

The Long Slumbering Offspring of Adam: The Evangelical Approach to the Tsimshian

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Franz Boas, one of the first anthropologists to study the Pacific coast Indians was deeply and immediately impressed by their physical environment. To him

the overwhelming solitude and stillness of the shores, the monotony of the dark pines and cedars, of the channels and of the roaring cascades, begat a longing for the sight of human habitation, that swallows the admiration of the magnificent scenery.¹

The loneliness and solitude of life on the northwest coast in the mid-nineteenth century was as strongly felt by the first missionary to the Tsimshian, the Anglican layman William Duncan as it was by the men of the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Fort Simpson where Duncan spent his earliest years. For the Company's servants it was the boredom, the lack of female company and amusement which were felt most keenly. But Duncan's longing was for spiritual counsel and for help in what appeared to be an impossible human endeavour. To his friend in Victoria, the Reverend Edward Cridge, he confessed that "now as I look forward, I feel almost crushed with a sense of my position. My loneliness; the greatness of the work, which seems ever increasing before me; ..." ²

In 1857, Duncan was not just the first protestant missionary to the Indians of the northern coast, but was entering a field where religion as a whole had not extended far beyond the boundaries of the few posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. Religious work in the Pacific coast colonies had been largely carried out by the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans. Catholic influence was directed, in the first place, to the French Canadian servants of the

Hudson's Bay Company and their half-breed families. Father Norbert Blanchet and Father Modeste Demers had been sent to the Pacific coast as early as 1838, and although their work was originally confined to the region below the forty-ninth parallel, Father Demers had visited British Columbia in 1841, 1842 and 1843, and had made extensive journeys through the valleys of the Fraser and the Thompson, making contact with many of the Indian tribes. Although thousands were baptized, Demers' work was largely significant in laying a groundwork for the later, more concentrated efforts of the Oblates.

Captain James Prevost's offer of a free passage to a missionary of the evangelical Church Missionary Society brought this experienced and well organized arm of the Anglican Church to British Columbia. But although the C.M.S. was thrust unexpectedly into a new mission field they organized this, their 'next assignment' with characteristic care and energy. Henry Venn, the brilliant and influential secretary of the society in this mid-Victorian period was quick to recognize the value of Prevost's own suggestion that Fort Simpson be the first centre of Christian activity among the coastal tribes. Both Venn and Prevost were well aware of the role of the Tsimshian Indians as the most important trading nation in the aboriginal economy of the coast, and recognized the function of Fort Simpson as a trade centre and meeting place for the many tribes of the region. In his journal in 1856, Venn noted that "Fort Simpson would be an admirable mission station, as on many occasions nearly 20,000 are encamped around."³ The Society's journal *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* pointed out quite explicitly that Fort Simpson was

central to all the most populous villages; and here, in the spring of each year, a kind of great national fair is held where the tribes from the most distant parts of the coast and interior assemble... On these occasions, valuable opportunities would be afforded to the Missionaries of conversing with the natives and giving them religious instruction.⁴

It was indeed an immense task that the society had set its young and inexperienced missionary. In his own terms, his aim was to reclaim from the depths of depravity, this portion of the human family, the Tsimshian, the "long slumbering offspring of Adam" as Duncan called them. In abstract terms, his mission would necessarily bring him into conflict with Indian culture and

would demand of the individual Indian a separation from the only way of life he had known, for the untrodden, unpredictable way of the Christian. Here were goals which required "immense faith and courage, and the gigantic audacity... to move uninvited into a large community of foreign and hostile people, and single-handedly assume absolute control and reshape their lives."⁵

Duncan himself was undoubtedly a man of great faith, who never doubted for a moment the justice of his mission or his vision of the ideal society for the Indians, though at times he was overcome with feelings of inadequacy, or personal inability to complete this mission. As necessary as was his personal ability, of equal importance for the success of his mission was the method or tactic he pursued, and this was dictated to a large extent by the Church Missionary Society. William Duncan was not simply an earnest Victorian on the frontier, the benevolent religious preacher anxious to save the souls of thousands. He was a determined young man, the agent of a world wide organization, which was experienced in dealing with exotic cultures and in handling large and small scale adoptions of Christianity; an organization based on the support of substantial numbers of Englishmen, many in positions of responsibility in government and business.

The spectacular accomplishments of William Duncan and his model villages of Metlakatla, British Columbia and New Metlakatla, Alaska, were well known to his contemporaries at home, in Canada and in the United States. His relationship with the Rev. Edward Cridge of Victoria and his role in the splintering of the Anglican Church have made him a significant figure in the religious and social history of British Columbia. Anthropologists, such as H.G. Barnett and others have frequently made didactic use of aspects of Duncan's work. Yet most comment has focused more on the model villages, than on Duncan's preliminary work at Fort Simpson where the original converts were made and the important principles of the missionary's work were first developed and established.

Duncan arrived at Fort Simpson on October 1st, 1857, but it was not until the beginning of June 1858 that he began active work among the Indians outside the confines of the Hudson's Bay

Company post. At Governor Douglas' insistence⁶ he contented himself in these nine months with teaching the half-breeds in the fort, attending some of the sick, taking a census of the people and talking informally with visiting chiefs or any individuals who approached him. And most important, he followed the C.M.S. instructions to learn the language of the Tsimshian and to study the people, their habits and their environment with a view to the possible introduction of new industrial pursuits.

In February 1858, before he had formally begun his mission or spoken to the Indians of Christ, Duncan sent extracts of his diary to the society and wrote his first report from Fort Simpson to the C.M.S. describing the conditions he had found and his future hopes for the mission. Indeed, after only one week at Fort Simpson, Duncan informed Venn that

there is hardly any prospect of our being able to change the pursuits of the people as far as getting their living is concerned. The physical character of the country is such as to impell its occupants to be hunters and nothing else.⁷

For as he recorded in his journal, "the land is densely covered with wood — excessively rocky, uneven and mountainous... there is so much rainfall during the year as to prevent any grain from ripening and to but barely allow some vegetables to come to any good."⁸ The immediacy with which Duncan treated this problem of Indian occupations shows that he viewed his mission in sociological as well as theological terms, and indicates that he, like Venn, saw the close relationship between cultural and economic change.

Duncan observed and recorded the ecological framework of Tsimshian life; the fishing and hunting of spring and summer, and the ceremonials of the winter season. He saw that the Tsimshian had adequate supplies of fish, seaweed, roots and berries and that food never seemed to pose any problem for them. "I must say that their food seems to agree with them for they are generally plump in appearance and very strong."⁹ The Tsimshian, he realized, were divided into nine tribes, and he distinguished five crests among them, the whale, porpoise, wolf, raven and eagle, clan membership being decided by matrilineal inheritance. Marriage within the crest was forbidden, and possible though not encouraged, within the tribe. Polygamy was not uncommon, but

most men, he found, had only one wife. Duncan also reported on the visiting customs of the people, on the carvings of the men, the weaving and the mat making of the women, the face painting, and the use of labrettes by the women, a custom already dying out according to Duncan, and on the propensity of the Indians to drink extensively and to gamble.¹⁰

He described Tsimshian dress for Venn and the other secretaries, pointing out that their hide shoes left them with continual wet feet and caused much sickness among them. He had already recommended to the Indians that they put wooden bottoms on their shoes as a measure of improvement.

To induce the Indians to adopt this measure I have got a pattern made to shew them what I mean. All who have seen it are pleased with the plan and call the cloggs *tsaush ah kan*, (shoes of wood). For men hunting a great deal these shoes would not do — but the Chimsyans scarcely hunt at all as a race. They do more in trading up the channels with other Indians.¹¹

It is important to notice here that Duncan was anxious to bring innovations to the Tsimshian, but that he was also careful that his suggestions should be approved by the Indians and should be appropriate to the already existing habits of the people. His careful observation of the Indians was not simply to satisfy his own or the society's curiosity about aboriginal peoples, but was to enable him, as Venn consistently pointed out to missionaries, to understand habits, pursuits and modes of thought of a people and thus to know how they could best be approached.

Duncan was particularly interested in the attitudes of the Indians to the so-called "medicine men", for in giving medical aid himself, he would be particularly affected by such mores. He realized that the "medicine men" of the winter ceremonials were not those called upon to heal the sick.

The Medicine profession is altogether a distinct business and the doctors a distinct class. After investigation of the Matter I am led to conclude that the Medical practitioners are for the most part those who have themselves been visited with some serious sickness and have recovered... it is believed that during the period of unconsciousness, supernatural power and skill was vouchsafed them.¹²

Illnesses were often deemed to be the work of malevolent persons, a fact which led Duncan to be extremely cautious in his work.

The potlatch and winter ceremonials were also of concern to the missionary. To a Victorian, concerned with self-improvement and thrift, the potlatch appeared particularly senseless. Duncan lamented that the Tsimshian had no pride in property itself.

They never think of appropriating what they gather to enhance their comforts, but are satisfied if they can make a display like this now and then... And thus it is that there is a vast amount of dead stock laid in the Camp — doomed never to be used, but only now and then to pass from hand to hand for the mere vanity of the thing.¹³

Much of the potlatching was in connection with house-building, he reported, and was accompanied by vocal music and much dancing. The houses themselves he found most impressive, and was pleased that the Indians spontaneously showed a tendency to improve upon their previous designs. In his report Duncan noted that in several cases improvements in the houses had been introduced. "A chief is now finishing one which will have a wooden floor and two small windows in it."¹⁴

The winter ceremonials were distasteful to him and though he abhorred the practice of face painting, Duncan noted appreciatively that "the number of designs they have and the taste they display in putting it on is really surprising."¹⁵ His ethnocentricity in fact did not appear to prevent him from admiring some aspects of the Indian culture. Nor did it prevent him from appreciating the function of the winter ceremonials in the Tsimshian society. When one of the Tsimshian chiefs pointed out to him that no guns could be fired during the winter season, Duncan was able to note that "no doubt this has been one object with the origination— to preserve peace during Months in the winter season when all the people are together."¹⁶

The missionary was interested too in the character of his people and not unexpectedly saw pride and revenge as the major characteristics of the Tsimshian.¹⁷ Of prime importance were the religious beliefs of the Indians, and Duncan was extremely diligent in reporting these and in recording the myths and legends of the natives. God was regarded as a great chief.

They call Him by the same term as they do their chiefs only adding the word for above, thus *shimanyet* is chief, and *lakkah* is above, and hence the name of God with them is *Shimanyet-lakkah*. They believe the

supreme being never dies... They do not know who is the author of the Universe, nor do they expect that God is the author of their own being. They have no fixed ideas about these things I fully believe. Still they frequently appeal to God in trouble. They ask for pity and deliverance. In great extremities of sickness they address God saying it is not good for them to die... Sometimes they show their anger against God, calling him a great slave, which is their greatest term of reproach.¹⁸

One traditional tale of the Tsimshian which fascinated the missionary was that of the flood "where they say that all people finished in the waters but a few. Amongst that few there were no Chimsyans and now they are at a loss to tell them how they have re-appeared as a race."¹⁹ The analogy between this and the Old Testament Noah's Flood did not escape Duncan, and in his later sermons this story was often used to great advantage.

A curious incident related to Duncan by both the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company's officers was carefully reported to the society. During a previous spring season an Indian from the interior had appeared at Fort Simpson, claiming to have been sent by an angel to bring the word of God to the Tsimshian. He had promised that a teacher would soon be sent to the Tsimshian, but that meanwhile they should attend to his preliminary instructions.

The sum total of his teaching amounted to a few popish ceremonies, mixed with Indian customs. Crossing-bowing-wearing crosses around the neck — singing and dancing without laughing — were all he demanded. The enthusiasm of the man was so great and his appearance and tenets so startling that the Indians almost to a man welcomed him and obeyed his injunctions... The Officers in charge of the Fort were astounded to see how readily they responded to this man's call.²⁰

Duncan's presence could thus be fitted into an expected pattern of events by the Indians, and this no doubt partly explains why they were at least prepared to hear his message. Their lengthy contact with whites in the fur trade had also opened their culture to changes and had perhaps made the individuals more receptive to new ideas. Duncan noted too, that "the presence of the Whites and their own visits to the South have shaken their superstition and awakened inquiry but that is all."²¹ According to Duncan, there was a general belief amongst them "that the Whites do possess some great secret about eternal things and they are gasping to know it."²²

At last, Duncan spoke to the Indians assembled in groups of a hundred in the houses of their tribal chiefs, and told them of his purpose in coming among them and of the importance to them of the word of God. He had spent several months perfecting this, his first sermon, in order to ensure his initial message was as clear as possible.

Duncan had no great ambitions for a mass conversion following this first appeal to the people. He had observed them long enough, and already understood them well enough to realize that few would comprehend his mission. "I have not been very anxious to inquire what the people thought of the message, for if I had I should have gathered up, no doubt, a great deal that was not true."²³ The missionary did not expect to gain instant adherents for Christ, but was prepared to live many years among the people, teaching them not only about Christ, but of his view of the way of life of a Christian.

Duncan's visits to the sick were of great importance to his religious work, for by this means he hoped to "secure their confidence and strike most effectively at their superstition."²⁴ These visits gave him many opportunities of speaking to all the residents of a house.

I usually address them on the evil of their doings and point out the inevitable consequences of sin both in time and eternity. I then tell them of the sinner's Friend and set the blessed Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ before them illustrating from their own customs need of such a Saviour.²⁵

This, in fact, became his most common approach in presenting the Gospel to the Indians. First that sense of sin, without which the message of salvation was meaningless, must be induced in the Indians.²⁶ It was difficult for the Indians to understand the sinfulness of their traditional ways, such as the winter ceremonials, their secret societies, and their attachment to animistic beliefs. But although these were not acceptable Christian practices, Duncan tended to give greater emphasis to the sin attached to following the white man's way in prostitution and drunkenness.

Do not love bad ways, Love God. Bad ways make God angry and deceive us. They please us a little time then bring us to misery. The Book of God says — the wages of sin is death. We all have sinned. We all must die.²⁷

Particularly after the gold rush, the wages of sin were becoming increasingly apparent to the Tsimshian and they could well appreciate that adherence to these sins did bring misery and death.

The missionary, however, presented them with an alternative in the salvation offered by Christ. This salvation was achieved by faith, not good works. But it was not the pre-determined salvation of Calvinism, for a choice was presented to the Indians. Christ offered them salvation, but it was the free choice of the individual to accept this offer of eternal life. Lesson nineteen, *Who are Saved*, makes Duncan's position on this quite clear.

All people who rightly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ do love Him, and all who love Him do obey Him: they leave their sins and try to be good. If we do not obey Our Saviour Jesus Christ, that shows we do not love Him, that shows we do not believe in Him, and if we do not believe in Him we shall not be saved.²⁸

But having been offered the road to salvation it was imperative that the Tsimshian follow Christ. Before the missionary came they had sinned in ignorance, but now as Duncan never tired of pointing out, God would no longer forgive their ignorance. To Duncan, the Tsimshian were like the Jews, for they had received the word of God first, before the surrounding tribes of Indians, and like the Jews they would be cast out if they did not heed the message.²⁹

I said that God had pitied their forefathers a long time, although they were bad and had not destroyed them because they knew not His way and nobody was here to tell them but now He had sent them His word and if they refused to hear He would soon cease to pity and they would certainly suffer for their sin.³⁰

In preaching, Duncan's sense of timing, and his ability to seize the appropriate moment to press home his lessons were important qualities. When one of his pupils died suddenly in school, Duncan took the opportunity to address all present "on the shortness of life and the realities of eternity."³¹ He knew the importance, too, of visual demonstrations to a primitive people, and was fond of showing the Indians a broken or rotten stick and a healthy branch. The former, he would tell his audience, represented the present position of the Tsimshian, while the latter could be their condition if they chose to follow God's way.³²

Duncan's knowledge of Indian traditions, legends and religious beliefs was of great value to his religious teaching. He would often direct the Indians' attention to the Flood of the Old Testament, knowing a similar story existed in their own tradition, and would interpret it for them in a Christian manner. Similarly when the subject of sacrifice arose, Duncan was aware of the function of this in Tsimshian life, and was quick to emphasize its Christian meaning. His adult class read an illustrated scripture lesson on the Flood.

The picture showed Noah and his family sacrificing when they returned thanks to God for their deliverance. In that religious act the Indians at once recognised an old custom of their own and seemed quite astonished. I cannot describe the encouraging feeling this circumstance supplied. I had at once a capital stepping stone from their own system to the Great Sacrifice and Lamb of God. It was quite a new light to them. They saw an evident reason for the custom of sacrificing and some reason for my setting forth a Saviour who had died for us.³³

In spite of Duncan's care in emphasizing the difference between the Indian and the Christian belief, the Tsimshian must inevitably have interpreted the new ideas in the light of their own existing religious beliefs. In such a transitional situation, much of their religious faith rested on the person of Duncan. The Indians certainly appeared to feel Duncan had particular spiritual powers. One of the old chiefs remarked to him in 1860, "you see they follow you — they want to see you — they are learning from you about God and regard you as the same as God to them."³⁴

Converts were called upon to renounce many of their traditional ways, such as potlatching, participation in secret societies, face painting, and their beliefs in animal spirits. It was extremely difficult for an individual to extricate himself from the potlatch, for either he was in debt, or, if he had recently held a potlatch, others were in debt to him, and by withdrawing from the system, he was denying them the opportunity of wiping out their shame. The potlatch, with all its attendant ceremonies and the network of obligations it established, was the greatest obstacle encountered by missionaries of all denominations among the coastal Indians.

Duncan had not expected early conversions and the C.M.S. would have been suspicious of any mass adherence to Christ. The society always emphasized the need for care in the selection of

the first converts. The *Intelligencer* in 1867 expressed the policy clearly.

It is better to wait until true converts come to hand, than precipitately to use individuals concerning whom we have misgivings... so heavy will be the pressure that unless by faith they are enabled to rest on Christ as their foundation, they will never be 'stedfast, immovable'.³⁵

Although some Tsimshian may have committed themselves to Duncan by 1860, there were no baptisms or acceptance of candidates for baptism until the arrival in 1861 of the Reverend L. Tugwell who had been sent by the C.M.S. to take spiritual charge of the Fort Simpson mission. It is sometimes assumed that the first converts of any missionary will be those who are dissatisfied with their present condition, who have little stake in their own society and will lose nothing by adopting the way of the missionary.³⁶ H.G. Barnett has claimed that Duncan's early followers were people who were not entrenched in the system of privilege and power, among them orphans, slaves and illegitimate children, "for whom the future held no prospect of emancipation or gratification of the social ambition accredited in the Tsimshian system of values."³⁷

There is, however, little information available on the class or status of the first converts and catechumens, although it is certain that no chiefs were among this group. Between July 1861 and July 1862 fifty-eight Tsimshian were either baptized or accepted as candidates for baptism. Of these, thirty-seven were males and twenty-one females. Twenty-two of these were under twenty years of age; twenty-seven were aged between twenty and thirty; five were between thirty and forty and only four were over forty. Thus, youth was certainly the major characteristic of Duncan's followers. Two tribes, the Gitlans and the Gitzaklalth dominated the list of converts, but there were representatives of each of the nine tribes in the baptismal registers at Fort Simpson.³⁸

The Christian Gospel was only part of the new culture that was offered to the Tsimshian. The Church Missionary Society and most Victorians believed that the Gospel must be accompanied by the introduction of civilization if it was to be at all successful. Duncan too was aware of this problem, and was prepared to devote a good deal of this energy to civilizing the Tsimshian, for

he saw it as a vital part of his religious mission. In March 1860, he realized that "I must wait for circumstances to change and for the Indians to gain some knowledge of civilization before I press the Gospel upon them".³⁹

Duncan's school was the major civilizing work undertaken at Fort Simpson. Here the Indians learnt the English, the reading, the writing and the arithmetic that would hopefully enable them to comprehend and to survive in the white man's world. At school, too, the pupils were taught European habits of cleanliness and clothing, deportment and demeanour, that would make them acceptable as civilized people. Clogs were recommended to the children for "naked feet are a hindrance to our progress in school."⁴⁰ To those who complied with his suggestion, Duncan promised a shirt, perhaps one of those which were being made by the fifteen girls in the sewing class he had begun in October 1859.⁴¹ The close link between the Gospel and civilization was brought home forcibly to the missionary during his first winter of school work, when he found he must clothe his pupils warmly if they were to be able to continue with their education. "I had appointed today to give away some baize to the children to make garments out of — for the weather is now extremely cold and it is with great difficulty we can go on with the school work."⁴²

Trained as an elementary schoolmaster by the C.M.S., Duncan excelled in teaching and in communicating his ideas. The organized systematic approach, characteristic of all Duncan's work, was most evident in the schoolroom. "Over eighty children at school today, I spoke to them in the morning about what God expects from us, being our maker, which is point No. 1 in my course of oral lessons."⁴³ The Tsimshian were also introduced to the Victorian mode of self-examination. Duncan gave his first class copy books and asked them to record their own thoughts in their own way, at home after school.⁴⁴ Shooquanah's journal reveals the values that were being impressed on the Tsimshian, the emphasis that was put on the importance of work. It also indicates the sense of sin, or guilt, so necessary to Christian salvation, that had been introduced into the Tsimshian mentality.

I could not sleep last night. I must work hard last night. I could not be lazy last night. No good lazy — very bad. We must learn to make

all things. When we understand reading and writing, then it will very easy [sic]. Perhaps two grass, then we understand. If we no understand to read and to write, then he will be very angry Mr. Duncan. If we understand about good people, then we will very happy [sic].⁴⁵

Cleanliness was also important at the Fort Simpson school and face painting and the wearing of nose rings were actively discouraged. "I inspect them every day and so most have now got in the way of washing hands and face."⁴⁶ The C.M.S. reminded its missionaries of the Apostle's prayer that "spirit, soul and *body* may be preserved blameless," and hoped its emissaries would "come to the conclusion that the good Missionary, who thus tries to train his boys in manliness and hardihood, as well as in Christian knowledge and mental culture, does well in regarding all three parts of human nature as alike objects of God's fatherly care, and designed for his service."⁴⁷

The school was the most important and most direct agent of acculturation at Fort Simpson. It was successful in teaching the elements of reading and writing to several dozen Tsimshian. It provided an opportunity for Duncan to give some daily instruction in Christianity and to make explicit the acceptable habits and way of life of prospective Christians. Duncan was certainly well satisfied with the work of the first year.

They can sing hymns and are learning God Save the Queen... they know the consequences to us of both courses of conduct, bad and good. They have learnt what are the proper expressions in prayer. They can count alone to 100... They have learnt how to speak in terms of civility to their fellowmen and have had several of their ways corrected.⁴⁸

During his stay at Fort Simpson Duncan became increasingly concerned by the poverty of the Tsimshian. He felt that a good deal of what he considered their destitute state, could be attributed to the effects of the potlatch, for much property was stored away never to be used by the people. Yet apart from this, Christian civilization would demand a great deal more capital outlay by the Indians for shoes, clothing and household furnishings, and Duncan felt it was imperative that additional means of earning money should be made available to the Indians. Venn had urged all his missionaries to seek opportunities to expand native industries and trade, and though Duncan was careful in noting the artistic, building and entrepreneurial skills of

the Tsimshian, he could do little to develop these for the Indians' benefit. The dominance of the Hudson's Bay Company, and his own dependence upon the hospitality of the Company, made it extremely difficult at this time to introduce alternative means of employment at Fort Simpson.

Self-help was to be Duncan's major means of accomplishing the social change he thought necessary in order to bring civilization to the Tsimshian. This was an approach which arose naturally from his own experience and his attitude to his own society, for the principles of self-help had elevated William Duncan to his present position.⁴⁹ Henry Venn had also explicitly applied these same principles to the problems of civilizing native peoples. Addressing the missionaries to Sierra Leone in 1852, the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society advised them to "keep in mind the importance of introducing from the first, the principles of *self-support and self-government* among the converts."⁵⁰

I intend from the first to demand co-operation. And from that, advance if possible to the self-supporting system... They are taught in their dealings with the white man that they never get anything for nothing — now if we set about doing all for them — I firmly believe they will suspect some deep laid plot and perhaps heap upon us every annoyance.⁵¹

Self-help was to be of double significance for the Indians. Not only was it the method by which they would reach civilization, but it produced the type of sturdy, independent, native Christian that the C.M.S. and Duncan saw as their goal.

From his first week at Fort Simpson, Duncan made clear to the chiefs and the people with whom he was in contact, that eventually he would need their help in building a school and mission house outside the fort. The Indians certainly had different expectations from Duncan, one chief asking if he intended to pay the parents to send their children to his school. "How absurdly unreasonable is man without the Gospel,"⁵² the missionary commented. Although the Indians, in conversation, agreed to help Duncan build his school, he was cautious enough to wait until the idea had become more firmly established in their minds. He felt it was "a pity we cannot put their sincerity to the test at once but I feel it would not be prudent to do so."⁵³ This policy was successful, for the following year, Duncan received a great

deal of assistance from the Indians, observing "their determination to supply me with plenty of boards for the school — *without buying* — which they say with emphasis."⁵⁴ The Tsimshian appeared to have absorbed well their first lesson in self-help.

By 1862, Duncan had achieved more than a modest success in his mission. Over fifty Indians had publicly committed themselves to him, while more than a hundred were prepared to work for him or attend his school. There had been no generation of religious excitement in the Indiana camp, no mass services, or large scale baptisms. Proselytizing had been largely carried out in the schoolroom, in small groups, or in personal conversations. The work at Fort Simpson was made spectacular by the fact that fifty-eight Tsimshian were prepared to renounce the potlatch and most of their traditional ways, to follow the unknown path marked out by a young, inexperienced, English missionary.

Undoubtedly one reason for Duncan's remarkable success was that the C.M.S. had made a fortunate choice in the Tsimshian. Having had a long contact with Europeans, these Indians had been opened to the novelties of cultural change for at least a generation before the arrival of the missionary. Yet being distant from white settlement, they were better able to avoid the physical and cultural breakdown that befell the tribes near Victoria. As the great traders and intermediaries of the coast, they in fact had been in a culture-contact situation with many tribes over a long period of time, and might well have become skilled in integrating into their own culture the artistry and legends of others. The European missionary thus might have found them exceptionally interested in new ideas and techniques, and well able to make use of them in their own lives.⁵⁵

Duncan's personality, and the tactic he used in his work were major reasons for his success in dealing with the Tsimshian. He seemed inexhaustibly patient, and was always willing to engage in long conversations about Christianity with anyone who wanted to speak with him. In spite of the fact that he experienced extreme discomfort in the wet climate at Fort Simpson, and probably had a form of tuberculosis throughout his stay in British Columbia, his energy was astounding. Each day he taught sometimes two hundred children, tended the sick of the

whole camp, and transcribed the Tsimshian language or translated English prayers and hymns. His energy was perhaps only exceeded by his quiet determination that the mission should succeed. Duncan saw himself as part of a world wide movement of evangelization, and though he might never be able to see the results of his own work, the Divine Master, to whom he was responsible, assured him of ultimate success.

Although a determined individual, Duncan was neither domineering nor uncompromising. He knew Tsimshian society well, and was prepared to compromise with it and to adapt himself to Indian ways as much as was commensurate with his own principles. This approach contributed greatly to his success.

Realizing the economic importance to the Indians of the spring fishing, Duncan wisely decided to close his school during that season.

I want to prove no hindrance to their procuring food as has been their custom. I have had several ask me whether they are to take their children to fish or whether they are to leave them here to attend school. But I invariably recommend them to go, for if distress for food was to arise by and by, there would be plenty among them ready enough to put me and the school down as the cause.⁵⁶

A more rigid policy, applied by a less thoughtful missionary could easily have led to a disastrous situation under those conditions.

Similarly, Duncan recognized the significance to the Tsimshian of the manner in which a speech is delivered. "They have a great idea of strong talk. Unless they feel affected at what is said to them, they regard the speech as weak. If you can stare them out and speak loud, that is a strong speech."⁵⁷ This was an important discovery for a missionary who must talk to many people, and make countless speeches. Here too, Duncan made a conscious effort to adapt himself to the Indian way. "The Thimshian people say that Mr. Duncan was a more eloquent orator in their language than the orator of their people."⁵⁸

In dealing with the chiefs of the Tsimshian, Duncan was at great pains to treat them as they were treated by their own people. This was in great contrast to the attitude of the Hudson's Bay Company where the factor sent Old Sebassa to the kitchen for his dinner announcing, "I have no idea to make the mess room or

my quarters a publick place of entertainment to every *chief* that likes to come."⁵⁹ Venn's advice was to "be wise in reference to the *governing powers* of the country... convince the governors that you do not wish to lower their authority,"⁶⁰ and it was this course which Duncan attempted to follow. On a journey up the Nass in 1860, a chief was Duncan's guide. Realizing that a chief should be treated differently from the rest of the party, Duncan offered him his own tin plate to eat from, while the others ate off wood. The chief, "though contented to eat with the others at other times was glad enough to show his pride of rank when occasion offered."⁶¹ At Fort Simpson, no chief committed himself entirely to Duncan, but none made a serious attempt to obstruct his work. They saw that he had gained some influence among their people and on occasion when their goals coincided with his, they sought to use his influence for their own ends. After Duncan had given a sermon on the evils of prostitution "there was a great meeting at the head chief's house. All favoured my views... He (the head chief) begs of me to speak strong against the prostitution and to shame them out of it."⁶²

The prestige of the chiefs within their tribes was of obvious value to Duncan, and as far as possible he accommodated himself to their wishes. Faced with an invitation to a festival he personally preferred not to attend, he nevertheless tried to understand the reason for holding the feast, and what role it played in the whole culture. The Indians assured him that this was only their way of welcoming his arrival amongst them, and that

their performance and drum beating was to them what the Book was to us. I think they meant that as we met to hear the Book so they met to hear the Spirit speak through the chiefs on these occasions — or else they meant that as we give a paper to those whom we love and wish well to, so they exhibit their wonders to those whom they respect and admire. As I had no desire in the least to offend them, I thought I had better go.⁶³

But to the Tshimshians, Duncan had himself become a source of prestige. Although they did not all accede to his views, they nevertheless felt a group pride in the fact that they had been chosen before other tribes to receive the Book from this messenger of God. When work on his schoolhouse had stopped for a time, the chiefs came to him to beg him to continue building. Many

tribes along the coast knew of his presence and purpose at Fort Simpson, and they feared the Tsimshian would be shamed if he ever left them.⁶⁴

The Fraser River gold rush which wrought such great changes in Victoria after 1858 also affected the distant coastal tribes. It had long been the habit of some of the northern coastal Indians to come to Victoria in the summer to trade. The Victoria of the gold rush, with its excitement, entertainment, greater opportunities for prostitution and easier access to spirits, increasingly became the mecca for entire tribes. On an extended visit to Victoria in 1860,⁶⁵ Duncan began to understand the strength of this external threat to his work. In the winter, most Indians returned north to Fort Simpson, bringing increasing amounts of liquor and disease to the rest of their people. Both the Hudson's Bay Company and the missionaries saw that the social conditions in the Indian camp were deteriorating rapidly. From 1860 most of the Indians took their furs to Victoria where it was easier to obtain rum and tobacco. By 1861, they were demanding what seemed to be exorbitant prices for their marten at Fort Simpson, and any respect or fear of the Company seemed to have disappeared. Hamilton Moffatt, the Chief Trader, complained to Victoria.

I am sorry to say that we have been exceedingly annoyed by the Indians up to the time of their going to the fishery. I have been fired at 4 times, and our canoe as she was returning from the Rafting received a shot from Lagaic [sic] the head chief, which fortunately did no damage. 700 pickets have been torn down and stolen besides other little injuries to [sic] numerous to mention. All this as they themselves acknowledge has been done from spite as they say they cannot now obtain Rum and Tobacco for nothing. If something is not done to stop these annoyances there will soon be no living here.⁶⁶

The Reverend L.S. Tugwell was also struck by the rampant hostility among the Tsimshian. During the winter of 1861 there was open fighting between two particular tribes, and though Duncan had attempted to establish peace, he had met with no success.⁶⁷ The school was very thinly attended that winter. There were demonstrations against Duncan's work and at least one attempt on his life by Loocoal, a medicine man. Duncan himself later acknowledged that his decision to move to Metlakatla was hastened by the warring attitude between the camps of the various tribes at Fort Simpson.⁶⁸

The elements of social breakdown themselves, the growing violence, prostitution, and above all the insatiable demand for liquor, were not new to the Tsimshian. But the scale on which they were present after the gold rush meant this was no longer an Indian dominated society, where Indian solutions for social problems were still viable. When only one or two canoes went to Victoria each year, a traditional society could still exist at Fort Simpson, and largely maintain the old norms and ways of life. But when almost the entire population migrated to Victoria as they did in 1860, the norms became those of the drunken, hostile Indian camps that had so appalled Duncan at Victoria. It was this way of living that was now being transferred to Fort Simpson, and which disturbed both the missionaries and the Hudson's Bay Company. Many of the Tsimshian realized the depths to which they were sinking, but recognized too, that they could no longer control themselves or their society, as they had in the past. In such a situation, the role of the missionary, who offered a different way of life, provided a set of guidelines, and promised happiness and prosperity was greatly magnified.

Duncan could see little future in his remaining at Fort Simpson. Economically the Indians no longer needed the fort, as they tended now to take their furs to Victoria. They were also able to trade with the free traders in the schooners, who were becoming more familiar sights along the coast, after an absence of forty years. As early as 1860, Duncan pointed this out to the C.M.S.

Other facilities for trading are opening up. A schooner, not the Company's, is at this moment in the harbour doing a famous trade with the Indians. Indeed I may assure the Committee that the importance of Fort Simpson as a central trading post is gone. Very few Indians from other places come here now as they used to and fewer and fewer will continue to do so.⁶⁹

By 1861, Duncan was convinced that the fort might be abandoned by the Company "because the fur trade with the Indians has nearly passed out of their hands."⁷⁰ He was also becoming increasingly fearful that the gold rush might directly affect Fort Simpson, for gold had previously been found nearby in the Queen Charlottes and on the Skeena. "Next winter we expect Fort Simpson to be deluged with profligate miners, and having nothing else to do will spend their time in the grossest immoralities

— so that if I do not go, I may have to witness much of my work overthrown, especially among the young.”⁷¹

The necessity of keeping the Indians from the destructive influences of Victoria had become a matter of vital concern for the future of the mission. Duncan felt work must be found for them at their own homes, and he hoped to be able to introduce some industrial pursuits which would provide employment for the Indians. Without this, the children who left his school “may be able to read and write, ... [yet] still are obliged to go back to the Indian mode of getting a living, and thus they are little better off than the Indians who have had no such education.”⁷² Employment at Fort Simpson would preserve the Tsimshian physically, for death was the fate of so many at Victoria. But the introduction of industrial arts was a basic part of a mission which saw Christianity and nineteenth century, protestant, English civilization as inseparable, and would inevitably have been a basic part of Duncan’s work.

Thus by 1862, Duncan had many pragmatic reasons for deciding to move away from Fort Simpson and to establish a new, model, self-supporting village for those Indians who wished to follow his way.⁷³ The C.M.S. had established self-supporting villages for converts in Africa, India and New Zealand, while Fowell Buxton and David Livingstone had advocated the establishment of Christian villages in Africa as cells of civilization, spreading the light to the heathen villages of the area. Similarly on the northwest coast, Duncan saw it as desirable to “place our example of order and industry in the shape of a Model Indian Village before the numerous Indian Tribes around here, shewing them the *proper* road to improvement, wealth and happiness.”⁷⁴

At first glance it perhaps seems incredible that after only four years among the Tsimshian, this small, young, English missionary was able to take a sizeable number of Indians away from their homes and establish a new Christian settlement. On close examination, however, there are several significant reasons for the success of Duncan’s plan.

Most important perhaps was the social condition of the Tsimshian after the gold rush. Some of the Indians, conscious of

their misery were prepared to give more attention to a missionary who promised wealth and happiness. Duncan was offering them a set of rules to follow and the promise of eternal life if they followed him, and this was no doubt attractive to a disoriented people. Perhaps also the Tsimshian, associating their present conditions with the environment at Fort Simpson, believed that migration from there would alleviate their problems.

The way in which Duncan presented his idea to the Tsimshian was well calculated to achieve his goals. Venn had advised the missionaries to "avoid putting yourself before the people as a leader; rather stand behind them as a prompter and counsellor. Prompting to self-action is more important than inducing men to follow a leader."⁷⁵ Similarly, Duncan prompted the Tsimshian, rather than made decisions for them, and spent many hours listening to their ideas about the location and future of the new village.

The idea of a model settlement was first presented to the Tsimshian in the summer of 1859. When an old chief and his son complained about the drunkenness in the camp, Duncan hinted to them about "the probability of some day dividing them. The Good going away to some good land and establishing a village for themselves where they could be free from the drunkenness and the bad ways."⁷⁶ This new village became a topic of discussion for the Tsimshian for the next two years, and this was certainly a deliberate policy on the part of Duncan. In 1861 he noted in his journal that he had decided to delay the move to the new village for yet another winter, "as I do wish to get the regulation of the new place well thought over and understood by the Indians before starting."⁷⁷ Duncan's patience, his forethought and his ability to involve the Tsimshian themselves in the decisions that would fashion their future, were important factors in his success in gaining Indian adherents for his new venture.

The location of the model village was itself suggested by the Indians.

Had several Indians here as I have every day to talk about our going to start a New Village. They all universally recommended the site of the old village about 15 miles from here. It is pleasing to hear their talk about the old home.⁷⁸

Duncan accepted their suggestion, being favourably impressed by the physical beauty of Metlakatla and the advantages it offered for the establishment of industries. This was an important decision, for it meant that the Tsimshian were now not only discussing the ideas presented by Duncan, but were actively initiating proposals for the new village.

To the Indians, though many who followed Duncan had been born at Fort Simpson, their old home would be associated in their minds with a precontact situation, a place where they had been able to control their own lives and where their families had been comparatively happy. Duncan noted that "many of the Indians have expressed a desire to return to their former home and there begin on a better footing a new history... May God grant this their desire."⁷⁹

From Duncan's point of view, and to some extent from the Indian point of view, the migration to Metlakatla was a radical move. Yet the choice of the ancestral home of the Tsimshian as the new site, indicates that internally at least, the Indians harboured strong conservative motives for their decision to follow Duncan. It should be noted too, that the west coast Indians were a highly mobile people and that the Tsimshian had already relocated themselves once from Metlakatla to Fort Simpson. They were accustomed to moving from their fishing camps to Victoria to Fort Simpson. Their removal from the fort to Metlakatla need not necessarily be considered as disrupting an experience as it might have been for a more stationary people.

In May 1862, a small group of canoes carrying a band of fifty Tsimshian left Fort Simpson to establish a new settlement at Metlakatla. The *Intelligencer* reporting the news to Victorian England, told of Duncan's aim to build "a model Christian village reflecting light and radiating heat to all the spiritually dark and dead masses of humanity around us."⁸⁰

Notes

1. F. Boas, *The Indians of British Columbia* (Bulletin of the American Geographical Society, vol. 28, New York, 1896), p. 229.

2. W. Duncan to E. Cridge, Fort Simpson, March 3, 1858, *Church Missionary Intelligencer* hereafter cited as *CMI*, 1863, p. 195.
3. H. Venn, Journal, December 3, 1856, cited in W. Knight, *The Missionary Secretariat of Henry Venn B.D.*, (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1880), p. 136.
4. *CMI*, 1856, p. 168.
5. W. Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia*, vol. 1. *The Impact of the White Man*. Anthropology in British Columbia. Memoir No. 5. (Victoria: Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology, 1964), p. 92.
6. James Douglas was concerned both for the safety of the missionary and the security of the Hudson's Bay Company men at Fort Simpson. In return for considerable practical and material aid from the Company, Duncan was expected to follow Douglas' instructions to exercise all due caution and for the first few months to deal only with those Indians who worked for the Company or who came into the fort on business matters. Church Missionary Society papers, CMS/A80 W. Duncan to H. Venn, Victoria, July 27, 1857.
7. CMS/A105 W. Duncan to H. Venn, Fort Simpson, October 6, 1857.
8. William Duncan papers, WD/C2154, Journal, October 7, 1857.
9. WD/C2154 Journal, February, 1858, *First Report from Fort Simpson*.
10. *Ibid.*
11. CMS/A105 *First Report*, February, 1858.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. WD/C2154 Journal, December 3, 1859.
17. CMS/A105 *First Report*, February, 1858.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. WD/C2154 Journal, January 14, 1858.
22. *Ibid.*
23. WD/C2154 Journal, June 15, 1858.
24. WD/C2154 Journal, September 17, 1858.
25. Provincial Archives of British Columbia, PABC F395/16 W. Duncan to E. Cridge, Fort Simpson, February 7, 1860.
26. H.A.C. Cairns, *The Clash of Cultures. Early Race Relations in Central Africa* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 179.
27. WD/C2159 *Language and Translation Notebook*, 1859.
28. *Ibid.*
29. WD/C2155 Journal, November 7, 1860.
30. WD/C2155 Journal, November 1, 1860.
31. CMS/A105 Journal, November 9, 1859.
32. WD/C2154 Journal, September 8, 1860.
33. CMS/A105 Journal, May 24, 1859.
34. WD/C2155 Journal, December 23, 1860.
35. *CMI* 1867, p. 67.
36. Cairns, *Clash of Cultures*, p. 187.
37. H. G. Barnett, *Innovation, the Basis of Cultural Change*. (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1953), p. 405.

38. WD/C2159 Baptismal Register, 1861-1862.
39. WD/C2154, Journal, March 6, 1860. It is interesting to note that at this time Duncan was reading a biography of Samuel Marsden, the first missionary to the Maoris, who had advocated so strongly that civilization and the Gospel were indispensable to each other. That the first Tsimshian convert, Shoo-quahnats, was to be baptized as Samuel Marsden indicates Duncan's great respect for Marsden himself and for his theories of mission work.
40. WD/C2154 Journal, November 2, 1859.
41. WD/C2154 Journal, October 28, 1859.
42. WD/C2154 Journal, November 9, 1859.
43. WD/C2154 Journal, June 7, 1859.
44. CMS/A80 W. Duncan to C.M.S., Fort Simpson, August 24, 1860.
45. Journal of Shooquanahts, 1860, cited in Sheldon Jackson, *Alaska and Missions on the North Pacific Coast* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1880), p. 287.
46. WD/C2154 Journal, November 15, 1858.
47. *CMI* 1865, p. 141.
48. WD/C2154 Journal, February 18, 1858.
49. Born in rather humble circumstances near Beverley, Yorkshire, William Duncan had risen to the ranks of the lower middle classes becoming a travelling salesman for a leather firm in Beverley. He was a devotee of the various kinds of self-help literature which flourished in Victorian England, and as his previous employer commented in later years, "besides discharging his duties to myself most faithfully and effectively, he planned out his spare time for self-improvement and laboured most industriously to make up for his want of earlier education." CMS/A124 G. Cussons to the C.M.S., Beverley, January 2, 1886.
50. *CMI* 1852, p. 20.
51. CMS/A105 W. Duncan to H. Venn, Fort Simpson, October 6, 1857.
52. WD/C2154 Journal, October 16, 1857.
53. *Ibid.*
54. CMS/A105 Journal, October 1, 1858.
55. See F. M. Keesing, "Some Notes on Acculturation Study," *Proceedings of the Sixth Pacific Science Congress, 1939*, cited in G. Kushner, M. Gibson, J. J. Honigman and R. Nonas, *What Accounts for Sociocultural Change* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 30.
56. CMS/A105 Journal, March 8, 1859.
57. WD/C2154 Journal, June 8, 1859.
58. WD/C2158 Diary and Notes of Mathilda Minthorn, New Metlakatla, Alaska, 1945, p. 38.
59. PABC Fort Simpson Post Journal, February 17, 1860.
60. *CMI* 1852, p. 19.
61. WD/C2154 Journal, September 7, 1860.
62. WD/C2154 Journal, March 17, 1859.
63. WD/C2154 Journal, September 8, 1860.
64. WD/C2154 Journal, August 18, 1858.
65. Governor Douglas took a particular interest in Duncan's work at Fort Simpson and when the missionary visited Victoria in 1860 he and Douglas spent many hours discussing Indian affairs and formulating a new policy for the Indians around Victoria. This policy, involving the establishment of tribal villages, industrial pursuits and an Indian police force, was never

carried out, due largely to a lack of funds for such purposes. It did, however, form a basis for Duncan's later policies at Metlakatla.

66. PABC H. Moffatt Letter Book, H. Moffatt to the Board of Management, the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company at Victoria, Fort Simpson, April 9, 1861.

67. CMS/A105 Journal of the Reverend L. S. Tugwell, December, 13, 1860.

68. WD/C2158 Notebook of Mission History, n.d.

69. CMS/A105 W. Duncan to C.M.S. Fort Simpson, October 25, 1860.

70. CMS/A105 W. Duncan to C.M.S., Victoria, May 14, 1861.

71. CMS/A105 W. Duncan to C.M.S., Fort Simpson, April 28, 1862.

72. CMS/A80 W. Duncan to C.M.S., Victoria, May 14, 1861.

73. The 1840's and 1850's, the decades when Duncan matured, was an age of models, when reformers devised such ideal towns as Saltaire, or like the Prince Consort at the Great Exhibition, designed model dwellings for the working classes. The activities of the Moravians and the Church of England Self Supporting Village Society are evidence too that others had considered the idea of a self-supporting religious community as an ideal form of society. See W.H.G. Armytage, *Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England, 1850-1960* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).

74. PABC F395/28 W. Duncan to E. Cridge, Fort Simpson, April 24, 1862.

75. *CMI* 1860, p. 90.

76. WD/C2154 Journal, June 2, 1859.

77. WD/C2155 Journal, September, 9, 1861.

78. WD/C2155 Journal, September 20, 1860.

79. WD/C2154 Journal, May 2, 1860.

80. *CMI* 1862, *Recent Intelligence*, n.d.