THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN CULTURE CHANGE

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Introduction

In recent years information on cultural change on the northwest coast of North America has increased both in quantity and in quality. This has resulted from the fact that anthropologists have been giving more attention to problems of this type and from the fact that enough time has now elapsed to begin to evaluate the effects of some of the changes which were introduced into this area during the 19th century.

The area referred to is the Pacific Coast of North America, extending continuously from Trinidad Bay in northern California to Yakutat Bay in Alaska. The eastern boundary of the area is the range of mountains usually referred to as the Coast Range, of which the Cascades in Washington and Oregon are a part. This area is characterized by an abundance of forest growth and a bountiful marine life.

When the early inhabitants were first contacted by representatives of western civilization they impressed one and all with the distinct and unique nature of the culture which they had erected on the basis of their two most prominent resources. Despite the diversity of language and social organization, the culture was remarkably uniform for the length and breadth of the coast. The most uniform characteristics of the culture were: canoe transport, large plank houses, "lineage-local group sociological units, rank-wealth correlation defining status, emphasis on individual status in social affairs, slavery, and elaboration of ceremonialism" (Drucker, 1955:186). These characteristics were further elaborated as a result of the first contacts with western culture. For example, the introduction of iron tools in the northern part of the area led to a virtual proliferation of the famous totem poles.

It is to this northern part of the northwest coast that attention is directed in considering three individuals who are reputed to have been extremely effective in initiating cultural change. These individuals acted at different times and in different places yet they had many similar characteristics. Each was a missionary, although of different religious persuasion. In the following discussion emphasis will be placed on the methods that each used, the results of these methods, and the attitudes of the people in the communities concerned toward each of the missionaries.

Discussion

William Duncan, an English clerk, was sent to the northwest coast in 1857 by the Church Missionary Society as a lay missionary of the Church of England. His formidable task was to convert the Tsimshian Indians to Christianity. When he arrived at Fort Simpson he found it to be a trading post of the Hudson's

Bay Company situated in the midst of 240 native houses. The post had the air and appearance of a fortress, and relations between the whites and Indians were in the nature of an armed truce. Duncan's first step was to retire into the post and learn the Tsimshian language. In doing so he was aided by Clah, a Tsimshian youth employed as a cook's helper within the fort. Clah's knowledge of Tsimshian culture proved of inestimable worth to Duncan in all of his subsequent actions. After eight months of study Duncan gained prestige by delivering his first sermon in the house of one of the Tsimshian chiefs. Subsequently, however, he concentrated his preaching efforts on the younger and generally less conservative members of the community. He built a schoolhouse and began to gather around him a nucleus of young men, including some aristocrats.

After five years of work, Duncan concluded that his efforts would be more fruitful if he could remove his 50 converts from the vicinity of Fort Simpson where Tsimshian culture was flourishing wildly. Consequently, he led his followers to a new village site, called Metlakatla, located 17 miles south of the old one. Members of the new community were bound by a pledge formulated by Duncan which set forth the following conditions:

1. To give up secret cult practices.
2. To cease calling in medicine men when sick.
3. To cease gambling.
4. To cease giving away property for display (the potlatch).
5. To cease painting their faces.
6. To cease indulging in intoxicating drinks.
7. To rest on the Sabbath.
8. To attend religious instruction.
9. To send children to school.
10. To be cleanly.
11. To be industrious.
12. To be peaceful.
13. To be liberal and honest in trade
14. To build neat houses.
15. To pay the village tax.

In a word, "Metlakatla was to conform to the best standards of contemporary European culture" (Barnett, 1942:23). In addition, Duncan was now able to control the influence of the unregenerated relatives of his little flock. He emphasized the importance of the nuclear family by making it the primary unit and seeing to it that nuclear family dwellings replaced the old long houses which had contained the extended family of 30 to 50 individuals. He tackled the economic problem by setting economic self-sufficiency as an early goal for the village as a whole. Eventually the village boasted a sawmill, a boat, a store, a fish cannery, police and fire departments, and a musical band. The population was trained in handicrafts, new arts, and technical skills, and a comparison of Metlakatla with Fort Simpson indicates that the former by 1870 was "a homogeneous community while the latter was characterized by a multiplicity of conflicting aims, interests and passions which continued on as disintegrating forces" (Barnett, 1942:29). Difficulties with church and state resulted in Metlakatla being moved to Annette Island in 1877. Here, too, Duncan came in conflict with the U. S. Bureau of Education, and in 1914 he saw the community pass into the hands of secular authorities. Duncan died in 1918 and left a legacy of adoration and bitterness.

Father Durieu was a Catholic priest whose field of endeavor was the Salish speaking tribes of the Gulf of Georgia (Homalthko, Tlahoose, Sliammon, and Seschelt). In 1860 two priests who attempted to work among these Gulf Salish were driven away, but two years later an Indian delegation went to New Westminister and begged the Oblate Fathers to build a mission for their people. The first mission was established among the Seschelt, and the individual who was to provide the pattern for the future conversion of the other Gulf Salish was Father Durieu. In 1868 he brought all of the tribes of the Seschelt together at Seschelt Peninsula. Here he established a theocratic community consisting of a church and a number of small nuclear family dwellings. His method was to rule through the existing chiefs, always reserving the right to pass on judgements rendered by them. Like Duncan he stipulated certain requirements that were binding upon all of his charges (Lemert, 1954:24).

1. The Indians must give up all primitive dances.
2. They must give up the potlatch.
3. They must cease all patronage of the shaman.
4. They must give up gambling and intoxicants.

When civil authority was incapable of carrying out enforcement of sanctions, Durieu stepped in and enforced them himself. Flogging was utilized along with the threat of excommunication and public shame. The positive aspects of the new culture were the encouragement which the priests gave to the building and care of small homes, the planting of gardens and orchards, and later the construction of water and lighting plants. In contrast to Duncan who deliberately played down the ritual and ceremonial content of his religion, Father Durieu emphasized the necessity of introducing Catholic ceremony and ritual into the new community, specifically to "capitalize on the Indians' love of display" (Lemert, 1954:25).

In terms of what he set out to do Durieu was successful. He Christianized the Indians, and their old culture gave way. Yet by 1910 the social-political system which he had set up had broken down. As the authority of the chiefs was undermined by the younger men when they began to learn English, so also was the authority of the priests undermined by the Canadian settlers who flocked to the area. Today there is said to be a goodly amount of anti-clericalism on the part of those who remember what it was like to live in the society which father Durieu fashioned for the Gulf of Georgia Salish.

The last individual to be considered is Billy Benson—a Salvation Army worker. He was a Tlingit Indian from the wealthy and powerful town of Klukwan who came in 1901 to the Tlingit village of Klawak on the west coast of Prince of Wales Island. At the time of Benson's arrival Klawak was a village which had been exposed to white influence for more than 20 years as the site of a saltry and later of the first cannery in southeastern Alaska. The whites who worked at the cannery were quartered close to the village and were responsible for the changes at Klawak prior to Benson's arrival. These changes were primarily the

result of the introduction of whiskey and the art of making it. The village enjoyed a reputation for drunkenness throughout southeastern Alaska. Indescribable dirt and disease were regarded as the natural order of things, and although many of the whites deplored these conditions none took any steps to alleviate them.

Benson set immediately to accomplish his task. The methods that he used were not described in detail, but it is possible to infer some of the reasons for his success. In the first place, his place of origin, Klukwan, gave him prestige among the status conscious Tlingit. In the second place, he was living proof, perhaps the first, that a Tlingit could live the white man's life and still be a Tlingit. Finally, he was an extremely eloquent man, and high value is placed on this gift. One of Benson's first acts was to build a small house. He kept it neat and clean and invited the villagers to examine its contents. In addition, he himself abstained from all forms of intoxicants. He organized a Sunday school and was intrumental in establishing a public school. Within five years Klawak had become a "Christian" village. It was neat and clean, the Sabbath was observed, a civil administration was organized, and the townsfolk assumed the responsibility of governing themselves. Eventually Benson left to work in another village, but in the meantime a Presbyterian church had been built and staffed.

The town continued to be run on religious principles until 1921 when a new regime was voted in on a platform of "less religion". Liquor was once more sold in town, and village solidarity broke down. Even today, although liquor is once more banned, the town is not the close knit unit which it once was.

Summary and Conclusions

It is possible to conceive of three models for cultural change in these three cases. Duncan's model was a 19th century Western European community, Durieu's was a paternalistic theocracy, and Benson's most closely approximates a midwestern small town at the beginning of the 20th century—a legacy from his own American missionary teachers. The models were all static in that they could not cope with the changes brought about by the 20th century. Hence their breakdown is comprehensible.

It is interesting to note that in each of these locations the people today are aware of the circumstances under which they acquired their present culture, and they have their versions of the roles played by the individuals who were most responsible for its acquisition. And yet today these three communities are far more similar to each other than to the models envisioned for each by its respective missionary. In evaluating the effects of these individuals one must also take into consideration the cultural change achieved in other northwest coast villages where no one individual is singled out as being responsible for the changes which have taken place. Again, these other villages are now very similar culturally to the ones which have been discussed. This raises the tantalizing question of whether the in-

dividuals were really important in terms of change of culture on the northwest coast. Within limits it may be fairly argued that they were important, since the changes which they wrought were closely scrutinized by both whites and Indians, and the results came to be highly valued by both. This, in turn, had the effect of establishing models for future change in Indian communities relatively unaffected by direct missionary contact. The point to be emphasized is that these individuals contributed to and achieved a new social, religious, and economic order in selected villages, and each individual had a somewhat different concept of the new order. The fact that the 20th century results of these contributions have tended to come to the same things simply serves to emphasize the point that communities organized along the lines of rigid models have too much stasis in them to continue to function in that manner in the face of modern life.

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