



Thomas Crosby and the Tsimshian: Small Shoes for Feet Too Large

Clarence R. Bolt

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When the Methodist missionary Thomas Crosby arrived in Port Simpson in northwestern British Columbia in 1874, he did so at the invitation of the Tsimshian people. Earlier contact with the Anglican missionary William Duncan had convinced them that, although many aspects of his mission program were appealing, his brand of religion was too austere. Instead they preferred the more expressive version represented by the Methodist Church.

In *Thomas Crosby and the Tsimshian*, Clarence Bolt demonstrates that Natives were conscious participants in the acculturation and conversion process--as long as this met their goals--and not merely passive recipients. In order to understand the complexities of Native-European contacts, he argues, one must look at the reasons for Native, as well as for European, behaviour. He points out that Natives actively influenced the manner in which their relationships with the White population developed, often resulting in a complex interaction in which the values of both groups affected each other.

As long as the conversion process unfolded as they wished, the Tsimshian supported their missionary. Over time, especially with regard to the land question, they realized that both missionaries and government officials were attempting to impose their restrictive visions rather than respecting Tsimshian concerns and goals. As one Tsimshian observed about the implications of accepting federal policy: 'It would be like trying to put a small pair of shoes on feet too large for them. It would cramp our feet and prevent us from walking as fast as we did without such regulations.' Missionary policy was no different.

This book is unique in that it examines the functioning of two missions to the same people in a single locale, demonstrating how a particular Native group tried to protect its traditional land resource while at the same time seeking participating in the emerging White society of nineteenth-century British Columbia.

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