

The Lemert Thesis and the Sechelt Mission

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Nineteenth-century Oblate Indian missionary practice in the Pacific Northwest, and in British Columbia in particular, has been characterized since the 1960s by both historians and anthropologists as a system of total social and cultural control.¹ These Oblate missions are said to have disrupted, and virtually destroyed, the cultures of the Indians and to have imposed upon them a rigid and totalitarian system of social and spiritual control administered through a network of native church chiefs, watchmen, and spies, all reporting to the priest, who ruled like a monarch over the mission village and its people.²

The first modern scholarly account of this authoritarian rule by the Oblates is found in a 1954 article by Dr. Edwin Lemert titled "The Life and Death of an Indian State" and published in the academic anthropological journal *Human Organization*.³ Lemert was then the Chairman of the Department of Economics, Geography, and Sociology at the University of California at Davis and had spent five weeks on the British Columbia coast

¹ For examples see John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 126; Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977), pp. 124, 139, and 145; Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informed History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1978), pp. 244-47.

² Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia*, Vol. 1, *The Impact of the Whiteman* (Victoria, B.C.: The Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Provincial Secretary and Government Services, 1965), p. 87. See also Grant, Fisher, and Knight, above citation.

³ Edwin Lemert, "The Life and Death of an Indian State," in *Human Organization*, Vol. 13, pp. 23-27.

in 1951, followed by a few weeks each in the summers of 1952 and 1953.⁴ During that time he visited a number of Indian villages, possibly including the Sechelt village, conducting interviews with the Indians about their problems with alcohol. In the course of those interviews he may have heard stories about nineteenth-century Sechelt village life under the Oblate missionaries. In his subsequent book on the Indian people and alcoholism, *Alcohol and the Northwest Coast Indians*, Lemert's view of general missionary activity on the British Columbia coast was not particularly negative. He commented on the work that Christian missionaries of all denominations did in controlling the deleterious effects of white contact and the contemporary perception among the Indians that their moral and spiritual life was better in those earlier days. Lemert reports that the older Indians believed their community and culture was more cohesive under the missions system than it had been since that time.⁵

In his book, Lemert did not specifically state that the missionaries were totally disruptive to Indian culture. However, in his "Life and Death of an Indian State" article of the same year, he took the view that they had been extremely disruptive and cited the Oblate mission at Sechelt village as showing historical evidence of this disruption. This historical evidence of cultural disruption between 1870 and 1904 was:

- 1) "The almost complete sloughing-off... of their ceremonial culture, that is potlatches and dancing rituals."
- 2) "The relatively complete Catholicization of the tribes within a very short period of time, under the aegis and control of Bishop Durieu's system."
- 3) "The abrupt decay of this system of social control under external influences and internal changes within the Oblate Order."⁶

Lemert reiterates that the Sechelt mission was one of the most successful of the Oblate coastal missions and was seen by outsiders as the Catholic Church's rival to William Duncan's widely known Church Missionary Society mission at Metlakhatla. The complete conversion of the Sechelt to

⁴ Edwin Lemert, *Alcohol and the Northwest Coast Indians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p. 303.

⁵ *Ibid.*, interview with a Kwakwilt man and his wife, pp. 390-92.

⁶ Lemert, "The Life and Death of an Indian State," p. 23.

Catholicism between 1862 and 1871 is said to have been the fastest conversion of a tribal group in the history of the Oblate's Pacific Northwest missions.⁷ Having achieved this startling rate of conversion, Lemert's article implies that the Oblates then settled down to a "Life" of forty years of authoritarian rule over a model population of Christian Indians who were kept devoutly practising the Catholic liturgical life and living the moral precepts of the faith under pain of public condemnation, flogging, and interdict. Lemert argues that the system of Oblate rule at the Sechelt mission finally reached its "Death" by 1910 because of the Oblates' failure to provide enough priests from France to run the system and their failure to establish a native priesthood to replace those original French priests. Their replacement by English-speaking Oblates who, Lemert asserts, were critical of the French Oblate's autocratic approach to the Indian missions, spelled the death of the Oblate mission system – not, however, before it had destroyed the traditional Sechelt culture.⁸

Lemert's article has become the accepted story of daily life at the Sechelt mission between 1860 and 1910. Since the publication of the article in 1954, historians and anthropologists have accepted Lemert's assessment of the Sechelt mission and have carefully footnoted their citations to his article as the basis for their information. Many substantive writings on the Indians of British Columbia and their relations with white culture have accepted Lemert's view of the Sechelt mission as accurate and have extrapolated that view to be characteristic of all Oblate missions that operated in the Pacific Northwest.

One of the earliest, and itself most influential, of these writings is anthropologist Wilson Duff's *The Indian History of British Columbia*, published in 1964. Duff bases his whole view of Catholic Indian missions in British Columbia and the system of authoritarian control exercised by the Oblate missionaries on Lemert's article.⁹ Duff uses Lemert's example of the Sechelt mission and the adjacent Coast Salish communities as a generalizable example for all Catholic missions in British Columbia despite an earlier reference to the writings of the Oblate Father A.G. Morice on the missionary history of the province.¹⁰ Had Duff made more use of Morice's

⁷ *Ibid.* Lemert cites these statistics from a 1942 article "Applied Anthropology in 1860" by anthropologist Homer G. Barnett, *Applied Anthropology* 1, no. 3 (1942), pp. 19-32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹ Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia*, Vol. 1, *The Impact of the White Man* (Victoria, B.C.: Anthropology in British Columbia, Memoir No. 5, 1964), pp. 91-92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91. Duff here cites Adrien G. Morice, OMI, *The History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada* (Toronto, 1910).

writings they would have provided him with a contrary, albeit uncritical, viewpoint to that of Lemert.

Historian Robin Fisher, in *Contact and Conflict*, was the next scholar to base his assessment of Catholic missionary work in British Columbia on Lemert's article.¹¹ Fisher virtually paraphrases Lemert's account of the Sechelt mission and accepts Lemert's assertion of the total cultural capitulation by the Sechelt Indians to the authority of the Oblate priests. He does, however, draw attention in a footnote to Jacqueline Kennedy's 1969 essay, in which she expressed scepticism regarding Lemert's assertions.¹² Despite the note of caution about the accuracy of Lemert's article sounded by Kennedy, Fisher follows Lemert's and Duff's assertions and implies that all Catholic missions in British Columbia matched Lemert's authoritarian model and were, in essence, small, priestly controlled, theocratic states organized to promote rapid cultural change. It is a view which had been echoed as well by historian E. Palmer Patterson III in his book *The Canadian Indian*, who cited Lemert's article to support his argument that the Oblate system was one of theocratic rule. Patterson points out, however, that this rule tended to be "indirect" and uses Lemert's article to support his viewpoint that tribal identities were left largely "intact."¹³

Fisher's seminal study of Indian and white relations in British Columbia was followed in 1978 with another influential book by anthropologist Rolf Knight on *Indians at Work* in the province. Knight directly cites Lemert's article three times to show that the Oblate missions in British Columbia were instrumental agencies of cultural assimilation to meet the labour needs of the white controlled mercantile and industrial economy of the province. Knight further footnotes Lemert twice in conjunction with other writers such as Cronin and Duff to support his argument but fails to draw attention to the fact that Cronin would not have agreed with Lemert's view.¹⁴ In addition, the citing of Duff was an indirect citing of Lemert, as the references cited by Knight refer to the Lemert citation in Duff.

Some recent Catholic historians have also tended to accept uncritically Lemert's assessment of the Sechelt mission. For example, Margaret Whitehead cites Lemert three times in her "Introduction" to the memoirs of

¹¹ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, p. 139.

¹² Fisher, p. 139, citing Jacqueline Judith Kennedy (now Gresko) (B.A. Honours Essay, University of British Columbia, 1969).

¹³ E. Palmer Patterson III, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500* (Toronto: Collier-Macmillan Canada Ltd., 1972), pp. 165 and 166.

¹⁴ Knight, *Indians at Work*, p. 244, citing Kay Cronin, *Cross in the Wilderness* (Toronto: The Mission Press, 1960).

Father Nicholas Coccola, OMI.¹⁵ These citations are used by Whitehead to support an authoritarian picture of the Oblate Indian missions in British Columbia. And while Protestant historian John Webster Grant does not directly cite Lemert, he cites the Duff and Fisher assessments of the Oblate system, assessments as shown above based upon Lemert, in supporting a similar portrait of these missions.¹⁶

Lemert's article has had an influence on the political discourse of Indian and white relations in British Columbia, particularly in respect to Indian Land claims. For example, the writings of political scientist Paul Tennant of the University of British Columbia on the Indian Land question in British Columbia have been influential and widely accepted among both Indians and whites. Tennant has drawn on Lemert's view of the Catholic missions both in his 1982 paper "Native Indian Political Organization in British Columbia, 1900-1969," wherein he states, citing Lemert, that the missions were "local theocracies" of internal colonialism,¹⁷ and in his 1990 book *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics*. In this book, Tennant directly cites Lemert four times in describing the Oblate "social control system" which operated in British Columbia.¹⁸

The above review demonstrates how Lemert's article on the Oblate mission at Sechelt has been accepted and has influenced the continuing academic and public historical, anthropological, and political discourse surrounding the role of those missions in the Indian and white relations of nineteenth-century British Columbia. Given this influence, it is surprising to find that the article appears to have been a side issue to Lemert's main research interest on addictive behaviour. His primary purpose of visiting the Pacific Northwest was to collect data related to research on concepts of cultural determinants to addictive behaviour, in this particular case alcoholism, among Indian groups. Lemert's book on that alcoholism, *Alcohol and the Northwest Coast Indians*, was a contribution to that research project. The article on "The Life and Death of an Indian State" did not add to that research and was outside his principal interest area.

¹⁵ Margaret Whitehead, "Introduction" to *They Call Me Father: Memoirs of Father Nicholas Coccola*, ed. Margaret Whitehead (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988).

¹⁶ Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, p. 126.

¹⁷ Paul Tennant, "Native Indian Political Organization in British Columbia, 1900-1969. A Response to internal Colonialism," in *B.C. Studies* 55 (Autumn 1982), pp. 3-49, p. 18.

¹⁸ Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia 1849-1989* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), pp. 73-80.

Lemert's prior and subsequent extensive research and publications on alcohol and, later, other addictive behaviour and substance abuse have been widely cited in the behavioural sciences literature. However, Lemert does not appear to have ever written before or since about the British Columbia Oblate missions, the Catholic Church missions in Canada, or the socio-cultural lifestyle of the Sechelt band. Within his own sphere of scholarly interests and activity in the behavioural sciences his Sechelt article has been cited only three times between 1966 and 1984, twice by the same writer.¹⁹ It has not even been cited by Lemert! Lemert's other behavioural science writings are cited extensively in each of those years. Over the last thirty-five years his Sechelt article has been widely and uncritically accepted as a definitive piece of research by the regional historical, anthropological, and political science community and the Indian people of British Columbia while it has been singularly irrelevant and unimportant within Lemert's own area of research and to his own scholarly community.

The impact which this article has had on the studies of both Indian and white relations in British Columbia and the picture which it has been instrumental in creating about the Oblate missions and Catholic Church in the province requires that the arguments and assertions which Lemert has put forward and the circumstances and the sources which enabled him to write such an account be evaluated in detail. Having detailed Lemert's argument and assertions above, the circumstances and sources of his writing the article will now be examined.

A major problem with both Lemert's book on alcoholism and his Sechelt article is that nowhere does he state which Indians he interviewed or how many interviews he conducted in each village or where the villages were. Lemert never states in either publication that he actually visited or spoke to any member of the Sechelt band. His information on the Coast Salish culture in general and the Sechelt Indians in particular, is heavily footnoted from the earlier studies and publications of the anthropologist Homer G. Barnett. Lemert's information on the Oblate system draws heavily on one published hagiographical article of Bishop E. M. Buno, OMI, one published promotional article by Father William Brabender, OMI, and two other unpublished writings on the Oblates.²⁰ He does directly quote one Indian oral

¹⁹ The Social Sciences Citation Index is only available from 1966 onward, and therefore I was unable to check citations to the article between 1954, when it was published, and 1965. The article was cited once in 1967, 1979, and 1981.

²⁰ E.M. Buno, "Bishop Durieu's System," in *Etudes Oblates* 1(1942), pp. 193-209, and William Brabender, "Mission de Sechelt: Ses pénibles débuts, ses épreuves, ses succès," in *Missions des Missionnaires Oblats* 253 (1935), pp. 37-41. The unpublished articles are: Gabriel Dionne, "Histoire des méthodes utilisées par les Oblats de Marie Imaculée dans l'évangélisation des Indiens du Versant Pacifique

statement in his text, obtained presumably from the “pathetic coteries of a few elderly Salish” remaining faithful to the Oblate system, but he fails to footnote it or identify the source.²¹ We therefore cannot be certain that Lemert had any amount of direct oral evidence from either Indian or non-missionary white sources as to life in the Sechelt mission village. Rather his main sources of information appear to be entirely documentary and secondary.

Lemert supports his three claims for cultural capitulation with the following evidence. He states, citing Brabender, that the first positive contact with the Sechelt was initiated by the Indians in 1862 and by 1871, only nine years later, “the sacrament of confirmation was administered to the entire Sechelt tribe.” As Lemert comments, “this set a record for proselytization on the Northwest Coast . . . unequaled . . . even by William Duncan.” From these “confirmations,” Lemert argued that the socio-cultural disruption of the Sechelt must have been “substantial” as the Oblate Bishop would not have confirmed any Indians who were not fully participating in the liturgy and living a Christian lifestyle.²² Using a *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* argument, Lemert states that the traditional lifestyle must therefore have been eradicated very quickly after the Oblate’s arrival at the village for these confirmations to have taken place.²³

au dix-neuvième siècle” (M.A. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1947), and George Forbes, “Origins of the Archdiocese of Vancouver” (cited by Lemert as an “unpublished, unedited paper”). This particular Forbes manuscript is held in the Oblate Collection at the Special Collections Division of the Main Library of the University of British Columbia, and a copy is also held in the Oblate Archives of St. Peter’s Province in Vancouver.

²¹ Edwin Lemert, “The Life and Death of an Indian State,” pp. 26 and 27.

²² Lemert does not make a distinction here between Catholic Church theory and Oblate practices in the field. In certain circumstances there does appear to have been confirmation of Indians who were barely knowledgeable of the Faith. See the problem faced by Lejacq at Fort St. James with adult “Catholic” Indians baptized by Demers in 1842 and then left without instruction until 1861. Rodney Fowler, “The New Caledonia Mission: An Historical Sketch of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in North Central British Columbia,” in Thomas Thomer, ed., *Sa T’sse* (Prince George: College of New Caledonia Press, 1989).

²³ Responsibility for the creation of this impression of the “success” of the Catholic missionaries must also lie with Bunoz and Brabender. Bishop Bunoz, OMI, was writing a pastoral document to inform and encourage his fellow missionary priests to continue with their work and to present a public image of the “success” of the Oblate missionaries to members of the Catholic laity upon whom the Oblates relied for financial contributions. Brabender was writing a promotional article for much the same reasons. Bunoz’s article was essentially a normative, rather than positive, description of the Oblate system, while Brabender’s was essentially Oblate promotional rhetoric. Lemert’s error was in accepting these documents as accurate reports of daily life at the Sechelt mission and not taking into account the intended

Lemert then gives a detailed description of the Oblate System, also called the Durieu System, citing extensively from the Bunoz article and the Gabriel Dionne thesis, which also drew heavily on the same Bunoz article.²⁴ As a description of the ideals of the Oblate system, Lemert's article is not inaccurate. The problem is that he uncritically accepts that the ideals of the Durieu system were fully operational at the Sechelt mission from the first contact and continued at full strength until 1910. By that time, according to Lemert, the system had slowly died starting with the prosecution of Father Chirouse for approving the flogging of an Indian woman in Lillooet in 1892, the death of Bishop Durieu in 1899, and finishing with the deaths and the retirements of the Oblates' "French and Belgium personnel" and their replacement with "English-speaking Oblates," which occurred between 1890 and 1910.²⁵

Lemert constantly speculates as to the deleterious effects that the full application of the Oblate system must have had on traditional Sechelt culture and lifestyle. Unfortunately he presents no independent documentary evidence, or oral history, to substantiate his speculations that the system was fully in effect or that the Sechelt lifestyle and culture suffered major disruptions because of the Mission. Lemert is strangely silent on any oral evidence he may have obtained from his field work. Given this lack of information in both his book and his article, it is questionable whether he even went to Sechelt during his field trips. His citation of the work of Homer Barnett suggests Barnett to have been his source of information on asserted changes to the Sechelts' lifestyle and culture. If this is the case, then his account rests on very tenuous ground.

audience of Bunoz's and Brabender's articles.

²⁴ Bunoz, "Bishop Durieu's System," pp. 193-209, and Dionne, "Histoire des Méthodes Utilisées." Bunoz's description of the Durieu system follows fairly closely the outline of the system which Bishop Durieu himself wrote out for Father Lejacq. However, Bunoz failed to note, as Durieu had done, that the Indians left to their own devices would often not maintain the system in its ideal format. It should also be noted that nowhere in this document does Bishop Durieu mention, or even countenance, corporal punishment for transgressors. Punishments are of a religious and penitential nature. In another letter, Bishop Durieu noted that the floggings, which his System was often accused of introducing, were exercised among the Interior Indian Chiefs to punish their members for a variety of minor and major secular offences before the Oblates arrived in their midst. Chief Justice Begbie wrote an opinion to the Bishop on the legality of the corporal punishment exercised by the Interior Indian Chiefs over members of their own tribe. As Bishop Durieu commented, before the coming of the Europeans it was the chiefs' only ultimate means of social control, when all other methods used by the tribe had failed to reform the transgressor. (Archdiocese of Vancouver Archives, Oblate Papers, Holy Rosary Accession).

²⁵ Lemert, "Life and Death of an Indian State," pp. 26 and 27.

Homer G. Barnett, an anthropologist, conducted field work on the West Coast of British Columbia in 1935 and 1936. He published a seminal work on the ethnography of the Coast Salish peoples in 1955, based substantially on his earlier field work. Barnett stated in his book that his two informants on the Sechelt Band were Joe Dally and Charlie Roberts.²⁶ Barnett gives no further details of these interviews in his published book, but his field journals for 1935 and 1936 contain more information.²⁷ Barnett noted that he had sailed up the coast on a freighter which was delivering supplies to the isolated communities. In 1935, Barnett interviewed Joe Dally of Sechelt village.²⁸ The notes on this interview are fairly extensive, but there is no mention of earlier or current daily life and cultural practices under the Oblate mission.²⁹ Barnett interviewed Joe Dally again and also Charley Roberts on his 1936 field trip.³⁰ He noted that Roberts was a “doctor,” suggesting that perhaps Roberts held some shamanistic rank among the Sechelt. Dally was not able to be of much help to Barnett, as he was sick in bed and it was “impossible to hold his mind or get anything definitely” from him.³¹ Once again, these notes with Dally do not deal with any cultural life and practices under the Oblate system at Sechelt. The notes to the interview with Roberts do give a rather disjointed account of Sechelt daily life, but it is unclear which time period is under discussion. There is, however, no mention in these notes either about the Oblate mission or Sechelt Catholic practices.

Based upon the field notes, the very short interview with Roberts appears to be the extent of Barnett’s investigation of the Sechelt village history. Even then the notes support the continuance of traditional cultural practices during the unspecified time period under discussion rather than their disruption. If Lemert relied on Barnett’s field work, Lemert’s Sechelt account rests on minimal information from one individual reported to a third party twenty years earlier.

Lemert’s *post hoc* assertions as to what must have occurred if the Oblate system was in operation has been taken by subsequent historians and social

²⁶ Homer G. Barnett, *The Coast Salish of British Columbia* (Eugene, Ore.: University of Oregon, 1955), pp. 174 and 175.

²⁷ Homer G. Barnett, “Field Journal 1935-36” (Homer G. Barnett Papers, Special Collections Division, Main Library, University of British Columbia).

²⁸ It is not stated in the Field Note Book exactly where this interview took place.

²⁹ Barnett’s notes of the interview cover pp. 1-88 of Book File 1-4, Sechelt and Squamish, 1935.

³⁰ Once again Barnett fails to mention where the interviews took place.

³¹ Barnett, Field Note Book File 1-8, pp. 29-30. For notes on the interview with Charley Roberts, see pp. 11-25, and full notes on Dally, see pp. 27-30.

scientists to be a statement of what *did* occur at the Sechelt Mission. The historical documentary evidence, however, fails to support such an account.³²

The history of the Sechelt Mission compiled from primary Oblate and secular documents suggests that the impact of the Mission was considerably less disruptive of traditional culture than Lemert asserts and also that the Mission lacked much of the practice and image of a model Christian Indian community. It suited both the Catholic hierarchy, secular officials, and the media of the time to extol this image to the distant European community as a counter to, and as a confirmation for, the fame of William Duncan's Protestant "success" at the Metlakhatla mission. The history of the Sechelt mission does not support Lemert's view of the Oblate mission at Sechelt as a theocratic autocracy of the priesthood.

The Sechelt band made contact with the Oblates in New Westminster in 1862, when two *sie'ems* of the Pender Harbour band, along with their families, came to ask Father Fouquet, OMI, for a missionary to come to their village.³³ Fouquet thought that the reason for the request lay in the great amount of disruption being caused by alcoholism at the village. Only one of the *sie'ems* sought baptism but was refused. The others in the group appear to have been more interested in forming a Temperance Society at their village.

The group spent five days receiving Catholic instruction from Fouquet and returned to Pender Harbour. There they built a chapel and the number of neophytes increased to about twenty. Leaders from other Sechelt villages also sought out Fouquet at New Westminster in 1862 and 1863, and two years later, in 1864, Fouquet asked that the leaders bring all the Sechelt people to New Westminster. Forty Sechelt canoes arrived at New Westminster on May 24, 1864, to be presented to Governor James Douglas on the occasion of Queen Victoria's birthday celebrations. Fouquet and the Sechelts then took part in a mission, and it was then that the first Sechelt baptisms took place. Those present were also vaccinated for smallpox. Fouquet also appointed the various *sie'ems* to official lay positions in the Church, such as bell-man³⁴ to sound the hours of the liturgical offices. These appointments did not disrupt the traditional band power structure as these *sie'ems* had rank and were already power-holders in their villages.

³² It also fails to support the accounts of Bunoz and Brabender.

³³ For a full account of the history of the Sechelt Mission see Rodney Fowler, "The Oblate System at the Sechelt Mission 1862-1899" (B.A. Honours Essay, Department of History, Simon Fraser University, 1987), especially Chapter 3.

³⁴ In the Chinook *lingua franca* of the Pacific Northwest, the bell-man was called the *tin-tin man*. This term probably derives from the Latin word *tintinnabulum*, meaning a small bell.

Fouquet and his fellow Oblates then made annual visits to the scattered Sechelt villages from 1865 to 1867. In 1868, a single mission was held at the site of present-day Sechelt, which was then a summer camp site for one of the bands, and all the Sechelt bands gathered at that spot. The Sechelt people built traditional temporary cedar bark houses there in 1868 and replaced them with more permanent traditional timber lodges in 1872 when the first European-style church was also built. These lodges were only used during the annual mission and afterwards the Sechelt returned to their regular villages.

Lemert's claim, citing Brabender, that all the Sechelt were baptized by 1867 and all were confirmed by 1871 is simply not true. Baptisms and confirmations were ongoing events at the annual missions and Father Thomas, OMI, was still baptizing elderly Sechelt Indians in 1895, and in 1897 he administered the sacrament of confirmation to a seventy-year-old man. This was twenty-five years after Lemert claims they were all confirmed. In terms of priestly control of the natives' culture and lifestyle, ten years after the Sechelt first contacted Fouquet in 1862, the Oblates still made only one annual visit to the tribe. There was no resident priest at the mission or among the scattered Sechelt villages.

G.M. Sproat, the Indian Land Claims Commissioner, visited the present-day Sechelt village site in 1876, and found it inhabited year-round by the Indians. He noted that the native church officers were enforcing the moral and spiritual code of the village through the use of fines, punishments, and flogging for transgressors. Sproat was concerned about this "ecclesiastical or individual authority," as he called it, but only wished it in the hands of the government authorities, not the native church chiefs.³⁵ Sproat would have had morality enforced by the State rather than the Church, but he still thought it a good thing for the Indians' acculturation and "progress." There is no evidence to show exactly how these church chiefs were appointed, but a 1868 letter of Fouquet's indicated that he wanted the native people to select the individuals, and he would confirm their choice.³⁶

From 1872 to 1904, there was no resident priest at the Sechelt Mission. The Sechelt people practised a mixture of traditional subsistence fishing and

³⁵ Sproat's view of the Indian justice system appears to agree with Begbié's legal opinion, at least for more serious crimes, which Begbie sent to Durieu. It is of interest that Sproat reports that the floggings had moved to the coast bands. Durieu noted in his earlier letter to Lejacq that the floggings were not practised among the coastal bands. (See footnote 7 above, and Fowler, "The Oblate System at the Sechelt Mission," see footnote 12 above.)

³⁶ This procedure was advocated by Durieu in his letter to Lejacq (see footnote 7 above).

gathering, together with independent lumbering. Decisions about band actions were conducted in the traditional ways and there is no evidence that the Oblate priest was involved or consulted about these secular and economic matters. Rather than change this traditional system, the Oblates actively advocated its continuance. Bishop D'Herbomez wrote on more than one occasion to the Provincial and Federal governments during the 1870s to protest on behalf of the Indian people of British Columbia against the adoption in British Columbia of the large agricultural-style reservation system used in the Prairies and in the United States. The Bishop wrote that the Indians of British Columbia "will be contented and satisfied if the Gov't will leave them in their Villages, their little gardens, their cemeteries and their fisheries." He went on to conclude that he was "fully persuaded that the ancient 'traditional' system, modified and put into practice by the spirit and liberality of the Gov't can only bring happy results."³⁷ These official sentiments by the Bishop of a missionary group now said to have intentionally set out to destroy the Indian's traditional lifestyle and culture appear to contradict Lemert's contention.

Annual missions were held by the Oblates in British Columbia throughout the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, and the Sechelt people became well known for their participation in the Passion Play pageants which were staged throughout the Lower Fraser Valley at various mission sites. During that time the Sechelt tribe became wealthy through fishing and logging in the area and built up the housing stock and service infrastructure of the village. In 1890 they paid for and built a new church and a spectacular pageant was staged to celebrate its consecration. Throughout all these developments, there was *no resident priest* at the Mission. The documents indicate that, in fact, the Indians probably saw Government agents, Commissions of Inquiry, lumber barons, timber cruisers, loggers, tradespeople, and white settlers during this period more than they did a Catholic priest.

It was not until the twentieth century, in 1904, that the first Catholic school opened, complete with nuns as teachers, and that the first resident priest came to Sechelt. By that time, many other social and economic changes had taken place in the Sechelts' traditional lifestyle, and these must certainly have been as disruptive, or more disruptive, than the arrival of one priest and a few French-Canadian nuns.

In conclusion, there is little historical evidence to suggest that the Sechelt mission alone was particularly disruptive of traditional Sechelt

³⁷ Louis D'Herbomez to H.L. Langevin, 29 September 1871, Canada, Parliament, *British Columbia Report of the Hon. H.L. Langevin, C.B., Minister of Public Works* (Ottawa: J.B. Taylor, 1872).

culture and lifestyle. Any disruption which occurred was much more likely to have come from a social or economic source rather than from the Oblate mission. Unlike most other Oblate missions in British Columbia, Sechelt never had a resident priest throughout the nineteenth century. Given this absence, it would seem hard to agree with Lemert's contention that this village was under an autocratic priestly rule for forty years. To the contrary, the Catholic presence in Sechelt expanded at the very time that Lemert contended that it was in full-scale decline.

This examination of the Oblate records raises serious questions about the veracity and substance of Lemert's claims in his influential article. Given the extensive citation in the regional literature of Lemert's article, it is unfortunate that it has been so influential with scholars who have simply cited his untested assertions as facts. These speculations have fuelled a picture of the Sechelt mission in particular, and the Catholic missions in British Columbia in general, which is less than accurate. It is to be hoped that this article will have helped to question and partially correct this picture.