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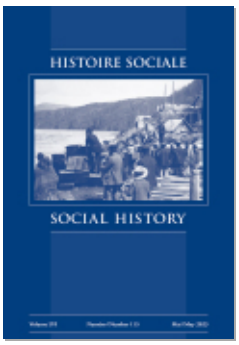

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A Corporate Christianity: Religion in the Early Modern Hudson's Bay Company

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The early modern Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) built a form of Christianity that was decidedly corporate in its design. Unlike the way Catholicism in the French fur trade was deployed to achieve imperial as well as commercial ends, Christianity in the HBC was positioned exclusively with commerce in mind. This meant it was used not to colonize Indigenous cultures or spaces but to control and protect the company's overseas resources and support corporate relations in London. Even when this use changed in the early 1800s as baptism and religious education was offered to mixed-ancestry children of company men, the corporate agenda remained at the heart of the company's use of religion. The history of religion in the early modern HBC underlines that the company's identity and aspirations at this time were commercial rather than imperial.

La Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson (CBH) du début de l'ère moderne a mis en place une forme de christianisme qui était résolument corporatiste dans sa conception. Contrairement aux usages du catholicisme dans le cadre de la traite des fourrures française, déployé à des fins impériales et commerciales, le christianisme de la CBH était conçu dans une optique exclusivement commerciale. Cela signifie qu'il était non pas utilisé pour coloniser les cultures ou les espaces autochtones, mais plutôt pour contrôler et protéger les ressources de la compagnie situées à l'étranger, tout en soutenant les relations de l'entreprise à Londres. Même si cette utilisation a changé au début des années 1800, lorsque le baptême et l'éducation religieuse ont été accordés aux enfants des hommes de la compagnie issus de familles mixtes, les objectifs commerciaux sont demeurés déterminants dans la pratique de la religion au sein de la compagnie. L'histoire de la religion dans la CBH au début des temps modernes montre que l'identité et les aspirations de la compagnie à cette époque étaient plus commerciales qu'impériales.

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SCHOLARS HAVE long argued that the French used Catholicism during the fur trade to extend their cultural influence into Indigenous communities, and thereby integrate Indigenous political leadership into a beneficial system of alliances. Bruce Trigger pointed to Champlain's 1630s decree that Wendat traders accepted Jesuits as a prerequisite to trading as evidence of this pattern, while W. J. Eccles noted how Jesuits were deployed by the French to link Indigenous traders into a French network of alliances during the eighteenth century.[1] More recently, Scott Berthelette has argued that Jesuits were deployed by the French regime alongside fur trade activity precisely because the missionaries brought a more imperial practice to the fur trade: "missionary goals of proselytizing and converting Indigenous peoples aligned more closely with expansionist imperial agendas of … New France's colonial government," argues Berthelette.[2] For these and other scholars, Catholicism worked alongside the French fur trade as part of a *Pax Gallica* aimed at entrenching French imperial domination in North America.[3]

In marked contrast, scholars of the early modern English fur trade carried out by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) cast religion as largely irrelevant to the HBC, its trade, and, by extension, English (later British) imperial ambitions in the region of the Hudson's Bay watershed, the territory the HBC claimed as Rupert's Land.[4] In his 1958 study of the HBC, E. E. Rich noted that company men were directed to hold prayers at posts, but his only substantive statement on the role of religion in the company's operation is that "towards the Indian the Company felt no missionary fervour."[5] Scholars writing after Rich have not moved beyond this view. Economically minded scholars like Glyndwr Williams and Arthur Ray make almost no mention of religion in their studies, while social historians, otherwise attentive to the cultural elements of the trade and the company, overlook religion as a factor in the company's early modern relations with Indigenous Peoples.[6]

1 W. J. Eccles, "The Fur Trade in Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," in Susan Sleeper-Smith, ed., *Rethinking the Fur Trade: Cultures of Exchange in an Atlantic World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 219–220; Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), pp. 227–229.

2 Scott Berthelette, "New France and the Hudson Bay Watershed: Transatlantic Networks, Backcountry Specialists, and French Imperial Projects in Post-Utrecht North America, 1713–29," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 101, no. 1 (March 2020), pp. 16–17, https://doi.org/10.3138/chr.2018-0094. This argument is also explored in Scott Berthelette, *Heirs of an Ambivalent Empire* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022).

3 Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chap. 1; and, Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, chap. 5. Another example of this interpretation is, Tracy Neal Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversion in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). On the *Pax Gallica* see Berthelette, *Heirs of an Ambivalent Empire*, p. 114.

4 This omission is illustrated by the lack of any mention of religion in the company in the following historiographical essay: Michael Payne, "Fur Trade Historiography: Past Conditions, Present Circumstances and a Hint of Future Prospects," in R. C. Macleod, Gerhard J. Ens, and Theodore Binnema, eds., *From Rupert's Land to Canada* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), pp. 3–22.

5 E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670–1870*, vol. 1 (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1958), p. 314. See also E. E. Rich and A. M. Johnson, eds., *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters: Commissions Instructions Outward, 1688–1696* (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1957).

6 Glyndwr Williams, "Highlights of the First 200 Years of the Hudson's Bay Company," *The Beaver: Magazine of the North* (Autumn 1970), pp. 4–59; and, Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their*

Scholars of company labourers, meanwhile, echo Rich's observation that directives from London to keep prayers at posts were largely ignored amongst the North American workforce and that religion did not figure prominently in the lives of the HBC's early modern workforce.[7] Indeed, for scholars of the HBC, it was only with the arrival of missionaries and the establishment of the Red River Colony in the 1820s that religion became part of the HBC's management of the fur trade in the Hudson's Bay watershed.[8]

This depiction of the early modern HBC as areligious, especially in comparison to the French trade, is incorrect, or at least incomplete. Religion was at least as important in the design of the early modern HBC system as it was in the French. Its relevance was but framed in a different and less imperial way. Instead of seeing religion as part of an elaborate policy of alliance-making, the governors of the company's London Committee sought to use religion to promote and support narrow commercial goals.[9] This commercial framing of religion generated what I call a "corporate Christianity" in which religion became a tool of business management rather than part of a state-led system of imperial expansion. The nature of this corporate Christianity changed overtime and over space, as commercial rivals of the company at the bayside and in London provoked its London Committee into redeploying religion as required. For the first 100 years or so (1670 to the 1790s), one of the HBC's main challenges was how to manage overseas employees and ensure loyalty to the company in a logistically complex trade. In this period, religion was used as both a method of social control over employees and as a kind of cultural palisade designed to "protect" employees—and company resources—from the Indigenous world around them. After the 1750s, criticism of the HBC in London provoked a new use of religion, this time as a rhetorical tool in a public relations campaign aimed at asserting the legitimacy of the company and of its charter privileges to a metropolitan public. By the 1790s, religion was deployed in yet another way: to integrate the mixed-ancestry children of company men and

Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660–1870 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974). Works by social historians include, Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670–1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), chap. 7; and, Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1980).

7 Two studies of post societies that note the directive to carry out prayers are, Michael Payne, *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory: Everyday Life in Hudson's Bay Company Service, York Factory, 1788 to 1870* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites, Environment Canada, 1989), pp. 107–108; and, Scott P. Stephen, *Masters and Servants: The Hudson's Bay Company and Its North American Workforce, 1668–1786* (Edmonton, University of Alberta Press, 2019), pp. 214–215.

8 See Robert Coutts, *The Road to the Rapids: Nineteenth-Century Church and Society at St. Andrew's Parish, Red River* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000); Gerhard J. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); and, Frits Pannekoek, *A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869–1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1991).

9 The "London Committee," sometimes referred to as the "Governing Committee" or the "Governor and Committee," was the nine-member board elected by the shareholders to oversee the operations of the company. The committee met, on average, once every week in the London offices of the company, outlining general policy and detailed plans for the trading year. As part of this work, the committee wrote lengthy instruction letters to overseas officers outlining how they should manage their trade and the employees under their charge. The substance of these instructions, especially as they relate to religion, forms much of the evidence presented in this article.

Indigenous women into its ranks. Only with a widespread reorientation of the HBC in the 1810s and 1820s, which accompanied new pressures on the company from missionaries and their allies in Britain to actively evangelize the "Natives" in North America, did the corporate form of Christianity that so dominated the early modern era give way to a more colonial form of Christianity that was less in line with corporate management strategies. What these patterns reveal is that throughout the early modern period, commerce—the management of effective and efficient overseas trade—was central to the HBC's orientation. Placed alongside the patterns of the French fur trade, the history of religion in the early modern HBC is not a story of absence but of how the commercial identity of the company created a form of Christianity designed to attain the relatively humble goal of managing a business rather than assimilating Indigenous Peoples and lands as part of a policy of state-driven imperialism.

Managing Overseas Trade

The London Committee viewed religion as something that could be used to manage its overseas trade efficiently. This meant using religion to ensure HBC ships and posts were organized in a strict hierarchy with the lowest paid servant at the bottom, the senior officer at the top, and the London Committee beyond them.[10] While physical discipline, sanctions, fines, and rewards were key strategies to achieve this strict order, and given the metropolitan context where control of Christianity through the Established Church was still viewed as a tool to entrench and legitimize the actions of the élites and bind together the community, prayer also served as a means of establishing social discipline overseas.[11] Thus, for the first 100 years of operation, a consistent instruction from the HBC's London Committee to overseas employees was to carry out daily prayer at the posts and aboard company ships as a means of social control.

These instructions were initially made to ship captains contracted to take HBC employees to the bayside. The conclusion of a 1688 instruction letter to Captain William Bond was typical of such directives:

> Finally Wee Recommend unto you the Care of the Service of God & Doe require you to have Prayers daily read on board the vessel under your Command that soe the Blessing of God may attend your endeavours in our service, and tho this bee her given you last in Charge, Wee hope it will bee first in your resolucion and Care and nee put in practice from your first Setting out with our Vessell…[12]

Instructions to ship captains were sometimes more precise. The summer after Bond's trip, Captain Leonmoar Edgcombe was told that he must consistently hold "Publique

10 Edith I. Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770–1879* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997) and, Payne, *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory*, pp. 27–50; and Stephen, *Masters and Servants*, chap. 7.

11 Richard Brown, *Church and State in Modern Britain, 1700–1850* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 92–108; William Gibson, *Church of England, 1688–1832: Unity and Accord* (London: Routledge, 2000), chap. 4.

12 London Committee to Capt. William Bond, June 18, 1688, in Rich and Johnson, *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke*, p. 48.

prayers both morning & Evening on board your Frigatte during the whole tyme of your Voyage…."[13] These prayers were a way for the London Committee to remind employees that they lived under the authority of the man reading the prayers (the captain), the people sending the prayer books (the London Committee), and, of course, the being to which the prayers were directed (God). Recognizing this hierarchy and behaving accordingly was good for their soul as well as the order of the post. Reinforcing this link between prayer and order, calls to prayers were often coupled with directions to "punish all Dissolute & profane psons,"[14] and officers were reminded that "Christian like behaviour will beget a Decent Decorum and peaceable Deameanour…."[15]

The messages to chief factors charged with managing posts at Hudson Bay were much the same. Officers in charge of bayside posts were told to keep daily prayers and dissuade profanity. Bayside officers were told that the "the Lds. Day" was to be "Duely [sic] observed."[16] This emphasis on special services once a week at the posts is made plain in instructions to Captain John Marsh, who was told in 1688 that "Upon arriveall [sic]" at the bayside, the Book of Common Prayer and some of the Bible "bee Daily read with Homilyes at least every Lords day."[17] Like the letters to ship captains, these instructions were relatively consistent throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even in 1748, at the height of conflict with the French in which most instructions focused on how to prepare bayside posts for a possible attack, the London Committee added a very short supplementary letter to a package of instructions to officer John Norton directing him to be an example of "virtue and sobriety," and continue to hold "religious Observances."[18]

While social control was a dominant purpose of holding prayers, the London Committee also envisioned public prayers as a way to establish a kind of "cultural palisade" around the posts, able to protect it—and its human resources—from the world outside. Although traversing the sea was a central dynamic of the early modern English Atlantic world, the sea itself was seen by élites in England as a dangerous space, a "moral hazard" that could corrupt the individual English seafarer. Brent Sirota has argued that, in this context, religion, particularly as embodied in the Church of England, was a way to resolve the problem of the danger of the seas by making the sea safe for English traders.[19] With prayers and by reading of the Book of Common Prayer onboard ships, seafarers would be safeguarded against such

13 Instructions to Capt. Leonard Edgcombe, June 6, 1689, quoted in Rich and Johnson, *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke*, pp. 67–68.

14 Instructions to Capt. John Marsh, June 18, 1688, quoted in Rich and Johnson, *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke*, p. 38.

15 Instructions to Capt. Leonard Edgcombe, June 6, 1689, quoted in Rich and Johnson, *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke*, pp. 67–68.

16 E. E. Rich and A. M. Johnson, eds., *Letters Outward, 1679–1694* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, the Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1948), pp. 80–81.

17 Instructions to Capt. John Marsh, June 18, 1688, in Rich and Johnson, *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke*, p. 38.

18 London Committee to John Newton, May 5, 1748, British Parliament, "Report from the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the State and Condition of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay, and of the Trade Carried of There," 1749, p. 270.

19 Brent S. Sirota, "Anglicanism and the Nationalization of Maritime Space," in Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, eds., *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

moral hazards. The maritime empire would be able to grow in a way that would be both commercially successful and morally safe. In this vein, instructions to HBC post officers were specific about how prayer should be used to protect them from the hazard of "going Native." In a detailed set of instructions to a Captain Nixon at the beginning of his term as governor at Fort Albany on the James Bay coast in 1680, the London Committee made the case that prayer—and public prayer in particular—should be used at posts on a regular basis partly to ensure that the members of the post retain a moral authority over the Indigenous outsiders with whom they traded:

> In the First place, *Wee do strictly enjoyn you to have publick prayers and reading of the Scripture or some other religious Books* wheresoever you shall be resident, *at least upon the Lords days,* As also to order the several chiefs in each Factory under your command to do the same, That wee who professe to [be] Christians may not appear more barbarous than the poor Heathens themselves who have not been instructed in the knowledge of the true God.[20]

While not a missionary society, statements like these suggest that the HBC had absorbed the prevailing rhetoric in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English missionary writing, that the English should feel pity for the "poor Indian," deploying it as a way to instruct its servants to understand their relationship with Indigenous Peoples. The rhetoric of the "poor Indian" assumed that the English empire in North America distinguished itself from Catholic Spain, which had, so this story went, felt no pity towards Indigenous Peoples in Mexico.[21] By feeling pity, the servants would be reminded of their own "civilized" nature and thus refrain from "going Native" and being wrapped up in the moral hazards that entailed.

The degree to which the London Committee saw Christianity as a cultural palisade is most evident in its consistent policy during this era against evangelizing or teaching Indigenous Peoples about Christianity.[22] The story of Joseph Myatt is the most detailed example we have of how this policy operated. Sometime early in 1723, Myatt made a fateful decision that nearly cost him his career when, as a newly promoted senior officer at Fort Albany, he began instructing an Indigenous boy in basic literacy and "in the Christian Religion."[23] Sometime that summer, the unnamed boy wrote a letter (likely with Myatt's help) to the London Committee requesting permission to travel to England to be baptized. On receiving the letter, the governors were dismayed. They wrote to another senior officer at the bay that the boy should never have been taught and that Myatt should be severely reprimanded for his breach of policy and his lack of judgment.[24]

20 Emphasis is from the original. See Governor Nixon's Instructions, May 29, 1680, in Rich and Johnson, *Letters Outward, 1679–1694*, p. 4.

21 Laura M. Stevens, *The Poor Indians: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 2.

22 Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, p. 314.

23 Richard White (former Company servant), quoted in, British Parliament, "Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay," p. 220.

24 E. E. Rich, "Introduction," in E. E. Rich, ed., *James Isham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1743 and Notes and Observations on A Book Entitled A Voyage to Hudsons Bay in the Dobbs Galley, 1749* (Toronto:

In some ways, this policy echoes the East India Company's (EIC) policy of non-interference in non-Christian communities throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[25] The rationale in that case was that the EIC did not want to offend its non-Christian trader partners, particularly the Muslim Mughal rulers.[26] In the case of the HBC, however, the London Committee was less concerned about upsetting Indigenous traders and their medicine men than it was about the potential danger posed by a Christian and literate Indigenous person in or near their forts. This fear came from two concerns both linked to the HBC's business goals. First, the London Committee feared that Myatt's interaction with the boy would set a precedent for allowing Indigenous children to be assimilated into the post's activities and thus dependent on its resources. This fear explains in part why the HBC opposed marriages between its employees and Indigenous women: It did not want to bear the costs of raising the families of its employees.[27] Second, there was concern that literate Indigenous people would act as spies for the French. The London Committee was always concerned about "commercial secretiveness" in the eighteenth century and was particularly concerned that French fur traders could use information from post records to cut off trade to the bayside.[28] A literate Indigenous boy was perceived as a threat to this secretiveness. In its letter of reprimand regarding Myatt, the London Committee stated that, "The Company are very much displeas'd to hear that any Indian is taught to Write & Read or admitted into ye Trading Room to prye into ye Secrets of their affairs in any nature whatsoever without our orde."[29] After reprimanding Myatt the governors directed all of the boy's books be removed so he would no longer be able to read, and that he be sent out of the fort, never to return.[30] Unlike the French, the HBC saw religious education as a threat to the company's posts and its trade.

The Champlain Society for The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1949), pp. xxviii–xxix.

25 Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698–1858* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), chap. 1.

26 Carson, *The East India Company*, pp. 14–15. Philip Stern gives a slightly more nuanced interpretation here, suggesting that while the EIC sometimes actively supported the erection of non-Christian sites of worship, it did so only when it suited the company. See Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. 5.

27 The cost of maintaining women and children at posts was a consistent concern of the governing committee. See Ted Binnema and Gerhard J. Ens, eds., *Hudson's Bay Company Edmonton House Journals: Reports from the Saskatchewan District, Including the Bow River Expedition, 1821–1826* (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 2016), pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.

28 Williams explains in some detail how, by the early eighteenth century, the London Committee pursued the practice of "commercial secretiveness" with "obsessive intent." Williams, "Highlights of the First 200 Years," p. 16. Rich quotes one HBC officer as writing in the 1740s that "it's the french that is our cheifest Obstical [sic]." James Isham, quoted in Rich, "Introduction," p. ci. For a good analysis of the London Committee's sensitivity to managing French rivalry in the eighteenth century, see Arthur J. Ray, "Indians as Consumers in the Eighteenth Century," in Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray, eds., *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 255–271.

29 London Committee to Richard Staunton, May 20, 1724, quoted in K.G. Davies, ed., *Letters From Hudson Bay, 1703–40* (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1965), p. 102.

30 British Parliament, "Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay," p. 220.

Along with bringing discipline and moral protection to the posts, the London Committee believed that prayer would bring divine support—that is, God's intervention—to the commercial affairs of the trade. In several passing remarks to ship captains and chief factors throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the London Committee noted that if posts and ships in the service of the company retained their Christian practice, then God would help these ships and posts in their work for the company, and, by extension, the company's trade. In May 1680, Captain Thomas Draper was told that "prayers [be] daily read on board" so that, in part, "the blessings of God may attend your endeavours in our service."[31] Also in May 1680, Captain Cobby was told to accept "God's blessings on your endeavours," on behalf of the company,[32] while in 1690 Captain James Young was told that he should ensure prayers were held "so that God may attend your endeavours in our service."[33] The lengthy instruction to Nixon, already cited, is the clearest instance of the governors drawing a connection between the maintenance of prayers at posts and commercial success. In a concluding statement to Nixon, the governors wrote:

> Th[ese] [instructions are] what wee have formerly directed, and have sent over prayer Books, the Bible and the Books of Homilies wch. Contains choice & well approved Sermons for Instruction. But we understand there hath been little or no use made of them heretofore, wch. neglect wee desire you would reform for the future that wee may more reasonably ex[pect] the blessing of God to attend your endeavours and to prosper the interest of the Company.[34]

The HBC was not unique in seeking godly intervention for its business goals. The directors of the EIC believed much the same. In the late 1700s, Charles Grant, EIC director and supporter of evangelization, argued that it was at least partly due to God's will that the EIC was such a commercial success. The EIC, wrote Grant,

> has prospered and become great, in a way to which the commercial history of the world affords no parallel; and for this it is indebted to the fostering and protecting care of divine Providence. It owes therefore, the warmest gratitude for the past, and it equally needs the support of the same beneficent Power in time to come….[35]

Although at odds with Grant's call for evangelization (at least before the 1810s), the governing committee of the early modern HBC shared the same belief that divine intervention was good for business.

31 Instructions to Captain Thomas Draper, May 21, 1680, in Rich and Johnson, *Letters Outward, 1679–1694*, p. 15.
32 Instructions to Captain Cobby, May 21, 1860, in Rich and Johnson, *Letters Outward, 1679–1694*, p. 17.
33 Instructions to Capt. James Young, May 22, 1690, in Rich and Johnson, *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke*, p. 108.
34 See Governor Nixon's Instructions, May 29, 1680, in Rich and Johnson, *Letters Outward, 1679–1694*, p. 4.
35 Charles Grant, "To the Honourable the Court of Directors for the Affairs of the East India Company," East-India House, August 16, 1797, quoted in, *Observation of On the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals; and on the means of improving it – Written chiefly in the year 1792* (British Parliament, 1813), n.p. [cover letter], https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Observations_on_the_State_of_Society_Amo/eStDAAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover.

"Every Man prays for himself"

While the London directors had very clear visions for how religion should be used within the posts, like their policies against fraternizing with Indigenous women, the directive to keep prayers were largely ignored or only partially obeyed by employees at the bayside posts. The London Committee seemed aware of the problem from early in the company's operations. Within the first ten years, the directors knew that employees were not reading the books and bibles they sent.[36] In the mid-eighteenth century, former employee Edward Thompson complained to a parliamentary committee that when he served at a post, there was no clergyman, "nor divine worship of any kind," and he had "never heard Sermon or Prayers there, nor ever heard of any such thing, either before this time or since."[37] Other former employees highlighted the lack of evangelizing to the Indigenous Peoples, painting a picture of the company and its bayside posts as sites of immorality.[38] James Isham, an especially loyal employee, was more neutral in his appraisal, explaining that, "Every Man prays for himself" at the posts.[39]

A major reason for this lack of religiosity at the posts was that by the late 1690s, the HBC saw itself as an institution of trade rather than settlement—and thus the London Committee did little to support either the establishment of Christian infrastructure, such as churches, or by appointing company chaplains. This had not always been the case. During the 1680s and early 1690s, as part of an attempt to establish permanent settlements, two, possibly three, chaplains had lived at the bayside. The first of these, a Reverend Thomas French, shipped out from London in the spring of 1683 as "Minister of the Bay at £20 by year for 3 years."[40] Stationed at Fort Albany, French was part of a large entourage of people sent to Albany to establish a permanent bayside settlement under the leadership of Henry Sergeant. Sergeant had left London with 20 gallons of "Canary Wine," six sheep and six hogs as well as fowl and fresh butter, and "his family" which included his wife, her companion, and his son, Henry Sergeant Jr., French and Sergeant's "three servants, and his maid servant," were also included in this group.[41] This experiment in settler colonialism was short-lived. After an attack on Fort Albany by French forces in 1686, the entire household was taken prisoner; Rev. French died sometime the following year, likely from starvation.[42] In 1693, the company appointed another clergyman, Thomas Anderson, on a four-year contract. But, like Rev. French, Anderson's time was also cut short when he was also taken prisoner

36 See Governor Nixon's Instructions, May 29, 1680, in Rich and Johnson, *Letters Outward, 1679–1694*, p. 4.
37 Edward Thompson (former servant), quoted in, British Parliament, "Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay," p. 224.
38 Coats, quoted in Rich, "Introduction," p. xxviii.
39 Isham, May 4, 1749, quoted in Rich, "Introduction," p. xxix.
40 G. N. Clark, "Introduction," in E. E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1679–1684. Second Part, 1682–84* (London: The Champlain Society, 1946), p. 106.
41 Appendix B in Rich and Johnson, *Letters Outward, 1679–1694*, p. 389.
42 Van Kirk notes that, although the governing committee made no comment on the role of Rev. French in this attack, they complained that Sergeant was a "burdensome nuisance" to the operations of the posts. See Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, p. 173.

and transported to France, dying sometime in 1696.[43] Some records suggest there was one other minister appointed in the later 1690s, although evidence remains inconclusive.[44]

From the 1690s until the 1820s, no further chaplains were appointed to HBC posts. The principal reason for this was that as of the later 1690s the HBC affirmed its identity as a trading company alone, thus giving up plans to establish settlements of any sort at the bayside. As Rich observes of this shift in orientation, by the 1690s, "the Charter slid naturally into position as the warrant for … a trade system."[45] With a focus on trade alone, and without plans for settlements, chaplains were deemed unnecessary. This decision to no longer appoint chaplains was in marked contrast not only to the French system but also to the EIC, which continued to appoint chaplains throughout the eighteenth century.[46]

The singular commercial orientation not only shaped the London Committee's decision not to send chaplains. It also explains why employees, especially officers, avoided following the instructions to pray. For one, not enforcing public prayer was a good way to ensure stable labour relations within the posts and thus ensure the smooth running of the trade. Posts on the bayside were akin to large, hierarchal families in which senior officers acted as patriarchal figures using a mixture of discipline and reward to maintain order.[47] Most senior officers seem to have agreed that forcing daily or even weekly public prayers onto a community of men that were not specifically requesting them was not worth the effort and risk. This is not to suggest that men, individually, did not carry out prayers on their own. It does suggest, however, that Christianity did not feature in the public space of the posts as the London Committee hoped.

The limited public displays of Christianity also meshed with the way the posts organized its relations with Indigenous traders. The HBC's trading strategy relied on servants and officers encouraging Indigenous traders to bring furs and other trade items into the posts. Quite unlike the French trading system in which either licensed engagés or unlicensed coureurs des bois overwintered with Indigenous communities to collect furs, the HBC employees were instructed to remain at their bayside posts and to "draw downe the Indians by fayre and gentle means to trade with us."[48] Because of this strategy of remaining at posts, the HBC's bayside trade relied heavily in building long-term, renewable relations with Indigenous traders in order to ensure they return to the bayside from year to year. This strategy meant the HBC not only used economic incentives, especially gifts like clothing, tobacco, and alcohol, but also that they adopted the trading practices of Indigenous bands.[49] Thus, instead of foregrounding trading ceremonies with European patterns of written

43 Rich and Johnson, *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters*, p. 197, note 2; Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, p. 314.
44 Davies, *Letters From Hudson Bay, 1703–40*, p. 24.
45 Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, p. 56; Williams, "Highlights of the First 200 Years," p. 8.
46 Carson, *The East India Company*, chaps. 1 and 2.
47 Scott Stephen lays out this argument very clearly in *Masters and Servants*, chaps. 1 and 7.
48 Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, p. 145. A brief description of the French licensing and fur trade system can be found in Berthelette, *Heirs of an Ambivaent Empire*, pp. 30–31.
49 Ray, "Indians as Consumers in the Eighteenth Century."

treaties and Christian prayers, trading ceremonies at the bayside featured Indigenous cultural patterns and Indigenous spirituality. Lasting over two to three days, these trading ceremonies involved the exchanging of gifts, a pipe ceremony, extensive speechmaking, and plenty of negotiations and interactions with Indigenous headmen, all carried out in the Indigenous language, usually Cree.[50] Christian prayers and symbols were never made part of this process. Writing about the way Europeans seemed to adapt to Indigenous practices during this period of the fur trade, one anthropologist has gone as far as to argue that the fur trade in the eighteenth century was marked more by European cultural change and accommodation to Indigenous practices than the other way around: it was Europeans who were being evangelized and converted, not the Indigenous Peoples.[51] The importance of maintaining these relations was especially significant until the 1760s, and again after the 1780s, when rival traders coming out of Montréal attempted to cut off Indigenous traders from reaching the bayside and, instead, take their furs to Montréal.[52]

Managing Metropolitan Critics

The limited practice of Christianity at the bayside reflects both the commercial orientation of the HBC and how London directives were adapted (or ignored) to suit the needs of the bayside trade. While these adaptations may have served the trade in North America, they undermined the reputation of the company in the metropole. The HBC, like other chartered companies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were often under attack because their monopoly privileges were seen as opposed to the common interests of the nation and its economic and political welfare.[53] Much of this criticism focused on economics and the fact that charted companies benefitted only a small number of privileged shareholders rather than the wealth of the nation as a whole. However, critics also called into question the ability of companies like the HBC to uphold the moral values and political interests of Britain overseas. Critics especially highlighted the failure of companies

50 Edward Umferville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay, Containing a Full Description of That Settlement, and the Adjacent Country; and Likewise of the Fur Trade, with Hints for Its Improvement* (London: Charles Stalker, 1790); Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600–1870* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983); and Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*.

51 Paul C. Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1986), chap. 2.

52 Ray makes clear that Indigenous traders made important use of European rivalry to enhance their own trading position. See Ray, "Indians as Consumers in the Eighteenth Century."

53 Adam Smith was just one in a long line of critics of the monopoly system enjoyed by the chartered companies (although he was notably uncritical of the HBC). Emily Erikson traces the broad history of this criticism in England, and its implications for the rise of new forms of economic thought, in Emily Erikson, *Trade and Nation: How Companies and Politics Reshaped Economic Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021). For the history of HBC and its critics, see Glyndwr Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and Its Critics in the Eighteenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 20 (1970), pp. 149–171, https://doi.org/10.2307/3678766; Williams, "Highlights of the First 200 Years"; David Chan Smith, "The Hudson's Bay Company, Social Legitimacy, and the Political Economy of Eighteenth-Century Empire," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 75, no. 1 (January 2018), pp. 71–108; and, Michael Wagner, *The English Chartered Trading Companies, 1688–1763: Guns, Money and Lawyers* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 191–198.

to provide for the spiritual welfare of its employees and Indigenous Peoples with whom they traded.[54]

For the HBC, this criticism came to a head in the 1740s when Arthur Dobbs, a member of the British parliament with commercial ambitions in North America, launched a public campaign against the monopoly afforded by the HBC's charter. As part of his attack, Dobbs argued that the company's sanctioning of Myatt for instructing the Indigenous boy was based entirely on the company's self-interest; the company was doing little else than seeking to avoid "suffering a remote evil as traders" by having to support the boy as a British subject at its post or in London. In penalizing Myatt while also failing to support chaplains at its posts, Dobbs asserted that the company "violated their indispensable duty as men and Christians; have sacrificed their own servants to their fear; and[,] lest the natives should be instructed and reformed, have hitherto neglected the sending over a clergy-man to keep up a sense of religion at any of their factories."[55] When Dobbs and other merchants later petitioned the Privy Council to have a charter to conduct their own trade, they emphasized, in contrast to the HBC, that such a charter would bring not only economic and political benefits to Britain in its ongoing rivalry with France, but also that their plan for "civilizing the Natives and incorporating them" would "lay a Foundation for their [i.e., Indigenous Peoples] becoming Christian and industrious Subjects of his Majesty."[56] Dobb's campaign culminated in a parliamentary inquiry into the company in 1749, focused principally on whether the HBC should be allowed to retain its monopoly.

While the company managed to defend itself at the inquiry and retain its monopoly, the problem of the company's lack of religiosity was not fully resolved. The HBC could do little to dismiss the criticisms about its failure to support Christianity at its posts. While it could assert it instructed its men to pray, it had not sent chaplains since the 1690s and had, as the Myatt case (which was often mentioned at the parliamentary inquiry) made clear, opposed bringing Christianity to Indigenous Peoples. In short, it could not prove it was serving the "common good" as expected of a chartered company.[57] Because the entire affair had forced the company to become more transparent about its affairs, scrutiny was going to continue.[58] With a spotlight on the company, and its clear failure to do its "duty as men and Christians" exposed, the London Committee was forced to launch a

54 See early chapters of Carson, *The East India Company*.

55 Arthur Dobbs, *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay, in the North-West Part of America* (London: Golden Lion, Ludgate Street, 1744), pp. 76–77.

56 D. Druyer and W. Murray, Petition to the Right Honourable the Lords of a Committee of His Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council, August 10, 1748, quoted in British Parliament, "Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay," p. 285.

57 Michael Chan Smith argues the 1749 inquiry was successfully won by the HBC because it had succeeded in mounting a public and private relations campaign to convince London's political society that it was serving the common good, and retaining its charter was a necessary part of this work. However, he does not look specifically at the issue of religion in the inquiry. Chan Smith, "The Hudson's Bay Company, Social Legitimacy."

58 As Glyndwr Williams remarked of the HBC after Dobbs, "for the first time the structure of the Company and its trade were laid bare" for all in London to see. Williams, for instance, notes that prior to the 1749 inquiry the list of shareholders was not publicly available, but thereafter it was placed in the public record. Williams, "Highlights of the First 200 Years," p. 19.

public relations campaign highlighting how the HBC was acting in the "public good" as well as the private interests of its shareholders.[59] The inland journey of Anthony Henday (1752) was part of this public relations campaign designed to make the HBC look more dynamic and vigorous in their opposition to French imperialism, so too was a new tradition of establishing proof that the HBC was in fact a Christian company.

This drive to assert its Christian credentials did not lead to more concrete Christian infrastructure at the bayside but to more careful use of Christianity by the HBC in London. Animated by a campaign of "impression management,"[60] the HBC sought to promote its Christian credentials by creating a written record of the use of prayers at its North American posts. This leveraging of religion is first evident in September 1750 when, in a break with earlier patterns, the journal writers of the three bayside posts—Prince of Wales Fort, York Factory, and Fort Albany—all started making consistent comments about the keeping of public prayers at the posts. James Isham's 1750–1751 journal from York Factory is undoubtedly the most detailed example of this new tradition. In contrast to his journals from throughout the 1740s, which make no comment at all about prayers, divine services, or sermons, this 1750 journal provides excessive, almost obsessive, detail about each Sunday morning and afternoon services. The first of these entries, from September 2, was the example followed throughout the journal. It reads in part:

> At 10 forenoon … Performed Divine Service for the Day, all the men attended and to my Great Satisfaction Behaved in a very Decent manner. Read a Sermon out of the 2 Vol, Bayles' collection of sermons, pages 541 [?] text Romans [?] Ver: 28th … and in the afternoon read the Divine Service …[61]

Isham's newfound desire to record his prayers was not unique. Further north at Prince of Wales Fort (previously Fort Churchill), factor Joseph Isbister, who likewise had never commented on "divine services" or "publick prayers" in his journals from the 1740s, began making consistent reference, every Sunday, to having "prayers read as usual."[62] Although not nearly as detailed as Isham's journal, from this moment on, Isbister's records made regular note of prayers and services at the post. George Spence, senior officer at Albany, followed the same path. Having never recorded any mention of prayers at that post before 1750, his journal begins to note that on each Sunday, he and the post community "read prayers to Day."[63] This was not a short-lived change. Throughout the 1750s, Isbister's successor at Prince of Wales Fort, Ferdinand Jacob, picked up where Isbister left off, making regular notes that "divine services [were] performed" at the post.[64] The same thing

59 Chan Smith, "The Hudson's Bay Company, Social Legitimacy."

60 This attack was part of a wider attack on chartered companies that would result in the end of the Royal Africa Company and in the modification of the Levant Company. A brief overview of this episode is found in Williams, "Highlights of the First 200 Years," pp. 16–20.

61 Hudson's Bay Company Archives (hereafter HBCA), B.239/A/34, York Factory Journal, September 2, 1750.

62 HBCA, B42/a/36, Prince of Wales Fort Journal, September 9, 1750.

63 HBCA, B3/a/43, Fort Albany Journal, August 5, 1750.

64 See HBCA, B42/a/42, Prince of Wales Fort Journal, September 1753.

happened with the York journals, which continued to consistently record divine services throughout the 1760s and beyond.[65]

While no record could be found of the committee explicitly telling bayside officers to begin making these references to prayers, the timing of events suggests that the return of James Isham to the Bay from England in August 1750 was the catalyst for this new practice. Isham, who had been recalled to England from the Bay in 1748 in order to appear at the parliamentary inquiry, was sent back in 1750 because he was seen as one of the London Committee's most trusted officers and someone especially able to defend the company's interests against rival merchants who were rumoured to be planning yet another voyage into the bay.[66] He was also a senior figure in the company, a "grand old man" of the bayside trade according to E. E. Rich, respected by other officers and thus likely able to influence their behaviour. Isham must have carried with him either written or oral directives to ensure that all bayside posts make consistent records of keeping prayers.[67] After the attacks in London during the 1740s, there was a need to save face and to at least refer to prayers in the journals so that, in the event of a future inquiry, a paper trail of prayers could be presented by the company to its critics.

Isham may also have had personal reasons for being so exacting in his prayers and his records of prayers. In 1750, he returned to the bay as a man married to an English wife. In this new era of life with the attendant obligations—or aspirations—of being a respectable Christian husband, prayer was more important to him than it had been in the past. At the least, these personal feelings reinforced the professional loyalties to a company needing to save face in London. Isbister, Spence, and others for their part followed the lead of this senior officer, recognizing that reporting religion, as with keeping accounts, was now part of their job. Indeed, Isbister seems to highlight the obligatory nature of holding, or at least recording, prayers when he commented that he "had prayers read as usual according to our duty."[68] Such use of religion to quell metropolitan critics would remain a feature of HBC practice through the nineteenth century.

Integrating Labour

As this strategy of impression management in London was established, the London Committee also charted a new, more substantial, use for Christianity at the company's overseas posts. This new policy was made clear in a lengthy letter from the committee to the bayside officers in 1806:

> Wishing to cultivate as much as possible an intimate connection with the Natives all over the Country & to facilitate your intercourse with them which must prove advantageous to the Concerns of the Company, we have thought it would be advisable to instruct ye Children belonging to our servants in the first rudiments of Religion & teach them from their youth reading, writing, arithmetic, accounts, which we

65 York Factory journals make regular references to the same. See HBCA, B239/a/35-55, York Factory Journals, 1751–1767.
66 Rich, "Introduction," p. c.
67 Rich, "Introduction," p. cii.
68 HBCA, B42/a/36, Prince of Wales Fort Journal, September 23, 1750.

> should hope would attach them to our service & in a short time become a Colony of very useful hands.[69]

From now on, mixed-ancestry children of company men would be offered a religious education and even baptism.

This plan was a dramatic reversal of the long-held policy against proselytizing or teaching children at the bayside. Now, religious education would be used to assimilate children into the company. The new plan was both an extension of the longer practice of using Christianity to manage and control overseas labour and a reflection of new opportunities and challenges presented to the company beginning in the 1780s. For one, it reflected the London Committee's new views on the place of women and children in the company. By the 1790s, positive reports from bayside employees about how women and especially "factory boys" (i.e., male children of company men) were "useful" to the company as unpaid labourers, had modified London's view on children of employees.[70] Children of company men started to be seen as a benefit not a drain on the company. Moreover, growing competition from fur traders based out of Montréal had generated new pressure on the HBC to find and retain more employees—a problem made especially difficult by a labour shortage in Britain due to the war with France during the early 1800s. Considering these developments, the use of religious instruction to convert "factory boys" into loyal labourers was a way to capitalize on the potential of company children to manage a labour recruitment problem. The leading historian of children in the fur trade, Jennifer Brown, could not have emphasized the pragmatic nature of this policy any more plainly when she observed that this decision to bring education to company children was "intended [by the London Committee] to make them [the children] into loyal and useful members of the post communities and to equip them with sufficient skills and education so that they could find company employment."[71]

While the need for labour was the decisive force precipitating this new direction in religious policy, fathers of mixed-ancestry children threw their support fully behind the new policy. At a time when British evangelical culture placed new emphasis on fatherly responsibility, these fathers felt they had a duty to provide their children with a literate and religious education so that their children could secure employment (for boys) or marriage (for girls) in the upper echelon of the HBC.[72] In response to the London Committee's suggestion to offer education, several officers replied, in 1807, that they lamented the "present helplessness of our children" and that there was an "anxious desire of every Parent that the Happiness resulting from Education and Religion should be imparted" to their children.[73] These fathers went so far as to ask for a "seminary" to be built at the bayside, complete with a matron sent over from England.[74]

69 HBCA, RG20/6a/15, London Committee to John Hodgson, May 31, 1807, copied in Archives Department research tools No. 15 Annals, 1791–1807.
70 Jennifer S. H. Brown, "A Colony of Very Useful Hands," *The Beaver*, vol. 307, no. 4 (Spring 1977), p. 40.
71 Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, p. 166.
72 Payne, *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory*, p. 108.
73 Quoted in Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, p. 165.
74 Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, pp. 165–166.

The idea of fathers securing a Christian education for their children was not entirely new. James Isham had already pioneered the use of Christian education as a way to provide for his mixed-ancestry son, Charles. Born in the early 1750s near York Factory, Charles was initially raised with his mother's family at the bayside. Although James was silent in his written notices to his employers about his son, towards the end of his own career, he devised a way to provide for his mixed-ancestry son by writing into his will that upon his own death, Charles was to be transported to England and given an English and Christian education. Thus, in 1761, when James Isham died, Charles was given passage on an HBC ship to England and placed in the care of an uncle. He then spent three years in England, attending school, after which he returned to North America and took up a position in the HBC, using his literacy and his Indigenous connections to carve out a successful career in the company.[75]

Looking back from the late 1700s, it is certainly possible that Isham and these later eighteenth-century officers were following even older patterns of officers using Christianity to manage their bayside children. Richard White, speaking at the 1749 inquiry, said that he "knows not of any Attempts made to educate Children, except those of Englishmen, who are generally the Governor's Sons."[76] This suggests that even earlier than Charles Isham, fathers were finding ways to educate their children—especially sons—for a career in the trade. It is here that the story of Joseph Myatt is worth returning to. White's comment, and Isham's later actions, suggest Myatt's story may not be about evangelization alone but about trying to secure a career for a mixed-ancestry son in the company through Christianity and literary education. Although the boy's identity is unknown, it would not be surprising if he was Myatt's own son, or the son of a fellow officer; either way, Myatt had taken a particular interest in the boy for some reason and appeared as a kind of father figure to him. The entire episode of Joseph Myatt was possibly an early case of evangelization to secure a career within the HBC.

Longstanding assumptions about the cultural superiority of Christian culture were also at play in the fathers' support for schooling. In the few private records of fur traders we have from this period, fur trade fathers make clear that for them, Indigenous spirituality was inferior to Christianity. Andrew Graham's "Observations on Hudson's Bay," ostensibly a series of collected writings by Graham from his time as officer at York Factory in the late 1700s, is one instance of such personal reflections. The description he provides of "Indians" generally reflects his experience of interacting with Indigenous Peoples in the context of trade.[77] His brief description of Indigenous spirituality is likewise written from an arms-length perspective of a trader trying to describe his clients. He writes about creation stories, the role of "conjurors" and "doctors," the use of "sweating" as a remedy, and medicine bundles, but he clearly has trouble explaining these things to himself

75 Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, pp. 56–57.

76 Richard White, quoted in British Parliament, "Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay," p. 220.

77 Glyndwr Williams, ed., *Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767–91*, vol. XXVII (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969), pp. 159–166.

and his Christian audience.[78] The most analytical he gets is his statement that "The religious sentiments of these people are confused; but in many things their ideas are just."[79] He never makes a statement about needing to adjust, challenge, or change these practices, but clearly highlights that while trade may bring him into contact with "Indians," religion separated him from them.

The writings of George Nelson, which stretch well into the nineteenth century, provide a more detailed instance of a fur trader reflecting on their own Christian spirituality and its relationship to Indigenous spiritual practices. Nelson, who began his career with the HBC's rivals, the XY Company and the North West Company, is remarkable among fur traders for his detailed and thoughtful writing about Indigenous, especially Anishinabek, spirituality.[80] Compared to Graham, Nelson was quite sympathetic to Indigenous spirituality and, unlike Graham, attempted to understand its internal logic, notably the role of dreams, or "the dreamed" as he termed it, in Indigenous spiritual practices.[81] Even in his more culturally sensitive approach, Nelson shared Graham's tendency to analyze and evaluate Indigenous spirituality through his own Christian framework. The result was that he could only evaluate its legitimacy against a backdrop of Christianity. This analytical approach led him to assume not only that Christianity was superior but that even if there were virtuous elements of Indigenous spirituality, they were only evidence that these apparently non-Christian peoples were carrying Christian knowledge in their hearts. As he noted in his writings:

> Without the slightest, most distant instruction in the knowledge of Divine truths, should still have such ideas of human obligations and express them with such beautiful Simplicity…that would do honor to many of our clergy. These things Show, as St. Paul says the knowledge of the Lord [is] in our hearts &c, &c.[82]

While the HBC system of corporate Christianity had long hid, or undervalued, expressions of this superiority in North America, cultural superiority existed in the outlook of even the most sympathetic fur trader, reflecting a post-enlightenment and early humanitarian impulse to describe and assess Indigenous spirituality against the assumed "truth" of Christianity.[83]

These views of Graham and Nelson, along with the 1807 letter from HBC officers, legitimize Brown's argument that the arrival of schools at the bayside posts was a case—sometimes rare in HBC history—of the interests of employees and employers "coincid[ing]."[84] Fathers wanted their children assimilated into the Christian culture of the company, just as much as the company wanted them to be

78 Williams, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, pp. 153–166.
79 Williams, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, p. 163.
80 Jennifer S. H. Brown and Robert Brightman, "Introduction," in Jennifer S. H. Brown and Robert Brightman, eds., *"The Orders of the Dreamed": George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth, 1823* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), p. 3.
81 Brown and Brightman, "Introduction," p. 21.
82 George Nelson, Unpublished reminiscences, 1825, quoted in Brown and Brightman, "Introduction," p. 23.
83 Brian Stanley, "Christian Missions and the Enlightenment: A Reevaluation," in Brian Stanley, ed., *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001), pp. 1–21.
84 Brown, "A Colony of Very Useful Hands," p. 45.

assimilated. Unlike the earlier era in which the absence of prayer at the bayside separated the employee and the employer, by the early nineteenth century, prayer was something that now bound them together. Brown explains that this change also highlights how the HBC posts were undergoing a change from purely commercial spaces towards "social and cultural entities" in which religion, at least in theory, would bind together men and women, parents and children, and employer and employee.

This new policy was useful in one other way: it allowed the HBC to continue to use religion in its public relations campaigns in the metropole. In a long memorandum asking for financial help from the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1808, the London Committee used this new policy to make exaggerated claims about its support for the religious education of Indigenous Peoples.[85] The company gave five reasons why the government should provide it with financial assistance. Four of these were economic and political in nature, related to the company's chartered privileges and its past financial performance. A fifth was about its performance as a supporter of religion. Here, the committee referenced the company's close "ties" to the "North American Indians" and its work to bring religion and "civilization" to this population. According to the committee, the HBC, "continue to them [Indigenous Peoples] those advantages which would result [in] their religious as well as civil welfare from the progressive Improvements & a gradual system of civilization and education which we introduced throughout the country." These "Improvements," the committee concluded, were "diffusing the comfort of civilized life to thousands of uninstructed Indians…"[86]

This was a careful distortion of the truth. The committee members knew—and insisted to its employees in May 1806—that the schooling it was offering in the bayside was meant to serve only children of servants "in the actual Employ" of the company.[87] But the committee also knew that in an imperial metropole increasingly shaped by the language of humanitarianism, where chartered trading companies like the EIC were being publicly challenged to do more to support the extension of Christianity into its trading territory, it was imperative that the HBC appear to be an active member of the rising tide of evangelical humanitarianism and the "civilizing mission" it promoted.[88] Thus, to ensure corporate needs would be well served by the rhetoric if not the reality of Christianity's place in the company, Christianity was framed broadly for a London audience.

85 By the beginning of 1808, the company was carrying a debt of almost £50,000 and facing the prospect of further losses due to the strength of the North West Company. To limit the crisis, the London Committee asked the Chancellor if the company could suspend payment of tariffs for several years while its finances stabilized. See HBCA, A.1/49, Governor and Committee Minutes, January 13, 1809.

86 HBCA, A.1/49, London Committee to "The Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury," December 21, 1808, copied in Governor and Committee Minutes, May 17, 1809.

87 HBCA, RG20/6a/15, London Committee to George Gladman (officer in charge of Eastmain), May 31, 1806, copied in Archives Department research tools No. 15 Annals, 1791–1807.

88 Carson's study of the religion in the East India Company captures this pressure in the case of that trading company. See Carson, *The East India Company*, chaps. 1 and 2.

Conclusion

Writing in 1965, K. G. Davies argued that in looking at HBC correspondence from the eighteenth century, "we are reminded … that the purpose of the Company was not exploration or to win admiration of future generations, but to make money."[89] The history of religion in the early modern HBC—from managerialism to public relations to labour recruitment—reaffirms Davies's interpretation. This history highlights that the HBC was not a "Company State" in the early modern era, or a "quasi-governmental" institution, or even a form of settler colonialism.[90] Rather, it was—in marked contrast to the French fur trade and the era of settler colonialism to follow—just a business, interested not in grand designs of settlement and empire making but in turning a profit from a relatively humble trade.

If there was more than a commercial orientation to the HBC's use of religion, it would not come into play until the 1810s, when it began working with Protestant and Catholic organizations to establish schools and settlements in the Hudson's Bay watershed.[91] However, even in crafting this strategy to bring education to Indigenous children, the HBC sought to retain control of Christianity and Christian education. It was the London Committee—not mission societies or parliamentary intervention—that created a plan to establish a school to teach "Native Indians [i.e. 'First Nations'] in the Company's Territory," and it was the committee's own members that reached out to the New England Company and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to put this plan into action—not the other way around.[92] In this plan, moreover, missionaries would be peripheral figures, not used at the school or anywhere in the region; instead, company officers would recruit potential students from throughout the company's territory and send them to a school where retired officers would work as translators.[93] The only "outsider" in this plan would be a hired schoolteacher. When the missionaries like John West (CMS) did eventually arrive in HBC territory in the 1820s, they found themselves in constant conflict with HBC employees, including George Simpson, who saw missionaries as a threat to the trade in the region.[94] Finding a balance between supporting missionaries in order to curry favour in London while carrying out trade in a way that satisfied

89 K.G. Davies, "Preface," in K.G. Davies, ed., *Letters From Hudson Bay, 1703–40* (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1965), p. x.

90 The interpretation of the HBC as a "Company State" is outlined in, Edward Cavanagh, "A Company with Sovereignty and Subjects of Its Own? The Case of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670–1763," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2011), pp. 25–50. Cavanagh's interpretation is informed by research on the East India Company; especially Stern, *The Company-State*.

91 For this history, see John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), chap. 5.

92 The plan is outlined in Benjamin Harrison, *Proposal of Mr. Harrison for the Application of Part of the Funds of the New England Company Within the Territories of the Hudson's Bay Company* (London: Printed by S. Gosnell, 1815). Further analysis of the plan is found in, Tolly Bradford and Rich Connors, "The Making of a Company Colony: The Fur Trade War, the Colonial Office, and the Metamorphosis of the Hudson's Bay Company," *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 55, no. 3 (2020), pp. 190–191.

93 Harrison, *Proposal of Mr. Harrison*, p. 14.

94 Studies that analyze this tension include, John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821–1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); N. Jaye Goossen, "The Relationship of the Church Missionary Society and the Hudson's Bay Company in Rupert's Land, 1821 to 1860, with a Case Study of Stanley Mission under Direction of the Rev. Robert Hunt" (MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1974); Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*; and, Robert Coutts, *The Road to the Rapids: Nineteenth-*

North American employees would animate much of the history of Christianity in the nineteenth-century HBC. As before, religion would continue to be shaped by, and shape, the corporate orientation of the HBC.[95]

One of the implications of this HBC-inflected Christianity was that, well into the nineteenth century, Indigenous Peoples continued to view Christianity as closely associated with commerce and the company. Such was the case that by mid-nineteenth century, Indigenous traders in the northwest plains connected the newly arrived missionaries in that region with fur traders. Methodist missionary Thomas Woolsey, recounting his interactions with Indigenous Peoples at Fort Edmonton in the 1860s, noted that Plains Cree hunters not only brought buffalo meat to him in expectation of trade but also insisted that the missionary—like the fur trader—extend credit to them in autumn to be repaid in the spring. Although reluctant to accede to the request because extending credit ran against his "text of 'no debt,'" Woolsey acknowledged that he had little choice. Without extending credit, the Cree would be "prejudicial to me getting provisions this winter." The Cree, for their part, can hardly be blamed for assuming that the "missionary" and the "fur trader" were more similar than different.[96] The form of Christianity constructed by the HBC since the 1670s had endowed religion with commercial meanings and connections. The French system may have implemented a more consciously imperial form of Christianity in its fur trade, but the HBC system too left an imprint on the meanings of Christianity in what is now western Canada.

Century Church and Society at St. Andrew's Parish, Red River (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000).

95 Derek Whitehouse-Strong, "'Because I Happen to Be a Native Clergyman': The Impact of Race, Ethnicity, Status, and Gender on Native Agents of the Church Missionary Society in the Nineteenth Century Canadian North-West" (Ph.D dissertation, University of Manitoba, 2004).

96 Glenbow Archives, George and John McDougall Family Fonds, M-729-3, Series 1b - George McDougall Correspondence, Thomas Woolsey to George McDougall, December 21, 1861.