

Ward, W. Peter

The Oriental Immigrant and Canada's Protestant Clergy,

The Oriental Immigrant and Canada's Protestant Clergy, 1858-1925

W. PETER WARD

At the heart of Protestant thought on the Oriental immigrant in Canada lay a paradox. Church leaders were of two minds on the Asian in their midst. On one hand he appealed to their charitable and evangelical instincts. His spiritual health, his moral welfare, and his social well-being all attracted church interest. On the other, the Oriental challenged the cultural identity of many Protestant Canadians. His seeming threat to national customs and traditions aroused their concern for Canada's social inheritance. Thus, throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Protestant response to the Oriental immigrant was impaled upon a central contradiction. Simultaneously the church accepted and rejected the stranger from Asia.

At the turn of the century nine-tenths of Canada's 22,000 Asians lived in British Columbia where they constituted eleven per cent of the population. By the early 1920's their numbers had grown to more than 56,000 and, although many had moved eastward in the intervening years, three-fourths still remained in the west coast province. Yet the province's white community had also grown rapidly and by 1921 the Asian proportion of the provincial population had shrunk to less than eight per cent. Nevertheless Orientals remained a large and visible minority in the province, one which excited a good deal of animosity. Not surprisingly, when Canada's Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches faced the problem of Oriental immigration, they fixed special attention on the Asian residents of British Columbia.

Two distinct patterns can be seen in Protestant reactions to immigrants from the Orient.¹ One was characteristic of Protestant missionaries who

¹ The general Canadian reaction to Oriental immigration has been discussed at length in Tien-fang Cheng, *Oriental Immigration in Canada* (Shanghai, 1931); Charles James Woodsworth, *Canada and the Orient: A Study in International Relations* (Toronto, 1941); Charles H. Young and Eileen R. Y. Reid, *The Japanese Canadians with a Second Part on Oriental Standards of Living* by W. A. Carrothers, ed. H. A. Innis (Toronto, 1938); Robert Joseph Gowen, "Canada's Relations with Japan, 1895-1922" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1966); Robert Edward Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia,

worked amongst Canada's Asians.² The other was common within the church at large. In neither case did differing attitudes distinguish the three denominations from one another. The missionary's response to Orientals was unique in the Canadian experience. While anti-Orientalism dominated public thought, particularly in British Columbia, the evangelical and humanitarian commitments of the mission worker challenged popular hostility. Furthermore the missions brought Asians and whites into direct and continuing contact in an atmosphere relatively free from tension. As a result missionaries could meet Orientals more frequently, know them more intimately, understand them more fully, and view them more favourably than could most other Canadians. Yet, like many other Canadians, Protestant missionaries were influenced by unflattering Oriental stereotypes and alarmed by Asian immigration. They agreed with the widespread belief that the Oriental threatened Canada's cultural destiny. Thus, at the heart of missionary thought lay an unrecognized conflict between evangelical humanitarianism and ethnocentric nationalism. It was a contradiction so profound that no missionary dared confront it.

This central contradiction can clearly be seen in the missionary movement's three underlying motives. The most obvious of them, the evangelical desire to win heathen souls for Christ, was especially evident within the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, those denominations most active in Oriental mission work. Many Protestant leaders considered the very presence of the pagan a rebuke to the Christian conscience. "It would indeed be a reproach to churchmen here," observed the Anglican bishop of Columbia in 1892, "if with these thousands of heathen flocking to our Christian shores, we neglect to do for them what missionaries of old have done for ourselves, and withhold from them the Gospel of our Divine Master's love and the means of His grace and salvation."³ It was

1850-1910" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, 1964); William Peter Ward, "White Canada Forever: British Columbia's Response to Orientals, 1858-1914" (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1974); Patricia E. Roy, "The Oriental 'Menace' in British Columbia," *The Twenties in Western Canada* (Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972), ed. S. M. Trofimenkoff (Ottawa, 1972), 243-58; Roy, "Educating the 'East': British Columbia and the Oriental Question in the Interwar Years," *BC Studies*, no. 18 (Summer, 1973), 50-69.

² British Columbians were concerned about Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian immigration into their province during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In discussing the problem they used the terms Oriental and Asiatic interchangeably. They are used in this same sense in this paper.

³ Church of England in Canada, Synod of the Diocese of British Columbia, *Reports* (1892), 11-12.

often suggested as well that mission work in Canada would bear fruit when the Asian returned to his homeland.⁴

Closely linked with this evangelical impulse was a charitable concern for the social problems of alien minorities. The Oriental immigrant often lived in trying circumstances. His condition appealed to the humanitarian traditions of Christianity and roused the sincere interest of Protestant missionaries. In the face of popular prejudice evangelists offered the Asian friendship, the fruits of western culture, and a new social life. These efforts, intended to help the church win converts, almost invariably reflected an attempt to stamp a narrow range of middle class, Protestant, Anglo-Canadian values upon the Oriental. But these motives do not detract from the essential humanity of the gesture. The Protestant missionary wished to foster improved inter-racial relations and to better the Asian's social and spiritual lot. His genuine sympathy for the newcomer cannot be denied.

Many Protestant missionaries were also alarmed by the Asian impact upon Canadian society. In fact, popular anxiety permeated evangelical thought. Deep within the missionary mind lurked the fear that the Asian might prove unassimilable. Yet most missionaries, unlike many Canadians, never seemed to doubt the possibility of cultural assimilation. Quite the contrary, they believed it was urgently necessary. A few justified their belief on humanitarian grounds, but most argued that assimilation was needed to ward off a grave threat to Canadian society. As the Methodist Superintendent of Oriental missions in British Columbia, Reverend Dr. S. S. Osterhout, warned,

if we fail to measurably Canadianize and Christianize this large body of people, who are so different by former environment and tradition, we shall as a people suffer considerably in the mixture. If we fail to Christianize them they will in a measure Orientalize us. If we fail to impart a touch of new life to them they in turn will touch us with a withering blight.⁵

In the eyes of the missionaries, assimilation would remove the threat of Oriental vice and paganism. Assimilation would give Asians the blessings of a higher civilization. Assimilation would transform Oriental immigrants into Canadian citizens. Assimilation would ensure national strength through cultural homogeneity. And the church, most missionaries believed, was the primary agent of the assimilation process. Since Christianity and civilization walked hand in hand, it was their duty to Christianize and

⁴ *Missionary Bulletin*, XI, no. 3 (June 1915), 526.

⁵ Osterhout, "Our Chinese Missions in British Columbia," *Missionary Bulletin*, XIII, no. 3 (July-September 1917), 499-500.

"Canadianize" the Asian newcomer. For proof of this axiom they looked no further than the homes of their converts. There they saw Asians who accepted Canadian standards, strived for Canadian goals, and worshipped Canadians' God.⁶ The Oriental-Canadian Christian was the touchstone of the missionary's success.

Missionary concern for the Oriental in British Columbia was no isolated phenomenon.⁷ It was buoyed up on the rising tide of evangelicism which swept late nineteenth century Protestantism. Growing interest in the heathen soul prompted several Protestant clergymen to evangelize the Chinese soon after their arrival on the west coast in 1858. At the outset only the Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican churches were involved in the work and then only on a rather sporadic basis. Not until 1885, when Reverend J. E. Gardner revitalized the mission in Victoria, did the Methodists place their work on a permanent organizational footing. The Anglicans and the Presbyterians followed suit in the early 1890's. Over the next two decades all three denominations founded additional missions throughout the province and the Methodists and Presbyterians extended their efforts to major centres across the nation. During the 1890's, when Japanese immigrants began to arrive in British Columbia, the Methodist Church took an active interest in them as well; in this case, however, Japanese Christians supplied the initial impulse and much of the subsequent evangelical leadership. East Indians, on the other hand, attracted considerably less attention. After 1912 the Anglicans and Presbyterians made modest efforts to reach them, but only the latter's work assumed a degree of permanence. Whatever the intensity of their commitment, each denomination devoted considerable sums of money and energy to their Oriental missions. And when the United Church was formed in 1925 it assumed the work which its predecessors had begun.⁸

Invariably missionaries had church affiliations, but only a minority

⁶ For example see Presbyterian Church in Canada, *Acts and Proceedings* (1916), appendix, 140.

⁷ Discussions of Protestant mission work amongst Orientals in Canada can be found in S. S. Osterhout, *Orientals in Canada: The Story of the Work of the United Church of Canada with Asiatics in Canada* (Toronto, 1929); N. Lascelles Ward, *Oriental Missions in British Columbia* (Westminster, 1925); Frank A. Peake, *The Anglican Church in British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1959); Tadashi Mitsui, "The Ministry of the United Church of Canada Amongst Japanese Canadians in British Columbia, 1892-1949" (M. S. Th. thesis, Union College of British Columbia, 1964); Timothy K. Nakayama, "Anglican Missions to the Japanese in Canada," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society*, VIII, no. 2 (June 1966).

⁸ After World War I Roman Catholics and Baptists entered the field in a minor way. The Presbyterian church also maintained several missions after church union in 1925.

were ordained clergymen. Most missions depended heavily upon lay volunteers who worked on a part-time basis, sustained largely by their idealism. Each denomination also relied increasingly upon leadership recruited from amongst recent converts, some of whom ultimately were granted ordination. A significant number of Canadian evangelists had encountered Orientals in the Asian mission field before coming to British Columbia. Virtually all mission leaders were new to the province, the majority being from British and eastern Canadian backgrounds.

Evangelical programmes took many forms. Missionaries usually held regular church and Sunday school services and many undertook itinerant street preaching. In addition evangelists regularly visited Orientals in their homes. Most missions also sponsored activities designed to meet the social needs of the Asian while surrounding him with a Christian atmosphere. By far the most popular were the evening English classes which, over many years, attracted thousands of Chinese and Japanese students, most of them adults. There were also educational and recreational programmes for children, teas and social gatherings for women, and hostels to provide refuge for those in need. In the late 1880's the Methodist Women's Missionary Society opened a rescue home in Victoria to assist Chinese prostitutes and slave girls who wished to flee their former ways and associates. On many occasions the home even went to court to do battle with the girls' owners for custody of the refugees.

Yet for all their zeal and dedication, the Protestant missionaries had chosen an extremely difficult task and, in consequence, they enjoyed less success than they must originally have anticipated. The greatest of all obstacles was the indifference, if not opposition, of most Orientals to the message of the Gospel. Clinging to the customs of their former homes and lands, Asians usually proved reluctant to embrace Christian ideals. A further hindrance was popular anti-Oriental sentiment, which encouraged many whites either to ignore or oppose the missionary effort. The perennial lack of adequate facilities and sufficient funds was another serious problem. Far more difficult to surmount were the cultural and linguistic barriers separating the missionary and the object of his ministrations. Few missionaries were fluent in any Eastern language and learning often proved a formidable task. Lacking the most elementary tools with which to spread the gospel, many missionaries were seriously handicapped from the outset. Consequently, Protestant missions used converts as preachers whenever possible. In some cases Oriental help was vital to the continued life of the mission.

Evangelism gave mission workers an opportunity to come to know the

Oriental immigrant in a way most Canadians could not. In turn this gave them a unique vantage point from which to view the nation's Oriental problem. Most missionaries were critical of federal immigration restrictions. Frequently they condemned the Chinese Immigration Act and its amendments as discriminatory, objectionable, and a hindrance to their evangelical efforts. Nevertheless they usually supported the concept of restriction and some even demanded that existing regulations be further tightened. In a joint petition to the Prime Minister in 1923, the superintendents of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican missions to the Orientals of British Columbia applauded the proposed abolition of the Chinese head tax and urged a more stringent law which placed Chinese immigration on "a class basis, admitting those . . . who largely enter non-competitive activities." The most desirable policy, they suggested, was one which regulated Chinese immigration by "admitting a certain number per annum, as is done in the case of Japanese, and closing the doors absolutely the moment that number has been reached in any given year; or, admitting only a certain percentage each year of the number of Chinese already in the country, that percentage to be determined by the requirements of the case, and by the number of Chinese which we could hope to assimilate and Canadianize."⁹ As the Methodist superintendent, S. S. Osterhout later declared, what was required were laws "more in keeping with the high ideals and traditions of the British Empire and the Dominion of Canada, laws free both from the suggestion of subterfuge and the element of unfairness."¹⁰

Missionaries generally considered the prejudices which underlay restrictive legislation as reprehensible as the legislation itself. In fact, during the twentieth century, they consistently objected to popular anti-Orientalism, although they seldom made their opposition public. Prejudice and discrimination offended their humanitarianism, their sense of common justice and fair play. It also raised the antipathy of the immigrants themselves and hampered the work of the mission. Evangelists found their work particularly difficult when anti-Orientalism was at its height and when restrictive legislation had just been passed. Thus the missionary, even though an advocate of rigorous immigration restriction, always urged charitable treatment for Orientals resident in Canada. "Let our

⁹ S. S. Osterhout, N. Lascelles Ward, and David A. Smith to King, April 3, 1923, Canada, Immigration Branch, Acc. 70/47, file 827821, Public Archives of Canada (PAC).

¹⁰ Osterhout, *Orientals in Canada*, 4. In keeping with this outlook missionaries occasionally demanded that those legal disabilities imposed upon Asians, particularly franchise restrictions, be lifted.

attitude," urged one Anglican missionary, "be one of sympathy, of welcome, of invitation to assimilation and it will yield a result diametrically different from that of coldness or persecution or ostracism. . . . Let us not forget that the responsibility for their presence with us rests upon our own shoulders and we have, therefore, obligations towards them we cannot honourably repudiate."¹¹

But the underlying contradiction in church thought was also apparent for, despite their familiarity with Orientals, their criticisms of white prejudice, and their concern for the welfare of Asiatic residents, Protestant missionaries commonly applied popular, negative stereotypes to Orientals, at least those who were non-Christians. Furthermore, because missionaries viewed the Asian through the filter of their own religious and moral beliefs, they tinged some of these inherited images with new shades of meaning. Repeatedly mission reports and correspondence emphasized that idolatry, superstition, spiritual indifference, moral inadequacy, and imperiousness to the Christian gospel were typical of the Oriental character. In the words of one Presbyterian, the Chinese had to be won from "the centuries of darling superstitions, demonolatry, ancestral worship and faith in false gods which meet in him."¹² Similarly a Methodist minister from Vancouver remarked that the Church was "face to face with a most powerful heathenism, strong, subtle, deep, a heathenism that cannot be moved by any ordinary effort. The problem is a more serious one than that confronting the missionaries in the Orient as all of our mission workers here can testify."¹³ Such attitudes undoubtedly reflected the many frustrations of missionary work but they also indicate how profoundly the missionaries' perceptions were shaped by popular imagery.

Most missionaries equally condemned the Asian's social conduct. In this instance as well, prevailing stereotypes and Protestant moral sensibilities again shaped the missionary outlook. While Orientals in general were damned for their overcrowded, unsanitary living conditions, the Chinese were singled out for special condemnation. Chinese gambling, opium smoking, and female slavery particularly offended the social values of middle class missionaries and roused the full power of their rhetoric. As Reverend G. E. Hartwell, the Methodist superintendent of Oriental missions in British Columbia prior to World War I, declared, Chinatown

¹¹ F. W. Cassillis-Kennedy, "Assimilability of Orientals in Canada," *British Columbia Monthly*, XXVI, no. 3 (November 1926), 4.

¹² Presbyterian Church, *Acts and Proceedings* (1894), lxxiv.

¹³ A. M. Sanford to Alexander Sutherland, January 27, 1910, Sutherland Papers, file 81, United Church Archives, Victoria University, Toronto (UCA).

was "the carcass [sic] to attract the foul birds of Western vices, the dumping ground of those evils which the white man wishes removed from his own door." Within its confines were found "the parasites of the Chinese race. They are easily recognized by the hard lines and the avaricious glint of the professional gamblers, the hopeless expression of the opium eaters, and the unclean features of the men of impurity. Their name is legion. They hide away largely from the public eye, but their haunts are found in nearly every building."¹⁴ Hartwell's successor, S. S. Osterhout, was particularly exercised about Chinese gambling. "Gambling," he declared in 1919, "is an organized vice of extraordinary financial strength, and the Chinese especially are given up to its practice to such an alarming extent that possibly half the population actually engage in gambling, hundreds of whom spend practically all their hard-earned wages in that way often to the neglect of their needy wives and families in the motherland."¹⁵

Yet the missionary stereotype of the Oriental heathen was not uniformly negative. Unlike many whites, missionaries often saw considerable virtue in the Oriental character. Missionary work was based upon the assumption that the Oriental was included in God's plan for the redemption of man, that he did possess praiseworthy attributes, and that, under Christian guidance, he could shed his many erroneous ways. Consequently some missionaries freely applauded the Oriental's industry, his thriftiness, and his willingness to accept Canadian social standards. In such cases Asians were obviously praised not for their unique cultural heritage but for their conformity to generally accepted Canadian values. Yet this praise stemmed from far more charitable attitudes than those shared by the public at large. During the mid 1920's, as popular anti-Chinese feeling began to subside in the wake of Chinese exclusion, a small number of missionaries also began to see the special problems of second generation Oriental Canadians, caught in the cleft between two cultures.¹⁶ Thus,

¹⁴ George E. Hartwell, "Our Work Among the Japanese and Chinese in British Columbia," *Missionary Bulletin*, IX, no. 3 (June-September 1913), 520. Hartwell did admit, however, that "in the midst of vices both Eastern and Western," many Chinese led "clean, upright and influential lives" and strove "to permeate the whole Chinese community with high ideals." "Evangelistic Meetings Amongst the Chinese in Vancouver," *Missionary Outlook*, XXXIV, no. 1 (January 1914), 4.

¹⁵ Osterhout, "Oriental Missions in Canada," *Western Methodist Recorder*, XVIII, no. 7 (January 1919), 5. One leading Anglican missionary, however, emphasized the social roots of Oriental vice and considered it the product of "an imperfect apprehension of moral values, rather than the fact that the people are essentially bad." N. L. Ward, *Oriental Missions*, 63.

¹⁶ Osterhout, *Oriental Missions in Canada*, 34-46; N. L. Ward, *Oriental Missions*, 67-70; Hilda Hellaby, "Problematical Future of Canadian-Oriental," *Sunday Province*

although missionaries sketched a dark and unflattering portrait of the non-Christian Oriental, they did depict some of his more favourable attributes.

On the other hand the missionaries held Oriental Christians in genuine esteem. They usually described their converts in glowing terms, declared them faithful, devoted, intelligent and honest — splendid examples of their race. The first matron of the Chinese Rescue Home in Victoria considered her years there "among the most remarkable and successful of my life's work." She recalled that "my five years residence with those Chinese girls and women and the Chinamen who were their friends and some of whom became husbands of the girls, led me to have a very deep and abiding interest and respect for the Chinese as a people and a nation. I felt often that we had many things we could learn from them to our profit."¹⁷ Similarly a teacher in Victoria's Chinese Day School admitted that "although my mind had been pretty well imbued with the 'heathen Chinese' sentiment so prevalent among us, it did not take me very long to discover that the Chinese people were men and women pretty much like ourselves, and I have always endeavored to act accordingly. From no people in Victoria have I received more kindness than from the Chinese people, heathen as well as Christian."¹⁸ Such favourable attitudes are scarcely surprising. Close contact and conversion had reduced the intellectual, social, and cultural distance between the missionaries and their charges. Furthermore, as converts were the only visible fruit of the missionary's arduous labour, most missionaries would be predisposed in their favour. Thus, while mission work did not necessarily force whites to abandon their stereotyped conceptions, at least it gave them a rare opportunity to view individual Orientals in the round.

The atmosphere of the mission also nourished those warm relationships so often absent from other patterns of intercultural contact in British Columbia. Many missionaries felt genuine affection for their Asian

(Vancouver), undated clipping, Hugh Dobson Papers, B7, file M, Archives of the British Columbia Conference of the United Church, Vancouver School of Theology, Vancouver.

¹⁷ Annie Tuttle, "Reminiscences," unpublished MS, n.d., 114-15, Public Archives of British Columbia. Mrs. Tuttle, whose maiden name was Leake, worked in the Home from 1888 to 1892 before she married.

¹⁸ E. A. Churchill, "Report of the Chinese Methodist Day School at Victoria, B.C.," *Missionary Outlook*, XVII, no. 5 (May 1898), 77. Occasionally, however, missionaries even expressed reservations about prospective Oriental converts. They urged that, in order to prevent backsliding, the church should be extremely cautious when accepting Asians as members. C. A. Colman to R. P. Mackay, July 8, 1895, *Presbyterian Record*, XX, no. 8 (August 1895), 205.

catechumens.¹⁹ Matrons of the refuge in Victoria enjoyed especially intimate ties with the girls and women under their care. Usually these relationships were intensely paternalistic. The matrons generally supervised their charges very closely and their efforts were a frequent source of tension. The girls were particularly annoyed when mission workers tried to prevent them from marrying non-Christian suitors.²⁰ Nevertheless, within this environment grew a genuine sense of inter-racial sympathy. Apparently many missionaries took great pleasure from their contact with Orientals and were gratified, not just by the latter's progress towards assimilation, but by the real pleasures of closer human contact. As one evangelist commented in 1922, the work had given several Canadian women a feeling "that 'East and West' are not so far apart after all."²¹

In the church at large, thought on the Oriental question was much less contradictory. Ethnocentrism far outweighed evangelical and humanitarian considerations in most Canadian Protestant circles. But this is not to suggest that church leaders gave the issue much thought. Only a few ministers, educators, editors, and administrators, especially in British Columbia, paid attention to the problem and even for them the issue was secondary. On the whole the Protestant clergy had far more immediate interests. They lacked the missionaries' deeper concern for the needs of the Oriental immigrant.

Missionaries aside, most clergymen's attitudes toward Asian immigrants were shaped almost entirely by negative stereotypes. This was particularly true in British Columbia where popular animus was strongest. Unlike the missionary, most church leaders had little contact with the Oriental community in Canada. They lacked the greater understanding which closer ties provided. Formed at a distance, their opinions drew heavily upon popular conceptions of the Oriental character. Despite the mitigating influence of Christian humanism, the Protestant clergy usually reflected common prejudices. In particular, they, like many Canadians, were obsessed with the problem of assimilation.

The church spokesmen's image of Oriental immigrants emphasized their unsanitary living conditions, their virulent diseases, and their threat

¹⁹ For example see May C. Smith to R. P. Mackay, July 6, 1920, Presbyterian Church, Mission to the Chinese in Canada, correspondence, box 4, UCA.

²⁰ For example see Mrs. Snyder, "Chinese Girls Home, Victoria, B.C.," *Monthly Letter* [a publication of the Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada], XVIII, no. 7 (April 1901), 2.

²¹ Etta DeWolfe, "Tales of the Oriental Work, Vancouver, B.C.," *ibid.*, XXXVII, no. 11 (August 1922), 3.

to the public health. Repeatedly clergymen also condemned Chinese concubinage, plural marriage, female slavery, gambling, and opium smoking. Usually they assumed that these lapses were the results of idolatry and superstition, that in their heathen state Asians could not see the error of their ways.²² Church leaders also clung to the widespread belief that, with their lower living standards, Orientals threatened to drive white workers from the labour market. Stereotypes such as these permeated popular attitudes and church leaders usually accepted them without demur.

Admittedly many clergymen opposed discriminatory legislation. From the mid 1890's to the mid 1920's Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican leaders repeatedly urged an end to existing federal restrictions on Chinese and East Indian immigration.²³ The Chinese head tax was condemned as an invidious discrimination and the continuous passage regulation as an ignoble subterfuge. But church criticism was aimed at the form, not the substance, of federal restrictive policies. Because they clung to the popular, negative Oriental image, most church leaders believed continued immigration restrictions to be necessary. A few even argued for outright exclusion. Existing regulations were considered odious not because they were discriminatory but because they offended the Asians. What was required, the *Presbyterian* remarked in 1914, was a measure which was "open, honest, and above board. Also, it should not be offensive or degrading to the people involved. It should not be dictated by any feeling of superiority, animosity or contempt."²⁴ The usual suggestion was that it would be best if China and India, like Japan, could be persuaded to enforce emigration restrictions themselves. This would permit them to save face while also preserving friendly diplomatic relations.

The major source of Protestant alarm was the image of the unassimilable Oriental immigrant. This popular stereotype roused profound anxiety in church circles. Committed to the concept of a homogeneous Canadian culture, based upon middle class values and Anglo-Canadian

²² Occasionally, however, Protestant spokesmen did claim that whites themselves were responsible for the Oriental's failings. C. S. Eby, "The True Inwardness of the Yellow Peril," *Empire Club Speeches*, 1907-08, (Toronto, 1910), 43-53.

²³ For example see Presbyterian Church, *Acts and Proceedings* (1895), 75-76; *British Colonist* (Victoria), May 15, 1903; [representatives of the Mission Boards, Presbyterian Church] to Robert Rogers, Minister of the Interior, December 21, 1911, Shore Papers, file 42, UCA; Resolution of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, June 16, 1916, Borden Papers, 100701, PAC; James Endicott to Borden, May 4, 1915, *ibid.*, 100655-56; R. P. Mackay to Charles Stewart, May 23, 1923, Canada, Immigration Branch, Acc. 70/47, file 827821.

²⁴ *Presbyterian*, new series, XXIV, no. 1 (January 1, 1914), 4.

traditions, many church spokesmen were alarmed by the Asiatic influx. The prospect of the unassimilable newcomer threatened their hopes for cultural uniformity in English Canada. It struck at the heart of their collective consciousness. As a result, concern for Oriental assimilation dominated church attitudes toward the Asian. The editor of the *Western Methodist Recorder* declared in 1900 that Orientals were "threatening us with the evil influences of an entirely obsolete type of civilization."²⁵ In a similar vein Reverend G. H. Wilson, of St. Michael's Anglican church in Vancouver, told a meeting of the Asiatic Exclusion League in November 1907, that

we cannot come down to the plane of the Asiatics without sacrificing all that has been accomplished during the past century, and that is what it will come to if the Asiatics remain here. We can do no [*sic*] more towards christianizing the Asiatics in their own land. There we can seek to bring them up to our own level, rather than have them here and be brought down to their plane. Then when we have brought them up to our level it will be in order to discuss the question of allowing them to come in contact with us.²⁶

The question was not an economic one, the *Christian Guardian* asserted, but one of "the preservation of our national ideals, and of the keeping of this Dominion, intact, as the white man's country."²⁷ Reverend J. S. Woodsworth also echoed these sentiments. Early in his career he suggested that Orientals were unassimilable, questioned the advisability of their immigration, and declared that "the idea of a homogeneous people seems in accord with our democratic institutions and conducive to the general welfare."²⁸ Dr. George Pidgeon, professor of practical theology at Westminster Hall, the Presbyterian theological college in Vancouver (and later first moderator of the United Church), was especially aroused. "Some patriots have had to defend their country against invasion by force of arms," he wrote in 1915.

We have to protect ours against peaceful possession by men of other races. Japanese, Chinese, East Indians and negroes have sought to enter and settle in our province in such numbers that, if they had been granted free access the European population would soon have been limited to employers and overseers of labor, with an ever-diminishing number of professional men and merchants. To have had the province dominated by such a medley of races

²⁵ *Western Methodist Recorder*, II, no. 1 (July 1900), 14.

²⁶ *Province* (Vancouver), November 21, 1907.

²⁷ *Christian Guardian*, LXXVIII, no. 38 (September 18, 1907), 5.

²⁸ James S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates, or Coming Canadians* (3rd edition, Toronto, 1909), 277. But Woodsworth did admit the possibility that small racial and cultural minorities could continue to exist in Canada.

would have been fatal. No true national life would have been possible. We could never have had a homogeneous population. Now the character of our civilization and the whole influence of the Occident on the Orient depends on the preservation of our national life in this Western Province, as in the Western States. At the point where the West touches the East our race must be at its purest and best. A white British Columbia is therefore the basis of our immigration policy.²⁹

One of those most deeply disturbed was Reverend John Mackay, principal of Westminster Hall, who subscribed to the idea of the yellow peril. In a series of articles on Canadian immigration problems published in 1914 he suggested that the western impact upon Asia and Japan's recent victory over Russia had stimulated racial awareness in Asia. "Like a yellow tidal wave," he observed, "the Oriental races rise, big with menace, over the whole world. And this tidal wave will inevitably submerge our white civilizations unless we see its meaning and prepare to turn it into a blessing and uplift to white man and yellow man alike."³⁰ Mackay believed there were several reasons why Orientals should be excluded from Canada. Because they had lived for centuries in climates which made even a low standard of living comfortable and efficient, they could live on far less than western man required. Faced with such competition, the white working man would soon be morally and physically degraded. In addition, Mackay argued, Asians were the products of civilizations whose ancient "patriarchal or tyrannical forms of government" and whose religious beliefs left them unsuited for assimilation into a democracy based upon individual rights. Mackay feared that, in an era of high immigration, the added burden of assimilating Orientals, "who will require at least two or three generations to attain the Western standard of democracy" would be too great for Canada to bear.³¹ While Mackay's support for Oriental exclusion was obviously based upon common, stereotyped assumptions, his alarm stemmed from another source as well. While critical of the Asiatic, he also deplored the serious imperfections inherent in western society; these, he argued, prevented whites from offering the newcomer leadership of requisite excellence. "We must keep out the Oriental races for a time from our Western communities," he wrote, "not because we are too good to receive them, but because we are

²⁹ George C. Pidgeon, "The Social Problems of British Columbia. III. Immigration," *Westminster Hall Magazine and Farthest West Review*, VII, no. 3 (April 1915), 18.

³⁰ John Mackay, "Problems of Immigration. III. Immigration and World Peace," *ibid.*, V, no. 2 (March 1914), 5.

³¹ Mackay, "Problems of Immigration. II. The Real Meaning of Oriental Exclusion or Restriction," *ibid.*, V, no. 1 (February 1914), 5-9.

not good enough."³² Canadian society was not sufficiently strong to meet the challenge of Oriental assimilation. Perhaps Mackay was attempting to rationalize his prejudice and alarm. Perhaps his view of western society's weakness was not widely shared. But his attitude toward the Oriental immigrant was. Like many church leaders, he feared the unas-similable Asian.

On the other hand some Protestant clergymen believed that not only was assimilation possible, it was the ultimate solution to Canada's Oriental problem. Furthermore they felt that the church was specifically called to this task, that it should teach the newcomers Christian truths and western values in order to hasten the assimilation process. There were several interpretations of the Oriental character which could justify a pro-assimilationist outlook. A few Protestant spokesmen believed the Asian immigrant capable of making a substantial contribution to Canadian life. "Many of us," the General Superintendent of the Methodist Church told the Prime Minister in 1899, are

under the firm persuasion that a gross wrong is attempted against these people, who are industrious and of an independent spirit, and will work into Canadian Citizenship at least as readily as the Galicians. Witness their efforts for education and personal improvement. It certainly is in Canada's interest to cultivate friendliness with Japan, face to face across the sea. More of us who are engaged in the work of Christian missions in the Empire are jealous of the honor of these people, and must oppose any unfriendly acts toward them on the part of any of our governments.³³

Some, less certain of the Orientals' positive value, still readily admitted that Christians were in duty bound to aid them. As a citizen, the Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of British Columbia admitted in 1922, he struggled with his prejudices. "But as churchmen it seems to me we have no option but to do our best to serve the Oriental. Indeed, as Christian citizens I cannot but feel we should bombard our governments until they consent either to return these people to their own land, or train them for citizenship in this country of their adoption."³⁴ Still others shared the widespread fear that Oriental immigration would injure the nation and urged the Church to take preventative action. Reviewing the Oriental work of the Methodist Women's Missionary Society, one commentator declared that "while the tide of immigration sweeps over the land, it must be met with

³² Mackay, "Problems of Immigration. III.," 6.

³³ A. Carman to Laurier, n.d. [1899], Laurier Papers, 31994, PAC.

³⁴ Church of England, *Journal of the Twenty-Second Synod of the Diocese of British Columbia*, 1922, 20.

earnest effort, its course directed, the impurities and wreckage of centuries of superstition and error removed, lest at flood it cover the land with loathsome infection and impregnate the soil with the poison of evil customs and degraded habits." She predicted that soon Orientals would play an influential part in the life of the nation. "Whether that influence is for good or evil," she declared, "depends on the church today, and her missionary zeal in holding out to these darkened lives the uplifting, restraining, and illuminating power of Christian truth."³⁵ A contemporary Anglican tract warned more succinctly: "if we do not Christianize these strangers within our gates they will Orientalize us."³⁶ Clearly some Protestant leaders considered Oriental assimilation both possible and desirable. In fact, for them it could not come too soon.

The Protestant clergy responded to Asian immigrants more positively than did most Canadians, largely because of their Christian evangelical and humanitarian traditions. Yet in the end church leaders proved unable to transcend prevailing prejudices. Their approach to the Chinese and Japanese was deeply rooted in the hard clay of ethnocentrism. Theirs was not the strident xenophobia of the exclusion league, the union meeting, or the political platform. Theirs was the firm, insistent belief that the Oriental *qua* Oriental had no place in Canadian society. Protestant leaders showed little willingness to acknowledge the special problems of the alien resident in a new and oftentimes unfriendly culture. They seemed almost unaware that Asians arrived bearing rich cultural traditions of their own. None apparently believed that these new arrivals could make their own significant cultural contributions to Canada.

Ultimately Protestant nativism, like its secular counterpart, was founded upon fear. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a latent anxiety that Oriental immigration threatened their society obsessed many Canadians, especially in British Columbia. Although anti-Oriental sentiment had obvious economic origins — the product of conflict between two competing groups of workers — this underlying fear was a major source of inter-racial tension. The Protestant response to immigration from Asia bears out this conclusion. While church leaders occasionally suggested that economic disparities aggravated race relations, their primary concerns lay elsewhere. Like many outside the church they believed that the nation's rightful destiny lay along the path of cultural

uniformity; they held that Canada could only achieve social stability and national greatness if immigrants rejected their pasts and accepted the values of English-speaking, middle-class Canadians. These precepts the Oriental immigrant seemed to challenge. He menaced the very core of the Canadian identity. Stereotyped as unalterably alien, he threatened the Anglo-Canadian vision of the culturally homogeneous community. Yet many Protestant leaders were vitally committed to the defence of this ideal. They yearned for a Canada in which their values prevailed unchallenged. Thus they considered Asian immigrants a problem, a source of concern if not alarm. Exclusion and assimilation seemed the only possible solutions.

³⁵ M. M. C. Lavell, *Oriental Missions in British Columbia* (Toronto, 1908), 4-5.

³⁶ Church of England, *Missions to Orientals in Canada As Carried on by the Provincial Board of Missions to Orientals in B.C.* An undated pamphlet published in the church's Popular Information Series, No. 14.