

**Boundaries Rejected: Roman Catholic and Presbyterian
Missions Among the Nuu-chah-nulth Peoples
on Vancouver Island, 1874-1910**

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Like colonizing states, Christian denominations and missionary societies often staked out territories for missionary activity and expansion. This, of course, had little to do with the consent of the people to be colonized or missionized.

On the sparsely populated outer coast of Vancouver Island, deeply indented with inlets and covered with islands, both Roman Catholic and Presbyterian churches established missions during the late-nineteenth century. Each denomination hoped to claim the entire coast as its mission field. Each seeking to convert the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people who lived in the many scattered villages, they competed for the favour of chiefs, the presence of children in their schools and government funds to operate them. Although never a major factor, the Methodists were also sporadically active in the area.

The historical context provides an understanding of this rivalry. Religious and ethnic tensions exacerbated by the Riel Rebellion continued to agitate Canadians over the Manitoba Schools question. A number of Protestant churches maintained missions for converting French Canadian Catholics. Presbyterian ministers still subscribed to the Westminster Confession, which named the Pope as “the antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.”¹

Catholics showed equal intolerance, anathematizing all who did not accept the declarations of the Council of Trent and of the 1877 Vatican

Council.² Catholic missionaries, including Fr. Brabant on Vancouver Island, used the Catholic Ladder as a teaching tool with First Nations people. This chart shows Protestantism as a detour from the path to heaven and onto the path to hell.³

At the same time, voices such as that of George Monro Grant spoke for a wider vision of Christian fellowship that included Catholics as well as Protestants. A Vatican-initiated survey of Catholic dioceses in Canada showed “that direct proselytism by Protestants was simply not a major concern” and disproved the notion that widespread anti-Catholic feeling existed. The greatest exception to this growing tolerance was work among First Nations people in western Canada.⁴

W.S. Moore, the Presbyterian Missionary at Mistawasis, Saskatchewan, provides an extreme example of the anti-Catholic bigotry that some missionaries brought to their work. Although strongly objecting to the “heartless brutality” of the Presbyterian school at Regina, he said he would sooner see Indian children die than to have them sent to the Catholics.⁵

In his *Reminiscences*, Rev. Augustin Brabant describes the 1874 beginning of the Catholic mission when he accompanied his Bishop, Charles Seghers, on a trip from Victoria along the west coast of Vancouver Island as far as Kyoquot. Considering the language difficulties involved, it is questionable that any effective communication took place. Nevertheless, between 13 April and 15 May they visited numerous villages where, according to Brabant, they adopted the following method:

In this and in every tribe on the coast instruction was begun by stating who we were, what was our object; then followed a history of the creation, the fall of man, the deluge, the multiplication of languages, the redemption of mankind; after which, if agreeable to the natives, baptism was administered to their little children. And, if time was left, a few hymns and songs were taught. But in all cases the teaching of the Sign of the Cross and the making of that sign by the Indians was the great thing and caused real excitement. We had in this camp eighty baptisms of young children.⁶

On this trip of initial contact the two clerics baptized an astounding number of children: at one village only two and at another nine but at others forty-three, seventy-five, ninety-three, one hundred and thirty-five. At Kyoquot on 26 April, Brabant says he “baptized one hundred and seventy-

seven children. I commenced at nine o'clock in the morning and it was five o'clock in the afternoon when I got through."⁷

On a second trip Bishop Seghers arranged with the chief at Hesquiat to obtain a mission site.⁸ In May 1875, Fr. Brabant was posted to Hesquiat where he spent the next twenty-five years of his life. At the time there were no white settlements and only four one-person trading posts scattered along the 200-mile coast line. Brabant, working among people of a totally different culture and language, experienced times of great loneliness and isolation, being, as he said, "as much as six months without seeing the face of a white man, and consequently speaking a civilized language."⁹

Bishop Seghers' instructions to Brabant placed primary emphasis on "the salvation and spiritual progress of the Indians." In addition to this, the missionary was to "neglect nothing towards establishing a civilized social order of life among them," to encourage them to acquire property and "improve their condition of life, so that with the improvement of their temporal and physical conditions their minds and hearts may be raised to higher and better things." Of particular interest to this paper, he was instructed to "teach the Indians fearlessly to beware and avoid with the utmost caution all heresy and heretics."¹⁰

Brabant established a second mission among the Ohiaht people at Namukamus in Barkley Sound in the fall of 1877. In 1880 Bishop Brondel, Seghers' successor, instructed Brabant to establish a mission at Kyuquot, sixty miles up the coast. Brabant had already spent time among the Kyoquots who had expressed desire for a resident priest and he was very hopeful, particularly with regard to the children.¹¹ Brondel also added to the earlier Bishop's instructions. Missionaries must teach children "to read, to pray, to learn the catechism, to sing, arithmetic, personal order and cleanliness, and some stories taken from the Sacred Scriptures. In times of recreation they should learn how to till the soil."¹²

Brabant built a small church at Ahousaht, between Hesquiat and Barkley Sound in 1881 and in 1886 Bishop Seghers, who had returned to the diocese, placed Fr. Lemmens in charge of all mission work in Clayoquot Sound, including Ahousaht, leaving Fr. Brabant at Hesquiat.¹³ Like the Presbyterians and the Methodists, the Catholics could not maintain a consistent missionary presence in all the mission stations which they had opened. Clearly, however, they had established themselves as the pioneering Christian presence on the outer coast of Vancouver Island.

In 1888 the Foreign Mission Committee of the Presbytery of Columbia of the Presbyterian Church in Canada reported on a perceived need for a mission among the Indians of British Columbia. "As yet very little has been done for them by any of the evangelical denominations and nothing at all has been done by our church. The Committee believe that schools of the kind lately introduced by the government in the North West Territory are greatly needed on this coast."¹⁴

In March 1890, Mr. John A. McDonald offered himself as a "missionary to the pagan Indians of British Columbia . . . The Methodist, English and Roman Catholic churches have missions among them. Our church has none."¹⁵ The following year he visited Methodist missions on the north coast of British Columbia and William Duncan's mission at New Metlakatla, Alaska. He then travelled up the west coast of Vancouver Island, meeting Mr. H. Guillod, the local Indian Agent, who gave valuable information about the area and its people. Concluding his report to the Foreign Mission Committee in Toronto, he wrote, "So have decided with your permission to locate at Alberni for the first year, to learn the language and to take the whole coast for a field."¹⁶ Doubtless, Mr. Guillod had informed McDonald, if he didn't know from other sources, that the Roman Catholics had already been active at a number of points which McDonald proposed to take for his field.

Brabant noted in his journal for October 1891, "that a young man representing the Presbyterian Church of Canada has taken up his residence at Alberni, Barclay Sound, and has been introduced by the Indian Agent to the natives of that district."¹⁷ In 1893 his Bishop told him that the Methodists planned to build a mission at Nitinat and had been given a \$500 grant from the Dominion Government. "They had asked and obtained the grant for the building of a school, but of course with them that also means a meeting-house or a church."¹⁸ Because of his health, Mr. McDonald was not able to stay for more than a year and a half at Alberni. During this time he did, however, invite some children into his home where his sister began to teach school. This became the "Home," the beginning of the Alberni Indian Residential School.¹⁹

McDonald's successor, Melvin Swartout, did not get along well with Bella Johnston, the woman who had been placed in charge of the "Home," After a few months, with his wife and two small children, Swartout moved to Ucluelet, situated on the outer coast sixty miles down the channel from Alberni. He set about to meet the Nuu-Chah-Nulth in the other villages in the

vicinity, to evangelize and to establish schools.²⁰ Brabant reflected bitterly in 1895:

Our Indians over all the coast are well-disposed . . . This being known seems to have excited the Presbyterian and Methodist denominations, and their efforts to invade the coast are very pronounced. Now that the Indians are more than half civilized and are withal peaceable and docile, the sects will come and give us trouble . . . When a man's life was in danger and when the only means of travelling was an Indian canoe; when the mails reached us only once or twice a year . . . we were welcome to do alone the work of converting the natives; but now with the present facilities and the absence of danger, the ministers come in sight to give us trouble and to pervert our children.²¹

Seeing the Protestants as a threat to his work, Brabant proposed to his Bishop that the Catholics should build "in a central part of the coast, an industrial school for boys and girls."²² Although education had been part of Brabant's mandate since 1880, he had not seriously committed himself to this work. Swartout claimed in 1901 that, in his seven years on the coast, he had "not met one Indian who has been taught by the priests to read and write."²³

Bishop Lemmens arranged a meeting with the Indian Agent who promised Brabant that a per capita grant would be available once the school was occupied. "Everything we asked for was promised by the agent, and so I returned to my mission, rejoicing in the thought that through a school we could keep the children from perversion."²⁴ Shortly after, however, the Bishop instructed him to abandon the boarding school plans which Brabant thought so necessary for preserving the results of his work over the past twenty years.

Four years later, in 1899, Bishop Christie, who had succeeded Lemmens, called Brabant to Victoria to discuss the building of a boarding school. Christie wrote, "I have just returned from Ottawa and have obtained a per capita grant from the government for fifty children. If we do not accept the grant it will be given to one of the sects; your children will be perverted and you will lose the fruit of all your labors."²⁵

The wording of this letter, reported in Brabant's memoirs which were circulated in 1890, created great agitation among the Presbyterians who had been trying for years to get a much smaller grant for a school that was already

built and operating. Brabant's *Vancouver Island . . . and Its Missions: 1874-1900* became a popular book among Presbyterians and Swartout made a point of ordering copies for distribution.²⁶

Brabant selected a commanding site on Clayoquot Sound for the new school which was built towards the end of 1899. Limited mission funds pushed the Presbyterians to use federally financed schools, with Presbyterian teacher-evangelists, as their means of gaining access to the villages. They frequently opened the school and placed the teacher before obtaining the government's recognition and grant. At times this practice led to delays and misunderstandings. Always there was difficulty in obtaining qualified teachers.

In 1896, Brabant wrote that a "young man [John Russell] representing the Presbyterian Church is now stationed in Ahousat. He is a school teacher by profession, but he holds divine service on Sunday."²⁷ The Presbyterians applied for a school grant at Ahousaht, which the government first gave but later withdrew.

The Presbytery of Victoria's formal protest of this action emphasized that the government was making no provision for the education of large numbers of Indians on the west coast, that the Presbyterians had opened a school at Ahousaht with a qualified teacher and, having applied for the annual grant of \$300 had received three quarterly payments of \$75. However, near the end of 1896, when the Catholics opened a school at Clayquot, "another point, about ten miles across a dangerous water . . . separated both geographically and tribally from Ahouset [sic]" the Indian Department transferred the grant from the Presbyterian school at Ahousaht to the Catholic school at Clayoquot. The Presbytery rejected claims of prior occupation by the Catholics. "The Roman Catholic Church were only in Ahouset for one or two school terms, and that about six or seven years before our Church commenced work there – during which interval of years, Ahouset was utterly abandoned."²⁸

In response, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs set out the Department's view of the history claiming that the grant to the Catholics had been made for Ahousaht and Clayoquot, "considered as one Mission." Even though no school had been held since 1891, the grant was still available and therefore had been transferred to Clayoquot. The Department reminded the Presbyterians that, in 1895, when Swartout had applied to open a school at Ahousaht, he was told that "there were no funds available for the establishment of a Protestant School on that Reserve." When the Presbyterians had

proceeded with the school without permission and sent in reports, payments were made until the error was noticed and the payments stopped. The Department regretted that no grant could be made for the school at Ahousaht and added that “any arrangement that might be made with that object in view might create a good deal of difficulty.”²⁹ The Presbyterians continued to negotiate with the Department and finally, in March 1900, succeeded in obtaining the annual \$300 grant for the Ahousaht school.³⁰

After the Presbyterians had been able to place a young man among the Ohiahts at Dodger’s Cove, across Barkley Sound from Ucluelet, Swartout, noting that “Roman Catholics are evidently preparing an aggressive work on the coast,” thought that the time had come for the Presbyterians to expand their work. In 1900 he indicated his own willingness to go to the Nootka Sound area up the coast from Hesquiat. He dismissed any Catholic claims to the area, saying that Brabant only visited the area once a year.³¹

The ill-fated Presbyterian venture at Nootka illustrates many of the factors at work in the intense Presbyterian-Catholic rivalry: the difficulty both churches faced in placing competent, long-term workers in small, isolated, difficult to reach communities; the appeal by the churches to factions and divisions within the aboriginal community; and the expedient use of schools and the presence of federal authority and funding.

Rev. Thomas Oswald, a young minister who had been asked to go to Nootka, indicated in August 1900 that he was waiting for a clear sign from God.³² Nine days later, although he did not mention any sign, Oswald announced that he was available to be appointed as of the end of March. John Russell, the Presbyterian teacher-missionary at Ahousaht, wrote in January 1901, that he had received several deputations from the Nootka area asking for a teacher. “They are very anxious, as they say, they have no one to help them to obtain any light whatever as the Catholic priests who have occasionally gone there are very uncertain in their services & in their tempers as well.”³³

Although appointed to Nootka as of 1 April 1901, Oswald asked if he could wait with going until May 1st so that he might visit relatives and attend synod.³⁴ Russell complained that this further delay was “a great blunder” and would lead to trouble for Oswald. Monthly steamer service meant that Oswald would not reach Nootka before 20 May by which time the people would be scattered for the summer. Adding to Russell’s concern, he had received a letter “purporting to be that of Chief Maquina of Nootka,” but

which he suspected was inspired by Brabant, forbidding him from going to Nootka.³⁵

While Oswald arrived on the Island's west coast in May, visiting Swartout and Russell, he did not arrive at Nootka until 18 June, making the fifty-two mile trip from Ahousaht in a canoe with Russell. Still tired from their journey, they explained their purpose to the Moachaht people and reminded them of their urgent appeal for a school.

We were informed that, the people were in favour of our coming & that they desired a resident missionary & a school but that while all were unanimous in desiring us to remain they were afraid to allow us, because (1) the priest at Hesquiaht had threatened to summarily degrade the chief & to deprive him of his chieftainship if he sanctioned our remaining & that he would moreover take away the cattle that he had given to the late chief. He had moreover informed him that our work was to do away with (summarily) their old customs, dances & c. To all of these objections I replied & stated that to retain us it was necessary for them to not only desire us to remain but to provide a building site. Fear of doing anything to injure their chief's prospects influenced them from readily receiving us so we left the council meeting . . . We were privately & urgently requested to remain by old & young . . . We consider it our duty to do all in our power to release the Indians from the slavery they enjoy at the priest's hands, who resorts to most unscrupulous means & who has systematically & persistently refused to alleviate their sufferings or to grant their requests for education.³⁶

Disregarding the opposition of the Chief, they rented a house and opened a makeshift school. Russell expressed great satisfaction that they had been able to work so quickly. "To rent a house 6 p.m. on Saturday, to conduct Sabbath services, manufacture school furniture & open a school at noon on Tuesday, has not I think been often accomplished."³⁷

Russell learned that Bishop Orth, now planned to appoint priests to Ahousaht and to Dodger's Cove, two points which the Presbyterians had been serving.

There is no religion of course in this, it is retaliation . . . I am certain that Bishop Orth is determined to make a last grand attempt to obtain supremacy of the West Coast. Nothing but very effective measures can meet him . . . We must have a vigorous policy or else leave the field. The

Methodist Ch. is responsible for the giving up of Clayoquot to the Catholics & our delay in filling Nootka is causing the trouble there.³⁸

Less than a month after Oswald settled at Nootka, the trouble arrived which Russell had predicted. Chief Maquina asked the Indian Department to order Oswald off the Reserve as a trespasser.³⁹ The Catholics, who had a government grant for a school at Hesquiat, arranged for it to be transferred to Nootka where they started a rival school.⁴⁰ The Catholic school at Nootka had an average daily attendance of eight children while Oswald's had only two and one-half.⁴¹

In spite of militant rhetoric from others, Thomas Oswald did not "stick to his guns." On 26 August, ten weeks after his arrival, he left on the monthly steamer. In his plaintive letter of resignation he cited the reasons for leaving: his loneliness, the lack of work to do, the Indian Agent's official order for him to leave, the losing competition with Fr. Brabant, and his feeling that there was no one in the village on whom he could rely. Oswald concluded by saying, "While I have not earned the martyr's crown, I believe that I ought not to be branded with a coward's name."⁴² According to Chief Joe of Ehatisht, one of the villages on Nootka Sound, the Catholic school was closed as soon as Oswald left.⁴³

Swartout vigorously defended the decision to place Oswald at Nootka and to open the school without asking permission of the Indian Department in accordance with the Indian Act. He claimed that application in advance would have required the Indian Agent to hold a meeting at which Fr. Brabant would have been present to influence the people against the Presbyterians. Instead, Swartout felt that the Presbyterian Church should go on the offensive: "what right has the Indian Department to treat Protestant missionaries as tramps to be ordered off the reservation at the whim of the Romish priest? What right has that Department to put barriers in the way of preaching the gospel to the Indians as difficult, if not more so, as those facing our church in China?"⁴⁴

The Presbyterians resented what they considered unfair treatment. With an obvious reference to latent anti-Catholic prejudice, Swartout wrote to R.P. MacKay, the Secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee in Toronto, "the sooner our church realizes that it has a conflict on with state-aided Roman Catholicism, the easier the question will be settled. Our people only need to get stirred up, to settle it quickly."⁴⁵

Swartout urged the Presbyterian Church to do battle with Ottawa to have the same privileges as the Roman Catholics, that is to have entry to any village on the coast. Until then the Presbyterians could not get a footing in any new village “without the risk of being ordered to leave.” Once free access was recognized by Ottawa, they should choose the “very best place on the coast for the experiment of testing Presbyterian Protestantism with Roman Catholicism.” Once again Swartout declared his own willingness to go to Nootka, provided he could take his family.⁴⁶ Although Swartout and Russell made numerous appeals for another man to be sent to Nootka, these were never acted upon.⁴⁷

R.P. MacKay, although not sharing Swartout’s enthusiasm for an all-out assault on Ottawa, did meet with Clifford Sifton, the Minister of the Interior, concerning the practices of the Catholics and the action of Indian Affairs Superintendent A.W. Vowell in ordering Oswald to leave. “The Government,” he told Russell, “is in an extremely delicate position in dealing with so highly organized and aggressive body as the Roman Catholics. Their Agents are everywhere, and they act as a unit, and can bring such pressure to bear upon the Government.”⁴⁸

In a letter to Russell, MacKay noted that Bishop Orth had been in Ottawa, “interviewing the Government . . . I think that Mr. Sifton wishes to favor us in these matters until the grants to the Presbyterian Church are somewhat up to grants to other churches. Political exigencies, however, are such as to make it practically if not theoretically impossible for the Government to do as they would like.”⁴⁹ MacKay was acutely aware of two problems which argued against a prolonged struggle with the Catholics: the shortage of personnel and the shortage of money.⁵⁰

In supporting the call for a large Boarding school at Ahousaht, Swartout said in a letter to John Campbell in Victoria:

I have always had a great deal of sympathy for the Roman Catholics. I have admired their pluck in opening up the wilderness, sending missionaries across the continent in the early days &c. &c. And I have believed in the policy of not interfering with them at any point where they have established a mission. But when I learn that the Roman Catholics seek to hold against all comers territory to which their highest claim is the fact that they have erected a building and pay it an occasional visit; when I learn that the most devoted priest on the coast descended to threatening the Nootka chief with the loss of his position

if he permitted the Protestants to establish a school for the benefit of his ignorant and wholly neglected children; when I learn that one of the most important themes discussed in the Romish service . . . is the Evils of Protestantism; and when I read in their own publications that the avowed object of erecting the Roman Catholic Boarding School at Clayoquaht . . . is to save the Indian children from the baneful influence of the Protestants, I confess to a change of opinion. Today, I hold the view that our Church should meet this Catholic question, should meet it effectually, and at once.⁵¹

In his letter to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Swartout, as evidence of Catholic failure to serve the needs of the different villages, points to their abandoned buildings at Alberni, Ohiaht (Dodger Cove) and Ahousaht and to the seldom-used building at Nootka.⁵² Work among the Ohiahts had been particularly important for Melvin Swartout. By canoe and sailboat he had travelled there as often as possible; he had lived at Dodger Cove himself for a few months, and he frequently had urged the appointment of a suitable teacher-missionary. But the Presbyterians had the same problems as the Catholics in keeping suitable missionary personnel, and Dodger Cove was vacant much of the time. In August 1904, a month after Melvin Swartout's drowning, Dr. Campbell, concerned that the Presbyterians might lose the village to the Catholics, asked, "Why is D. Cove left so long without a teacher?"⁵³ John Ross was appointed soon after this but when he left in 1908 the work was abandoned.⁵⁴

In 1908, when the Presbyterians hoped to secure a grant for a Boarding School at Bamfield, in the territory of the Ohiahts, R.P. MacKay was forced to agree with the Indian Agent, A. W. Neill, "that our church has not been doing justice to the missions on the Western coast, that is Ucluelet and Dodger Cove. I regret it very much but we do find it difficult to get agents that are suitable."⁵⁵ Although MacKay saw little that could be done "amongst the children at Dodger Cove" he agreed with Campbell that "we must not let go and allow the Roman Catholics to come in."⁵⁶

John Russell, the Presbyterian teacher at Ahousaht, knew in advance the significance of a Catholic Boarding School at Clayoquot. Children from Ahousaht, after attending his primary school, would never go past the Catholic school to attend the Presbyterian school at Alberni.⁵⁷ Aware of a concerted attempt by the Catholics to attract Ahousaht children to their school, he became discouraged when they "succeeded in enticing" his most

promising schoolgirl. "It seems hard for me to spend the best years of my life only to have my pupils go over to the Catholics when they reach ten or twelve years of age."⁵⁸ This sad and discouraged statement, which parallels similar statements by Fr. Brabant, highlights the personal anguish caused by denominational rivalry. According to Russell, the Catholics intended to recruit ten girls from his school and the preferred method of doing this was the offer of school dresses; the priests and nuns attracted the girls who then pressured their parents to allow them to go to Christie Residential School.⁵⁹ On one occasion, arriving by a small steamboat decked out with streamers, the Catholics paraded through Ahousaht accompanied by the school's brass band. Although Russell was able to keep his charges safely in the school room during this visitation, he had the sense that he was losing the battle.⁶⁰

In response to Russell's complaint, the Indian Agent said that the Catholics had a prior claim at Ahousaht. Russell countered by pointing out that the Catholics claimed any whom they had baptized; he referred to the mass baptism of infants and children practiced by Bishop Seghers and Brabant on their first trip along the coast in 1874. "If Father Brabant baptized 177 children in eight hours . . . it required two minutes, 42 42/59 seconds on an average to baptize one child."⁶¹

By all accounts, Russell was a good and conscientious teacher, deeply dedicated to the educational process as well as to the Presbyterian version of the gospel. He complained that the Government used the churches in order to escape its own responsibility for providing education. But, he said, the government had no idea whether or not the churches were doing a decent job of teaching the children in their care.⁶²

Looking at the results of residential or boarding schools, Russell raised serious questions about their efficacy. At one point he said, "Regarding the Home Schools I am entirely opposed to them on this Coast."⁶³ He observed that graduates of these schools sank to the "common level" when they returned to their home communities so that "the last state is worse than the first." Instead, he proposed what he called an "'Industrial day school' where the children are trained daily & then sent home, the idea being the raising of the standard of the whole community . . . In this case the parents are responsible for food and clothing as they ought to be in every case & they get the benefit of what training the child gets."⁶⁴ Russell particularly objected to the practice of residential schools training young women for "service" in white people's homes in the city. "Fitting the girls for servants here is robbing the Indians of those who ought by nature to be the mothers of the

future members of the tribe & to thus unfit them for this is assisting in the extinction of the tribes.”⁶⁵

Russell noted that with the new Christie Residential School, highly visible on a hill overlooking a bay a few miles from Ahousaht, the attitude of the Ahousaht people towards residential school began to change. “The Indians are . . . gradually becoming more in favor of the Home Schools, as they think the training must be superior. I notice also a growing desire of the children after they have some advancement in the day schools [for] training in the Home schools.”⁶⁶ Recognizing the “probability . . . that I shall not be able to hold my best & most desirable pupils on the present system,” he suggested that the Presbyterians, instead of enlarging the Alberni Home, should build at Ahousaht. “The hope of our Mission on West Coast is Ahousaht . . . Unless we can hold Ahousaht intact, our prospects are not bright.”⁶⁷

Although Swartout also had his doubts, other Presbyterian workers favoured the residential school system. At a workers’ conference, the Presbytery of Victoria and the Synod of British Columbia passed resolutions in favour of a Presbyterian boarding school at Ahousaht.

But the Ahousaht Residential School did not come into existence as the result of a rational planning process. Instead, Russell, “at great inconvenience & with considerable discomfort,” took a little boy into his home in the summer of 1901 to prevent him from going to the Catholics. The following year, as parents moved to summer work sites, Russell took in several more children for the same reason. At the end of September he had seven children in his home and at the end of October he had sixteen – with fifteen on a waiting list. The following March Russell had twenty-five children under his care.⁶⁸ Everything was done on an ad hoc basis and none of these children had been properly admitted with signed consent forms.⁶⁹ There had been no preparation in terms of food, beds, bedding, or other furniture.

Frantic appeals to the Woman’s Foreign Mission Society secured financial support for purchase of basic items.⁷⁰ But the house was not equipped to handle these numbers and Russell, who had a growing family of his own, broke under the strain. He asked for a furlough and, once away from Ahousaht, submitted his resignation to take effect 31 October 1903. In his resignation letter he urged that a boarding school for fifty students be built at Ahousaht.⁷¹

Melvin Swartout had disagreed with Russell for taking in so many children and criticized him for leaving on furlough before making adequate

arrangements for their care.⁷² The Presbyterians were left with a situation where one loyal woman worker, Miss McNeil, herself near the point of collapse, was responsible for looking after all of these children. The church came through with grants, hired another couple as principal and matron and arranged to build a residential school. After some negotiations, the Indian Department promised a grant of \$1,500 for construction and a per capita grant of \$60 for up to twenty-five children.⁷³ In the same government estimates the Catholic school at Clayoquot was raised to the status of an industrial school and, as such, received \$120 per capita for fifty students. The application of the Presbyterian school at Alberni for similar status was “noted for future consideration.”⁷⁴

Dr. Campbell, concerned about the cost of building at Ahousaht, nevertheless thought that the Presbyterians had to press on. “We cannot draw back, unless we are to abandon the place to the R.C.’s, and if we do that we may withdraw our other missionaries, & if so the ghost of John Knox wd. haunt us. The Pres. Ch. is not the church that is accustomed to hand the heathen under her care to the Papists.”⁷⁵

Regardless of how one might judge their objectives today, one can presume that both Presbyterians and Catholics entered their missionary work on Vancouver Island’s west coast with sincere motives. In seeking to carry out their mission as effectively as possible, they saw the need to work in a large contiguous area. This need brought them into mutual conflict to such an extent that their struggle with each other began to take precedence. Both Christie Residential School and Ahousaht Residential School were founded, not because of any analysis of the needs of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth communities or their children, but in order to prevent the other denomination from securing the hearts and minds of the children.⁷⁶

The residential schools at Alberni, Clayoquot and Ahousaht are perhaps the most important legacy of this rivalry for denominational supremacy among the Nuu-Chah-Nulth. Canadian churches and Canadian society as a whole are only beginning to understand the meaning of that legacy as they face up to court challenges. In addition to problems of sexual, physical and emotional abuse at the residential schools, Canada and the churches must confront larger justice questions of First Nations cultural identity and their place in Canada’s future. One man told the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, “we need to know why we were subjected to such treatment in order that we may begin to understand and heal.”⁷⁷ Other Canadians also need to know so that they too may begin to

understand and heal. Denominational rivalry is one of the factors which needs to be acknowledged in that process.

Endnotes

1. *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1643), Chapter XXV, vi.
2. “The Tridentine Profession of Faith, 1564,” with added decree of 1877, *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. Henry Bettenson (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 373.
3. John W. Grant, *The Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 124; J.R. Miller, *A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 191-192. For reference to Fr. Brabant’s use of the Catholic Ladder, see Chas. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island* (Victoria, BC: Acme Press, 1926), 49.
4. Mark G. McGowan, “Rethinking Catholic Protestant Relations in Canada: The Episcopal Reports of 1900-1901,” *The Canadian Catholic Historical Association Historical Studies* (1992): 22-23.
5. “Holding as I do that the system of Romanism is Antichristian, idolatrous, blasphemous and deluding: a system that . . . with God’s grace I would die before I would adopt it, and one which I would ten times over see my own children being laid in their graves than see them adopting, of the Indian children I would have no less care but would most certainly send them to Regina or any other place save one -Hell- then send them to a place where trained in delusion they should come forth to Mistawasis and other places to spend their lives in deluding others to the same doubt and the same damnation” (W.S. Moore to R.P. MacKay, 11 March 1903, File 47 # 79.199C, Foreign Mission Committee, Western Section, Indian Work in Manitoba and the North West, Presbyterian Church in Canada Papers, United Church of Canada Archives).
6. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 14. Charles Lillard points out that, including his own *Mission to Nootka: 1874-1900*, there have been four different versions of Fr. Brabant’s memoirs (*Mission to Nootka: 1874-1900* [Sidney, BC: Gray’s Publishing, 1977], 5). In this paper, except where otherwise noted, I have used Chas Moser’s 1926 text.
7. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 18.
8. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 30.
9. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 9.

10. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 4-6.
11. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 63, 77-79, 89, 95.
12. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 8.
13. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 99, 115.
14. Report of the Foreign Mission Committee of the Presbytery of Columbia, File 22, #79.199C, UCCA.
15. John A. McDonald to Rev. G.M. Grant, March 1890, File 3, #79.199 C, UCCA.
16. McDonald to Hamilton Cassels, 12 September, 1891, File 3, #79.199 C, UCCA.
17. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 122.
18. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 123.
19. McDonald to Rev. James Ross, 5 July 1892; McDonald to Cassels, 11 November 1892, File 1, # 79.200C, Foreign Mission Committee, Western Section, Indian Work in British Columbia, Presbyterian Church in Canada Papers, UCCA.
20. Cf. Melvin Swartout to R.P. MacKay, 23 February, 1894, 16 March 1894, 3 April 1894, 18 April 1894, 16 May 1894, 22 June 1894, File 4, #79.200 C, UCCA.
21. Lillard, *Mission to Nootka*, 112. This material is not found in Moser's version of Brabant's work.
22. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 125.
23. Swartout to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 29 August, 1901, File 32, #79.200 C, UCCA. Vince McNally, the Oblate historian, says, "although he had made half-hearted attempts, Brabant had still not established a school for Native children after almost twenty-five years on the West Coast" (Vince McNally, "A Lost Opportunity? A Study of Relations Between the Native People and the Diocese of Victoria," *Western Oblate Studies* 2 [1992]: 172). My attention was drawn to this by Patrick Jamieson, *Victoria: Demers to De Roo: 150 Years of Catholic History on Vancouver Island* (Victoria: Ekstasis Editions, 1997), 162.
24. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 126.
25. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 128.

26. Swartout to MacKay, 5 August 1901, File 32; cf. Swartout to MacKay, 9 February 1901, File 30; 8 July 1901, File 32; Campbell to MacKay, 13 July 1901, File 32; Swartout to Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 29 August 1901, File 32; and Russell to MacKay, 16 September 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA
27. Moser, *Reminiscences of the West Coast of Vancouver Island*, 126.
28. Minutes from Presbytery of Victoria, 3 May 1899, File 23, #79.200C, UCCA.
29. Deputy Superintendent General to Rev. Wm. Moore, 18 June 1899, File 23, #79.200C, UCCA
30. J.D. McLean to Wm. Moore, 16 March 1900, File 26, #79.200C, UCCA.
31. Swartout to MacKay, 3 May 1899, File 23; 24 March 1900, File 26, #79.200C, UCCA.
32. Thomas Oswald to MacKay, 20 August 1900, File 28, #79.200C, UCCA.
33. John Russell to MacKay, 28 January 1901, File 30, #79.200C, UCCA.
34. Oswald to MacKay, 4 March 1901; 29 March 1901, File 30, #79.200C, UCCA.
35. Russell to MacKay, 9 April 1901, File 31, #79.200C, UCCA.
36. Russell to MacKay, 28 June 1901, File 31, #79.200C, UCCA.
37. Russell to MacKay, 28 June 1901, File 31, #79.200C, UCCA.
38. Russell to MacKay, 28 June 1901, File 31, #79.200C, UCCA.
39. Campbell to MacKay, 18 July 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
40. Swartout to Campbell, 17 July 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
41. Oswald to MacKay, 26 August 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
42. Oswald to MacKay, 26 August 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
43. Campbell, notes attached to "Statement made by Chief Joe of Ehatisaht at Victoria, 12 May 1903," File 50, #79.200C, UCCA.
44. Swartout to Campbell, 23 July 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
45. Swartout to MacKay, 25 July 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
46. Swartout to MacKay, 7 November 1901, File 33, #79.200C, UCCA.

47. Swartout to MacKay, 2 September 1901, File 32; 7 November 1901, File 32; 14 August 1902, File 41; Swartout to Miss Greig, 26 September 1902, File 42; and Russell to MacKay, 29 May 1902, File 38; 5 July 1902, File 40, #79.200C, UCCA.
48. MacKay to Swartout, 19 November 1901; MacKay to Russell, 6 December 1901, *MacKay Letter Book, Nov. 1901-July 1902*, #79.185C, UCCA.
49. MacKay to Russell, 26 December 1901, *MacKay Letter Book, Nov. 1901-July 1902*, #79.185C, UCCA.
50. MacKay to Swartout, 19 November 1901; MacKay to Russell, 13 January 1902; 25 June 1902; 31 July 1902, *MacKay Letter Book, Nov. 1901-July 1902*, #79.185C, UCCA.
51. Swartout to Campbell, 8 July 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
52. Swartout to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 29 August 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
53. Campbell to MacKay, 17 August 1904, File 65, #79.200C, UCCA.
54. John T. Ross, *Reminiscences*, unpublished manuscript, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 62.
55. MacKay to Neill, 4 December 1908, File 118; cf. MacKay to Campbell, 24 February 1909, File 119, #79.200C, UCCA.
56. MacKay to Campbell, 8 March 1909, File 121, #79.200C, UCCA.
57. Russell to MacKay, 14 June 1901, File 31, #79.200C, UCCA.
58. Russell to MacKay, 9 April 1901, File 31, #79.200C, UCCA.
59. Russell to MacKay, 4 September 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
60. Russell to MacKay, 27 September 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
61. Russell to MacKay, 16 September 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
62. Russell to MacKay, 24 March 1900, File 26, #79.200C, UCCA.
63. Russell to MacKay, 9 April 1901, File 31, #79.200C, UCCA.
64. Russell to MacKay, 23 February 1901, File 30, #79.200C, UCCA.
65. Russell to MacKay, 9 April 1901, File 31, #79.200C, UCCA.

66. Russell to MacKay, 14 June 1901, File 31; cf. 3 July 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
67. Russell to MacKay, 3 July 1901, File 32; cf. Russell to Swartout, 3 July 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA.
68. Russell to MacKay, 9 September 1901, File 32; 2 July, 1902, File 40; 27 September 1902, File 42; 25 October 1902, File 43; Russell to MacKay, 2 March 1903, File 48, #79.200C, UCCA.
69. J.C. Butchart to Mackay, 14 January 1904, File 58, #79.200C, UCCA.
70. Russell to Campbell, 3 November 1902, File 44, #79.200C, UCCA.
71. Russell to MacKay, 13 August 1903, File 53, #79.200C, UCCA.
72. Swartout to MacKay, 3 August 1903; 10 August 1903, File 53, #79.200C, UCCA.
73. Frank Pedley to MacKay, 5 November 1903, File 56, #79.200C, UCCA.
74. James Motion to MacKay, 19 December 1903, File 57, #79.200C, UCCA.
75. Campbell to MacKay, 7 January 1904, File 58, #79.200C, UCCA.
76. Although it does not change my conclusion, we should notice Swartout's comment to MacKay: "It is not wholly because of the RC's that we would build at Ah. The Rc's only make it more urgent. If Boarding schools are to be the solution of this work . . . there should be one at Ah" (5 August 1901, File 32, #79.200C, UCCA).
77. *Report of The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1996), I, 384.

