauldaugit*, which was definitely linked with evil doings, for which the term "witchcraft" seems appropriate, and *halaayt*, a much more positive term which also covers a complex cosmological system.

⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal, 1 February 1865; 9 February 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal, 29 May 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal, 17 September 1866. CMS C.2./O. In a similar vein, Christopher Roth cites an incident told by Matthew Sheppard to Marius Barbeau around 1915 that in one Gispaxlo'ots royal house, "there were so many that they had not enough names for them. So one name was divided into three; it meant the same thing; and pronounced in almost the same way." "'The Names Spread in All Directions': Hereditary Titles in Tsimshian Social and Political Life," *BC Studies* 130 (Summer 2001): 80.

⁹ John Cove, *Shattered Images: Dialogues and Meditations on Tsimshian Narratives* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1987) 74; Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 129. Interestingly, in contemporary Tsimshian society Christopher Roth notes that names "are social actors who constitute a social order that transcends their holders," "'The Names Spread in All Directions,' 76. Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, states that for the Tsimshian proper, the concept of personhood was "a complex intermingling of house, crest, and privilege," 128.

¹⁰ Jay Miller, "Feasting with the Southern Tsimshian," *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present*, edited by Margaret Seguin [Anderson] (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984) 29.

¹¹ Michael Harkin, *The Heiltsuks*, 101.

¹² Christopher Roth, "'The Names Spread in All Directions,'" 76, notes that traditionally the father's side provided mortuary payments and services, as well as a whole range of ceremonial services in the course of an individual's life. Viola Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, writes that among the Tsimshian the lineage relatives (i.e. maternal) also had very definite duties to perform in the formalities following death which were distinct from those of the lineage to which the father of the deceased belonged, 220-21; 236. For Nisga'a mortuary practices see also Marjorie M. Halpin and Margaret Seguin [Anderson], "Tsimshian Peoples: Southern Tsimshian, Coast Tsimshian, Nishga, Gitksan," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Northwest Coast*, vol. 7, edited by Wayne Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1990): 277-78.

¹³ Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture: A Light through the Ages* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 129.

¹⁴ Doolan noted on 8 January 1865 that he "Heard the sad news that two poor Indians had been murdered up the river for disturbing the tomb of a chief." CMS C.2./O.

¹⁵ Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, 9. On a related process, see Ronald William Hawker, "A Faith of Stone: Gravestones, Missionaries, and Culture Change and Continuity among British Columbia's Tsimshian Indians," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 26 (1991): 80-101, for an excellent discussion of how CMS and Methodist missionaries active among the Tsimshian-speaking peoples of the Nass and Skeena River valleys from 1857 on laid the "philosophical groundwork" for the popularity of the gravestone as a substitution for wooden crest poles as status symbols. Hawker cites the introduction of the rituals of Christian burial as the missionaries' most obvious contribution to this development, while stressing the

continuity with older ways as the Tsimshian found new ways of expressing and affirming the traditional ranked social system.

¹⁶ Harkin, *The Heiltsuks*, 91, makes this point for the Methodists, whose “enthusiasm” and proclivity for evangelizing closely mirrored the “low” Anglicanism of the CMS.

¹⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal, 7 December 1864. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 5 June 1865. CMS C.2./O.

²⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 1 February 1864; 9 February 1864. CMS C.2./O. As noted above, the man suspected of causing the young chief’s death had been seen earlier walking around the chief’s house three times. Explaining why he was expected to return, Doolan wrote, “If he does not repeat the process on the death of the party, they think he himself will die and so they watched to shoot him.” Viola Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, relates a similar practice among the Tsimshian in the early twentieth century, 241.

²¹ Describing the effect of this tragedy on the people around the mission, Doolan noted, “Everyone moves about very quietly and all are much subdued, as if a national calamity had taken place.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 December 1866. CMS C.2./O.

²² Such rituals were deeply inscribed in Tsimshian culture more generally and appear to have continued after the acceptance of Christianity. Viola Garfield, writing in the 1930s, noted that at death “A religious meeting with hymns and prayers, wailing and long periods of silence during which people constantly come and go, is the custom at present,” *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 240.

²³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 13 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

²⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 3 February 1866. CMS C.2./O.

²⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 10 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

²⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 4 January 1867. CMS C.2./O.

²⁷ Carol Cooper, “To Be Free in Our Lands: Coast Tsimshian and Nisga’a Societies in Historical Perspective, 1830-1900,” Waterloo: University of Waterloo, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1993; E. Palmer Patterson, “George Kinzadah—Simoogit in his Times,” 22.

²⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 8 May 1866. CMS C.2./O.

²⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 18 April 1866; 28 April 1866. CMS C.2./O.

³⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 May 1866. CMS C.2./O.

³¹ Michael Harkin, *The Heiltsuks*, 144.

³² Robert Doolan to CMS, Metlakatla, 14 July 1864. CMS C.2./O.

³³ Doolan’s understanding of initial signs of Nisga’a interest in a missionary likely drew from the historical call of Macedonians to St. Paul in the New Testament (Acts 16:9). Brett Christophers, *Positioning the Missionary*, writes that missionary John Booth Good regarded as a defining feature of his mission the fact that the Nlha7káp̓mx had called him for help, and not vice versa, 4.

³⁴ See Nicholas Thomas, “Colonial Conversions,” for a discussion of this distinction between the propaganda discourse of some early twentieth-century evangelical missions and other discourses of modern colonialism.

³⁵ Doolan, Metlakatla, to Hills, Bishop of Columbia, Victoria. 7 Jul 1866. CMS C.2./O.

³⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 May 1866; 4 July 1865; 19 July 1865. CMS C.2./O.

³⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 May 1866. CMS C.2./O.

³⁸ Roger Keesing, *Custom and Confrontation: The Kwaio Struggle for Cultural Autonomy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 6.

³⁹ Carol Cooper’s study of Coast Tsimshian and Nisga’a societies in the modern period, “To Be Free in Our Lands,” supports such a view.

⁴⁰ Gayan Prakash, “Introduction,” *After Colonialism*, 9.

⁴¹ Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture*, 129.

⁴² Robert Doolan, Journal. 15 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 13 February 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 3 December 1865; 18 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁶ James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) xii; 2.

⁴⁷ Marie-Françoise Guédon, “An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners,” 143.

⁴⁸ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 244.

⁴⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 2 April 1865; 11 April-5 May 1865. CMS C.2./O. Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to Bishop Hills, Columbia, at Victoria. 7 July 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 3 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁵¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 7 April 1867. CMS C.2./O.

⁵² Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 January 1866. CMS C.2./O. Interestingly, Doolan appears to have adjusted his own sensibilities to dress somewhat while stationed on the Nass. On one particularly warm day in May 1865 when Doolan was employing two men and three boys to work on the mission house, the churchman noted that “One man is working with nothing on him but a shirt and a cap. At first I did not like to see them working in such an undress, but now I scarcely notice it. Most of them when they come to work with us dress very decently, but the man has no trousers, and the weather is too hot for him to wear his blanket.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 29 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁵³ James A. McDonald, “Images of the Nineteenth-Century Economy of the Tsimshian,” *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present*, Seguin [Anderson], Margaret, editor (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984) 40-54, challenges the conventional view of anthropologists that the nineteenth-century Tsimshian had a traditional hunting and gathering economy, demonstrating they were “intimately connected, from the earliest contact period, with the commercial and industrial economy of the northwest region of British Columbia, both as traders and as labourers.” See also E. Palmer Patterson, “The Nishga and the Fur Trade, 1834-1842,” *Native Studies Review* 6:1 (1990): 67-81, for a discussion of a significant dimension of Nisga’a commercial relations with Europeans in the nineteenth century.

⁵⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 18 March 1866; 4 February 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁵ There is some evidence that CMS missionaries in the North Pacific had to be careful in associating particular dress with attending church. In Margaret Whitehead’s *Now You Are My Brother: Missionaries in British Columbia*, Sound Heritage Series No. 34 (Victoria, B.C.: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1981), Robert Tomlinson Jr. claims that the Reverend Robert Tomlinson and William Duncan, learning that a shaman was just an ordinary human being without attire on, refused to wear robes in church, lest they be regarded as ordinary beings the rest of the week, 16. Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, writes that for the neighbouring Tsimshian, physical appearance, including clothing and bodily adornments, had always expressed social status as well as inner spiritual/bodily states. Further, one’s clothing was integral to the functioning of the ritual: “Apparel during winter ceremonies or secret societies’ initiations literally transformed the individual and propelled her or him into contact with non-human beings,” 222.

⁵⁶ Robert Doolan to CMS, 22 May 1865; Journal, 4 February 1866.

⁵⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 12 June 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Bruce White, “‘Give Us a Little Milk’: The Social and Cultural Significance of Gift Giving in the Lake Superior Fur Trade,” *Minnesota History* 48:2 (1982): 60-71; Mary Black-Rogers, “Varieties of ‘Starving’: Semantics and Survival in the Subarctic Fur Trade,” *Ethnohistory* 33:4 (1986): 353-383.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Vibert, *Traders’ Tales*, 155-156.

⁶⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 12 June 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁶¹ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 229. For a discussion of the life of Wolf Chief Kinzarda see E. Palmer Patterson, “George Kinzadah—Simoogit in his Times.”

⁶² Robert Doolan, Journal. 11 February 1865; 25 June 1865. CMS C.2./O. Roger Keesing, *Custom and Confrontation*, 8.

⁶³ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 43.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Furniss, “Resistance, Coercion, and Revitalization.”

⁶⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 29 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁶⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 29 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁶⁷ On the day of the tragic expedition to the sea to trap martens, Doolan had noted that Cowdaeg was very poor and had no clothes, “as he gave them away when he was made a medicine man.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁶⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 1 July 1867. CMS C.2./O.

⁶⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 3 April 1867. CMS C.2./O.

⁷⁰ Gayan Prakash, “Introduction: After Colonialism,” 8.

⁷¹ Gayan Prakash, “Introduction: After Colonialism,” 4.

Chapter Three: The Material Dialogue

The steadily increasing flow of new material goods into the Nass River Valley in the mid-nineteenth century attracted the attention of both Nisga'a and CMS missionaries. The Nisga'a had long been involved in extensive trade with their neighbours through well-established networks both along the coast and into the interior through "grease trails." However, the advent of Europeans into their world as a distinct group had made possible the opening of new exchange relations not already embedded in the existing ceremonial system. Still, even as they strove to ensure that these new possibilities for material exchange were in accord with their own interests, the Nisga'a endeavoured to incorporate the new goods that found their way into their homes and hands in ways that would reinforce existing life ways. For his part, Reverend Robert Doolan regarded the Nisga'a's changing material culture with an ambivalence that shaped his civilising project. Novel European goods and technologies—and Nisga'a desire for them—could be employed in the service of the word. By affirming the superiority of the civilization that produced them, these goods could, by association, do the same for Christianity, the whites' most explicit articulation of the supernatural power that underlay their material achievements. Although this connection was not lost on the Nisga'a, for whom the sacred permeated all aspects of life, Doolan had reservations about entangling spiritual aims with material pursuits, realms that had been separate in Western thought long before the rise of industrial capitalism. The Anglican missionary shared with many of his European contemporaries a distrust of the material, as we have seen in his refusal to give out shirts and trousers to potential converts as Wolf Chiefs Thratcouquats and Cockshoo of Lakunkedah informed him was the practice of the Catholic priests at Fort Rupert.¹

By far the most disturbing indigenous practice from the vantage point of the missionary, however, was the capacity shown by the Nisga'a to refashion the values assigned to European goods and the uses to which they could be put.² The Nisga'a used many new goods to symbolic and practical ends previously unforeseen, and certainly unintended. The Nisga'a's assertion of indigenous understandings of their material world and the connections between this world and the spiritual realm initiated a material dialogue with the CMS missionaries over the contested cultural domain of property and goods. Within and alongside the more overt exchanges of the mission, the missionaries

set about inculcating a new set of material relations in the Nisga'a, which, once accepted, would pave the way for their conversion to Protestant Christianity, and as a corollary, their integration into the emerging capitalist order. The Nisga'a, however, had very different ideas about their material relations, and attempted to reassert reciprocal relations in material and symbolic values with the churchmen.

At the time of William Duncan's first visit to the Nisga'a villages along the Nass River, the Nisga'a, like other First Nations on the Northwest Coast and beyond, were going through a period of rapid material change resulting from contact with European trade goods. The fur trade was only partly responsible for this diffusion. Long-existing indigenous trade routes continued to be used to transport goods far beyond their point of origin.³ Although direct contact between Tsimshian-speaking groups and Europeans did not take place until the 1780s, archaeological evidence suggests that European trade goods were filtering into the northern Pacific region via intertribal trade routes as early as 1700.⁴ The estuary at the mouth of the Nass River provided a critical site for the exchange of both ideas and goods. Every spring its shores were the site of the Nass fishery, the principal eulachon fishing ground on the North Pacific Coast, where Nisga'a, Tsimshian, Tlingit, and others congregated from the months of February to May to prepare this fish and its valuable oil for storage as well as trading.⁵ In 1831 the Hudson's Bay Company established Fort Simpson at this site as part of its bid to build a string of forts along the northern coast that would allow direct access to the furs in the interior. This post was abandoned only three years later when it was discovered that the Nass River was not as navigable into the interior as initially thought, and in the face of Nisga'a resistance to the loss of their intermediary position.⁶ Despite this move, during the 1850s and 1860s the Nisga'a began to replace the Coast Tsimshian as the chief traders at the relocated Fort Simpson on the Tsimshian Peninsula, a development that created tensions between the Nisga'a and the Tsimshian, even though the latter had voluntarily reduced their trade there in favour of the southerly markets. In 1866 the HBC erected an auxiliary trading post at Lakunkedah (Ankida), and Robert Cunningham took a clerkship position there when his association with the CMS was terminated.⁷

Market exchange, rather than displacing more traditional systems of material relations in the period under examination here, served to augment the existing ceremonial

system as newly available goods acquired in the fur trade were channeled into conventional forms of distribution and display. This is not to underestimate the very palpable changes wrought by the fur trade. The exploitation of a resource based on the desire for goods that can be obtained from an external market in exchange for that resource is a significant development, the consequences of which have been demonstrated by world systems theorists.⁸ Yet, as Harkin points out in his analysis of the Heiltsuks, the value of such an analysis is limited. The model ignores what is specific about the history of each people who have undergone this political-economic transformation. Rather, it universalizes the experience of all peoples who have undergone reorganization under capitalism of the relations of production, such that they appear no longer as central actors in a circumscribed universe of goods, but are consigned to the margins of a universal capitalist system.⁹ In an oversight that serves to perpetuate the view that non-Western peoples are peripheral to the production of history, we ignore the fact that material relations are always embedded in other social relations.

The Nisga'a who interacted with the CMS attempted to embed the new mission into their existing system of material and social relations, asserting reciprocal relations in material and symbolic values in their exchanges with the missionaries. This did not preclude them from accepting the missionaries' use of cash to meet the considerable physical labour requirements of their civilizing project. No doubt, at least one reason for the CMS practice of attempting to visit an indigenous community to gauge their receptivity before dispatching a missionary was because of the missionary's utter dependence on his subjects once in the field. Duncan had made just such a visit to the lower Nisga'a villages in 1860 at the invitation of Chiefs Kadounaha and Kinzarda. This visit led the lay missionary to believe the Nisga'a were the next people to be evangelized.¹⁰ Yet the reception Doolan and Cunningham received when their canoe beached among the three lower villages in the autumn of 1864 was mixed. Two young men travelled the thirty miles from their village and stayed with the missionaries, telling Doolan they were anxious to learn "the Book." Doolan wrote that the son of a chief, likely Tacomash, remained with them from the beginning as well. Given the intense cold, the Nisga'a gathered around Doolan and Cunningham had difficulty believing they intended to stay for the winter when they saw them busy preparing the ground for a

house. One of the chiefs from the most populous of the villages agreed to rent them a deserted house for a year in which to create the schoolhouse. Doolan wrote that the chiefs and some of the other men came forward readily to lend them bark and plank for roofing and flooring the schoolhouse, but told them “they did not intend treating us as the Tsimshian had treated W. Duncan.”¹¹ Clearly Doolan’s biggest asset was the education he offered, and to this end the Nisga’a were willing to assist him in what they envisioned would be a reciprocal relationship.

In their opening letter to Robert Doolan from London in February of 1864, the Committee of the Church Missionary Society expressed its confidence that Doolan’s position as an ordained missionary would give him advantages in the exercise and manipulation of the many graces necessary to his task. Importantly, it would also enable him to appreciate the value of the eminent lay missionary Mr. Duncan, with whom he was appointed. One of less experience than Doolan in the realities of life, the Committee noted, might be vulnerable to what it termed “the great missionary problem.”¹² Without further mentioning Duncan, the Committee explained that, in the forty years the Society had laboured in Rupert’s Land, little had been done to solve the problem of the missionaries devoting their energies to the material development of the mission, at the expense of the evangelical project.

The reason for the tendency of CMS missionaries to become preoccupied with the material operations of their missions lay in the Society’s particular conception of the desired state to which they were to bring their indigenous subjects. In this same letter the Committee enjoined Doolan to keep in view the eventual self-government and self-support of the Native Christians, a principle espoused by the CMS Secretary, Henry Venn.¹³ The missionary was to direct “the training of the Indians from the first for a time when they must be thrown upon their provision for the future.” That this provision included a reformulation of the Natives’ material relations was clear in the Committee’s explanation of the problem in Rupert’s Land. The Native peoples there were under peculiar difficulties owing to the recent scarcity of the means of subsistence and their dependence on hunting fur-bearing animals. The Committee believed the indigenous population on the Northwest coast had “far greater facilities for self support,” and anticipated a special report from Doolan on this subject as soon as time allowed.¹⁴ Thus

although viewing the material basis of the mission as distinct from and subservient to the spiritual aims of the Society, the CMS nonetheless recognized the importance of creating a solid base from which conversion could proceed. Herein lay the missionaries' tension between denigrating the value of what they perceived as material, and relying on material means to bring about desired spiritual ends.

Concern that knowledge of the universal truths of Protestant Christianity should reach all peoples brought the CMS to the "dark" corners of the globe. Yet the belief that a self-supporting Native Church was impossible without an accompanying revolution in the means of subsistence among its adherents drew its missionaries into a struggle to reform the everyday material world of their subjects. For the CMS churchmen, conversion was to occur simultaneously on two levels: the Nisga'a had to be converted to both the evangelical message of the mission as well as to the signs and practices of English culture, to both Christianity and civilization. Not all Christian missionaries placed an equal emphasis on the need to change the material basis of society. The Jesuits, for example, believed all peoples had apprehensions of divinity that required not denial but rather completion through the Christian revelation. Thus Jesuits systematically sought out aspects of indigenous culture and thought from which the gospel might be grafted.¹⁵ During the early nineteenth century, however, humanitarians tended to believe that a European culture coming into contact with an indigenous one doomed the latter to extinction. Native peoples' only hope of surviving was to become like Europeans. The responsibility for helping them learn to cope with European technology, adapt to European economic patterns, as well as cultivate the European values of sobriety, frugality, industry, and enterprise fell to administrators and missionaries.¹⁶ Debate among nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries centered on the question of whether civilization or conversion to Christianity was the corollary of the other, while both were seen and promoted as necessary.

To be sure, there existed elements in most indigenous material cultures that were antithetical to the acceptance of Christian doctrine. This was no less true of the Nisga'a and other peoples of the Northwest coast. However, the perception that a reconstruction of an entire culture was required was an ambitious undertaking that produced tensions in the missionary and ambivalence about his efforts, similar to those resulting from the

incorporating orientation of mission discourse discussed in the preceding chapter.

Doolan often despaired of the long days spent securing provisions or supervising work on the mission buildings, which left little time to acquire the Nisga'a language by which the word was to arrive. In a later letter Henry Venn encouraged the missionary, telling him that the exhausting labour of a recent "building affair" was indeed a contribution to the mission.¹⁷

The very material basis of the mission contributed to the Nisga'a view of the missionaries as agents of trade and possible exchange, a role that easily coexisted with the more supernatural abilities they attributed to them. To the missionaries' dismay, the Nisga'a demonstrated an aptitude in matters of trade that they felt was lacking when it came to concerns the missionaries deemed to be of a more spiritual nature, a lack they identified as an obstacle to the evangelizing project. One Sunday during his second winter among the Nisga'a, Doolan related in his journal that he had learned not to crowd too much into one sermon. "The Indian retains so little he hears, and the ideas are all so new to him. If you talk to him on trade, he quickly understands you, not so with regard to spiritual matters."¹⁸ Doolan often found himself buying food from the Nisga'a, who cultivated gardens in plots along the river. On occasion this necessitated going house to house, a task he described as "weary work."¹⁹ When buying food for that same winter from the Nisga'a in the lower villages Doolan noted that "[t]his is a long work as compared to making purchases in England." He explained:

The old women talk and talk about their salmon and potatoes, trying to make you believe, such salmon and potatoes as theirs are not anywhere else to be found, and then they examine the cloth or cups or anything you have to barter, most minutely. Time is no object with them, and if you give in to one party, the next will wait and wrangle till they also get their own price.²⁰

The Nisga'a's perception of the missionaries as agents with important connections to the spiritual and material bases of white society likely accounts for some of the strong opposition that had already developed against them by their first winter on the Nass. In December 1864 Doolan wrote that the mission had many "secret enemies." He explained that those who opposed the missionaries' work used their influence against them in an "underhand[ed] manner," offering no overt opposition. Meetings of the chiefs were the

primary context in which criticisms were aired, but they nonetheless reached the missionaries through informants such as Cowcaelth. During a large meeting that month the chiefs opposing the missionaries argued that “after a little time [their] hearts will get proud, and [they] have now come only to find out the value of martin skins.”²¹ This sentiment was echoed later that winter by a chief returning from Metlakatla, who stated that Doolan had lowered the price of marten furs by writing to Duncan, and then accused the missionary of getting the Nisga’a to work for him for next to nothing and bringing sickness among the children.²² Upriver Nisga’a suffering from lack of food earlier the same winter had looked upon the missionaries as the source of the low prices for their animal skins and the sickness prevalent among their children as well.²³

It appears the Nisga’a saw the CMS missionaries as figures capable of harnessing the supernatural powers that they believed underlay white society, and of using them for the benefit of the people among whom they were stationed.²⁴ Hence the enthusiasm of Chiefs Kadounaha and Kinzarda that Duncan should visit the Nass. They had seen firsthand at Fort Simpson and then Metlakatla the advances the lay missionary had effected among the neighbouring Coast Tsimshian, as he travelled to Victoria to procure the fittings for a saw mill and then a printing press. Yet the reciprocal nature of Nisga’a society placed responsibilities on those with special access to sources of supernatural power. Shamans like the woman who rattled over Tacomash knew the importance of being seen to use their powers for good, and indeed the devastating effects of the 1862-63 smallpox epidemic among the Nisga’a challenged shaman and missionary. The obstacles presented by sickness were evident in Chief Claytha’s accusation that both were working together against his people. When the price of furs fell and sickness spread among the children, many Nisga’a suspected the missionaries.

The advent of the mission also introduced unprecedented opportunities for wage labour into Nisga’a society, which people attempted to integrate with traditional patterns of seasonal resource gathering and feasting. Doolan’s quest for a mission house set apart from the Native structures and distinct in its European style nonetheless required Native labour. Both he and Robert Cunningham regularly went through the three villages in search of men to assist them in this and various other tasks. In 1864, the year the CMS arrived on the Nass, the Nisga’a’s defiant attitude toward a group of investors who had

established a company for the purpose of exploiting the Nass fishery had deterred them from proceeding further. Nonetheless, the Nisga'a by this time appear to have been familiar with wage labour. In his first spring Doolan drew out a plan for a new mission house and looked up some men, but found wages to be very high.²⁵

Men were generally employed in jobs requiring strenuous physical labour, while boys depending on their age appear to have either assisted the men or served in the mission house, performing mundane tasks that freed the missionaries to pursue other duties. Boys received half the wage of men, creating a wage scale that interestingly does not appear to have included women. On the surface at least, the missionaries' search for labour sought to create a class of wage labourers, and to impose a particular English, middle-class version of the gender division of labour.²⁶ Far more difficult was the task of instilling the work ethic required for such an individualized system of material relations. Not surprisingly, Doolan found the Nisga'a to be poor workers within this system. While supervising the construction of a ladder at the water's edge, the missionary observed that, "It requires a great deal of patience to deal with the Indians. I find that it is not of much use attempting to hurry them." When the mission house was underway in May 1865 Doolan complained that he could not "get more than a fair half-day's work from them, tho' they expect full pay."²⁷ Neither could Nisga'a in Doolan's employ be counted on when paid work threatened to interfere with preparation for traditional pursuits. With work proceeding slowly on the mission house, the following month the missionaries stopped by the house of an excellent worker who had promised to help them, only to be disappointed. They found the man preparing for a hunt: "He had just washed himself in the river and was drying himself before the fire. For some time before he had taken very little food, and had kept away from his wife. He thinks he should be unsuccessful, if he did not do all these things."²⁸ The hunter's rites of purification, in which sacrifices and prayers were offered to the spirit of the animal sought in the hope that the animal would allow itself to be killed, were essential to success and could not be disrupted, regardless of missionary demands.²⁹

Although the missionaries' desire for converts required a reconstitution of the Nisga'a subject, their need for labour placed them at odds with a people for whom work was integrated into the communal obligations of the seasonal round. The Nisga'a year

was divided into two distinct phases: a season when most resource gathering would be undertaken, commencing with the eulachon fishery in late winter/early spring and continuing to the Winter Ceremonial. The latter phase was marked by social and religious activities when the Nisga'a returned to the villages and the spirits were closer to human beings, enabling easier contact.³⁰ Lineage and tribal heads planned the seasonal movements of their own groups and delegated work, which moved with the seasonal runs of salmon, herring, and eulachon set the pattern for the yearly cycle of economic activities. Viola Garfield points out that there was a strong tendency for the winter village to break up into individual family units. Still, the propensity for collective work remained visible. Chiefs delegated work to their immediate relatives, supervised with their senior wives the work of men and women respectively, and determined the ideal quantities to be collected in a given season.

Similarly, surpluses were built up in accordance with long term plans, and feasts, potlatches, and large projects like the construction of a new house were planned years in advance. Besides meeting its daily needs, each family had to ensure it stored sufficient provisions to meet the demands of trading, feasting, potlatching, purchase of services and payment of debts.³¹ The year began in February or March with the arrival of the eulachon, followed by the salmon runs from May or June through to October. Materials required for household furnishings, implements, clothing and dwellings were also collected during the summer months. Women gathered berries, shellfish, and vegetable foods. They also tended the gardens many Nisga'a were increasingly cultivating, perhaps after years of contact with fur trade posts, and which were planted before leaving for the salmon run.³² The strong tendency for winter villages to break up into family units to perform the seasonal activities left the villages deserted save for the elderly and a few others left behind during the summer. Offshore fishing was the prerogative of the men, as was fall hunting, which ended the seasonal production activities for most families.³³

The prevalence of communal obligations that characterized Nisga'a material relations obliged the missionaries to work within the seasonal round if they wished to enlist Nisga'a labour. Like the above-mentioned hunter, the Nisga'a abandoned whatever project they might have been involved in with the missionaries when the salmon arrived or some other event set a communal activity in motion. While working with Doolan on

the new mission house during the first summer, a group of Nisga'a men were invited to a feast being held at the lower village by parties from upriver canoeing by on their way there. Doolan complained that everyone but a man named Moke left, but even he departed for another feast three days later, bringing the work on the house to a standstill.³⁴ Short a more dependable source of labour, the missionaries frequently bore the brunt of the immense amount of physical labour their designs for the Nisga'a entailed. In the three years Doolan worked among the Nisga'a, for example, the mission house was built, expanded, relocated further from the villages, and finally taken apart and reassembled at the new mission site of Gingolx downriver. During the spring of 1867 Doolan complained that most of the able-bodied men and even boarders had gone to the Nass fishery, "so we have to work with our own hands."³⁵

At this initial stage of contact at least, the churchmen could not match the chiefs' ability to harness great numbers to a collective purpose. Still, the missionaries represented a new force in Nisga'a society capable of using their resources to direct the energies of at least some Nisga'a. Further, any acceptance of the alien ideology that was coupled with this new force presented a considerable threat to the traditional chief's power. In such cases the missionaries simultaneously eroded chiefly direction over material relations as well as intellectual justifications for the traditional ordering of society. When an unnamed chief wanted Cowcaelth to work for him carving some instruments to be used in "medicine work," he was obliged to promise the young man double the wages that the missionaries were giving him. Cowcaelth nonetheless refused, having decided to use his skills as a *gitsontk* in the service of the mission as a carpenter.³⁶ The former *halaayt* carver appears to have been paid in cash, a form of payment that was becoming a substitute for the food, clothing and other supplies that specialized producers traditionally received for their manufactures, although he likely received some payment in kind as well. Thus, for any Nisga'a willing to work for the missionaries, the mission presented an alternative authority in the allocation of resources and direction and division of tasks.

Yet we have already seen that this authority did not operate in isolation of indigenous society. Significantly, the Nisga'a assimilated their material interactions with the mission into existing understandings of the social relations of exchange. The CMS

missionaries found marked opposition soon after their arrival on the Nass. Still, the churchmen had supporters, and most Nisga'a tolerated their presence, a position stemming from the perception that they had something to offer Nisga'a society. This may have been material benefits, which were inextricably bound to spiritual power in the Nisga'a view. Regardless of the precise goal, Nisga'a expectations for the missionary were shaped by the notion of reciprocity or mutual obligation that permeated every aspect of their society.³⁷ Doolan's sense of his purpose among the Nisga'a generally prevented him from appreciating the nature of the space they had opened in their society for him, or how his conversation with his subjects was changing him. Nonetheless, the entrenched hegemony of the notion of reciprocity among the Nisga'a could at times bring to light for the missionary the hazards of not accepting such a role.

This danger was evident in the summer of 1866 when a young man engaged in erecting a picket fence around the mission house drowned after running off to secure a large stick of firewood floating past the house. On the day of the accident Doolan expressed his shock as well as his relief that no one had as yet blamed him, as the young man had not initially asked his consent. He also noted that "I shall of course, have to pay to the relatives so many blankets, as compensation, as he was working for me at the time." Doolan's journal indicates he was well familiar with this practice around him.³⁸ The next day the missionary faced the wails of relatives in the house, as well as the anger of the dead man's brother, who clearly placed the blame with the missionary, telling him the death would be avenged. Doolan used the service as an opportunity to urge the mourners to come at once to Jesus for pardon, pointing out that it was now too late for the dead young man to do so. Early the following morning, thanks to the negotiating skill of an elderly chief named Neitsaul who assisted the missionary, Doolan gave the brother of the deceased four blue blankets and a cap, settling his obligations. He later concluded his summary of these events with the observation that, "This universal custom among the Indians of giving compensation in case of an accident is very awkward, as in employing Indians, should a serious accident occur they expect a very great amount of property."³⁹ Doolan did not recognize these and other customs as expressions of reciprocity. Rather, such compensation was an occasional concession made necessary by the Nisga'a's idiosyncrasies.

For their part, the Nisga'a made a much greater effort to understand the particular social relations Doolan wished to instill around labour. As discussed above, the inordinate attention the missionaries gave to resting from work on the Sabbath contributed to an emerging view among the Nisga'a that this day had a special significance. As this association became accepted the day became popular for feasts, as we have seen with the Wolf chief Kinzarda. Yet by the time of the first Nass fishery after the missionaries' arrival, many ceased work on the Sunday while those around them cut holes in the ice to catch the eulachon. Not surprisingly, Doolan found such structured idleness "a healthy sign and encouraging."⁴⁰ At this early stage of the mission the churchmen did not have the support of Native constables who turned in those who broke the Sabbath, as did Duncan at Metlakatla. Even less could they enforce church attendance, or stop work once the service was concluded. Instead the missionaries attempted to inculcate a sense of shame among those who worked or engaged in commerce on Sundays by scorning them for their sinful behavior. On the final Sunday of July 1865 a chief entered the mission house to enquire if it was, as he put it, the "day of rest." He desired to leave off work and hoist his flag. The missionaries hoped to see him at service, but later found him returning from a sloop in the river selling whiskey. Doolan wrote that, "He was disappointed, and looked very much ashamed of himself, or rather ashamed at our seeing him."⁴¹ It is difficult to gauge the chief's feelings from the missionary's reading of his countenance through a moral hierarchy. However we do know that for a Nisga'a drawn into the mission such as Cowdaeg, the admonition of both Doolan and Cowcaelth for breaking the Sabbath was sufficient to bring him and his wife up from their fishing station to attend church the following Sunday.⁴²

For the vast majority of Nisga'a still outside of the mission at this early stage, however, interest in observing the Sabbath was more likely to grow from the apparent benefits of avoiding work on this day. In the fall of 1865 a man broke his leg while cutting wood on a Sunday, which apparently "made a deep impression on the Indians." On his way down to the river with some others, the man had laughed at those who chose to desist from work. Doolan wrote that after several other men were injured while working on a Sunday, the Nisga'a began to call it "the bad day," and most desisted from work out of fear they would meet with an accident.⁴³ These Nisga'a were far more

interested in harnessing and domesticating the mission's evident power than accepting the explicit message behind its order and discipline. Their treatment of the Sabbath exemplifies a repeated pattern of appropriating novel ritual forms and then modifying them to meet local symbolic and material imperatives. The Nisga'a consistently chose to "talk back" to the colonizers in a register of their own by re-constructing and re-presenting the forms the missionaries attempted to instill into their culture.⁴⁴

Significantly, this aspect of the Nisga'a's dialogue with the CMS missionaries functioned at different degrees of consciousness. For even the acceptance of the mission's regime by those drawn into the church was always mediated to some extent by Nisga'a forms, as new ideas and rituals were received into well-entrenched ways of seeing and organizing the world. This phenomenon is in fact common in situations of religious transformation, in which professions of new belief obfuscate the fact that older modes of thought and action were never completely laid aside. At the most superficial level, one had to revolutionize one's sense of time in order to know when the Sabbath occurred before it could be observed. As late as Doolan's final summer on the Nass he wrote that few knew when Sunday came. One upriver party on their way to the sea to make plank found themselves passing the new village of Gingolx at the wrong time for trade. They had arrived on the final Sunday in June. Doolan wrote that the chief was "anxious to talk about buying and selling, but I told him it was God's day, and we had better talk about our souls and about God." The missionary expressed his hope that the upriver Nisga'a would soon know better than to arrive on a Sunday.⁴⁵ Although those closer to the mission could more easily keep track of divine time, there appears to have been some confusion as to how the day should be spent. On the Sunday before the upriver party arrived, those Nisga'a with Doolan at the new site of Gingolx rested on the Sabbath, even though there was much to be done, considering they had been at their new home for just over a week. Doolan noted that he had "[a]ssembled the people in the afternoon to learn a hymn. They have no resources to fall back upon, as we have, such as books, consequently, they know not what to do on Sundays, and feel the day is long." Similarly, the previous spring the missionary had noted that while the Sabbath was better kept now than a short time back: "The better disposed do not know what to do all day,

and keep coming into the house in twos and threes, so I instantly as soon as they come in make them sit down and learn something.”⁴⁶

Indeed, for those Nisga'a who came into contact with the CMS mission on the Nass, the meanings the missionaries attached to particular goods or practices were by no means inherent in them. On occasion new goods could become focal points of resentment to missionary power, as when the Wolf chief Cockshoo (Qwochsho) of Lakunkedah visited the schoolhouse one Sunday in June 1865. The chief was upset that a girl named Spalacht, whom he wanted to marry, had been married the previous day to a young man who had spent the winter studying at the mission. Convinced that the missionaries had persuaded the young man to marry her, Cockshoo began kicking over the rows of benches, before being pacified by two men. On entering the schoolhouse Doolan inquired about the clock, and learned the chief had attempted to break it.⁴⁷ More often, though, Nisga'a appear to have viewed objects introduced by the CMS in terms of the access to the supernatural they provided. The significance of this approach is put into perspective when we realize that for the Tsimshian-speaking peoples, sacredness was pervasive, or as Margaret Seguin suggests, there was perhaps a cline of sacredness.⁴⁸ The Nisga'a did not separate spiritual and material aspects of the world. Although Doolan adhered to the sacred/secular dichotomy of Western culture, he was not beyond employing novel goods when it seemed they could be put to spiritual ends. Thus the early encounter was marked by attempts to seize upon the novelty of various goods to the Nisga'a, as both missionary and Native saw in them a validation of their respective cosmologies.

The technological prowess of English society offered the missionary a near limitless repertoire from which to demonstrate the blessings of the Christian God.⁴⁹ Still, such associations brought into relief the tensions between the only partially overlapping projects of the CMS and other European colonizers of the North Pacific Coast. Many Nisga'a associated the British man-of-wars or warships with the missionaries stationed among them, a connection that was partially correct. For although Doolan tried to distance himself from the power of the colonial state, he nonetheless was entangled in its exercise and at times attempted to invoke it to further his aims. Doolan relied on the regular travel of the British Navy for maintaining correspondence with the CMS in

London. A sense of the missionaries' complex relationship with the society of colonial British Columbia can be seen during a trip Doolan made to Victoria in the summer of 1866 on Duncan's suggestion. Doolan hoped to "materially assist our agents in purchasing suitable goods for the Indians," as well as give information to any merchant at Victoria willing to take the trade at Metlakatla. While there, Doolan addressed a meeting convened by Bishop George Hills, which was attended by "all the leading personages, such as the Governour and suite, and the officers of the H.M. ships at Victoria."⁵⁰

Doolan was nonetheless disappointed to find that the Bishop had kept away—through anticipation of a collection—the "poorer and middling classes" he would have wished to have seen present.⁵¹ Although Doolan found that many parties in Victoria "sneer at and disbelieve our work," he was assured by several merchants that he "would not find them backward" when he wanted help. Before leaving Victoria Doolan called on Admiral J. Denman to ask his advice about some matters connected with the mission, and was promptly offered a ride back up the coast in the Royal Navy gunboat *Forward*. The Admiral "was anxious to despatch one to Metlakahtlah and the Naas river" and desired that the missionary "do all in [his] power to forward the work of the Captain of the gunboat in respect to the Indians, particularly at Naas." It is not clear precisely what the gunboat Captain's work with respect to Native peoples was, but the term likely referred to the illegal liquor trade that operated out of nearby Russian waters and British attempts to curb it through the extension of state power. To this request for assistance Doolan wrote, "of course I promised to do so."⁵² Thus, on arriving back at the Nass River, Doolan was able to inform the CMS that he was "glad to write we succeeded in reaching the villages, which no man-of-war, owing to the shallowness of the river had ever before effected."⁵³ Such alliances blurred the distinction between sacred and secular colonial power, a distinction the Nisga'a on shore did not make.

In this particular missionary visit to Victoria we see a jumble of colonizing interests, including endorsement of the CMS mission by the colonial elite, the missionary's attempt to broaden popular support among the middling and lower classes, and both derision and financial backing within these broad groups. To be sure Doolan had his own interests in mind in assisting the penetration of colonial law into new waters. He regularly wrote that the mere spectre of a visit from a man-of-war stifled Nisga'a

plans that could potentially be prosecuted under colonial law, such as Chief Claytha's threats to shoot someone to wipe out the disgrace of his brother Chief Kadounaha's death. In October 1865, one year before leading the H.M. *Forward* into the Nass, Doolan expressed to Bishop Hills his frustration at the failure of a man-of-war to make an appearance. "It is a great pity [one] does not visit us," he informed the Bishop. "The fear of the consequences that may on her arrival befall them, arising from their misdeeds, operates as some little check on them, but when we tell them, again and again, the man of war is coming, and she never comes, what must they think?"⁵⁴ When at Fort Simpson, the missionary also encouraged any captains he would find there to proceed to the Nass in hopes that they would stem the illegal liquor trade.⁵⁵ Yet Doolan was concerned to reassure the Nisga'a that this relationship did not exist. Understandably, the Nisga'a found this confusing. During a meeting of Nisga'a chiefs in January 1866, Chief Ndah made a speech, in which he exhorted his fellow chiefs to seize the man-of-war if it came, and to take vengeance on any white men. Doolan saw in this latter remark an allusion to the missionaries. He wrote that Ndah was later very sorry for what he had said, and "fears we shall deliver him up to the man of war when it comes." Doolan thus assured him that "our mission was one of peace, and we had nothing to do with the man-of-war."⁵⁶

The great excitement that the prospect of a visit from a man-of-war created among many Nisga'a in the lower villages was no doubt close to the reaction hoped for by the CMS missionaries. Yet the ultimate aim of these and other spectacles clearly went beyond any desire to discipline through threat of punishment, an effect that was at best only marginally advantageous to a colonizing project that eschewed compulsion. In their attempt to woo the Nisga'a to Anglican Christianity, the CMS missionaries became vanguards of the latest European technology for different reasons. Although their primary goal was to bring the word of evangelical Christianity to this distant periphery of the world, the churchmen could not help but notice the genuine enthusiasm of those around the mission for the ever-widening range of goods offered by their own industrial culture. Nor could they resist the temptation to harness such displays of interest. Doolan wrote on 8 March 1865 that ceremonial work was going on every night, but that he "Hear[d] with much thankfulness that Cowcaelth has family prayer in his house every

night,” which was “full of Indians, wishing to trade bits of curiosities.”⁵⁷ In this and other ways the missionaries ushered novel and as-yet unseen goods into the Nisga’a world whose meanings were not yet established and of which they hoped to be the arbiter.

A trip Doolan made to Metlakatla accompanied by three young boys in May 1866 provided one such opportunity to “open up their minds,” as the missionary liked to phrase it. The boys were anxious to see the Christian village, and it was their apparent sadness at the prospect of turning back during a storm while en route that convinced Doolan to continue. They were not to be disappointed. The H.M. *Sparrowhawk* was docked at Fort Simpson, and had brought Bishop Hills. Given the man-of-war’s imminent departure, the celebration of Queen Victoria’s birthday was moved up, permitting a twenty-one-gun salute at noon from the gunboat. Doolan recalled in his journal that “Some of the guns were of very heavy metal, and the ground shook under us from the reverberations. I think my little boys at Nass were rather frightened when they heard them.”⁵⁸ That evening, they and the village were treated to an exhibition of the magic lantern. Like the pictures illustrative of the Saviour’s life Doolan brought with him when visiting the sick, magic lanterns promised by the sense of novelty and curiosity they invoked to bring their Native viewers to Jesus. Bishop Hills lent both Doolan and Duncan boxes of slides, the display of which, along with stereoscopic views and pictures, was reserved to mark the Christian calendar.⁵⁹

Glimpses of initial indigenous responses to the new technologies introduced by missionaries to further their work are unfortunately rare. Still, Doolan describes one such encounter in his journal. Residing at Metlakatla during Duncan’s trip to Victoria early in 1867, Doolan was present to witness the lay missionary’s return with a new “machine” that it was hoped would effect some good among the sick. He wrote, “Duncan shewed the children the effects of a small galvanic battery. Some were afraid at first to receive a shock, but eventually all tried it. Thus, their minds are being opened out.”⁶⁰ The missionaries’ introduction of new goods, in this case a medical device, was envisioned as part of an opening up or out of the native mind, a process they hoped would prepare the way for reception of the word. Certain material goods, by their novelty, might be introduced by the churchmen in such a way that they would buttress claims of the

superiority of their spiritual message in the minds of those interacting with the mission. More commonly in the nineteenth century, however, a new good entered the Nass watershed by way of trade, a process over which the churchmen had even less control. Doolan's journal abounds with references to new items that Nisga'a were acquiring, and to his dismay, putting to unforeseen uses.

The supernatural significance Nisga'a attached to new European goods in the period under consideration speaks to the limits of the missionaries' ability to harness their own material culture in the service of propagating Christian doctrine. It also provides a sense of the resilience of Nisga'a cosmology during the initial period of missionization, as foreign and potentially threatening items were incorporated and used to buttress it. During Doolan's second winter stationed on the Nass he wrote of one Nisga'a shaman who had been "doing a great trade" at Fort Simpson. The missionary explained, "He has obtained a long strip of india rubber, and after rattling some time over the sick person, he stretches the india rubber, letting it suddenly go, and the people on hearing the twang, believe he has caught the evil spirit."⁶¹ New goods appear to have provided additional means to old ends, and even offered the prospect of extending one's ability to access supernatural power. In his above-mentioned account of a visit made with Robert Cunningham to the house of a worker whom they found preparing for hunting, Doolan related that he was "more than once struck on entering the Indians' houses at seeing two or more guns standing outside." The missionary found that "when a woman is near her confinement, and at other seasons peculiar to women, all the guns and I believe, tho' I have not seen them, the nets, are put outside the house. They say the guns would not kill, nor the nets catch any fish, if they left them in the house." The abundant references to guns in Doolan's journal indicate that this weapon was widely used in hunting by mid-century. Yet for any perceived advantage of the gun for killing prey, for many Nisga'a its efficacy nonetheless was dependent upon adherence to traditional purification rites.

In November 1865 Doolan visited a "great medicine woman" who was ill. The previous winter she had asked the missionary to be baptized, believing she was dying, but Doolan refused, concluding that she was "evidently full of tales picked up from the priests at Victoria, and knew nothing of her real state before God." During this visit the woman related some of her dreams to Doolan, and told him that she had been "in the land

of the spirits, and had seen her sister, who would not let her enter.” To confirm that the time of her passing was near, the woman “then shewed [Doolan] her photograph, which had been taken at Victoria, and said, she should soon die, as the picture had last night changed color.” The missionary not surprisingly tried to show her the folly of such thoughts, but could tell that she was not convinced. “The people say, we don’t know anything about these things,” Doolan wrote in his journal, “and seem to pity our ignorance.”⁶² Interestingly, this Nisga’a woman and evidently many others found the CMS missionaries to be quite ignorant of spiritual matters, and pitied them for their lack of spiritual knowledge or understanding—the very thing for which the missionaries pitied the people of the Nass, and which they were attempting to provide. Far from being convinced of the folly of her thoughts, the woman found in Doolan’s disbelief an ignorance that she pitied. The missionary’s attempts to dissuade his subjects from their apparent superstitions with arguments or evidence based in reason had little effect. What he took to be definitive disproofs in no way undermined Nisga’a ontological assumptions.

This was equally true for some of the more dangerous uses of goods in the Nisga’a life world as well. The Nisga’a Doolan encountered on the Nass appear to have shared with their Tsimshian neighbours a distinction between *halaayt* and *haldaawgit*. A *halaayt* was someone who had been endowed with or contacted by a *naxnox* or “spirit,” a term that applied to any being, event, or ability that appeared to exhibit or express some form of “power”—in short, anything connected with the abnormal or extraordinary. Any demonstration or representation of the gift of power, particularly the dramatization of such power by the initiates of the secret societies, was also called *halaayt*.⁶³ While *halaayt* was a positive term—shamans did generally work for good—*haldaawgit* was definitely linked with evil doings, practices which have led some to compare the term to “witchcraft” in English usage. Witches (also called *haldaawgit*), were not *halaayt*, but effected their evil “through magic,” meaning they relied not on their own or a spirit’s power but rather on the properties of the ingredients or materials they used.⁶⁴ The introduction of new material goods that occurred with the establishment of the CMS mission presented new potential for danger, should they be taken and used against those associated with them. Claytha raised just such a concern among those around the mission

in the spring of 1866 when he accused the elderly chief Neitsaul, who was accustomed to sitting silently in the mission house for hours, of cutting the strings off some of the children's slates while Doolan was absent. This he did, Claytha alleged, for the purpose of killing the children. The Wolf chief pointed out that the children had hung the slates around their necks, and some of the dirt from their bodies had adhered to the string, which Neitsaul could use to afflict them. Doolan explained to the CMS that this belief was held by "[t]he most intelligent amongst these people," and concluded that "We may laugh at such foolish notions, or pity such superstitious fears, but if any of the children should die, the matter would be very serious for the accused."⁶⁵

The struggle to control the place both new and old goods should assume in Nisga'a cosmology found its most explicit expression when enacted on the terrain of the ceremonial complex associated with the term potlatch. Indeed it was here that the missionaries demonstrated most forcefully their ignorance of the Aboriginal practices they insisted on changing. The churchmen were not alone in their confusion, however. The multi-faceted gift-exchange ceremony was frequently misinterpreted by colonial society. The potlatch's numerous functions, rooted in unfamiliar assumptions about the world, readily lent themselves to a distorted understanding by outsiders.⁶⁶ The potlatch permeated every aspect of Nisga'a life. Its performance could mark one or more community rituals, including naming, house dedication, perforation of ears, nose, and lower lip to wear ornaments, bestowal of supernatural power, marriage, competitive challenges between groups, and death.⁶⁷ Food sharing and the solidarity suggested by this activity were at the heart of these occasions.

Potlatching was the most formalized of all the feasting situations, emphasizing as it did the public importance of solidarity and the continuity of institutions. Viola Garfield claims that the Tsimshian potlatch served as a "legal and publicity department through which all matters concerning the group were approved and accepted."⁶⁸ The potlatch served as a kind of public register in Nisga'a and other oral societies on the Northwest coast. Invited guests were feasted and given gifts in exchange for publicly acknowledging individual claims to songs, crests, dances, powers, property rights and the giving of people to names. Potlatching was important to every individual, as all significant changes in status were validated through the distribution of goods. The

system was highly adaptive, representing a “close mesh” of economic, political, social and cosmological strands. Significantly, competitive potlatching—the boastful or revenge type of potlatch in which relative rankings of the host and guests were sorted out, and which has been so misrepresented by outside observers—became more common among many Tsimshian peoples in the early historical period.⁶⁹ This was the main form against which CMS missionaries raised strong objections. Ironically, its growing prevalence was brought about in part by the dislocations and influx of European goods resulting from the establishment of missions and fur trading posts. Still, the dynamic of the feasting-potlatching institution worked toward a balancing out in the long term, intended as it was to result in the mutual recognition of changes in the social fabric.

The Anglican churchmen’s discourses on the potlatch disclose little understanding of this reciprocal quality. Doolan almost exclusively referred to the potlatches held around him on the Nass as “whiskey feasts,” revealing both the prominent place alcohol had recently taken in them as well as his ignorance of the array of occasions and purposes for which the Nisga’a were congregating.⁷⁰ Yet the missionary’s critique of the ceremonial exchange system of the Nisga’a was multi-faceted, containing elements of Doolan’s commitment to evangelical Christianity as well as many of the Victorian sensibilities of the larger colonial society. While these beliefs were concurrent in many aspects, there nonetheless existed significant differences between them, particularly when it came to the question of the future relation of Aboriginal peoples to a growing white society. Doolan’s accounts of Nisga’a feasting and potlatching are rife with these tensions and contradictions.

Homi Bhabha describes colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*” This mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence, since in order to be effective, “mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.”⁷¹ Evangelical discourse, even with its incorporating aspirations, shared this desire for mimicry, for a reformed but distinct Other. Brett Christophers has argued that missionary discourse could not assume the immutable difference—such as binding racial hierarchies—held by secular colonial discourses in the nineteenth century. He finds the Anglican missionary agenda, as propagated by the Reverend John Good to the Nlha7káp̓mx, to be concerned

with transformation rather than subjugation. The discourse of the Anglican mission coexisted uneasily with the strict racial hierarchies of secular colonialism. According to Christophers, the missionaries “borrowed the standard lexicon of empire but altered its signification.”⁷² To be sure, Anglican and other Protestant missionary discourses marked conversion as the point at which heathens became Christians, and the other became the same. The doctrine of the equality of souls likely found more muted expression in Anglican theology with its attention to hierarchy than in other Protestant sects, however. Further, from the initial CMS encounter with the Nisga’a it appears the arrival of this point of sameness could be perpetually put off to a time in the distant future when conversion was judged to be complete.

Indeed missionaries were profoundly affected by the prevailing racial discourses. More than Christophers’ acknowledges, the churchmen also partook in the signification of empire. Catherine Hall has demonstrated how in the England of the early to mid-1850s abolitionist and liberal orthodoxy about black people as brothers and sisters—and as potentially perfectible through Christianity—had given way to ideas of immutable biological difference. “Race” increasingly became a primary form of self and group identification.⁷³ In a letter to Doolan in March 1866, for example, the CMS condemned the illegal liquor trade operating out of nearby Russian waters. They noted, “[w]e have heard with indignation at the conduct of white Christians in brutalizing the natives by their...traffic in ardent spirits.”⁷⁴ The emphasis the Society placed on the faith of the violators was intended to highlight the inconsistency of their behaviour with their brothers and sisters. Still, their designation as “white” Christians set them apart permanently from Native converts. The churchmen operated between the increasingly racialized discourse of empire and that of the Protestant equality of souls, between a desire for distinction from their charges and a hoped-for unity with them, with all of the tensions incumbent on such a position. Doolan’s desire for mimicry was maintained by a near impossible demand for complete conversion to English life ways, but stemmed from his anxieties about dissolving distinctions between himself and his subjects. For example, Robert Dundas, the missionaries’ young Tsimshian translator to the Nisga’a from Metlakatla, was recognized by them as a Christian, but nonetheless retained many of the deficiencies of the Native. Discouraged by the repetitious nature of Dundas’s

address during each Sunday service, Doolan told his diary in May of 1865 that “I give him thro’ Mr. Cunningham some suggestions on the subject chosen during the week, but the Indian mind is not very retentive.”⁷⁵

Preceding this desire for a reformed Other was the very construction of this Other as an ontologically different object of the colonizer’s gaze. This “early” Other was particularly important in anchoring evangelical discourse, with its sliding scale of alterity between heathen and Christian. The significance of this gradation of alterity lies in the fact that the colonizer’s ambivalence could also exist at any point in the formation and evolution of the Other. Regardless of the missionaries’ particular (re-)fashioning of sameness and difference in each subject, the maintenance or regulation of these boundaries was continually threatened, as Nisga’a who interacted with the mission gave lie to the power of the missionaries’ labels to encapsulate them and explain their relation to the churchmen. Such displacement can be seen in Doolan’s attempt to juxtapose the mere “display” of property at feasts with what he saw as the more tangible exchange he thought should characterize material relations.

The potlatching feasts of Wolf Chief Kinzarda that began during Doolan’s first winter on the Nass became a case in point to the missionary of the inherent vanity behind such spectacles. In May 1865 the missionary described the narcissism and duplicity he saw in the chief’s give-away:

Great preparations in the camp for hoisting a large carved stick before the house of a chief called Kinzarda, and who is about to give away property: I hear he has been nearly five years gathering together this property. In the afternoon the stick, which is very finely carved, with representations of the human face, and the wolf, was hoisted, and ten guns were broken on it, and thirty given away: All this was done for display, and is a great farce, as I heard that the owner of three of the guns that were given away, received them back again that night.⁷⁶

The missionary’s condemnation was characteristic of his opposition to feasts and potlatching in that it included a mix of Christian and more secular elements. Doolan felt that the entire pole-raising and gift-giving occasion was held for no other reason than to enhance the status of Chief Kinzarda.⁷⁷ Oblivious to the symbolic and ceremonial aspects of this exchange of goods, to the churchman the entire event was a great charade. Not only were goods being given for the wrong reason, but at least some were deceitfully

presented as gifts, further evidence of the sinful motives from which such apparent generosity had sprung. The accumulation of property, like the industry that went into its collection, was not in itself bad, and indeed both were encouraged elsewhere.⁷⁸ However, the dispersal and even destruction of this wealth—in this case a highly valued European good—was a subversion of the missionaries’ teleological vision of material progress. Indeed, the previous winter Doolan described Kinzarda as “a very bad man and much opposed to us, [who] has destroyed by throwing into the fire three coats two blankets and a gun.”⁷⁹

Combining new goods with more traditional ends was one way in which the Nisga’a upset the authority of the missionaries’ discourse against feasting and potlatching. Doolan described one of Kinzarda’s initial feasts, which had been postponed from a Saturday to a Sunday, with a mixture of fascination and revulsion:

This night Kinzarda had his grand feast, and entertainment. He visited us, but we firmly refused. On all sides of his house were galleries erected and in the middle a sort of stage for the players. The wom[e]n would come into our house first, I suppose to show their finery. All their faces painted, and dressed in blankets tastefully decorated with small mother of pearl buttons. I am sorry that some of our scholars were induced to sing some of the hymns taught them at our house. Some refused and Cowcaelth said that he would leave the house if they did as it was tempting God.⁸⁰

The missionary’s description conveys a sense of the important visual dimension of potlatching and feasting, underscoring the significance of re-enacting stories for both the perpetuation of names, titles, and crests as well as the maintenance and building of relations of power.⁸¹ Although he assumed that the women had only entered the mission house to parade their ceremonial dress, Doolan found their blankets “tastefully decorated.” Interestingly, those attending Kinzarda’s feast persuaded a number of the churchmen’s students to share some of their newly acquired songs, although others refused. In this exchange we see the ambivalences of both the missionaries and those with whom they interacted. The Nisga’a confounded Doolan’s attempt to denigrate Kinzarda’s feast by crossing distinctions of the aesthetic with those of religion that he had constructed to critique it. During a supposedly heathen gathering for the purpose of vanity, the missionary nonetheless found himself sorry that Christian hymns were being requested and sung by his students. More than any others who intermingled between the

new mission and the surrounding Nisga'a villages, these young scholars were exposed to the churchmen's dichotomization of these worlds. Cowcaelth and others' refusal to sing may be evidence of the effects of this distinction. Yet the particular objection of one of Doolan's converts to singing Christian hymns at a potlatch—that it was “tempting God”—reminds us that even where missionary teachings were consciously accepted, they most likely were received alongside more deeply rooted patterns of belief with which they became enmeshed, rather than being replaced. We cannot be certain, but Cowcaelth's statement may have expressed a desire not to provoke wrath, as might occur when relations with the spirit world were upset in traditional Nisga'a belief.

The CMS missionaries' opposition to feasting and potlatching began a dialogue in this early period that caused even the most determined opponents of the mission to reflect on a well-established cultural practice. As we have seen, Wolf Chief Claytha of Lakunkedah was an open foe of the missionaries. He did not believe they were real missionaries and encouraged others to ignore them. Doolan wrote of the chief that “a more wicked man than Claytha is not to be found at Nass. He equals Legaic who is now at Metlakahtlah, in wickedness.” Claytha held a preparatory feast in November 1865, during which he collected property from his clan that would be used to honour their crest the following year. After the first day of feasting and dancing the chief had gathered close to five hundred blankets, and he proceeded down the river to the lower village to receive property from the relations of one of his wives who had recently died. Yet “on passing the mission house,” Doolan wrote, “he stood up in his canoe and made a speech, the purport of which, was, That he was doing nothing wrong, as his wife and child had lately died, and he was receiving property on account of their death. Later in the day he made another speech before Mr. Cunningham's house, expressing the same sentiments and asked us to pray for him.”⁸² Claytha may have perceived a need to defend his enactment of tradition before a threatening newcomer.

Whatever the precise reason for Claytha's speeches, it is clear that the missionaries, in ardently opposing the entire ceremonial complex of the Nisga'a around them, had to some extent succeeded in insinuating themselves into the world they wished to re-form. One of the mission's strongest critics perceived the need to explain to both missionaries that his actions were in accord with Nisga'a tradition. Yet the multivalent

quality of Claytha's speeches invites further analysis. Peeling back the layers of meaning, likely operating at different levels of consciousness, we see in this recognition of missionary authority a desire to access the bases of this power. Claytha requested that the missionaries pray for him. On the third day of his feast, in which eulachon grease was being given out, the chief came down to the mission house at dusk, excited and apparently intoxicated. After his visit Doolan wrote that "It jars very much on my feelings, to hear a man in his state calling on his Great Father in Heaven to pity him."⁸³ Like the fur traders around him, Doolan misunderstood the Native practice of seeking pity. Although taking on different inflections across First Nations, the practice was a way of showing humility or modesty before a prospective donor, or more generally may have stemmed from a desire to establish or reaffirm a relationship.⁸⁴ Doolan keenly placed Claytha's request within the Christian telos of conversion, trusting that "it may please God to change his heart and convert him, thus shewing to the heathen his mighty power."⁸⁵ Claytha appears, at least at this point, to have been interested in augmenting his own power by drawing from a new source. However, in taking Christian hymns or other practices out of their "proper" domains and combining them with Nisga'a practice, Claytha and other Nisga'a redrew colonial boundaries in a way that relocated their position in relation to the missionaries, simultaneously displacing the latter's authority and asserting the continuing validity of Nisga'a practices.

For all the missionaries' efforts to stop the practice of potlatching, they nonetheless were ambivalent about the place material goods should occupy for the Nisga'a they sought to evangelize. The churchmen brought with them to the Nass a very specific notion of the correct relationship of property to the spiritual pursuits of life. So far we have seen this in their confusing attempts to separate and submit what they regarded as the material to the spiritual, as well as in their willingness to employ the former in the service of the latter when this appeared beneficial. Another dimension of this relationship was a disdain for material wealth that was not acquired through industrious means, or put to good use. Such property could serve as a hindrance to one's salvation. These views were also gendered. In her discussion of the content of middle-class masculinity with respect to property, work, and the home in nineteenth-century England, Catherine Hall writes, "True manliness was derived not from property and

inheritance, but from ‘real religion’—the faith born from religious conversion and a determination to make life anew.” The CMS missionaries came from a culture in which respectable English middle-class men valued the capacity to work for oneself in the world, and found dignity in labour and earning money, as opposed to merely living off an existing fortune.⁸⁶

Doolan criticized the Nisga’a both for what he perceived as their material poverty, as well as for the extravagance of their system of ceremonial exchange. References to the apparent paucity of the material means of subsistence punctuate the missionary’s journal. For example, on one particularly cold winter day at the school house in 1866 Doolan wrote that “the children keep constantly jumping up and running to the fire to warm themselves.” He explained, “Some having but one blanket, no shirt or trowsers, they look very wretched.”⁸⁷ On another cold day one month earlier the missionary was moved to write about two or three men whom he felt plagued him very much during school. “They have no shame,” an exasperated Doolan wrote,

and keep begging all day. They come into the room, sit down, and are fixtures for some hours. Suddenly coming into my room, I found a man had taken my great coat, and was wearing it. He told me he had a very good coat in his house, and if I had no objection, he would exchange. I certainly did object and after some little persuasion, I got him to divest himself of the coat and leave. They are constantly coming and asking for the loan of a cap or something, but they are very honest, and return anything lent to them.⁸⁸

Doolan’s criticisms suggest that the aesthetics of material poverty were a significant part of his disapproval. So too Kinzarda’s “display” and giving away of nine hundred blankets at his potlatch offended the middle-class sensibilities of this English missionary. Neither was seen as an acceptable—let alone desirable—state in the eyes of a man from a culture that celebrated a moderate respectability, and there is some evidence that Doolan saw both states as part of the same problem. During the tragic canoe expedition to the coast to trap martens in which Chief Kadounaha and others drowned, the missionary explained that Cowdaeg was “very poor and having no clothes, as he gave them away when he was made a medicine man.”⁸⁹ Shortly after Doolan’s arrival on the Nass he explained that Cowdaeg was “now running on the back half naked” after he and both his parents had distributed their property at various potlatches.⁹⁰

Although they shaped his aversion to potlatching, Doolan's middle-class sensibilities did not provide him with firm answers to the question of the place of property among an evangelized Nisga'a. Rather, their refraction through Anglican Christianity contributed to a certain distrust or unease in using material goods to attain spiritual ends, as we have already seen. For their part, the Nisga'a who interacted with the mission on the lower Nass saw no such tension. The traditional feast system, with its exchange of food, wealth, and crests was central as the context for keeping and building relations of power, particularly of the supernatural kind. The hosts' very ability to give a potlatch demonstrated that the beings of the supernatural world, "the guardians of wealth," had assisted them in their worldly efforts.⁹¹ As a means of circulating goods, the potlatch ceremonial complex was a cornerstone of the Nisga'a ideal of reciprocity, in which a recognition of mutual interdependence ensured that the needs of all were met. Nisga'a around the mission periodically fused the apparent extremes of poverty and excess Doolan thought were generated by this system, bewildering the missionary. Witnessing Wolf Chief Claytha's above-mentioned feast in preparation for a potlatch the following year, Doolan "was astonished to find some old women, who were usually to be seen sitting round the fire, and wearing a very dirty torn blanket, were the possessors of ten or twelve new blankets."⁹² So common must this apparent juxtaposition have been that later the same winter while visiting the sick the churchman remarked that, "You would fancy that they were very poor judging from the dirty bits of rag they bind round their wounds, when their boxes are full of cloth, and blankets. But these they hoard up to give away at some future time."⁹³ By asserting an integral cultural practice, one that permitted them to be both 'poor' and 'wealthy,' these Nisga'a confounded missionary attempts to categorize them according to English sensibilities.

In asserting the central place of goods in the establishment and maintenance of relations of power with beings of this and other worlds, the Nisga'a also presented the missionaries with their understanding of what it meant to be poor. Doolan regarded requests for goods from the Nisga'a as evidence of their poverty, although his efforts to discern who fit his construction of wretchedness suggest some awareness of other motives at work. In early March 1865, as Nisga'a came down from upper villages to await the arrival of the eulachon and swelled attendance at the mission service to nearly

one hundred, Doolan complained that people were constantly coming to beg. In response the missionary tried to find out “cases of real want,” a tactic these Nisga’a did not receive well. “They quite despise me because I will not give them all they want,” Doolan wrote. “They think I am very poor, which is a great fault in an Indian’s estimation.”⁹⁴ Here we see an important dimension of the Nisga’a’s high regard for the owners of wealth. Recognition and display of one’s title and social position were indeed part of potlatching, but they existed in the context of a host of clearly defined reciprocal obligations that ensured that times of need would be met with generosity. The term *sm’oogit* or chief in the Tsimshian languages literally translates as “Real Person.”⁹⁵ There are indications that the early European missionaries encountered by the Tsimshian peoples were also thought to be Real. On William Duncan’s first visit to the Nass in April 1860 he was feasted and given presents of furs, as well as sprinkled with white down during a dance by Chief Kadounaha.⁹⁶ The qualities of a chief found in myths and ethnographic interviews note that above all chiefs must be able to command wealth and distribute it to both the benefit and renown of their people and themselves. Indeed, the quality of being a Real Being was laden with power and with responsibility. In this context, Doolan’s restrained giving and attempts to ferret out “real need” were evidence of his poverty and of his inability or unwillingness to honour reciprocal obligations.⁹⁷

In both word and gesture, many Nisga’a articulated and affirmed their own concept of poverty before the missionaries. These Nisga’a explained to the missionaries the reciprocity that was integral to their potlatching, and tried to incorporate them into this relationship. On several occasions, the missionaries were instructed of this importance of giving and receiving material goods for maintaining their social relations. When an unnamed chief came to Doolan asking for medicine for his sore leg in October 1865, the missionary asked him if he was coming to the service. On this Sunday at least, the chief had plans to attend a feast being held by Cowaikik. He assured the missionary that “he should not drink his share, but carry it home in a bottle, and take a little at a time.” Unsatisfied, Doolan told him that the best thing he could do would be to fling the alcohol away, to which the chief replied that, “if he did so, the giver of the feast would be ashamed.”⁹⁸ During another feast later the same fall, the mother of the mission student Wachlee (Wahlee) urged her son to participate, telling him that “he need not drink any

whiskey, but good to bring it away with him, and after some time, he would have saved enough to give a feast himself.” This same day Wachlee urged another young man, named Letq, to join him in building a house near the mission house. Letq replied that “he had a good many friends at his own village and he felt ashamed to leave, before he had given away a certain amount of property.” Nonetheless Doolan concluded from this that “Thus Satan allures men on their ruin.”⁹⁹

The deleterious effects that would result from extracting oneself from the web of social relations embodied in the potlatch were articulated most explicitly when Doolan and the newly-arrived Reverend Robert Tomlinson went around the village, calling at every house to tell the people of their plan to start a Christian village at the mouth of the river. Another unnamed chief, whom Doolan described as “ha[ving] always been well inclined toward the mission,” was anxious to come, but could not make up his mind whether or not to accede to the missionaries’ rules. The rule to which the chief particularly objected was that in this new village no one was to distribute property, “or tear it up for purposes of display.” The chief told the missionaries that “the chiefs would soon become poor, if they followed our rules.”¹⁰⁰ To this Nisga’a chief, the cessation of all ceremonial exchange of goods was true poverty. It was likely this demand to stop distributing property that contributed to Chief Kadounaha’s belief that conversion meant one could no longer be a chief. The chief who had initially invited Duncan to the Nass explained to Cunningham shortly after the establishment of the mission that he wished “to do what is right and be with us, but does not wish to resign his place as a chief.” Cunningham told Kadounaha of “the efforts W. Duncan was making to keep Legaic in his position as a chief” and assured him that “we should try to do the same.”¹⁰¹ Doolan appears to have sensed this potential obstacle to the Nisga’a’s conversion to Christianity early during his time on the Nass. In his first letter to the CMS the missionary noted the importance the Nisga’a attached to property and their practice of polygamy. He observed, “one of the most difficult questions that will arise” would be “[h]ow to maintain a chief’s world[ly] position on his embracing Christianity.”¹⁰²

Significantly, both the missionaries and the Nisga’a they met on the lower Nass in the 1860s attempted to incorporate the other in part by asserting a specific relation to property. Just as Chief Claytha came into the mission house and presented both

Cunningham and Doolan with two marten skins to “make peace” after he had mistakenly come close to firing on a sloop owned by Duncan, so Doolan told the above-mentioned chief who was anxious to move with them to Gingolx that “It was better to sacrifice the property and follow God’s ways.” As we have seen, however, there were fundamental differences in the respective views of property. The reciprocal nature of Nisga’a society made them more open to the possibility of changing as a result of their interaction with the missionaries than were the latter, who defined their work in terms of implanting a message into a void. Indeed, many desired access to the power that was so evident in white society, whose attainment they did not see as precluding them from being Nisga’a. Regardless of this receptivity, at the time of Doolan’s return to England and the move to Gingolx in 1867 the Nisga’a were clearly more certain of the proper relationship they desired with material goods—including the stream of new items entering their world—than were the CMS missionaries. In their engagement with these churchmen many Nisga’a consistently asserted their own conceptions of the roles goods should play in their lives, both in connecting with the supernatural and in achieving more mundane ends. Frequently this involved transgressing the dichotomies and other constructions the missionaries sought to impose. Doolan wrote that the chief who wished to move with the mission to Gingolx assented to his insistence on making the transition from ‘giving’ property to ‘sacrificing’ this practice altogether, yet the missionary nonetheless saw him as having two hearts in the matter and feared “this world has too great a hold on him.”¹⁰³

Here again we see the missionaries’ attempt to distinguish between spiritual and material pursuits, a dichotomy that made little sense to the Nisga’a and which they transgressed. The churchmen’s ambivalence towards property did not prevent them from using it to try to impose their designs on the Nisga’a. They both denied its importance and employed it to bring conversions, and tried to organize their subjects into categories defined by a perceived paucity or excess of wealth, both of which they found deplorable. Doolan saw as disingenuous the practice of crying through the village after the death of a chief, noting of the mourners that, “They will all of them get paid for their crying.” Similarly, Doolan wrote that it “jarred on [his] feelings” when he heard the relatives of the drowned young man who had been erecting a picket fence at the mission “leave off crying to ask about the dead man’s boots.”¹⁰⁴ The churchman despaired when one of “his

patients” was taken to see a shaman, writing, “The consequences, I fear, will be serious to her. They will have to pay him six or seven blankets.”¹⁰⁵ Doolan proudly noted on several occasions that compared to the shamans his work among the Nisga’a was without charge. This stemmed from the same impulse to spread the gospel freely that had led Doolan to wish that his address in Victoria had been without collection, in the hope of attracting the poorer and middling classes.

Nonetheless, the missionary found himself accepting gifts when it appeared that this might present an opportunity to further the word. Such an occasion arose in March 1866 when Doolan visited some sick people and dressed the wounds of a man who had shot himself. Doolan found that “A good opportunity was afforded me, by his presenting me with a martins skin, as payment for my services, to tell him why I had come amongst them.”¹⁰⁶ Still, as we have seen, Doolan refused to give goods on the suspicion that this would pollute his spiritual message. Elizabeth Ryan’s reply to the query of Thratcouquats and Cockshoo on why Doolan did not give them shirts and trousers and other things like the priests at Fort Rupert did had been that the missionary “did not want to bribe them to become Christians, but that their hearts must be changed, before they could be Christians and that no property would accomplish this.” In January 1866 Doolan reflected that “I thought at one time of giving each scholar a bit of soap every week to wash, before he came, but I did not wish in any way to seem to bribe them to come, so I did not.”¹⁰⁷

However unattainable an ideal, the word being introduced by the churchmen was to arrive free of material entanglement. Doolan juxtaposed the rival Sunday pursuits of hearing the word and potlatching in such a way that the latter appeared concerned only with the mundane and purely material. On enquiring why Cowcaelth’s wife who frequently attended service was absent on the final Sunday in May 1865, Doolan learned that a feast was being held during which property was being given away. Undaunted, the missionary wrote, “I trust that in a little time, she will prefer hearing the word of God to receiving property.”¹⁰⁸ Even goods with obvious spiritual functions were presented by Doolan as entirely worldly in nature in this construction. In January 1866 the missionary wrote that “I heard with much pleasure that Cowwaiekek [Cowaikik] had sold to Mr. Cunningham all his tools used in the medicine work, such as rattles, masks, etc. This is

very encouraging news, as it shews the word of God is taking effect in his heart, and bringing forth fruit.” In explaining that others were interested in joining the mission, but unwilling to follow Cowaikik in severing existing cultural practices or social relations, Doolan lamented that “The things of the world have at present too strong a hold on their hearts, but if they are God’s children they will be brought to Jesus.”¹⁰⁹ Salvation was possible, but required that the Nisga’a overcome their preoccupation with material concerns, a critique that reflected much of the missionaries’ own anxieties. Yet in juxtaposing receiving God’s word with well-entrenched Nisga’a ways of relating to property, Doolan unconsciously contributed to its relativization by the Nisga’a as but one of many new means—albeit an important one—by which they could gain access to new forms of power. The significance that the Nisga’a who interacted with the mission would attach to the word was no more determined by the missionaries than were the other goods they introduced. It is to this spiritual dialogue itself—including but far from encompassed by the substantive message of the word—that we must finally turn if we are to better understand the initial stages of the Nisga’a encounter with evangelical Christianity.

¹ Discussing the intense dislike of materialism repeatedly expressed by Victorian CMS missionaries in Ukaguru, Tanzania as part of their quest for a godly life, Beidelman observes that “Radical antimaterialism drove these people away from a Britain undergoing rapid industrialization and secularization. Despairing of an ungodly society at home, they sought to construct a new Jerusalem abroad in which childlike natives, uncontaminated and undistracted by the myriad products of complex modern society, could live in Christian communities which echoed an image of a Christian past that probably never existed,” “Contradictions Between the Sacred and the Secular Life: The Church Missionary Society in Ukaguru, Tanzania, East Africa, 1876-1914,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23:1 (1981): 78.

² Greg Denning, *The Death of William Gooch*, describes an artifact in any culture as being “a manifold text of values, of systems, of perceptions and relations,” which is inscribed into it. It is in the context of our culturally-given signs and symbols that we read the meanings encapsulated in our things. Denning adds, “Where things cross a cultural boundary we re-invent their meanings,” 23.

³ In a different context, Daniel Clayton finds that at Nootka Sound the Native maritime fur trade with Europeans encouraged the consolidation of pre-existing trade routes. Even at Clayoquot Sound and Barkley Sound, where European influence was stronger due to traders’ focus on this area and the likelihood that a smallpox epidemic in the Strait of Georgia region had encouraged southern Nuu-chah-nulth groups to travel north more frequently to trade, Clayton finds that the fur trade “was superimposed on processes of territorial exchange that had probably been under way for a number of decades before contact, and it encouraged the reformulation of Native trade patterns,” *Islands of Truth*, 148-149.

⁴ Carol Cooper, “To Be Free on Our Lands,” 75. See E. Palmer Patterson, “Early Nishga-European Contact to 1860,” for a broad outline of the history of Nisga’a contact with non-Natives prior to the arrival of the CMS in the 1860s. Patterson’s estimate is that the earliest Nisga’a contact with European trade goods likely occurred through the Tlingit who traded and fought with Russian traders entering their territory by the mid-eighteenth century, although inland trade routes extending south and east suggest other possible early sources of these goods.

⁵ E. Palmer Patterson refers to the mouth of the Nass River as “an international market for Tlingit, Haida, and northern Kwakiutl,” and notes that the Coast Tsimshian had traditional fishing rights at the fishery, “George Kinzadah—Simoojit in his Times,” 20. In explaining his belief that detached totem poles originated among the Nisga’a, Marius C. Barbeau, *Totem Poles*, Volume 1, Anthropological Series 30, National Museum of Canada Bulletin 119 (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1950) writes of the Nass Fishery: “The estuary of the Nass was the most important thoroughfare of Indian life in all the northern parts. Oolaken fishing in the neighbourhood of what was called Fishery Bay...was a predominant feature in native life. The grease from the oolaken or candle-fish was an indispensable staple along the coast. For their yearly supply the Haidas, the Tlingits, the Tsimshians, and the Gitksans journeyed by sea or overland every spring and camped side by side for weeks at a time in temporary villages of their own from Red Bluffs eastwards on the lower Nass. Exchanges of all kinds, barter, social amenities, and feuds were quite normal at Fishery Bay and Red Bluffs. Cultural features of the local hosts...were constantly under the observation of the strangers and often were a cause for envy or aggression,” 13.

⁶ E. Palmer Patterson, *Mission on the Nass*, 22. Daniel Clayton’s assertion that Native peoples on the Northwest Coast were incorporated into a capitalist order of consumption and exchange, but that the process of positioning these exchange relations in Native territories had a great bearing on the character of this capitalist project, appears applicable in early Nisga’a-European trade relations. The stretching of the world economy to the Northwest Coast simultaneously involved its adaptation to local circumstances and imperatives. Clayton follows scholars of cross-cultural interaction who argue that a European global order was—and is—articulated in, rather than imposed on, new fields of accumulation and incorporation, *Islands of Truth*, 71.

⁷ Carol Cooper, “To Be Free on Our Lands,” 174; Robert Doolan to CMS, Metlakatla, 6 July 1866. CMS C.2./O. The re-establishment of an HBC trading post on the Nass was in large part a company response to the growing success of opposing traders, generally Americans, in obtaining furs from Nisga’a territory by travelling directly to the Nass and offering better prices than the HBC. Already in the late 1830s the Nisga’a were suspected by HBC traders of holding back furs in hopes of the coming competition. See E. Palmer Patterson, “The Nishga and the Fur Trade, 1834-1842,” 70.

⁸ See for example, Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 158-94. For reflections on a similar process in another region of the Pacific Northwest, see Elizabeth Vibert, *Traders’ Tales*. Vibert argues that the effects of the introduction of things like the horse, firearms, and other European trade goods into Plateau societies cannot be comprehended without considering the social and historical contexts in which they became embedded. The historian must assess their influence with reference to evolving indigenous meanings and patterns of social relations. Vibert finds that European goods served to reinforce many of these meanings and patterns as they were incorporated into preexisting systems of exchange and reward and given meanings that accorded with evolving indigenous values and practices, 243-44.

⁹ Michael Harkin, *The Heiltsuks*, 126.

¹⁰ Eugene Stock, *Metlakatla and the North Pacific mission of the Church Missionary Society*, 80-83.

¹¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 October 1864. CMS C.2./O.

¹² CMS to Robert Doolan. 2 February 1864. CMS C.1/L.3.

¹³ For more information on the history of the CMS, including the ideas of Henry Venn, its Secretary for most of the nineteenth century, see Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, Vol. 1-4 (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899). The contradictions between recognizing the necessity of secular conduct and remaining true to the primarily religious role the missionaries had defined for themselves are discussed in Thomas O. Beidelman, “Contradictions Between the Sacred and the Secular Life.” These contradictions existed within individual CMS missionaries as well as between the rules and instructions formulated by leaders back in London and the missionaries, who often had more realistic views from their stations out in the field.

¹⁴ CMS to Robert Doolan. 2 February 1864. CMS C.1/L.3.

¹⁵ John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 32. Of the Jesuit missionary approach Webster notes, “Copious references to Indian customs in early missionary literature were thus expressions not of idle curiosity but of an urgent theological compulsion.”

¹⁶ John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 75.

¹⁷ CMS to Robert Doolan. 16 March 1866. CMS C.1/L.3. The great burden of the secular tasks undertaken by CMS missionaries appears to have been typical, with similar results. Beidelman notes in his

examination of CMS missionaries in Ukaguru, Tanzania, that “Frequently, efforts at playing down personal welfare led to overwork, poor nutrition, improper treatment of illness, and depression,” “Contradictions Between the Sacred and the Secular Life,” 86. Interestingly, Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs*, has noted in another context that the CMS was firm in its belief that its work was that of evangelizing only. Should a missionary desire funds for schools (apart from those training Native ministers), hospitals, or any other project, he would have to solicit funds independently of the CMS, although evidently the Society was not beyond offering its moral support for such auxiliary projects, 119. In their opening letter to Doolan the CMS advised the missionary to have a conventional division of work, which consisted of the “educational; pastoral; missionary house; translational; [and] secular affairs of a mission.” CMS C.1./L.3.

¹⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 10 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 22 November 1864. CMS C.2./O.

²⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 24 October 1865. CMS C.2./O.

²¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 7 December 1864. CMS C.2./O.

²² Robert Doolan, Journal. 28 February 1865; 7 March 1865. CMS C.2./O.

²³ Robert Doolan to CMS, Nass, 22 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

²⁴ This interest has been documented in missionary-Native encounters elsewhere. Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs*, notes that the Dene looked to the Oblate and CMS missionaries as sources of information about Europeans and society, and that they “were particularly curious about the manufacture of trade goods and anxious to know the secrets of the society that could produce such goods,” 127.

²⁵ Carol Cooper, “To Be Free on Our Lands,” 204; Robert Doolan, Journal. 10 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

²⁶ Indeed, mission histories in other contexts have argued that missionaries tried to provide exposure to European gender norms by the example of their own lives, and that mission education mimicked the nuclear family and specifically tried to produce a class of servants. See, for example, Natasha Erlank, “Sexual Misconduct and Church Power on Scottish Mission Stations in Xhosaland, South Africa, in the 1840s,” *Gender & History* 15:1 (April 2003): 69-84.

²⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 16 May 1865; 31 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

²⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 1 June 1865. CMS C.2./O.

²⁹ Viola E. Garfield, “The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors,” *The Tsimshian Indians and Their Arts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966) 39-40.

³⁰ Viola Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 297.

³¹ Garfield, Viola E., Paul S. Wingert, and Marius Barbeau, *The Tsimshian: Their Arts and Music*, Publications of the American Ethnological Society (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1951), 15.

³² For a discussion of how Nisga’a and Tsimshian women continued their traditional productive activities while assuming expanded roles as traders and workers at the Hudson’s Bay Company fort and later as employees in the newly established canneries during the fur trade and mission eras, see Carol Cooper, “Native Women of the Northern Pacific Coast.”

³³ Viola E. Garfield, “The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors,” 15.

³⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 2 June 1865; 5 June 1865. CMS C.2./O.

³⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 6 March 1867; 30 March 1867. CMS C.2./O. Similarly, Doolan noted in his journal on 18 July 1865 that “All the boys have left. Had to turn cook and baker.”

³⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 November 1864. CMS C.2./O. For an excellent discussion of the role of the *gits’oontk* in Northwest Coast art, including an investigation of the intermediate social status they occupied, as neither chief nor commoner, see Audrey P.M. Shane, “Power in Their Hands: The Gitsonk,” *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present*, Margaret Seguin [Anderson], editor (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984): 160-173.

³⁷ Viola E. Garfield, “The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors,” 25.

³⁸ Doolan reported during his first summer on the Nass, for example, that an elderly chief named Nagaotm or Nagaohn [Negwa’on] was thought by many parties to have to give as reparation 40 to 60 blankets after shooting and killing a young man named Quandahmuks during a quarrel en route to Victoria. Robert Doolan, Journal. 15 July 1865. CMS C.2./O. Several months before this drowning the missionary had also faced the claims of Wolf Chief Claytha, who blamed Cowdaeg for the drowning of his brother, Chief Kadounaha, and demanded the young man recompense him. Robert Doolan, Journal. 6 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

³⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 16-18 June 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 19 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 29 July 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴² Robert Doolan, Journal. 21 July 1865; 28 July 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 11 November 1865; 4 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁴ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 248. Nisga'a treatment of the Sabbath at this time resembles the response of the Interior Salish to the Virgin Mary, introduced by Jesuit missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. Laura Peers demonstrates how Plateau converts linked Mary not only with the special powers and images of the Virgin that the Jesuits emphasized, but with their own view of women and of "proper" women's roles. By "intricate recombinations" of new as well as traditional spiritual and physical needs, new ideas about sacred beings and more traditional relationships with them, and new powers and holy objects—only some of which were used in old ways and some of which were used as new means to traditional ends—the Plateau peoples "translated" the Virgin into a recognizably Plateau woman who could protect and sustain them, "'The Guardian of All,'" 292, 300. Although agreeing that the meaning Native peoples assigned to new religious symbols and what they enabled them to accomplish is important, Elizabeth Furniss highlights the importance of examining the broader circumstances that initially led Native peoples to adopt new cultural symbols, as well as the long-term consequences for them when they use colonial symbols to represent themselves to non-Native audiences. Furniss finds that the 1890 revitalization of the Shuswap under the symbols provided by the Catholic Church "also set the basic terms for their relationship with church and government authorities, ultimately furthering the entrenchment of colonial hegemony," "Resistance, Coercion, and Revitalization," 253. The long-term effect on the Nisga'a of appropriating novel forms to meet their own imperatives—and of their ability in doing so to disrupt the hegemonies they found themselves working within—remains to be explored.

⁴⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 30 June 1867. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 23 June 1867; 6 May 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 4 June 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁸ Margaret Seguin [Anderson], "Lest There Be No Salmon: Symbols in Traditional Tsimshian Potlatch," *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present*, Margaret Seguin [Anderson], editor (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984) 132fn.

⁴⁹ For the use of displays of technology as a route to respect in other missionary contexts, even when this contrasted sharply with the missionaries' own religious values, see Jean and John Comaroff, "Through the Looking-glass: Colonial Encounters of the First Kind," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1:1 (March 1988): 20-24; Bruce Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987).

⁵⁰ Robert Doolan, on board H.M. Gunboat "Forward," Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, to CMS. 8 September 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁵¹ Doolan informed the CMS that Bishop Hills had insisted on a collection. Hills was disappointed that the missionary had not requested funds at the meeting, which would have gone toward what Doolan described as Hills' "Fund for Our Indian Missions." Doolan appeared unsympathetic, noting that he felt Hills "nearly ignored" the CMS. Robert Doolan, on board H.M. Gunboat "Forward," Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, to CMS. 8 September 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁵² Robert Doolan, on board H.M. Gunboat "Forward," Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, to CMS. 8 September 1866. CMS C.2./O. The CMS missionaries strongly opposed the illegal liquor trade and worked with the colonial state to prosecute those involved in it. In a letter to Doolan in March 1866 the CMS noted, "We have heard with indignation at the conduct of white Christians in brutalizing the natives by their ... traffic in ardent spirits." CMS to Doolan, 16 March 1866. C.1./L.3. For more on the role of the illegal liquor trade and British attempts to curb it through the extension of state power, and how this shaped the CMS mission to the Nisga'a in its first decade, see Barry Gough, "Pioneer Missionaries to the Nishga: the Crosscurrents of Demon Rum and British Gunboats, 1860-1871," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 26:2 (1984): 81-95.

⁵³ Robert Doolan to CMS, Metlakatla, 20 Oct 1866. CMS C.2./O. For a study of the complex relationship between CMS missionaries and other colonial peoples in another historical context, see Thomas Beidelman, "Contradictions Between the Sacred and the Secular Life."

⁵⁴ Enclosure, Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to Hills, Bishop of Columbia, at Victoria, 2 October 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 15 May 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 29 January 1866. CMS C.2./O. Beidelman, "Contradictions Between the Sacred and the Secular Life," makes a similar observation about the CMS missionaries in Ukaguru, Tanzania. He notes that during the first fifteen years of the CMS work in Ukaguru, from the time the missionaries passed through the area in 1876 until the formal establishment of German rule in 1891, missionary life appeared to conform to the romantic, idealized notions that the Victorian CMS members had about their calling. Right up until the establishment of British rule, the CMS was still able to view itself as unconnected from the political and secular sectors of colonial society. Beidelman holds that such a disassociation of the mission from government was important to the CMS, in that it permitted the missionaries to pursue activities without concern for materialistic and secular needs voiced by government and business, which they considered contrary to the true values of life. Further, this distinction allowed heroic individuals struggling in an alien wilderness alone and unprotected by government to find in their work a sign of divine guidance and protection, 77.

⁵⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 8 March 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 14 May 1866; 21 May 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁹ Robert Doolan to CMS, on board H.M. Gunboat "Forward," Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, 8 September 1866; Robert Doolan, Journal. 25 December 1865; 7 January 1867. CMS C.2./O.

⁶⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 12 March 1867. CMS C.2./O.

⁶¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 29 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁶² Robert Doolan, Journal. 1 November 1865. CMS C.2./O. In discussing the way the haldaawgit worked through "magic," Marie-Françoise Guédon, "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," states that this was based on the ancient and widespread belief that objects which have been associated in some way can transmit at a distance, to each other and to people connected with them, some of their properties. Clearly for this woman her photograph was linked to what it represented, just as part of an object or body could be associated with the whole object or body, 148.

⁶³ Marie-François Guédon explains that "If a *halait* is the person through which the power is made manifest as well as the demonstration of that power, the *naxnoq* is the source of that power," "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," 140.

⁶⁴ Marie-François Guédon, "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," 148.

⁶⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 24 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁶⁶ Paige Raibmon points out that the effort to define the potlatch has itself been part of the colonial mission. "Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka'wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia and at the Chicago World's Fair," *Canadian Historical Review* 81:2 (June 2000): 164fn. A later missionary to the Nisga'a, James Benjamin McCullagh, reflecting on the Nisga'a potlatch after sixteen years of close observation, told the CMS annual conference in 1899 that, "The Indian potlatch presents a most difficult problem, not only to solve for the betterment of the race, but even to understand." He explained that "there are ramifications connected with it which, I must confess, seem to baffle all effort at investigation." The suggestion that ignorance of aboriginal custom should not preclude it from being a problem to be solved for the "betterment of the race" is evident in his conclusion nonetheless that "it seems to me that upon the thorough eradication of its principles from the Indian mind depends, humanly speaking, the permanency of the results of our work." *The Indian Potlatch: Substance of a Paper Read before C.M.S. Annual Conference at Metlakatla, 1899* (Toronto: Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1899) 1-2. See Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990) and Tina Loo, "Dan Cranmer's Potlatch: Law as Coercion, Symbol, and Rhetoric in British Columbia, 1884-1951," *Canadian Historical Review* 73:2 (1992): 125-65 for further discussion of Eurocanadian society's misunderstanding of the potlatch complex.

⁶⁷ Viola E. Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 192.

⁶⁸ Viola E. Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 217.

⁶⁹ Jay Miller, "Feasting with the Southern Tsimshian," 29-30.

⁷⁰ A particular type of feast in which alcohol assumed a prominent place appears to have developed among the Tsimshian peoples by the mid-nineteenth century, but Doolan uses the term in a generic sense, applying it to potlatches which clearly from the description he provides had many other functions. Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, writes that it was common for missionaries to believe that all feasting among First Nations was characterized by excessive consumption of alcohol, 97. In her discussion of Tsimshian potlatching, Viola Garfield devotes a heading to the "Rum Feast," in which she explains that "Many

potlatches were given for no other purpose than to give the host an opportunity to display his wealth and insult his guests in speech and song” *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 208.

⁷¹ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, editors (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 153.

⁷² Brett Christophers, *Positioning the Missionary*, 19-31. One of Christophers’ main arguments is that the essential assumption of mission work was that heathen ignorance could be cured, and that “People were distinguished from one another by religious belief, not by genus or skin colour,” 23. A belief in the catholic basis of Christianity was the rationale for the missionaries’ attempts to convert difference into sameness. Christophers notes that “it is a short step from the belief that all people can apprehend Christ to the conviction that a Christian’s duty is to help the ‘heathen’ turn,” 24. Nonetheless, Christophers’ analysis does not give enough attention to the significant impact of prevailing racial discourses on the missionaries’ Christian ideology. These combined to produce a sense of alterity that in many respects functioned as if it were fixed.

⁷³ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 21; 48.

⁷⁴ CMS to Robert Doolan. 16 March 1866. CMS C.1/L.3.

⁷⁵ Robert Doolan, Nass River, to CMS. 22 May 1865. CMS C.2./O. The words “thro’ Mr. Cunningham” were later crossed out from Doolan’s journal, as were most other references to the lay missionary, apparently in an effort to efface him from the historical record of the CMS record of the mission. Doolan took great comfort in the presence of another European on the Nass with whom he could converse. However, as noted above, Cunningham’s formal association with the CMS missions at Metlakatla and the Nass was sure to be severed at the first opportunity after Elizabeth Ryan, a Tsimshian student at Duncan’s mission house, became pregnant in 1864. Doolan married the two in September 1866, and after the CMS granted permission for his dismissal the couple remained on the Nass where Cunningham took up work as a trader. They remained in contact with the Tsimshian kinship network and the CMS missions, but Doolan and Duncan tried to make clear to the Nisga’a that although still present, Cunningham had no connection with the mission. Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS, 6 July 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁷⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁷⁷ Indeed, this motive was no doubt present to some degree. E. Palmer Patterson notes that in the mid-1860s Kinzarda was very active in raising his status, and sees this effort as the probable basis for his participation in the invitation to William Duncan to send missionaries to the Nisga’a, “George Kinzadah—Simoogit in his Times,” 23. If such was the case, Chief Kinzarda’s opposition to the mission under the Reverend Robert Doolan would speak all the more loudly, coming at the price of potential prestige.

⁷⁸ Doolan’s faith in the value of industrious behaviour and in storing up goods in anticipation of future need both come through in the following passage in his journal, which decries the laziness of Nisga’a women while at the same time recognizing, although in a backhanded way, their diligence in performing difficult work: “Bitter cold, the wind catches the loose snow, and whirls about in clouds, and thro’ it all, the women are busy carrying wood. The burdens they carry are very great. They are too indolent to procure wood in the Autumn before the cold comes, and suffer accordingly.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 8 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁷⁹ Further south, Michael Harkin observes a similar critique of Heiltsuk potlatching by Methodist missionaries, *The Heiltsuks*, 146. Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 November 1864. CMS C.2./O.

⁸⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 28 February 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁸¹ Describing one man he found being tattooed on his chest, Doolan explained that he “was about to give away property, which he wanted remembered.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 25 June 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁸² Robert Doolan, Journal. 17 November 1865. CMS C.2./O. The words “before Mr. Cunningham’s house” were later struck through by an editor, as was the word “us,” over which was written “me.” See footnote 59 above for a likely explanation.

⁸³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 18 November 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁸⁴ See Elizabeth Vibert, *Traders’ Tales*, for a discussion of fur traders’ lack of comprehension of this First Nations cultural practice, as well as interpretations of its function. Vibert writes that fur traders in the Columbia Plateau generally interpreted speeches asking for pity “either as evidence of real need, or as a manipulative or ‘beggarly’ attempt to get goods,” 145. While not discounting the aim of material benefits that would flow from affirming metaphorically the speaker’s current relationship with the trader, Vibert

argues that this was not necessarily the immediate aim in using a “consciously self-humbling approach,” 156.

⁸⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 17 November 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁸⁶ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 27.

⁸⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 18 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁸⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 14 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁸⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁹⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 7 December 1864. CMS C.2./O.

⁹¹ Viola Garfield, “The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors,” 45.

⁹² Robert Doolan, Journal. 17 November 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁹³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 31 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁹⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 1 March 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁹⁵ Margaret Seguin [Anderson], “Lest There Be No Salmon,” provides an excellent description of Real People, which I cite here at length. She defines them as “those who had been ‘shown to the people’ since childhood, who had ‘fed the people’ by giving feasts and distributing property, who had ‘put on a name’ entitling them to social and economic prerogatives, who ‘would talk to the people,’ and whose conduct, particularly on Real Occasions, affected the entire lineage.” Real Occasions were those in which Real Beings interacted, altering the world, and feasts were among the most real. Slaves were completely outside this cline of “reality,” commoners were less real than chiefs, and chiefs could be ranked as more or less real, 115.

⁹⁶ Margaret Seguin [Anderson], “Lest There Be No Salmon,” 117; Eugene Stock, *Metlakatla and the North Pacific mission of the Church Missionary Society*, 80-82. The sprinkling of white down was a gesture of peace, as Duncan appears to have realized when he explained that it “thus symbolically unit[ed] me in friendship with all the chiefs present, and the tribes they severally represented.”

⁹⁷ The Dene appear to have similarly regarded the Oblate missionaries stationed among them, finding a disjunction between their evident access to powerful goods and their unwillingness to share them. Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs*, cites an Oblate historian who later recorded the Dene as “perpetually begging” for gifts and provisions, and calling the priests “unreasonable and avaricious” for withholding anything, since they had only to “send a little bit of paper into the ‘Great countries’” and it would “bring them back cargo,” 139.

⁹⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 15 October 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁹⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 1 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 12 June 1867. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 25 December 1864. CMS C.2./O. The Chief Legaic (Legex) referred to here (there were seven in the nineteenth century) was the Coast Tsimshian chief who extended his monopoly on the Skeena River trade with the interior Gitksan and Athapaskan tribes, such that all goods and passengers had to go up the Skeena in his canoes until the 1890s. This holder of the title converted to Christianity and joined William Duncan at Metlakatla, and was able to maintain his chiefly status, as alluded to here. For a narrative of how Legaic’s cunning in a competition with the Nisga’a Wolf chief Kinzarda at the site of Gingolx was exposed, forcing him to depart defeated and ashamed, see C. Marius Barbeau and William Beynon, *Tsimshian Narratives 2: Trade and Warfare*, Mercury Series, Directorate Paper No. 3, edited by John J. Cove and George F. MacDonald (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987), Narrative No. 29, 103-05. The importance Christian missionaries often attached to converting chiefs, in the hope that they would collaborate with the missionaries and could influence their people as leaders, as well as the conversion of indigenous leaders at strategic moments to reaffirm their positions of leadership and to advance their political interests are explored in other historical contexts. See, for example, Elizabeth Furniss, “Resistance, Coercion, and Revitalization.”

¹⁰² Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 26 October 1864. CMS C.2./O. Doolan wrote that Duncan had felt this same obstacle.

¹⁰³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 12 June 1867. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 10 March 1866; 16 June 1866. CMS C.2./O. The reason for the inquiry about the boots was suggested the following day when the deceased man’s brother came to the mission house. Doolan wrote, “After walking three times around the house, carrying his brother’s boots, and some papers, he took up the latter, exclaiming that they were the cause of his death.” Doolan was also distressed by what he perceived as an inappropriate concern for property during the mourning following Tacomash’s death. He noted, “Parties in twos and threes coming all day to the house to weep and lament. Already, I find his

relatives are quarreling over his little property, which consists but of a few clothes. His father is away, and his Uncle has taken the lion's share." Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 May 1866. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 5 November 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 23 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 11 November 1865; 26 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 28 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 27 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

Chapter Four: The Spiritual Dialogue

Those aspects of the initial missionary dialogue that concerned the soul and the supernatural between the CMS missionaries and the Nass River Nisga'a in the mid-1860s were not exempt from the larger forces that shaped the encounter more generally. Although, as we have seen, the mission was not without its strong critics, many Nisga'a who appear in the historical record took an interest in the evangelical message the missionaries so determinedly tried to impart. This response stemmed in part from a curiosity about the powers that underpinned these newly arrived figures, as well as a desire to acquire those powers and skills seen as desirable. Foremost among those skills was literacy. The Nisga'a who sent their children to the missionaries, as well as the children who sought instruction on their own initiative, saw in the churchmen an opportunity to draw from the powers so evident in white society. They also saw this as a means to better equip themselves for living in a world increasingly shared with this society. At one level, these needs dovetailed nicely with the desire of the Anglican churchmen to establish a school where they could instruct all who would attend, and through which the word could enter Nisga'a culture. Yet, the missionaries generally interpreted Nisga'a acceptance of their services within a framework of conversion, as the steps toward the opening of their hearts to Lord Jesus that they were intended to be.

The tensions that arose from such differing motivations challenged both missionary and Nisga'a. Although he trusted that the translated texts both he and William Duncan made were working to their desired effect, Robert Doolan was often at a loss when searching for more tangible manifestations of conversion. He was further troubled by the Nisga'a language, which he persistently tried—and failed—to master during his time on the Nass, despite the fact that the Nisga'a at the mission were more interested in his use of English. Furthermore, those Nisga'a who had let their children be instructed by Doolan contested the missionary's authority over them, challenging the churchman's attempts to keep them continually under his influence and out of secret societies, "medicine work," and even work with their houses at the different fisheries. They critiqued Doolan's pedagogy both in approach and value by suggesting to him how the students should be treated, and telling him who would and would not benefit from his instruction. Furthermore, Neshaki, a prominent Wolf chief of Lakunkedah, took it upon

herself to provide Christian instruction to a number of young girls in the lower villages who, given their gender, were far less likely to be taught by the missionaries.¹ In so doing, Neshaki joined the young men who were sharing what they had learned at the mission with those at their upriver homes, and those Nisga'a who by 1867 were holding service among themselves, further ensuring that the word that arrived on the Nass was in many ways shaped by Nisga'a understandings.²

Before turning to these aspects of the spiritual dialogue, it is important to have an appreciation of the means by which such interaction was likely conveyed. The languages of communication undoubtedly included action and gesture. Where these have been recorded, they are of some use to the historian when interpreted within the appropriate symbolic context. Spoken words were certainly of primary importance, but these too had to cross the cultural barrier intact if they were to faithfully convey the meaning ascribed to them. Mastery of the indigenous language—or as the CMS phrased it in a letter to Doolan, “the reduction of the language to grammatical order”—was a necessary preoccupation of Christian missionaries everywhere, concerned as they were with sharing the truths of their religion with peoples of all tongues.³ Prior to any eventual acquisition of English, the indigenous language would have to suffice as the vehicle by which the word was to arrive. To this end it had to be studied and analyzed as intensively as the divine truth it was to be made worthy of carrying. The conviction with which the churchmen went about their task of translating stemmed from a fundamental epistemological principle that the Comaroffs have identified in their study of Nonconformist missions in South Africa. This was the assumption that naming and knowing truth was a matter of managing signs and correspondences in a world of verifiable realities. Indeed, it was for the very reason that all human beings shared the potential to know things by their correct name that they could become heirs to God's Kingdom, a universal civilization that transcended the cultural barriers of this world.⁴ The duty of those who already had the knowledge to teach those without it was the *raison d'être* for the missionaries' presence among the Nisga'a, and to this end their indigenous language was put into service.

In their opening letter of instructions to Doolan the CMS Committee reminded the new missionary of this important task by noting that “The advantages which you have

enjoyed of a Classical and Academical course of reading will point your attention especially to the translation of the Holy Scriptures.” While they recognized William Duncan’s progress in the study of the language, they also thought that Doolan would be of particular help in reducing it to a grammatical order and preparing translations. The Committee further reminded the missionary that he had been furnished with the latest edition of Sepvius’s Standard Alphabet, and that they preferred to receive alphabetic tables required by different languages arranged according to the tables of Sepvius. Finally, “Any deviations which have been introduced, or which are thought advisable from the standard alphabet, should be fully discussed and referred home.”⁵ Such classification and translation formed an integral part of making difference into similarity, of reducing the chaotic non-European world to the universalistic categories of the West. Language offered the promise of fixed categories through which a nebulous cultural landscape might become subject to missionary control.⁶ Translation also expedited the day when all of humanity could converse freely with one another. In another letter to Doolan two years later, the Committee enclosed a syllabary that had been successfully introduced among the Cree and Inuit peoples, adding that “If applicable to the Simpsian, it might prove a link in that intercommunication among the Christian Indians.”⁷ The CMS missionaries set about the labourious task of grammar writing and translating with the conviction that they were helping to usher in a new era in which all of God’s children might partake in Christendom as never before.

The systematization of diverse languages in order to impart a common message involved some standardization, as the above quote suggests. Seeing the Nisga’a language as a dialect of the Tsimshian spoken around Metlakatla, Doolan decided to attempt to learn the latter language first, building on the considerable work of Duncan.⁸ The new missionary to the Nisga’a was not a linguist, however, and it appears that he soon decided to write all publications for them in Tsimshian. Producing and giving out tracts were significant occupations for Doolan during his time on the Nass. The effectiveness of this approach had likely been instilled in him early. In a letter sent in October 1865 to George Hills, the Bishop of Columbia, Doolan mentioned that during his residence at Cambridge he had visited a district of Moduigley every week for the purpose of distributing tracts.⁹ During his trip to Victoria in the late summer of 1866 Doolan found that, through friends,

he had many opportunities to acquire skills at the printing houses of the different newspapers in Victoria, which he readily put to use on his return. The churchman's journal abounds with references to days spent at the printing press at Metlakatla setting type or printing lessons for winter school, to frustrated attempts to produce a readable copy of a tract or the Lord's Prayer in Tsimshian, and equally, to sending parts of the printing press to Victoria for repair, or hoping a blacksmith would be on board the next man-of-war to mend the press.¹⁰

The power of texts needed no explanation for these literate emissaries of the word, for whom their sole means of communication with the CMS from their far-flung mission was the printed word. The confidence that the Holy Scriptures needed only to be translated for their universal truths to work their effect in unlocking the hearts of their students no doubt reflected the evangelicals' own transformative experiences with the texts.¹¹ However, as strong as the missionaries' conviction in the effectiveness of this approach was, it was nevertheless tested through experience on the Nass. In February 1866 Doolan wrote that he had visited a man who was dying, as he put it, "from fear of the medicine people." Trying to share with the man what he perceived as the needlessness of such anxiety, the churchman "put the good news very plainly before him." This apparently had little effect, as having done this Doolan "felt how impossible as regards spiritual matters, it is to make an impression on the hard heart of man, if the spirit accompanies not the word spoken."¹² Thus, while the written and spoken word of the gospel were paramount to the CMS evangelicals, it was the spirit that gave the word its potency, and that had to be transmitted through the translation if the word was to work its effect. It is more likely, however, that in translating their sacred texts into Tsimshian the CMS missionaries created what the Comaroffs have described as a counterpart of the scriptures, at least as they read them, in an indigenous tongue, as they had come to understand it. They had transposed the Bible into "a cultural register true to neither, a hybrid creation born of the colonial encounter itself."¹³ Furthermore, as I have argued in chapters two and three, while placing great faith in the power of the word to transform, the churchmen did not hesitate to try to reshape Nisga'a culture in ways seen as conducive to receiving Christianity while waiting for it to work its effect.

The receptivity of those Nisga'a who were taught hymns in Tsimshian, or encouraged to read Doolan's translation into Tsimshian of an "easy reading Scripture book for the Indians," is not clear from the missionary's correspondence. In January 1866 Doolan noted that some of the average of forty students who attended his school were beginning to read very well. Adults were generally less inclined to learn to read than their children. Still, the following spring at the conclusion of one of his Sunday sermons the missionary distributed portions of recently printed scripture to all present, observing, "[s]ome already can read a great many verses."¹⁴ At one point Doolan explained that some of the children did not know Tsimshian, but "all the grown up people know it well."¹⁵ Speakers of numerous languages frequented the three lower villages among which the mission was stationed, particularly during the Nass fisheries. On one December day in 1865 when the mission house was full of people, Doolan described it through his missionary eyes as "a perfect babel of tongues."¹⁶ References by Doolan, such as the one he made just before relocating the mission to Gingolx in June 1867 that many were anxious to learn texts in Tsimshian, confirm the interest in literacy found elsewhere. Yet they reveal little about what the Nisga'a around the missions actually heard when Christian concepts were delivered to them in a neighbouring dialect. Doolan also frequently held a Sunday evening service in English at Robert Cunningham's house. Although the missionary found it a pleasant break "to praise God in one's native tongue," these services appear to have been small and were far from the main thrust of the mission in these early years, which was to deliver the word in the indigenous tongue.¹⁷

Doolan was most confident of the transformative power of the word when presenting tracts before the Tsimshian into whose language he believed they had been faithfully translated. Such was the case in the spring of 1867, when he crossed the river to see more sick people and give the Tsimshian tracts to any Metlakatla people he might see there. Entering four houses, the missionary found an excellent opportunity to give the tracts to "our people," who were sitting apart and observing the Sabbath, and to tell the rest about the glad tidings they contained. Doolan wrote, "I read to them three or four times the most striking verses. I was sure they understood, as it is written in the very best Tsimshian." The missionary was much less sure when presenting his prepared texts to

the Nisga'a at the mission house every Sunday, but looked to his faith that his words were not being uttered in vain. On the final Sunday in March 1866 Doolan wrote that

I tried to speak very plainly on the death of Stephen, and trust I was understood. At present I feel my discourses are only like the skeleton of a human frame. I am not sufficient master of the language to enable me to fill in and impress the subject by illustrations, but the Lord's promise is sure, "My word shall not return unto me void," and thro' his mercy, I am enabled to tell them every Sunday of a Redeemer's love and compassion.¹⁸

With little means of weighing the fruits of his labour, Doolan tried to find solace in knowing that he had fulfilled his duties. He frequently reminded himself that responsibility for the salvation of the souls around him was ultimately not his. The important step to Doolan was delivering the word to his subjects. At a Sunday service in March 1866 the missionary was delighted that about seventy people attended, who were apparently very attentive. Doolan found this uplifting after a week of feeling "much depressed, and dispirited." Taking as his subject Philip and the Ethiopians, Doolan could reflect in his journal that "Again has the love of God in Jesus been told them, and I leave the result after much prayer with him."¹⁹ However unconcerned Doolan may have tried to be about the results of his work, the arrival of the word on the lower Nass was an event of momentous import for the Nisga'a in the missionary's view. Although still finding it "very difficult to put my matter plain before the people" the following month, by the second Sunday in April 1866 Doolan nonetheless found that he "was enabled to speak very plainly to them on the consequences that would follow if they persisted in their evil courses. I told them, nearly two years had elapsed since God's book had come amongst them and how many during that time had perished in their sins."²⁰ Whether the Nisga'a Doolan encountered on the Nass knew it or not, the coming of the Christian book had ushered in a new era for them.

The people who witnessed the arrival of the first CMS mission on their river undoubtedly shared a sense of the import of this event, albeit from a vastly different perspective. Cultural differences ensured this. The students and other Nisga'a whom Doolan found to retain so little, such that it was "necessary to repeat again and again the same truths," had been socialized by stories that had varying degrees of comparability with the churchmen's translated parables of the prodigal son, the leaven, or the draw

net.²¹ Doolan took encouragement when about twenty men came to the service in January 1866 during what many Nisga'a had told him was the worst continuance of bad weather they had ever known. The missionary explained in his journal that "it shews me, that no idle curiosity, but the desire to hear about God had brought them. I took the cure of Naaman, as my subject, and spoke of Jesus as the healer of our souls."²² Doolan interpreted his audience's motivations for attending through a Christian telos, yet even if he was correct that their desire to hear about God had brought them to him, there could be no certainty that they would leave with his message. As Homi Bhabha argues, there was no assurance that a translated text would carry the same meaning as its original. "Here the word of divine authority is deeply flawed by the assertion of the indigenous sign," Bhabha writes. "The Word could no longer be trusted to carry the truth when written or spoken in the colonial world by the European missionary."²³ This uncertainty was a cause for considerable worry for those whose job was translating truth. During a large Sunday service the following month at which roughly one hundred and fifty people were present, Doolan felt he was helped by the Lord to speak but was nonetheless much depressed. "I trust they understood me," he explained, "but I forget these poor creatures know nothing of God's Book and forgetting this, I find, I leave out so to speak, a link in the chain, and they are bewildered."²⁴

We can only imagine how the evangelicals' word was interpreted in a Nisga'a context as the missionary delivered a sermon on the sacrifice of Isaac to a house full of people, or brought "good news" to a dying woman, or told an ill upriver chief through those present about God. In these and other similar instances the churchman would ask his listeners if they had understood him, noting in his journal that they had replied in the affirmative.²⁵ These positive responses to Doolan's queries tell us little about what his listeners in fact heard. Those listening to the churchmen's sermons surely read their own references into them, references which were not intended but which were nonetheless evoked by fragments of their discourse. Both the identification of these references and attempts to construct a context for them that included the alien and foreign aspects of the sermons would have rendered the latter vulnerable to recontextualization.²⁶ Doolan took comfort during his evangelizing trips in the fact that as soon as he began to speak on serious subjects, as he put it, there was usually silence in the house and the men stopped

work. On a Sunday in July 1867, just before leaving the new village of Gingolx for England, Doolan was able to write that “Some can understand me very well,” although the elderly people—those he had earlier remarked as knowing Tsimshian—did not. Still, he felt that “they learn a little, I trust, in Philip’s [Cowcaelth’s] house, after the service.”²⁷ These means of transmission made certain that the word taken up by the Nisga’a around the mission was both reflected in and refracted through Nisga’a culture and everyday practice.

The question of language affected the message the Nisga’a likely received from the churchmen in yet another way. For although the self-defined purpose of the man who had been sent to them was religious instruction, the Nisga’a’s first missionary was unable to become fluent in the language in which this was to be performed. Doolan’s difficulty learning Tsimshian, as well as Nisga’a, to which he had hoped to proceed, made him very self-conscious.²⁸ During Doolan’s first months on the Nass this language barrier compounded his feelings of isolation, giving him an increased appreciation of Duncan’s accomplishments in acquiring the Tsimshian language.²⁹ In a letter to the CMS after his first year stationed among the Nisga’a Doolan disclosed that he was still not able to address his subjects directly, writing “I am as yet, but as a babe in my knowledge of the language.” He later attributed this difficulty to a “very defective ear,” which he conceded was “a sad drawback to a missionary, at least, to one working amongst these Indians, who are very fond of singing.”³⁰

The analogy of the missionary being left “as helpless as a child” among his students appears frequently in Doolan’s journal, reminding us of the important division pointed to by Stoler and Cooper that often exists between the appearance of colonial omnipotence and a social reality steeped in colonial anxieties.³¹ In a particularly revealing entry made when Robert Cunningham left for a routine trip to Metlakatla during the summer of 1865, Doolan wrote that “His leaving me alone drove me to my knees to ask the Lord for help and strength. Studying Simchean, but I cannot make out what the people say.”³² Doolan appears to have turned to the study of Nisga’a vocabulary during this first summer, but nonetheless was still “obliged to direct them by signs.”³³ To complement these efforts, the missionary pasted pictures on calico to assist him in teaching Bible subjects, although with mixed results. The only journal entry in

which Doolan recorded their use occurred in April 1867, after visiting some sick people. He wrote, “Fortunately I brought with me some pictures illustrative of our Saviour’s life, which much assisted the Indians to understand me.” Their effectiveness must have been questionable, however, as the next day Doolan wrote that he was “very downhearted, at finding I could make them understand so little.”³⁴

Doolan’s translation difficulties hindered his ability to censure behaviour of which he disapproved, and left him vulnerable during Nisga’a attempts to help him. The missionary for example longed to speak to Kinzarda “on the folly of his proceedings” during his potlatch, but was prevented from doing so, explaining “my tongue at present is tied.”³⁵ In the context of Catholic missions to the Spanish Philippines, Vicente Rafael has observed that translation laid the basis for articulating the general outlines of subjugation proposed by conversion, but also produced an unavoidable separation between the original message of Christianity and its rhetorical formulation in the vernacular. In this space lay possibilities for subversion of missionary power. Premised on a different sense of what it meant to submit to and negotiate with authority, Tagalog conversion “alternately supported and deflected the exercise of Spanish power to the extent that that power was formulated in a language other than that of its original agents.”³⁶ This insight suggests the potential instability caused by Doolan’s reliance on employing the native vernacular in spreading the word of God in a culture with different notions of authority.

The possibility of Doolan’s hearers avoiding the full effect of the missionaries’ intent was further opened by his dependence on Nisga’a translators. Doolan soon learned to take the laughing that sometimes followed his words as a cue that he had made a mistake. During his first winter on the Nass, however, Tacomash informed Robert Cunningham that some of Doolan’s students had been giving him “some very indecent words in their language,” which the churchman had unquestioningly written down. At least one Nisga’a solution to the missionary’s communication problems with his congregants was recorded, although not followed. During the same winter Doolan wrote that an elderly woman, who apparently professed much friendship for the missionary and was very anxious for him to talk to her, told Cunningham “that it would be a good thing

for some one when I was asleep to put on two sticks some saliva and drop it into my ear; then I should understand her.”³⁷

Doolan chose instead to rely on translators, and a young Tsimshian man named Robert Dundas who accompanied the missionaries to the Nass appeared promising in this capacity. A routine was soon established whereby Doolan would give him, through Cunningham, some suggestions on the subject of the week. Dundas would then use these as the basis of his address at the close of the service. Cunningham appears to have acquired a proficiency in the language during his time supervising the Tsimshian aboard Duncan’s vessel, the *Carolena*, and had the help of his wife, Elizabeth Ryan, a former student at Duncan’s girls’ school, while on the Nass.³⁸ Ryan appears to have served as an intermediary between the Nisga’a and the missionaries. Often news reached the churchmen through her, and people interested in the mission consulted the Tsimshian woman for advice. In June 1865, for example, Doolan wrote that Cowcaelth had asked Ryan “how much of the Book he must know before he could be baptised.”³⁹ Cunningham’s approach to evangelizing the Nisga’a does not appear to have included giving sermons, likely in part due to his lack of formal training.

Thus relying on Dundas, Doolan found there to be “much repetition” in each of his discourses, which he attributed to lack of knowledge. Still, he hoped to make a good catechist of the young man.⁴⁰ Nonetheless the churchman soon found the young Dundas difficult to manage, explaining in his journal that “He gets a little puffed up by pride, and at times forgets himself.” Dundas’s behaviour no doubt arose at least in part from Doolan’s treatment of him, which the latter described for the CMS in a letter containing abstracts from his journal during the summer of 1865: “I constantly keep this hope [that Dundas would become a catechist] in view, and strive to make him feel, that his position as a teacher, has raised him above his fellow Indians.”⁴¹ For all Doolan’s complaints about Dundas’s overbearing manners, temper, or apparent forgetfulness about what he was told to say in his sermon, Doolan was aware of his utter dependency on the young man. This was made patent when Dundas was shot in the calf while moving some things down the river in a canoe with Cunningham in September 1865. Doolan wrote that “He is, thro’ God’s mercy, nearly recovered, but the consequences to that mission, had anything very serious occurred, would have been very perplexing.” Indeed, the

missionary did not attempt his first address in Nisga'a until over a year after his arrival, and then only because Dundas was away.⁴²

The missionaries' dependency on their Tsimshian translator for communication proved to pose a less destabilizing threat to the mission than Dundas's conduct, however. This became increasingly clear during a series of long talks Doolan had with Dundas, starting in November 1865. Dundas told the churchman that he, as Doolan put it, "felt the conflict with sin very hard." The missionary tried to comfort him by assuring him that his was not a singular case, and that "All Christians had the same conflict." In January 1866, another long talk was prompted by Doolan's knowledge that Dundas was very fond of a young woman living in one of the lower villages, as well as his observation of Dundas's growing intimacy with some of the local young women. Doolan warned him "to take care as Satan would use every means to entrap him."⁴³ However, the missionary was nonetheless grieved when he walked up to Cunningham's house for service the following Sunday evening, where he was told that "Robert Dundas, in whom [he] had placed so much confidence had two months back committed sin with the wife of a man now very ill." Doolan was bothered by both the alleged sin and Dundas's duplicity in so long concealing it. "Everyone at Nass except ourselves knew of it," he wrote. "It is astonishing how silent they are about one another."⁴⁴ Indeed, Doolan only heard about the incident on account of a quarrel that had arisen between Dundas and another woman, who then revealed his transgression of the missionaries' moral code to Elizabeth Ryan, the Tsimshian wife of Robert Cunningham.

Respectability and sexual propriety were central to the construction of English middle-class society in the nineteenth century, both at home and in its colonial transplantations abroad. As a representative of this society, Doolan shared its specific morality—in particular the view that although restraint from sexual temptation, for men especially, was an incessant struggle, its achievement was a mark of character.⁴⁵ This attitude helps to explain the grave dismay of missionaries when they were faced with a favoured convert's sexual deceit, as Natasha Erlank has noted.⁴⁶ The importance missionaries placed on sexual behaviour was partly motivated by concern for their subjects' souls, but also reflected their anxieties about maintaining the boundaries of European identity. Erlank explains that "More generally, sexual mores were a principal

way in which colonial societies attempted to distinguish themselves from indigenous ones.”⁴⁷ Dundas’s dismissal from the mission was seen by the missionaries as a severe blow to their attempts to incorporate the Nisga’a around them into their Christian universe. For Doolan the news was particularly shocking since, despite all his complaints about the young translator, it undermined a personal bond he felt he had formed with Dundas that was not unlike his affection for Tacomash, his first convert. As he sent Dundas off to Metlakatla after speaking with him about the matter, Doolan wrote that he could scarcely refrain from shedding tears. Nonetheless, the young translator’s sexual conduct threatened to destabilize the incorporation of the Nisga’a into a Christian moral order by introducing a degree of reciprocity to this process. Dundas had accepted elements of Christian notions of sexual morality, but combined them with Nisga’a sensibilities in both his actions and his defence of them. Doolan’s dismissal of Dundas can be seen as part of a larger attempt to establish the universal applicability of the Protestant missionaries’ Christian morality.

Doolan’s account of events indicates that Nisga’a morality differed significantly from his own at this time. The churchman recorded his astonishment at how silent his people were concerning the incident, how it had been kept from the missionaries for two months, and how it would have been longer had not a quarrel arisen between Dundas and an unnamed woman. This silence suggests different views on sexuality. Carol Cooper notes that, like other Native societies, while nineteenth-century Tsimshian and Nisga’a societies were especially concerned with matters regarding the chastity of young unmarried women, adult women “were freer to determine their own sexual and reproductive lives.”⁴⁸ Even so, there are indications that the Nisga’a around the mission accepted Dundas’s relationship with the young woman. Following his talk with Dundas the day before learning of his actions, Doolan had explained in his journal why Dundas thought he had best leave, for fear of falling into sin. He wrote, “There is a young woman here very fond, and he fears himself. I heard last summer he was nearly falling, that property had actually been given, but thro’ God’s grace, he then escaped.”⁴⁹ Although she was young, it is likely that the woman’s status as a married and therefore adult woman gave her greater freedom to determine her sexual life.

The customs governing marriages and their termination in Nisga'a and Tsimshian societies were commonly cited as lax by the CMS missionaries.⁵⁰ Marriages were primarily contractual arrangements between lineages. Although young people had some choice in the matter, arrangements were mainly the prerogative of their lineage relatives. The proposal of marriage was usually made by the young man's relatives, who sent an emissary with gifts to the girl's relatives. We do not know how far the arrangements had gone before Dundas "escaped." Doolan's description suggests that Dundas had been able to undo the process before the girl's relatives had come to the translator's home and reciprocated the giving of gifts, which would have constituted a marriage contract.⁵¹ From these limited insights we are able to discern a picture in which Dundas's actions with the wife of a man who had recently become very ill would have appeared far less illegitimate. Indeed they may well have been accepted by the woman's clan had Dundas not backed out before the arrangements had been completed. The prominent role of lineage relatives in any marriage proposal further suggests the legitimacy of the young Tsimshian's actions.⁵² Interestingly, the unnamed woman who eventually reported Dundas's actions to Elizabeth Ryan knew her knowledge had currency in the church moral code to which Dundas subscribed, and used it as a point of leverage in her quarrel with the young man.

Robert Dundas clearly operated within the register of the CMS missionaries from whom he derived both status and power, but he also intertwined this practice with the moral code of the Nisga'a among whom he lived. Dundas's actions reveal the ways in which he wove strands of each to his advantage. Finding himself attracted to the married young woman, Dundas had gone so far as to participate in giving property. Such a proposal went against anything the missionaries might have countenanced, and it was perhaps pressure to conform to their code that soon led Dundas to withdraw. Certainly the churchmen's moral code had a strong influence on the former Metlakatlan. This is suggested by Dundas's beliefs about why he had been shot in the leg in the canoeing accident shortly after his near marriage to the young woman. As he told Doolan when he first saw him after the accident, he interpreted the injury as a punishment from God, although the missionary did not then know the sin to which he alluded. Yet, it was only when it became clear that news of his actions would soon reach church authorities that

Dundas decided to partially disclose his predicament to Doolan. During this talk Dundas proposed to leave the community, accepting the churchmen's solution to such temptation. In fact, before the news broke Dundas had tried to plan a departure that would have saved him from the missionaries' disdain, intending to leave as soon as his tribe came to the fishery. When Doolan confronted him after learning of his actions, Dundas did not deny the matter. Doolan recorded that "At times he was very penitent," but then "again the old man would appear, and he tried to brave the matter out, saying, he was not the first Christian that had so fallen."⁵³

Dundas thus moved between moral codes, trying to follow Nisga'a practice, but being constrained from doing so by Christian codes. The young translator attempted to circumvent the disdain he would inevitably receive when they learned of his actions by preparing to leave to join his tribe, but finally accepted their displeasure when confronted by Doolan. Dundas's decision to submit to the missionaries' moral code in his final encounter with Doolan legitimated their view that his actions had been wrong. Yet it also enabled Dundas to negotiate between a visible penitence for his actions and an appeal to the universality among Christians of his particular struggle with sin, an insight Doolan had earlier shared with him. Dundas's experience suggests that the existence of at least two distinct registers on the Nass after 1864 opened sexual and other socially regulated acts to becoming key sites for negotiating status and identity, although with certain limits as the churchmen also used morality to construct an identity discrete from that of the indigenous population around them.⁵⁴ Doolan's mission was dominated by a moral imperative, which must be linked to the politics of conversion, as indications of a change of heart were more likely to be seen in works than in professions of faith. Because the CMS missionaries looked for evidence of conversion in morality, morals became a key signifier of heathen or Christian identity. In this way Doolan's appraisal of his translator's faith was reduced to a question of sexual propriety.⁵⁵

The particular case of Robert Dundas also illuminates Nisga'a limits regarding the degree to which it was permissible to construct an identity by drawing from both cultures. At this end, however, the parameter seemed less a matter of enforcing one moral code over another than of articulating expectations of what the new mission should be. As Susan Neylan has noted with respect to the Tsimshian, for the Nisga'a in the nineteenth

century an individual's identity was not so much one of "self" as of belonging to and assuming a specific place and role within one's society, group and community.⁵⁶ The Nisga'a who attended Dundas's sermons clearly challenged his identification with the mission. In Doolan's first mention to the CMS of the young Tsimshian who had accompanied the missionaries from Metlakatla and was giving addresses at the conclusion of the service, we learn that the Nisga'a who attended were not impressed. Citing the young translator as an example of discouragement he had so far faced, Doolan wrote that "It is a strange fact that the Indians dislike to listen patiently to one of themselves talking to them, and some have said that they would come to the service if Mr. Cunningham or myself spoke, but would not come to hear Robert Dundas."⁵⁷ Those who attended the mission services appear to have preferred to hear a sermon delivered by Doolan, despite his language difficulties, or the lay missionary Cunningham, an ex-prizefighter with little education or training, but whose language skills were stronger.

For all their apparent differences as preachers of the word, Doolan and Cunningham shared at least one similarity that Dundas lacked, and that the Nisga'a who attended their services valued. This is suggested by Doolan's description of a service held during his first winter on the Nass. The missionary described it as a good meeting in spite of the weather, with eighty adults as well as their children in attendance. Dundas had apparently spoken "very well" at this particular service, but Doolan remarked that nonetheless, "I hear they very much dislike listening to Robert, as they think that he is only an Indian, and as one of themselves, they have as much right to talk as he has."⁵⁸ The preference these Nisga'a had for hearing Doolan and Cunningham suggests that for all the communication challenges of this initial encounter with the CMS, the Nisga'a who interacted with the mission were less interested in the specific content of the weekly sermons than in having emissaries of white society among them. They saw potential in these agents to assist them in accessing aspects of this society seen as desirable. To be sure, Dundas's status as translator earned him recognition from some Nisga'a. This was particularly true of young men like Tacomash, who, among other reasons, saw his illness as punishment from God for envying Dundas's position in the mission house. Yet, to most Nisga'a who attended the mission services he was seen as a young Tsimshian man who had no more a claim to an audience than they.

Indeed, Nisga'a desire for instruction clearly stemmed from motivations the missionaries would not have regarded as strictly spiritual. As we have seen, however, the churchmen found their enthusiasm exceedingly gratifying, "from whatever motive it may arise."⁵⁹ Nonetheless, they chose to explain the patent interest in learning of Nisga'a youth in terms of a craving for the word. Doolan cited in an early letter to the CMS the example of young Tacomash and an unnamed friend as an instance of "the anxiety manifested by some among them to learn "the Book" as they call the Bible."⁶⁰ Later, when Tacomash was ill, Doolan reflected on how the young man

told me how joyful he was on hearing of our arrival. When the news arrived amongst them that two white teachers had come to the lower villages, his people were holding a whiskey feast, and a friend of his was nearly joining the whiskey party, when Tacomash prevailed on him to get into a canoe and come to us. These were the two young men I alluded to some time ago, who left their own village to learn of God.⁶¹

Repeated requests from upriver chiefs anxious for a teacher, as well as encounters like the one Doolan had during his first winter on the Nass when he was present at a large meeting of chiefs and found a young girl "in spite of the smoke sitting near the fire spelling out the Alphabet," further reveal a keen interest in learning. In one instance a chief from an upper village came to visit Doolan to remind him that his people were very anxious for a teacher, and that some time ago Duncan had told him that he would try to get one sent to his village. This need may have been partially ameliorated by the habit some boys from the upriver village made, upon return from their occasional visits to the mission school, of gathering other young people together to teach them what they had learned.⁶²

From Doolan's journal we can catch glimpses of the motivations that appear to have driven many Nisga'a to seek missionary instruction. These differed from the churchmen's hope that they were primarily interested in learning about the Christian God, but reflect a range of pragmatic interests tied to Nisga'a priorities. The above-mentioned Nisga'a interest in the power of text stemmed from the new possibilities for communication it presented. On Christmas Day in 1864 Doolan wrote that "A woman came in to know how her daughter at Victoria was, and when we told her we could not tell, only God knew, she wanted us to ask him, by writing the question on some paper and

putting it outside the house that he might see it.” Similarly, after a vessel anchored at the mouth of the Nass with a large amount of whiskey in May 1866, the elderly chief Neitsaul came into the mission house, “urgently asking [Doolan] to paint his name on a large board, which he would nail above the door of his house, so that when a man-of-war came, the chiefs would see the board and not destroy his house.” Writing could also help to solve the new problem of keeping track of the Sabbath. One of Cowdaeg’s uncles pointed this out when, before leaving for the salmon fishery, he asked Doolan “for a paper which would shew him when it was Sunday, as he did not wish to work on that day.”⁶³

Given these and other differences in the educational priorities of the missionaries and their subjects, those Nisga’a who sent their children to the mission school offered a very qualified support. Doolan felt that the young people desired to learn English “from their frequent intercourse with white people as compared to former years,” but not all youth were permitted to come. The Wolf chief Cockshoo (Qwochsho), in demonstrating to the missionaries that he wished to do what was right, apparently told Elizabeth Ryan “he had given to us his son to do with him as we liked and he wanted his daughter to attend school, but that he himself was too old to learn.” Generally, however, fewer girls appear to have been sent to school than boys. The explanation of one mother to Doolan that her daughter “was longing to come to school but very often she had to carry wood, and could not come,” suggests that a gendering of priorities for Nisga’a youth may have been a factor.⁶⁴

The gender balance in Doolan’s school was further tipped by the frequent presence of a number of men. They were not of the target age group of the churchmen—and their presence was clearly not welcomed at times—but seem to have attended of their own accord. Such was the case of the men who came along on the afternoon of Christmas Day in 1865, when Doolan called the children together for a little feast and tried to explain to them the birth of Jesus and the meaning of the word Christmas.⁶⁵ Of “A great many men” who swelled the school attendance a few weeks later, Doolan wrote that, “These take their place with the boys according to their knowledge.” It appears, however, that learning was not the sole or even primary reason for their presence.⁶⁶ Indeed, some of the men who were regular fixtures around the mission were receptive to

learning about the Saviour and the salvation of their souls. Nagaotm, an elderly chief who regularly attended meeting on Sundays, told the missionary that “he was too old to learn to read, but he could listen.” This response was echoed by Neitsaul, the elderly chief whom Claytha accused of cutting the strings from some of the children’s slates and using them for harm.⁶⁷ Yet far more common in Doolan’s conversations with men about their souls was the response that they thought themselves too old to learn new ways, but very much wished their children to be instructed by the mission. During the churchman’s discussion with Kinzarda and two other chiefs in the spring of 1867 about why the Nisga’a had not changed their ways, one of the chiefs echoed this sentiment. This prompted a likely frustrated Doolan to tell him, “that his soul was as precious as that of any of the children around us.”⁶⁸ The previous spring Doolan had been paid a visit the day following a Sunday service by an old man “looked on as a very wise man amongst the Nishkas.” The missionary wrote that after the service, the man had apparently “told a chief who had been sitting near him, that the news was good, and he wished he had heard it when he was young, and it was good for him (the chief) to listen while he was young.”⁶⁹ Clearly the churchmen’s new ways were regarded as most appropriate for the young.

The conspicuous presence of elderly Nisga’a men in Doolan’s school points to their continuing desire to influence the socialization of their children. Men like the Wolf chief Thratcouquats from Lakunkedah, who had been eager to meet Doolan on his arrival at Metlakatla, approved of the missionary education of their children. Yet this did not prevent them from suggesting how it might be improved. Doolan described a visit by Thratcouquats in April 1866 during which the chief respectfully offered an appraisal of the churchmen’s instruction:

School being over, he rose and said, How glad he was that teachers had come amongst them. It was good to teach them. They were very ignorant. He was one of the first who wished teachers to come amongst his people. It was not good to punish the children, as if punished, they would not again come.⁷⁰

In a humble yet firm manner, Thratcouquats attempted to change the missionaries’ relationship with their students to one he saw as more appropriate, without diminishing his show of gratitude for their work. Doolan does not appear to have taken the chief’s

advice, however. He concluded his description of Thratcouquats' visit with the words, "Poor man, I fear from the little I have learnt of him that his own heart is still as hard as ever." We might conclude from this remark that Doolan had evidently encountered yet another adult who believed that the knowledge the missionaries had to offer would be more instrumental to the welfare of coming generations than to the present one.

Other Nisga'a were more forthright with their criticisms, particularly of Doolan's desire to have his students as completely under his control as possible. Viewing the mission as "A little oasis in the wilderness," Doolan could not help but see the influences of the surrounding culture on his students in a negative light. To be sure, the missionaries' *raison d'être* was to transform the people by giving them the light of the gospel. Intervening in the socialization of the next generation was integral to this process, especially given the widespread opinion of the Nisga'a around the mission that they were too old to adopt the churchmen's ways. After taking two more boys into the mission house in December 1865, bringing the total to four, Doolan explained in his journal, "I think it is better for them to be with me, than in the Indian houses where they learn no good."⁷¹ The churchman appears to have shared the common missionary concern that all of his work risked undoing if his students returned to their families even briefly. This view also suggests his considerable anxieties about the effectiveness of his work. At the end of July 1867, just before Doolan's return to England, a large number of canoes stopped at Gingolx on their way out to the sea. The parents of some of the boys who lived in the mission apparently came and asked for their children to accompany and help them, promising to return them to the missionaries as soon as the salmon fishery was over. Doolan reluctantly complied, noting, "This I was sorry for, as, what good they may have learnt with us will be, I fear, eradicated by the evil example of others."⁷² Indeed, echoes of the ideals of residential schooling can be heard in the CMS missionaries' rejection of any sort of dialogue with their subjects, particularly in their demand for uninterrupted time.

Unwilling to surrender their children completely to the mission for the education they desired, many Nisga'a with children under the missionaries' care struggled to ensure that their children could spend time with their house and clan, time that was regarded as of equal importance to their proper development. As lingering traces of paint on the

faces of Doolan's students suggest, there was far more movement between the mission and adjacent lower villages than the missionaries would have liked. In this sense the students who attended Doolan's school can certainly be regarded as go-betweens. They straddled the meeting of cultures on the lower Nass, living within both to a greater degree than any other party to this encounter.⁷³

Yet the ease with which these students travelled between life worlds should not blind us to the tensions incumbent from the reality of their location at the interstices of these worlds. Young men like Cowcaelth and Wachlee were pulled in different directions, looked upon unfavourably by missionary or Nisga'a depending on which course of action they agreed to follow. Participation in the activities associated with the winter ceremonial complex proved a key point of contestation between the missionaries and the inhabitants of the lower villages over the socialization of Nisga'a youth. During the winter of 1864, the first indication of the arrival of the spirits, or the beginning of the season to those uninitiated in one of the secret societies, occurred much as it likely had before the missionaries' arrival. In his description, however, Doolan depicted his presence as having some effect, even at this early stage:

In the evening, a chief called Hinishlishyahu came round to every house, blowing a kind of hollow tube and which makes a hideous squeaking noise...inviting the people to the medicine work. Some of the young men with him, and who are often in our house were much ashamed at our seeing them engaged in the work.⁷⁴

In this and other accounts of his students' participation in Nisga'a cultural practices the missionary saw his gaze inducing shame in its object. Seeing himself as both the emissary of a new moral order and the arbiter of that order between God and his subjects, Doolan frequently constructed himself as a standard of righteousness whose presence brought discomfort and shame to those who did not conform, particularly those who had received the word yet persisted in their old ways.⁷⁵

Despite whatever effect we can attribute to Doolan's gaze on the actions of his students, the Nisga'a chiefs in the lower villages do not appear to have relinquished their important role of bestowing supernatural power on youngsters during the winter ceremonies.⁷⁶ The explicit purpose of the secret societies' ceremonies and other winter dances appears to have been to bring "dancers" or initiates in contact with *naxnox*.

Chiefs, through their function as priests during the winter months, provided spiritual leadership in their role of sponsoring young novices into throwing ceremonies or secret societies.⁷⁷ Compared to the direct method by which a shaman acquired his or her powers, these ceremonies were characterized by indirect encounters, or the acquisition of power through re-enactment of an actual or mythical event.⁷⁸ For example, the power that had originally been obtained through a vision quest could in subsequent transmissions be “thrown” into a child by a chief. All children received the protection of the spirits through a chief of their own or their father’s tribe, who acted as an intermediary. Being stronger, the chief was able to regulate and control the influence of the supernatural power conveyed through him or her. The chief enticed her or his spirit power and then threw it into the child. The whistle blown while the power was being thrown was the voice of the spirit or *naxnox* taking possession of the children. Power was usually conveyed in two separate ceremonies, the first and essential one when the child was very young, and the second—if the family could afford it—when the child was somewhat older and could actively participate in the ceremony. These powers were similar to crests in the sense that they were possessed by particular lineages within which they were inheritable.⁷⁹ The CMS missionaries do not appear to have understood the ceremonies going on around them, describing and condemning them without distinction as “medicine” or “ahlie” work, the latter a corruption of the term *halaayt*.⁸⁰

Doolan’s desire to keep the students at the mission and his limited comprehension of the underlying cosmology of Nisga’a cultural practices led him to depict negatively the efforts of chiefs to have their youth participate in *naxnox* ceremonies. Often he stressed the youths’ reluctance to participate or their attachment to the mission. During Doolan’s first winter on the Nass he wrote that Chief Kinzarda was using his influence to induce a young chief named Akshegtakun to become a “medicine man,” adding, “but he says he had promised W. Duncan to attend school and he liked being with us.”⁸¹ Two weeks earlier during the ceremonial season Doolan reported that Cowdaeg “is enduring much persecution” for not joining in the rituals. Nonetheless, in the following spring, when Doolan had hoped that the young chief would be ready for baptism, he explained in his first report to the CMS, “I am sorry to write that persuaded by his friend [Cowdaeg] was made an ahlien and has attended the service lately very irregularly.” Doolan frequently

portrayed the loss of a potential convert in terms of a dramatic personal struggle, here noting “The poor lad told us that he used to cry very much, as he heard the bell ringing for school, and had one night made up his mind not to listen to his friends, but break from them.”⁸² The persecution and inner struggle depicted by the churchman in his young students was a lamentable but inevitable step on the path to conversion. It was the price to be paid for parting with evil ways and having “thrown in their lot with us,” as Doolan put it.

Yet these students clearly moved back and forth between the worlds of the Nisga’a and the mission, despite Doolan’s attempts to portray them as progressing along the path to salvation. When in January 1866 the missionary reported that Cowaikik had sold all his tools used in the “medicine work” to Cunningham, he interpreted the news as very encouraging, noting, “No man would take such a step as this, if his mind was not fully made up.” The picture we have of Cowaikik in the ensuing weeks is one of far less certainty, however. Doolan soon wrote that Cowaikik was “much distressed,” and suffered greatly due to having sold his tools. The missionary attributed this primarily to Claytha, who was “much annoyed at the young men attending school, and using his influence to keep the young men away.”⁸³ As late as Doolan’s final spring on the Nass, he reported of Cowaikik’s oscillation between the wishes of the missionaries and his people. Cowaikik, he noted, “had given up his old practises, but who has again been led astray by Claytha, came to me, saying, he intended leaving off his old ways.”⁸⁴

As in the case of the young translator Robert Dundas, the arrival of the CMS mission presented Nisga’a students with an alternative set of precepts from which to fashion or orient their identity. This development need not be depicted as giving Native peoples freedom to opt out of existing cultural practices, as some scholars have portrayed.⁸⁵ More precisely, it can be seen as arising out of a social context in which individuals—often young people—could interweave their lived experience from two radically different tapestries. For the young man Wachlee (Wahlee) and others, such a path generated criticisms from both missionary and relatives. Wachlee was one of the young men Doolan had cited in a report to the CMS as being “very consistent, and ... very desirous of instruction,” yet having “endured some amount of persecution” for his involvement with the mission. Yet, his life as it appears in the missionary record was

plainly a more selective negotiation of mission and Nisga'a ways. We have seen in the previous chapter how in December 1865 Wachlee was urged by his mother to participate in a potlatch. The missionary noted then that Wachlee had encouraged Letq, another young man, to join him in building a house near the mission house. The following month in a report to the CMS, Doolan cited Wachlee as one of his students who had "been very firm lately in following what is right," but who was nonetheless influenced by Claytha's talks with him. "This lad has much to bear from his own relations," the missionary wrote, noting "His Uncle with whom he lives, is always sneering at the school and church, and on Wachlee returning the other day from school, the old man told him he had better eat what he had learnt at school, and leave off eating salmon."⁸⁶

Wachlee could equally elicit the consternation of the missionaries. In March 1866 Doolan recorded that he was "Much pained on hearing" that Wachlee,

who up to the present time, has been very consistent, is falling back into his old ways. He is tired of his present wife, who is a hard working, modest woman, and has sent her away, as he wished to take another young woman as his wife. He has lately avoided me, and also Cowcaelth, who is constantly giving him good advice.⁸⁷

Wachlee appears to have patterned his life across both worlds, transgressing the boundaries and means of distinction presented by each. Two days after receiving this news Doolan wrote, "I heard with much sorrow that Wahlee, as soon as service was concluded, went to work yesterday."⁸⁸ Wachlee's interest in the mission cannot be questioned: the young man is described at various times as being very desirous of instruction and consistent in following the churchmen's ways, and had even invited another young man to join him in moving near the mission house. Yet Wachlee appears not to have let himself be restrained by the limitations the missionaries tried to impose on him. When he tired of his wife and wished another young woman to take her place, he sent the former away. This brought condemnation from Doolan and Cowcaelth. However, the churchmen as well as their advice could be skirted. To be sure Wachlee attended the missionaries' service the following Sunday, but soon after went to work at the fishery, a decision that was no doubt strongly influenced by the untimely arrival of the eulachon on the Sabbath.⁸⁹

The CMS churchmen struggled to control both the meanings of the symbols and stories they introduced to the Nisga'a, and the identities that could be derived from them during the initial period of missionization. Those Nisga'a who adopted elements of Christianity and incorporated them into their identity challenged this goal, however. The interactions of the Wolf chief Neshaki (Niskinwetk) of Lakunkedah with the mission illustrate this point. One of the senior Wolf chiefs, Neshaki was a leading fur trader who successfully adopted a traditionally male role as an intermediary or "middleman" between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Nisga'a.⁹⁰ Neshaki established herself as a great chief on the lower Nass when she gave a large feast at Lakunkedah, at which she raised a pole to honour the memory of her recently deceased brother, Chief Neskinwaetk. The pole had been carved by the renowned carver Oyai, who worked for one year to complete the massive undertaking. In erecting this pole Neshaki succeeded in outdoing her husband, Eagle Chief Sakauwan (Saga'waan or "Sharp Teeth," who also held the title Mountain)—who had tried to shame her after she had left him—and assumed her brother's title and sole leadership of the Wolf clan.⁹¹ This feast occurred sometime while Doolan was stationed on the Nass, and after her marriage to the prominent HBC fur trader Captain William Henry McNeill, who had been in charge of Fort Simpson from 1851-59. The marriage appears to have been mutually beneficial. McNeill secured access to a steady supply of furs from the lower Nass valley by incorporating himself into the Wolf clan, while Neshaki enhanced her own wealth and prestige as well as that of the Nisga'a around her home village of Lakunkedah.⁹²

Neshaki accepted the Christian teachings that had recently come to the North Coast, but clearly rejected the concept of a firm dichotomy between Nisga'a and Christian presented by the CMS missionaries. In April 1863, only three years after William Duncan's arrival, Neshaki was baptized along with her sister Shoodahsl by Bishop Hills at Metlakatla, where she received the Christian name Martha.⁹³ Among the remarks recorded by Hills about Neshaki during her baptism were that two years earlier she had been found "giving Christian instruction to a sick and dying person," and that "Her husband [McNeill] tells me that she passed much time in devotion."⁹⁴ Despite her early acceptance of Christianity, Neshaki was a controversial figure on the North Coast.⁹⁵ After his arrival in 1864, Doolan made much of Neshaki's Christian status when

describing her actions. Neshaki first appears in Doolan's journal in the autumn of 1865 making preparations to leave Lakunkedah. "I hear some of the young women from here will accompany an Indian woman," the missionary wrote, "who was living with a Capt'n McNeil for some time at Ft. Simpson, to Metlakahtlah, and remain the winter there."⁹⁶ Neshaki was still on the lower Nass the following Sunday, and was one of the few who attended Doolan's service. Most of the regular congregation had gone up the river. The churchman remarked that on this day he was "Much grieved at the conduct of a baptised Indian, named Martha McNeil. She waited till service was concluded, and then embarked in a canoe to go up the river. She told me the chief who she accompanied would not wait a day. The example to the young men here, trying to reform is very bad."⁹⁷

As an influential chief, Neshaki appears to have taken responsibility for a number of young women, a role that did not necessarily conflict with the CMS missionaries' concern over the socialization of young men. Indeed Neshaki's status as a baptized Nisga'a woman could have potentially given her work a complementary status to that of the mission. Doolan, however, saw her differently. From his perspective, Neshaki's incorporation of Christian spirituality into a Nisga'a lifestyle was inconsistent. Moreover, her ambiguous position, arising from the negotiation of conversion without the sense of the mutual exclusivity of being Nisga'a and Christian, set a dangerous precedent for the conversions the churchmen hoped would come. Although the young men around the mission were not under Neshaki's care, Doolan correctly gauged the enormity of her influence on those "trying to reform." Later in the autumn of 1865, Doolan noted that Takthl, a student from upriver at the mission and friend of Tacomash and Wachlee, "is again drinking up the country." The missionary provided a brief synopsis of the problem, as well as a solution in his account: "A baptised Indian, Martha McNeil has given him the whiskey. As his only chance, humanly speaking, of being saved, is to keep away from temptation, I shall still let him remain the winter with me when he returns."⁹⁸ Although permitted to stay at the mission over the winter, it became clear during the spring that Takthl had "again fallen into sin," and that Neshaki had been involved this time as well. As Takthl was from the upper village, the young man had stopped with Robert

Cunningham while visiting the mission. Takthl soon wished to leave, and when he was asked for the reason, he apparently told Cunningham

That now he knew a little about God, and he was ashamed to stop in the house, as he was not doing what was right. He was cohabiting with a girl living with Mrs. McNeil and tho' he knew he was doing wrong, he could not help it. He wishes to marry the girl, but he is poor, and her parents will not hear of it.⁹⁹

In addition to giving Takthl whiskey, Neshaki had allowed the young man to cohabit in her house with one of the girls under her care, violating both the churchmen's moral code and traditional Nisga'a concerns about social status.

The root of the missionaries' opposition to Neshaki lay not so much in her actions, which were not in themselves that unusual. Rather, they were disturbed by the fact that they were performed by someone who with equal enthusiasm demonstrated her devotion to the Christian God. As emissaries of the word, the missionaries saw themselves as its most qualified interpreters and arbiters of who was and was not acting in its spirit. This assumption, and the concerns that arose quite logically from it, are apparent in Doolan's account of the third day of Claytha's feast in November 1865, in which he noted that he was "sorry to find a baptised Indian, Martha McNeil has been drinking with the Indians, and joining them in their heathen customs. The example is very bad, as much harm, humanly speaking is done to God's work by such conduct in one professing Christianity."¹⁰⁰ Like the requests of participants in Kinzarda's feast for Christian hymns, or Claytha's own calling on his "Great Father in Heaven to pity him," Neshaki's participation in a feast as a Christian transgressed the boundaries of the identity the missionaries wished to instill among their subjects. Her participation in Nisga'a cultural practices and circumvention of the moral code of the mission were made all the more dangerous to the churchmen's project by her self-identification as a Christian since her baptism in 1863. For as a Christian Nisga'a, Neshaki presented those receptive to Christian spirituality on the Nass and beyond with an alternative reference point, much as the visiting Roman Catholic priests had threatened to do before Doolan was sent out to ward off their expansion plans.

On another front Neshaki likely heightened missionary anxieties by combining her hybridisation of Christianity and indigenous ways with an authority that defied the

Victorian standards of domesticity and submissiveness the churchmen thought befitting of women.¹⁰¹ Susan Neylan writes of the approach of the nineteenth-century CMS and Methodist missions to the Tsimshian, “While male catechists were assessed in terms of their loyalty to the missionary and their evangelistic work, Tsimshian women were conceptualized in the Euro-Canadian discourse, according to Victorian notions of femininity, maternal and domestic duty, and passive vulnerability.”¹⁰² Although she continued to participate in feasts and other traditional ceremonies, Neshaki simultaneously instructed others, particularly young women around Lakunkedah, in Christianity, continuing a practice that had begun before her conversion. It is likely the CMS missionaries were not used to a woman competing with their authority in this way. After Claytha’s feast in November 1865, Doolan noted that

Today Martha McNeil left for Metlakahtlah, taking with her three young girls from here. Two have behaved very well, and I hope a work of grace has begun in their hearts. I prayed earnestly for them that God would watch and keep them. One of them is the poor girl sold by her father to an upcountry Indian, and who made her escape from him.¹⁰³

Doolan was no doubt uncomfortable with Neshaki taking charge of young girls in this and other instances, but was relatively powerless to stop the Wolf chief. The third girl mentioned was likely the above-mentioned girl whom Doolan had described as a regular at school and church on Sunday. This girl’s mother had explained when the missionary visited her house that she often had to carry wood and could not come. Doolan had remarked at the time that on first seeing her he had been struck by the “openness and simplicity” of her appearance. But now, he noted, she had been sold “for so many blankets to an old, diseased man, who wants her for his wife.” However relieved Doolan may have been that this young girl had been freed from a marriage arrangement of which he did not approve, the churchman could only look on and pray that all would go well with her new teacher.

Doolan did not succeed in forcing his particular Christian identity on Neshaki or any of the other powerful chiefs on the lower Nass. Instead, he attempted to account for as well as discredit the behaviour of this baptized Nisga’a in his journal and other correspondence with the CMS, by wrapping it in a discourse of the fallen convert. After Neshaki’s departure for Metlakatla with three young girls in tow, the missionary noted

that many people had left the Nass for Fort Simpson, where they planned to stop for the winter. The berries had failed that year, but plenty of shellfish and seaweed was to be found at the fort. This reason probably factored into Neshaki's decision to stop at Fort Simpson, of which Doolan soon learned. In early December 1865 he wrote that he "heard with sorrow that Martha McNeil had not gone on to Metlakahtlah, but was stopping at Fort Simpson, where she was constantly drinking. It is sad to think she has so fallen, and I very much fear the young people with her will learn no good. I wrote to Duncan, hoping he could get them to leave her."¹⁰⁴ Duncan appears to have spoken with Neshaki, but with mixed effect. When the Wolf chief returned to Lakunkedah the following February to get her property together before leaving with Captain McNeill to live in Victoria, she paid Doolan a visit.¹⁰⁵ The missionary described himself as glad to see her, "As she expressed herself to Mr. Duncan very penitent for her past folly." Still, Doolan was not keen to see Neshaki resume offering Christian instruction to the young girls around the mission shortly after their talk. On the second Sunday in March 1865 Doolan wrote that he heard that "Mrs. Mc. Neil has invited the young girls of the camp to her house to speak to them on their evil ways, but as she has not been consistent during her stay here, her words will have little weight." The missionary further noted, "One Indian lad told two girls not to go, as she did not practice what she preached."¹⁰⁶

Certainly Neshaki did not practise what the CMS missionaries preached. While professing Christian spirituality, she consumed alcohol around the young women she instructed; she housed an unmarried couple, and she participated in feasts and other traditional celebrations. Such activities did not endear her to the missionaries. Yet the high-ranking Nisga'a chief did not derive her authority from the mission alone; nor did she seek its approval. Writing of two Native women who served as chiefs and councillors in their respective Methodist settlements at Port Simpson and Greenville/Laxgalts'ap in the late nineteenth century, Carol Cooper notes that, significantly, neither of these women held their positions "through any magnanimity on the part of the missionaries." Rather, the women held power "because the native peoples themselves continued to acknowledge them as leaders and sought their advice."¹⁰⁷ The same could be said of Neshaki. The Wolf chief had instructed others in Christian teachings before accepting baptism in 1863, and likely continued to do so during her

frequent returns to the Nass to manage her chiefly duties after moving to Victoria with McNeill three years later. As with her alliance with the HBC, Neshaki used Christianity to enhance her prestige, dispensing its teachings in a manner befitting that of the leader of a powerful Nisga'a clan in a society still organized by matrilineal collectives. Neshaki's status conferred an authority on her teachings that was independent of missionary approval. In this sense Doolan misjudged the weight her words would carry before the young girls.

As the first baptized Nisga'a chief, Neshaki's adoption of an active form of Christian leadership may foreshadow the patterns of acceptance that eventually unfolded in the period of missionization that began after the founding of the Christian village of Gingolx. This examination of a few aspects of the spiritual dialogue between the CMS missionaries and the Nisga'a they encountered on the lower Nass during what we might call the first phase of their encounter—as well as the considerable challenges to the means of communication through which this conversation took place—points to a specific desire of many Nisga'a for their young to be instructed in the ways of the white world. The terms under which they were able to secure this education were harsh, initiating a struggle over the socialization of young men and women. The advent of the mission provided its young students with an alternative set of social precepts by which to live, true to its intentions. Young men from Tacomash to Wachlee to Takthl negotiated identities somewhere in between those offered by the mission and their own culture. They were guided in this process by chiefs and others who critiqued the instruction of their children and who were unwilling to relinquish control over their upbringing. In this and in other capacities Neshaki, the leading chief of the Wolf clan in the lower villages, stands out as a figure who used her chiefly responsibilities to negotiate a path for her people that simultaneously drew from the newly-arrived Christian teachings and spirituality, without losing sight of the cultural beliefs and practices that underpinned Nisga'a life ways. The CMS missionaries were instrumental in bringing their particular type of evangelical Christianity to the lower Nass in the 1860s. But they were not to be the sole or final arbiters of the meanings or forms it would take there—at least not during the initial encounter.

¹ Viola Garfield, "The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors," writes that women of the chief class took tribal chiefs' names, at least in the nineteenth century if not earlier. Often such chieftainesses came to power when no close male heirs existed. Garfield cites the example of two Coast Tsimshian chieftainesses who were influential leaders and respected for their abilities. As discussed below, in the mid-1860s Neshaki established herself as a great chief on the lower Nass when she raised a pole to honour the memory of her recently deceased brother, Chief Neskinwaetk. In doing this she assumed her brother's title and sole leadership of the Wolf clan, as well as prevented herself from being shamed by her former husband, Chief Sakauwan, whom she had left. Interestingly, Garfield observes of the neighbours of the Tsimshian-speaking peoples, "There is no recorded instance where a Haida or Tlingit group solved the problem of a successor by choosing a woman," 28.

² On the first Sunday in April 1867 Doolan remarked that the morning and afternoon service he held in the largest house "was filled, tho' the Indians from the other side of the river did not come. They had service amongst themselves." Robert Doolan, Journal. 7 April 1867. CMS C.2./O.

³ CMS to Robert Doolan. 2 February 1864. CMS C.1./L.3.

⁴ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 216. CMS missionaries' faith in the abilities of language to unite humanity underscores Johannes Fabian's argument that missionaries operated in and constructed difference within a medieval paradigm of time (as opposed to post-enlightenment evolutionary time), in which a Time of Salvation could conceivably include all of humanity, *Time and the Other*, 26.

⁵ CMS to Robert Doolan. 2 February 1864. CMS C.1./L.3.

⁶ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 222. Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988) notes that translation is "a matter of first discerning the differences between and within social codes and then of seeing the possibility of getting across those differences," 210.

⁷ CMS to Robert Doolan. 16 March 1866. CMS C.1./L.3.

⁸ The relation of Nisga'a to similar adjacent languages has been outlined by Laurence C. Thompson and M. Dale Kinkade, "Languages," *Handbook of North American Indians: Northwest Coast*, vol. 7, edited by Wayne Suttles, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1990): 30-51. They write "Tsimshian is a close-knit family of two (perhaps three) languages, Nass-Gitksan and Coast Tsimshian, a divergent southern dialect of which may be considered a separate language, Southern Tsimshian. Other dialects present an intergrading spread. Nass-Gitksan divides into three dialects—Nishga spoken in the Nass River valley and Eastern and Western Gitksan," 31-3. In this construction, Nisga'a and Coast Tsimshian (into which Duncan and Doolan translated their texts) are dialects of two distinct languages, but part of the same language family.

⁹ Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to Hills, Bishop of Columbia, at Victoria. 2 October 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰ See for example, Robert Doolan, Journal. 16 August 1865; 7 September 1865; 1 May 1866; 16 January 1867; 23 January 1867. CMS C.2./O.

¹¹ The importance placed on communication of the gospel, in conjunction with some degree of Providence, was characteristic of Protestant missions of various denominations, which placed heavy emphasis on the study of the Bible in its theology. Although not explicitly mentioned in Doolan's journal, the transformative power of the missionary's own experience was often held by the latter as an example for their subjects, as Natasha Erlank, "Sexual Misconduct and Church Power," 78, has noted in the context of an African mission.

¹² Robert Doolan, Journal. 27 February 1866. CMS C.2./O.

¹³ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 218. Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, offers an excellent study of what conversion could possibly have meant to a colonized people whose language differed from that of the colonizers.

¹⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 January 1866; 7 April 1867. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁵ Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 20 October 1866. CMS C.2./O. Robert Doolan, Journal. 4 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 6 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 11 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 25 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 11 March 1866. CMS C.2./O. Such an approach echoes the CMS's encouragement to their missionaries not to follow ordinary, orderly methods of missionizing, but to trust

instead to the “Providence of God” to provide support, Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, 4: 31.

²⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 4 April 1866; 8 April 1866. CMS C.2./O.

²¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 16 July 1865; 14 January 1866; 26 January 1867. CMS C.2./O.

²² Robert Doolan, Journal. 21 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

²³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 33-34.

²⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 4 February 1866. CMS C.2./O.

²⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 11 February 1866; 24 June 1866; 23 April 1867. CMS C.2./O.

²⁶ Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, identifies this process as informing Tagalog, and possibly other, histories, and argues that it was also a feature of Tagalog translation and conversion, 12.

²⁷ The previous Sunday Doolan had noted in his journal, “Evening prayers every night at Philip’s, conducted by himself, which is very gratifying.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 7 July 1867; 14 July 1867. CMS C.2./O.

²⁸ Doolan’s difficulties learning Nisga’a were not helped by the death of his first convert, the young student from the upriver village of Gitwinsilth, whom the missionary had hoped to employ to assist him in this task. Hiring him for this work would have the additional benefit of “tak[ing] him away from the influence of his friends.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 7 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

²⁹ Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 26 October 1864. Robert Doolan, Nass, to CMS. 22 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

³⁰ Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 14 August 1865; 26 September 1865; 29 April 1866. CMS C.2./O. Singing hymns appears to have been a significant part of the missionaries’ services, and was taken up enthusiastically by the Nisga’a. Canoeing to Metlakatla in June 1866, Doolan wrote, “The Indians beguiled the way by singing hymns which sounded very pleasant on the waters.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 25 June 1866. CMS C.2./O.

³¹ Robert Doolan, Nass, to CMS. 22 May 1865. CMS C.2./O. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony,” 1-56. Interestingly, Doolan’s self-depiction offers an instance in which the usual construction of Native peoples by missionaries as childlike younger brothers and sisters is reversed.

³² Robert Doolan, Journal. 22 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

³³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 12 June 1865; 23 June 1865. CMS C.2./O.

³⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 23 August 1865; 14 April 1867; 15 April 1867. CMS C.2./O. Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs*, notes that as evangelicals, the CMS missionaries strongly rejected the use of pictures, medals, rosaries, crucifixes, and other religious objects in both public and private devotions, 142, although Doolan evidently resorted to pictures in his attempts to communicate his message.

³⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 30 June 1865. CMS C.2./O.

³⁶ Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, 21. In another context Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal*, argues that Russian Orthodoxy’s susceptibility to Native reinterpretation, or being “Tlingitized,” meant that instead of being a hegemonic ideology, Orthodoxy became a set of beliefs and ritual practices that assisted many Tlingit in dealing with a changing sociopolitical and intellectual environment, in maintaining their “respectability” in the eyes of the Americans, as well as enabled them to maintain integral aspects of the traditional sociocultural order, xxx.

³⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 19 December 1864; 10 January 1865. CMS C.2./O.

³⁸ Peter Murray, *The Devil and Mr. Duncan*, 95.

³⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 6 June 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁰ Robert Doolan, Nass, to CMS. 22 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 25 December 1864. CMS C.2./O. Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 26 September 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴² Robert Doolan, Journal. 2 September 1865; 15 October 1865. CMS C.2./O. When Dundas was away for two weeks in early May of 1865 helping his mother cure fish at the foot of the river Robert Cunningham filled his place, holding the usual service. Robert Doolan, Journal. 5 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁴³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 28 November 1865; 26 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 18 February 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁴⁵ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, notes that among the characteristics which middle-class Englishmen valued were “a commitment to the values of labour and discipline and a willingness to put off immediate pleasures in the interests of pleasures to come,” 41.

⁴⁶ Natasha Erlank, “Sexual Misconduct and Church Power,” 79.

⁴⁷ Natasha Erlank, “Sexual Misconduct and Church Power,” 79. Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), states that discourses of sexuality were used to map “the moral parameters of European nations,” 7.

⁴⁸ Carol Cooper, “Native Women of the Northern Pacific Coast,” 60.

⁴⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 17 February 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁰ Carol Cooper, “Native Women of the Northern Pacific Coast,” states that nineteenth-century Nisga’a and Tsimshian women resented the intrusions of the missionaries upon their personal lives, and were particularly resistant to their efforts to prevent them from divorcing their spouses. Cooper cites a comment made by the Reverend Robert Tomlinson, Doolan’s successor as CMS missionary at the newly founded Christian village of Gingolx, in 1872 that one of the major problems facing his mission was the “brittle nature” of Nisga’a marriages. The Reverend James B. McCullagh also found this to be the case as late as the 1890s around his mission at Aiyansh, 65. Doolan wanted a successor who could provide an example of the type of marriage he thought should be the norm. Before leaving the mission in July 1867 he noted that “I told Duncan that I had suggested to Mr. Tomlinson, as soon as he was sufficiently master of the language, that he should take charge of the village, as I thought it of so much consequence to the welfare of the mission that the missionary should be married.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 8 July 1867. CMS C.2./O.

⁵¹ Viola E. Garfield, “The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors,” 24. Garfield states that negotiations were conducted by mothers or grandmothers.

⁵² Viola E. Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, writes that the Tsimshian-speaking peoples “had no particular objection to marriages outside the tribe, so long as the clan affiliation and social status of the outside member were considered,” 231. Thus the Tsimshian translator’s marriage to a Nisga’a woman would not have posed a problem, providing it respected the traditional rules governing marriage.

⁵³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 19 February 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁴ Indeed, the metropolitan society, white settler society, and the society around the mission each provided a potential site for the articulation of different relations of power, different subject positions, and different cultural relations for both the churchmen and indigenous peoples, Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 65. The ways in which the contrast between two cultures and their everyday practices introduce a vehicle by means of which persons could make, and remake, their subjective identities on a changing social stage has been explored elsewhere in a missionary context. See Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, and Natasha Erlank, “Sexual Misconduct and Church Power,” for example.

⁵⁵ Dundas had to choose between church and custom, which the CMS missionaries constructed as antithetical moralities. Analyzing the production of doubt in the context of the evangelical mission to India, Homi Bhabha argues that by making morality “a space of contradictory and multiple belief,” mission instruction denied Natives an obvious option, ensuring that any decision was at best ambivalent, *The Location of Culture*, 134.

⁵⁶ Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, 131.

⁵⁷ Robert Doolan, Nass, to CMS. 22 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 4 December 1864. CMS C.2./O.

⁵⁹ Robert Doolan to CMS, Metlakatla, 14 July 1864. CMS C.2./O.

⁶⁰ Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 26 October 1864. CMS C.2./O.

⁶¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 22 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁶² Robert Doolan, Journal. 25 June 1865; 7 December 1864; 12 February 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁶³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 25 December 1864; 2 May 1866; 28 July 1867. CMS C.2./O. The word “print” is crossed out and replaced with “paint” in Doolan’s description of Neitsaul’s request. Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, believes that for the Tsimshian, even after a century of contact with literate Europeans, “a strong case can be made that specific written objects were considered *halaqyt* while others were interpreted at a much more mundane level, as documentary tokens through which to display one’s personal credentials.” Further insight into Neitsaul’s request may be offered when we consider that the Tsimshian used some written documents in similar fashion to crests i.e. displayed them to validate privilege and status, 229-230.

- ⁶⁴ Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 26 September 1865. CMS C.2./O. Robert Doolan, Journal. 11 November 1865; 13 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.
- ⁶⁵ Robert Doolan, Journal. 25 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.
- ⁶⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 5 December 1865; 22 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.
- ⁶⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 14 July 1865; 24 March 1866. CMS C.2./O. Doolan described Nagaotm the day after the chief's visit as "nearly blind," which would likely have partly accounted for his view on learning. Nonetheless his view that he was too old to learn how to read was common among elderly Nisga'a men Doolan encountered.
- ⁶⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 23 April 1867. CMS C.2./O. Doolan's interest in the souls of Nisga'a of all ages appears to differ significantly from that of other Anglican missionaries in nineteenth-century British Columbia, such as John Booth Good, whose goal was long-term change in the Nlha7kápmx, in which Native beliefs would gradually pass away with the older generation, and a new crop would emerge "speaking our language, adopting our habits, and possessing our faith," quoted in Brett Christophers, *Positioning the Missionary*, 121.
- ⁶⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 5 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.
- ⁷⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 24 April 1866. CMS C.2./O.
- ⁷¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 7 January 1866; 15 December 1865. CMS C.2./O. Doolan echoed this sentiment later when he took in another student boarder, writing "They soon leave again, as their habits are so wandering, but I trust with God's blessing on the means, they learn a little, during their short stay." Robert Doolan, Journal. 10 May 1866. CMS C.2./O.
- ⁷² Robert Doolan, Journal. 30 July 1867. CMS C.2./O.
- ⁷³ An insightful body of work analyzing the cultural "go-between" in an Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal context has appeared in recent years. For an excellent collection of essays exploring the identities forged by such culture brokers see *Through a Glass Darkly: Reflections on Personal Identity in Early America*, Ronald Hoffman, Mechal Sobel, Fredrika J. Teute, editors (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
- ⁷⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 24 November 1864. CMS C.2./O. Viola E. Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, writes of the timing of the winter social and religious activities that, "It was the privilege of the tribal chief to decide when the first initiation of the season was to be held, and who was to be initiated. The blowing of the whistles at night behind the houses was the first indication of the arrival of the spirits and the beginning of the season as far as the uninitiated were concerned. They knew by the sound of the whistle which group was about to hold a ceremony. Once the supernatural spirits had visited the village, further initiation and elevation ceremonies were held until the end of the period when the powers were 'put away,'" 297-98.
- ⁷⁵ Doolan also appears to have attached a telos to the effects of the introduction of a new moral order finding expression through, among other things, his gaze. The following November he wrote that "The medicine work has again begun, but it will be very paltry work this year compared to last. A great many chiefs are away and a great many are now ashamed of it." Robert Doolan, Journal. 29 November 1865. CMS C.2./O.
- ⁷⁶ Jay Miller, "Tsimshian Religion in Historical Perspective: Shamans, Prophets, and Christ," *The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors of the North Pacific Coast*, Jay Miller and Carol M. Eastman, editors (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 137.
- ⁷⁷ Marie-Françoise Guédon, "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," writes that *smhalaayt*, literally "true" or "real" *halaayt*, and *wut'aahalaayt* or "great" *halaayt* were the chief initiates or initiators of the secret societies, 139; 158. Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, notes the distinction between chiefs in their political function (as *smgigyet* or "real people") and their priestly function (as *smhalaayt* or "real halaayt"). Chiefs only had the latter function if their power extended beyond the political into the spiritual. These two functions were dominant in summer and winter months respectively, mirroring the shift between an economic and a spiritual focus among the people as their seasonal movements oscillated between summer and winter village locations, 34.
- ⁷⁸ Marie-Françoise Guédon, "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," 153.
- ⁷⁹ I draw from both Marie-Françoise Guédon, "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," 153-59, and Viola Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 297-99 for this description of the ceremonies in which children first came into contact with supernatural powers.
- ⁸⁰ *Halaayt* is part of a very complex cosmological system. It is generally translated as "dance," "dancing," or "dancer," although probably referred to a specific kind of dance. It could also be translated as

“medicine-man,” “shaman,” or “initiate.” The term means one is dealing with the supernatural realm. Everyone endowed with power (*naxnox*) could be called *halaayt*, although a chief’s power had to extend beyond the political into the spiritual to have this designation. Once a gift or power was expressed and controlled, one became a *halaayt*, and any demonstration or representation of the power was also designated by the same term, Marie-Françoise Guédon, “An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners,” 138-39. Doolan appears to have adopted the term “ahlie” from William Duncan, who also used it to refer to a shaman or other person who had acquired a power, and as an adjective—“ahlie work”—to describe the ceremonies in which *halaayt* was expressed or represented. Benjamin McCullagh, a later CMS missionary to the Nisga’a, believed the Nisga’a had a “semi-secret Society” called Alaid, Joseph W.W. Moeran, *McCullagh of Aiyansh* (London: Marshall Brothers Limited, 1923) 55. The first injunction in William Duncan’s list of rules for residents of the new Christian village of Metlakatla was “To give up Ahlied or Indian devilry,” quoted in Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, 282.

⁸¹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 20 November 1864. CMS C.2./O. Doolan appears to have used the term ‘medicine man’ interchangeably to indicate both a shaman, as well as a *wiihalaayt*, or initiate into a secret society. It is unlikely Akshegtakun was “induced” to become a shaman by Kinzarda, as the process of becoming a shaman was highly independent and individualistic undertaking. Marie-Françoise Guédon, “Tsimshian Shamanic Images,” *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past, Views for the Present*, Margaret Seguin [Anderson], editor (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984) 176 writes that while all *halaayt* operate from a reality where *naxnox* prevail over normal human daily life, “they do not all reach this reality or realities of *naxnox* in the same fashion, and it is in respect to their individuality, their independence, that *swanaskxw* differ from other *halait*.” It is more likely Akshegtakun was called by the chief to be initiated into a secret society or to acquire some form of supernatural power.

⁸² Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 November 1864. CMS C.2./O. Robert Doolan, Nass, to CMS. 22 May 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁸³ Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 26 September 1865. CMS C.2./O. Robert Doolan, Journal. 27 January 1866; 3 February 1866; 9 February 1866. CMS C.2./O. Just over a week after noting Cowaikik’s troubles, Doolan described “Another man in great trouble, as he has sold to Mr. Cunningham two tubes of wood the most sacred instruments of the medicine people.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 17 February 1866. CMS C.2./O. The chief apparently seldom came to the mission house, and was taunted by participants in the Winter Ceremonial for his action, raising questions of the reasoning behind his decision to sell. We can assume the missionaries actively condemned any paraphernalia used in traditional rituals, and the eagerness with which they purchased these items eerily echoes of the practices of the ethnographers who would soon scour the Northwest coast for such goods.

⁸⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 7 May 1867. CMS C.2./O.

⁸⁵ An example of a work emphasizing the element of choice introduced by the advent of Christian missions with respect to British Columbia is Margaret Whitehead, “Christianity, a Matter of Choice.” Whitehead writes, “It is true that the advent of settlement and government intervention often curtailed the Indian’s determination of their life-style. But in the matter of religion, the Indians remained free to choose,” 98.

⁸⁶ Robert Doolan, Metlakatla, to CMS. 26 September 1865. CMS C.2./O. Robert Doolan, Journal. 1 December 1865; 29 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁸⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 23 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁸⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁸⁹ Evidently Wachlee was not the only one to make this decision, as Doolan noted that he had to discontinue his morning school, “as all the children engaged in catching fish.” Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁹⁰ Due to Neshaki’s prominence as a Nisga’a chief, fur trader, and Christian, who was active on the Northwest Coast from Fort Victoria to her home village of Lakunkedah, she figures prominently in the historical record. Patterson’s article, “Neshaki: Kinfolk and Trade,” *Culture* 10:2 (1990): 13-24, which offers the most comprehensive overview of Neshaki’s remarkable life to date, states that the earliest mention of Neshaki appears in the journal of Fort Simpson in 17 May, 1855. She spent her final days at Gingolx, and died there on 4 October 1883. Of her fur trading abilities, Hamilton Moffat, chief factor of Fort Simpson, noted in 1863 that Neshaki’s exchanges alone were “sufficient to make the monthly trade look very well,” quoted in Cooper, “Native Women of the Northern Pacific Coast,” 54. By the spring of 1866 Neshaki was being supplied with trading outfits at her Nass residence from the HBC on credit. The

Wolf chief was instrumental in the establishment of a branch post, under Thomas Hankin and then Robert Cunningham, on the Nass in the 1860s.

⁹¹ Marius C. Barbeau, *Totem Poles*, 10-12.

⁹² Captain McNeill's first wife, a woman known as Mathilda, was a Kaigani Haida. The marriage was equally strategic for McNeill in terms of securing a successful trade with First Nations on the Northwest Coast. Patterson, "Neshaki," 21. Neshaki and McNeill's marriage was first contracted by indigenous customs, and only several years later (1866) solemnized by the Church of England, following a common pattern in the fur trade whereby marriage was a means of cementing alliances between trading partners, as it had been in indigenous societies. Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1999). On Native marriages Doolan wrote, "It is quite a matter of trade, most of the Indian marriages." Robert Doolan, Journal. 13 January 1866. CMS C.2./O.

⁹³ Neshaki was recorded as making the following statement during her confession of faith, given by Henry S. Wellcome, who likely received it from William Duncan: "I must leave all evil ways. I feel myself a sinner in God's sight. I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. God sends down his spirit to make us good. Jesus is in heaven, and is writing our names in God's book. We must stand before God and be judged by Him. I feel God's Word is truth. Have been for some time accustomed regularly to pray," *The Story of Metlakahtla*, (London and New York: Saxon & Co., 1887).

⁹⁴ Wellcome, *The Story of Metlakahtla*, 58.

⁹⁵ Peter Murray, *The Devil and Mr. Duncan*, writes that Hamilton Moffat, the HBC factor at Fort Simpson (1859-61), once described Neshaki as a "beast" in a letter to Duncan, adding, "She is a *lying, drunken whore* and I shall not fail to let Capt. McNeill know all when next I write," 81-2.

⁹⁶ The criticism suggested in this passage likely derived from what the CMS missionary regarded as a state of concubinage in the three years before Neshaki and McNeill decided to solemnize their marriage before the Church of England. Indeed, Doolan's marriage of Robert Cunningham and Elizabeth Ryan shortly after arriving on the North Coast also appears to support Brett Christophers' argument that Anglican criticism of unions of white men and Native women were fuelled more by an unyielding moral dogmatism than a concern for racial purity, *Positioning the Missionary*, 61.

⁹⁷ Robert Doolan, Journal. 26 October 1865; 30 October 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁹⁸ Robert Doolan, Journal. 13 November 1865. CMS C.2./O.

⁹⁹ Robert Doolan, Journal. 31 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Doolan, Journal. 18 November 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰¹ The churchmen were likely also startled by the economic activities of Neshaki and other Nisga'a women, although there is little evidence of this in the historical record. CMS missionaries, like the English evangelicals discussed by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, appear to have shared the view that "the moral influence of mothers was the linchpin of religious regeneration," 124.

¹⁰² Susan Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing*, 268.

¹⁰³ Robert Doolan, Journal. 21 November 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Doolan, Journal. 9 December 1865. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁵ For the McNeill's later settlement in Victoria, see Sylvia Van Kirk, "Tracing the Fortunes of Five Founding Families of Victoria," *BC Studies* 115/116 (Autumn/Winter 1997/98): 149-179.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Doolan, Journal. 27 February 1866; 11 March 1866. CMS C.2./O.

¹⁰⁷ Carol Cooper, "Native Women of the Northern Pacific Coast," 68. The respective women were Victoria Young and Victoria Calder.

Conclusion

The conversation between CMS missionaries and the Nisga'a they encountered on the lower Nass in the 1860s was to a large extent shaped by the desire of its participants to exercise discursive power over the terms by which it would proceed. Each party regarded the domestication of a new and foreign cultural system as imperative to ensuring its ability to create and determine meaning, whether in a defensive or imperialistic sense. On arriving on the North Pacific Coast the churchmen entered an environment in which their religious truths were no longer hegemonic, taken-for-granted understandings of the world. While confident of the transformative power of the word of which they saw themselves the bearers, the missionaries were not blind to the very high likelihood that those attending the mission would have difficulty accepting it from their current state of heathenism, or worse, would get it "wrong." The most certain way to ensure the Nisga'a would be able to participate in the creation of a universal community of believers appeared to be through making them over in the missionaries' image. This explains in part why alongside conversion to Christianity existed a parallel project to convert the Nisga'a to the signs and practices of Protestant English culture.

The missionaries' civilising project, and thus the rationale for their presence among the Nisga'a, was based on the management of distinctions. This was apparent in Doolan's description of the two students differently dressed but sharing the same form in his schoolroom as "Dirt and cleanliness sitting close together." Such moralizing dichotomies emphasized the pre-mission past with the new era unfolding under the watchful direction of the churchmen, with the understanding that as their work progressed the differences between themselves and their subjects would become all but indistinguishable. Yet as we have seen, the missionaries' project was riddled with ambivalences. Their confusing relationship with other English colonizers, their uncertainty about the proper place of material goods in a Christian life, and their desire for a reformed other, who was Christian yet not merged seamlessly with themselves, served to undermine the missionaries' ideology, as well as provide ample material for indigenous critiques. For although versed in the Protestant belief in the equality of souls, in practice the missionaries' project was not so much about erasing differences as extending the European system of distinction. This task was not without its serious

challenges, however. The Nisga'a who engaged with the mission proved very capable of seizing upon the novelty of the goods and practices introduced by the churchmen, seeing in them a validation of their own cosmology. Thus, although trying to "open up their minds" by introducing new technologies and other means, the missionaries could be left to feel their explanation of Tacomash's death was as helpful "as idle tales," and even be pitied for their ignorance of the supernatural.

It should not surprise us that the Nisga'a's receptivity to the CMS mission was highly selective, and performed within their own cultural framework. Addressing the "ideational impact of culture contact" in the context of the Native peoples of the Northeastern Woodlands during the early stages of their encounter with Europeans, George Hamell writes that "Culture, or rather societies, never confront the unknown, but confront an unknown made known by their preconceptions of such encounters."¹ Professions of new belief, such as that made by Tacomash before his death, both reveal and obfuscate the fact that older modes of thought and action were not easily laid aside. Rather, missionary teachings were enmeshed with more deeply rooted patterns of belief and practice. This is evidenced, for example, in how in trying to understand the structured idleness on the Sabbath encouraged by the missionaries, the Nisga'a around the mission discovered that it was "the bad day." A further reason for this selective approach can be attributed to the desire of many Nisga'a at this time to access the power and knowledge evident in white society, while remaining detached from its embrace. Many Nisga'a perceived the introduction of writing and text as presenting new possibilities for communication, as we have seen. We may conclude that during their initial encounter with mission Christianity the Nisga'a were far more interested in harnessing this power for their own uses than in the explicit message of the churchmen, although to some extent these were seen as overlapping. The rejection of the Tsimshian translator Robert Dundas's right to deliver the sermons by those who attended Sunday service, even though in all likelihood he did so more clearly than the missionaries could have done, further emphasizes this point. The churchmen were for obvious reasons identified with the white society growing around the Nisga'a. Thus while many considered themselves "too old" to learn from the mission, they were nonetheless keen to have their children instructed at the school, although not uncritical of this process.

The Nisga'a of the lower Nass opened a place in their society for the CMS missionaries they invited there in the 1860s, but proved critical of the churchmen when they diverged from Nisga'a expectations of the role the mission should play. The Nisga'a saw a role for Doolan in their mortuary practices. Yet they verged on open violence when the missionary showed no sign of accepting this role, such as when Doolan out of ignorance did not place a white cloth over the deceased's face, but rather used this invitation to interfere with traditional practices. Claytha could explain to young Cowaikik that he should wait until the "true teachers" came, after seeing that the CMS missionaries had not met and prayed over the body of Kadounaha when it was brought up to the village as he had seen the priests down south do. So too a number of Nisga'a accepted the opportunities for wage labour opened by the arrival of the mission. Nonetheless they insisted on incorporating this new form of work into the seasonal round, and the many feasts and rituals which punctuated it.

A recurring theme in the Nisga'a's interaction with the mission was the desire to establish a degree of reciprocity in their relations with the missionaries. The Nisga'a clearly recognized the enormous power wielded by the newcomers. Yet the position of authority they were prepared to accord the missionaries did not come without responsibilities. Thus Doolan's attempts to ferret out "cases of real want" from among the many requests were in fact taken as evidence of his poverty. Periodically the missionaries were forced to recognize the mutual obligations the Nisga'a felt undergirded their relationship. This was poignantly expressed when a young man drowned who had been in Doolan's employ erecting a picket fence around the mission house. The missionary grudgingly gave the brother of the deceased property, recording that he found the custom very awkward. Far more often, as we have seen, the missionaries denied the reciprocal nature of their relationship with the Nisga'a.

Still, the churchmen's denial of the dialogic nature of the encounter did not negate its reality. The Nisga'a frequently talked back to the missionaries in ways that disrupted their assertions by revealing the limits of their ideologies. This was no less true in instances in which the Nisga'a had been drawn into the churchmen's system of distinction. Cowcaeth's wife, for example, appropriated distinctions laid by Doolan around dress by juxtaposing the pride the missionary had tried to cultivate in wearing

supposedly superior English dress, with a refusal to sit beside those who were not as nicely dressed at the Sunday service. In so doing, she articulated a fundamental contradiction between the corporeal signification of superiority and a triumphal civilization, and the Christian humility and subordination of material to spiritual concerns the churchmen also desired in the Nisga'a.

Despite a growing commonality of horizons, the denial of reciprocity could contribute to a sense of two very distinct worlds co-existing on the lower Nass. This understanding likely informed those children who attended Doolan's school during the "Ahlied work" with only traces remaining where the facial paint had been washed off. Similarly, the missionaries' maintenance of a distinct moral register on the Nass after 1864 opened sexual and other socially regulated acts to becoming key sites for the negotiation of status and identity. This development was in accordance with the churchmen's plans, although they did not appear to have foreseen the ways in which many young Nisga'a would move between moral codes to their advantage. Of equal threat to the stability of the mission was a figure like the Wolf chief Neshaki, who patterned her life and spirituality across the churchmen's distinction between Native and Christian. As a baptized Nisga'a, Neshaki provided an alternative reference point for the Nisga'a's adoption of elements of Christianity, a role that was further strengthened by her position as a chief and therefore a conduit of new ideas. Neshaki's prominent position within the fur trade on the Northwest Coast and marriage into colonial society serve to remind us that the Nisga'a's dialogue with the CMS was but one dimension—albeit a significant one—of larger dialogues in which the Nisga'a were engaged at this time, both with Europeans and with their own past as they moved through their history. This latter dialogue pre-dated the arrival of Protestant Christianity, and continues into the present.

In her study of nineteenth-century Protestant missions and Tsimshian Christianity, Susan Neylan argues for the advantages of her broad regional approach, while hoping that it would provide a context for the development of solid case studies until now lacking in the historiography. Clearly there is value in a microcosmic approach like the one undertaken here. Focusing in on the early acts of one mission, and on the (mis-) understandings of what the mission was to be about permits us to see the varied responses to the missionaries' arrival, the individual motivations and voices that shaped the

encounter. Gananath Obeyesekere has argued that the latter must be taken into account, in addition to cultural and historical structures, when we consider the nexus of ethnohistorical events.² Indeed the responses of the chiefs in the lower villages were complex and varied. Kadounaha had invited missionaries to the Nass during his visits to Fort Simpson in the early 1860s, and “professed to be a great friend” of the missionaries. His long discussion with Robert Cunningham shortly after the establishment of the mission points to a key consideration governing his approach to it. Doolan wrote that Kadounaha said he wished “to do what is right and be with us, but does not wish to resign his place as a chief.” Numerous other chiefs, such as Thratcouquats and Cockshoo, expressed their wish to do what was right when asked by the churchmen, but for varying reasons did not believe this required them to join the mission.

Claytha, the most articulate opponent of the missionaries, denounced them openly and made it clear that he desired “to stop the white man’s tongue.” Personal interest was undoubtedly an element in the chief’s opposition. Yet Claytha’s specific objections reveal that the missionaries were not living up to his expectation of them. Indeed, Claytha’s request that the churchmen “pray for him” in his speeches before their houses reveals some interest in their spiritual role. Chief Kinzarda, another opponent of the mission in Doolan’s reckoning, also displayed an interest in the mission that characterized the responses of all chiefs, whatever their overall view of the mission. Kinzarda “often heard the truth from Mr. Duncan,” but this did not prevent him from criticizing the missionaries. The Wolf chief increasingly found Sundays to be ideal for holding feasts, not least because the people were well dressed on this day, and encouraged the mission students to share their Christian hymns on at least one such occasion. Kinzarda and other chiefs were not prepared, however, to let the churchmen’s instruction interfere with the initiation of young people into secret societies or their chiefly duties. Significantly, the particular orientation of Nisga’a chiefs toward the explicit message of the mission at this time appears to have had little bearing on their approach to traditional cultural priorities, which remained consistent. This is most evident in the actions of Neshaki as she appears in the historical record. The prominent chief had accepted Christianity before the establishment of the CMS mission on the Nass, but in no way saw this as precluding her from pursuing obligations traditionally

associated with her position in Nisga'a society, including the proper instruction of young women.

The mission had a different effect on the young students who attended its school, which was in part what many Nisga'a anticipated in sending their children to be instructed. The particular orientation of the Nisga'a chiefs and other adults who appear in the historical record toward the message of the mission had little bearing on the priorities and values they expressed through word and action. Yet students like Tacomash, Doolan's first convert, or Cowaikik, who sold his "medicine tools," however reluctantly, embodied in their lives a dichotomy between old and new ways. Cowcaelth's choice of using his carving skills as a *gits'oonik* in the service of the mission, however, suggests greater continuity than such an abrupt disjuncture might imply. For whatever the sense of dissimilarity between Nisga'a and mission ways held by these students, many forms of traditional spirituality were transferred to the mission, where they found new expression. Further, young men like Wachlee and Takthl could use the sense of distinction between ways to negotiate identities that reflected their straddling of two worlds.

My focus on the short period of the initial encounter precludes me from making any conclusions about the long-term consequences of these responses to the mission. To their students and others, the missionaries presented conversion to Christianity as an individual activity that often required a severing of existing social relations. The group conversion of a number of chiefs at Gingolx shortly after the period under examination certainly suggests the continuance of the Nisga'a practice of attaching very different meanings than the churchmen to the beliefs and practices introduced by the latter, much as we have seen in the first phase of the mission. Such a finding would be consistent with Susan Neylan's conclusion that the conversion of the neighbouring Tsimshian was more a shift in religious affiliation for an entire group than the voluntary spiritual "turning" of an individual.³

Other historians of Christian missions on the Northwest Coast have seen in this process the entrenchment of colonial hegemony, or the acquisition of the tools necessary to cope with a changing sociopolitical and intellectual environment, enabling Native peoples to preserve aspects of the traditional order as they moved through a particularly

tumultuous period of their history.⁴ To be sure there is truth in both theoretical approaches to the complexities of experience under missionization. In his study of Heiltsuk-Methodist interaction, Michael Harkin sees in intercultural dialogue “a fundamentally negative process of the suffusion of techniques of power throughout the Heiltsuk lifeworld.” Although acknowledging the ways in which the Heiltsuk contested this hegemony, Harkin concludes that, “Under the guise of humanitarianism, the bonds of discipline were imposed and strengthened.”⁵

The Nisga’a who interacted with the CMS mission that was founded among their villages became engaged in a dialogue in which the social and cultural meanings of aspects of everyday life became the subject of sometimes agonizing contestation. In this unequal power struggle the path taken by the Nisga’a was different from the one they might have taken had they not been the object of a colonizing project. This said, there is nonetheless value in examining the opening acts of such an encounter, the initial utterances in which the conversants struggled both to make sense of and to establish their place in relation to the other. Although we cannot discount the effect of the history between these early events and the present on our perceptions of the former, my particular framing hopefully permits a close analysis of the beginning of a long relationship. This analysis offers a glimpse of some of the expectations each party brought to the relationship, and an appreciation of how the participants could mediate, contest, and ultimately be transformed by the dialogue itself. Indeed, the transformation we have seen to mark the initial encounter, in which individuals exhibited the ability to simultaneously correspond to multiple identities, points of view, or realities, was a sure sign of power in the Nisga’a view.

¹ George Hamell, “Strawberries, Floating Islands, and Rabbit Captains: Mythical Realities and European Contact in the Northeast During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21 (1986-87): 80. Hamell proposes that the traditional mythical reality and its dependent sub-systems among Native peoples of the Northeast were, over time and across space, serially and systematically reinterpreted, restructured, or even largely replaced by other mythical realities and cultural subsystems which better fit the reality of the “here-and-now” of the contact experience, 83.

² Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 37.

³ Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing*, 22.

⁴ See Elizabeth Furniss, “Resistance, Coercion, and Revitalization,” for an example of the former, and Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal*, for an example of the latter.

⁵ Michael Harkin, *The Heiltsuks*, 156.

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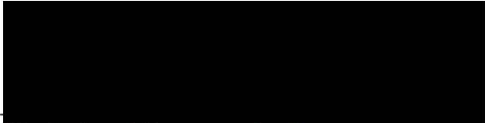
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