

*Positioning the Missionary:
John Booth Good and the Confluence of Cultures
in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia*

Brett Christophers

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The title of this book is significant. Rather than presenting a straightforward historical narrative, Christophers positions his interpretation of a nineteenth-century mission to the Nlha7káp̓mx (Thompson Indians) near Lytton within three frameworks. In so doing he brings fresh insights into the motivations and paradoxes of one branch of the international missionary movement. Some of the more important of these concern missionary attitudes towards the sexual relationships between Native women and men (Indigenous and White), hence the play in the book's title on the so-called "missionary position."

The main object of this study is John Booth Good, who was born and trained as an Anglican missionary in England. Good worked for five years in Nanaimo before being reassigned, by Bishop George Hills of the Diocese of Columbia, to the mining town of Yale in 1866. In March 1867, three groups of Nlha7káp̓mx invited Good to relocate his mission to the Lytton area. Concluding, as missionaries are wont to do, that this solicitation expressed the workings of Divine Providence, Good overcame the objections of his bishop and moved. The first few years were encouraging. By 1870, Good had some 2,000 Nlha7káp̓mx under instruction. He purchased a large

site outside of Lytton, which he hoped would become a centre where Christian Nlha7káp̓mx would settle and farm. With the assistance of Nlha7káp̓mx converts, he began learning the local language, extended Christian instruction to the villages, and introduced a system of watchmen to monitor behaviour among Christians in the outlying villages. Despite a promising beginning, the mission soon began to falter. Good proved unable to manage his meagre funds, leaving the mission in debt more years than not. The Nlha7káp̓mx proved uninterested in settling at the St. Paul Mission, forcing Good to make extended trips to his widely dispersed parishioners. In addition, Good remained responsible for providing religious services to a growing White population. As the years passed, an increasing number of converts ran afoul of the mission's moral code, forcing some out and alienating others. Only eight years into his mission, Good was already considering resigning. From 1876 on, he spent each winter in Victoria, where his wife and children had relocated. In 1883 he closed his part-time mission for good.

Christophers positions Good's mission first within the framework of Nlha7káp̓mx ethnography, as recorded by James Teit. He specifically addresses the questions of why the Nlha7káp̓mx

first invited Good to settle among them and later largely rejected his mission, and he also considers the social changes caused by the missionary intrusion. I found this the least satisfying level of analysis, as it rarely rises above common-sense observation.

Christophers' second framework, an analysis of missionary discussions, is far more interesting and convincing than his first. He spends much of the early chapters discussing the deeper theological motivations for missions, exploring both their ideological and practical effects. It is, to say the least, very unusual to find an intelligent discussion of Pauline mission theology in a secular history. Christophers also fruitfully explores differences between Good and Bishop Hills, particularly concerning the treatment of polygamous marriage (although, surprisingly, Christophers does not seem to be aware that most Tractarian Anglicans regarded marriage as a sacrament).

Within his third framework, colonial discourse, Christophers strongly supports the emerging scholarly consensus that stresses the diverse nature of colonial projects and voices. He rightly asserts that missions had a basic religious and humanistic motivation that distinguished them from state and commercial colonial enterprises. His interpretation of the ways that

Pauline theology conditioned Anglican notions of space and strategies of mission puts this insight into good effect, as does a fascinating discussion of church attitudes towards common-law marriages between Native women and White men.

Christophers' account of the Lytton mission itself is surprisingly thin. He provides only the barest sketches of the mission, converts, or Good himself. Indeed, in some chapters Good appears only as a bit player. As a consequence, Christophers' discussions often have a rather ethereal quality. I do not doubt, to give one instance, that Good was aware of Augustine's condemnation of the fourth-century Donatist movement, but I do wonder whether this ancient argument really explains much about his immediate motivations and actions in Lytton. *Positioning the Missionary* works best as an informed and intelligent commentary on some general themes of the Protestant missionary movement in the late nineteenth century, with John Booth Good as a convenient vehicle. Regional historians may object to the inadequacies of the history, while students of mission may take exception to Christophers' apologetic tone. Still, the book deserves a close reading for its provocative insights and tentative opening of new grounds for future exploration.