

The Education of Henry Bird Steinhauer, Indigenous Missionary in Western Canada

A.A. DEN OTTER

In May 1869, Henry Steinhauer, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary in western Canada reported to the *Wesleyan Missionary Notices* that at his mission in Whitefish Lake (about 130 kilometres northeast of Fort Edmonton), “the Spirit of God moves in the dark and chaotic mind of the Indian” to bring about their conversion to Christianity. Continuing in similar vein, Steinhauer noted that he was making such good progress in settling a migratory people that he presided over a Christian village with little houses and gardens and perhaps a cow tethered in the front yard. “And the poor children,” he added, “once so destitute, are now clothed, washed, and combed, and highly delighted with the day-school.” What a wonderful contrast, he enthused, with the days when the “highest ambition [of his charges] was to kill each other and to kill the buffalo.”¹

These words, typical of the *Notices*, would have led the uninformed reader to assume Steinhauer was one of the British or Canadian-born Caucasian missionaries whom the Methodists supported in the Northwest. Nothing would have been further from the truth for, although born in Ontario, Henry Steinhauer was a full-blooded Ojibwa, who had arrived in what was then Rupert’s Land twenty-eight years previous. He had come, so he reminisced, by birch bark canoe “and for months” had not seen “a pale-face . . . save at the Hudson’s Bay Company’s posts.” How could it be that an aboriginal person could describe the time before his arrival in the Northwest as the “dark days” and a fellow native as a “naked savage, who trusted to the conjuror and to his medicine-bag for tomorrow?”

One factor in this remarkable report, in which Steinhauer clearly distanced himself from his native cohorts, corresponds in part to what Mary Louise Pratt observed in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Indigenous people, Pratt argued, often appropriated the language and values of the European imperialists who imposed foreign cultural traditions on them.² These autoethnographic texts were not, she continued, authentic expressions of a new aboriginal culture, but were designed to impress the metropolitan audience and to gain an entry into its society. Undoubtedly, as a convert to Christianity, Steinhauer sought the approbation of those born and raised in that faith; nevertheless, his wording comprised more complex determinants and was authentically his.

Like most of his contemporaries, Steinhauer was writing with an eye on gratifying the supporters of missions in western Canada. The *Notices* were part of a relatively elaborate publicity network whose primary purpose was fund-raising. Collectively, the periodicals published by various missionary societies created the stereotype of a monolithic, aboriginal people who were miserable in their supposedly savage, heathen, and nomadic state as opposed to Euro-American Christians who were disciplined, settled farmers--or as the mission press put it--civilized agriculturalists.³ Steinhauer's language expressly reflected that perception. The financial status of his mission at Whitefish Lake was tenuous at best and to secure support from central Canadian churchgoers he had to demonstrate some success in lifting his indigenous fellows out of a perceived miserable existence. Moreover, he had to couch this description in the religious phraseology of nineteenth-century evangelical Christianity in general and Wesleyan Methodism in particular.⁴

Another possible factor in Steinhauer's attitude may have been an ethnic difference. Born an Ojibwa, he ministered most of his life among the Cree people. As Laura Peers has demonstrated, although Ojibwa and Cree bands intermingled and often shared encampments, the Cree thought that the Ojibwa believed themselves to be more spiritual in character and to have stronger supernatural powers than other tribes.⁵ This feeling of sacred superiority, Peers suggests, created an invisible barrier between the two people and, therefore, may have contributed to Steinhauer rhetorically distancing himself from his pastoral charges.

While tribal rivalries, missionary rhetoric, and a desire to assimilate himself into Euro-Canadian society may have been part of Steinhauer's outlook, the primary influence on his intellectual and spiritual life was his conversion to Christianity, the subsequent isolation from his people, as

well as the education he received in the Methodist schools of Canada West. Moreover, when he wrote these words in 1869, he was nearly fifty years old, and had worked and lived among Canadian Methodists for over forty years. Educated by them, he had absorbed the idiom of their religion and much of their culture. Although he had shed the trappings of his aboriginal heritage slowly, by the last decades of his life he appears to have absorbed the essence of European culture, especially its religious component. Although his words did not articulate an indigenous ethic, they were an authentic expression of his own personal value system.

Born sometime between 1818 and 1820 near Lake Simcoe in Upper Canada, Shahwahnegezhik, as he was originally named, spent the first decade of his life among his people, who tried as best they could to maintain their traditional hunter-gathering subsistence in face of growing numbers of Euro-Canadian settlers.⁶ Parents, grandparents, and elders taught him the hunting, fishing, and other skills needed to survive in the North American environment. They also instructed him in the essentials of Ojibwa culture, especially its religious underpinnings. Shahwahnegezhik appeared destined to grow up like hundreds of his fellow Ojibwas.

Before he reached puberty, however, Shahwahnegezhik had a life-altering experience. One day, attracted by the sound of children chanting, he approached a Methodist schoolhouse and lingered in the open door, captivated by the sight of students reading from books. The teacher, a missionary, invited him in and thus launched Steinhauer's career.⁷ The record is not clear as to when he had the religious conversion experience central to Methodism, but in 1828 Shahwahnegezhik was baptized in a mass ceremony.⁸ From this point on, he began to shed his Ojibwa identity and slowly, but relentlessly adopted a Euro-Canadian way of life.

The transformation of his personal identity, although radical, likely was not traumatic. In the first place, Shahwahnegezhik was relatively young and his personality still malleable. Moreover, his peoples had a generations-long experience with Euro-North American and thus the new way of life would not have been entirely unfamiliar to him, his parents, or his elders. More significantly, his initial attraction to the newcomers was entirely pragmatic. Even at his young age, he recognized the importance and power of literacy and it was his desire to learn to read that drew him to the school. Once he entered the classroom, he would not have found the religious concepts, initially taught to him in elementary form, entirely foreign. His Ojibwa ancestors believed in a Supreme Being and a world

filled with spirits, some good and some malevolent. They too believed in life after death. In fact, Shahwahnegezhik's grandfather taught him about a prosperous place with an abundance of game, fish, sugar, roots, and berries, which only those who had lived brave and virtuous lives would enter. His people's notion of an afterlife and their profound spirituality, with its visions, fasting, prayer, and emotional sacramental ceremonies that often led to ecstasy, prepared him for the teachings of Methodism. He felt that Christianity embodied many of the same basic values as that of his ancestors.⁹ Driven mainly by the desire to acquire the power of the written word, Shahwahnegezhik gradually accepted the religious doctrines that were integral to the Methodist curriculum.

Once the eight or ten-year old Shahwahnegezhik had committed himself to Wesleyan Methodism, the church assumed responsibility for his education. Likely, the mission school he had shyly approached was located on Grape Island in Lake Ontario, near Belleville. Established in 1827, Grape Island was a hamlet of nearly two dozen neatly whitewashed log cabins, a chapel, a schoolhouse, and a variety of village shops as well as a hospital. Its founder, United States born Rev. William Case, imposed upon its inhabitants a rigorous daily seventeen-hour regimen of work, meals, prayers, and devotions. Despite their hard work, the missionary and his charges had limited success as they could not overcome the limitations of the island's cramped size nor the need to travel to neighbouring islands to tend their crops and cattle.¹⁰

Next to the chapel, the school house was the most important structure on Grape Island. Education was central to Methodism and, while its primary purpose was moralistic, that is, to learn to worship God and love humanity, it also had a strong practical theme. Not only was material success in life a noble goal, Methodists, as members of a minority, dissenting faith had a strong sense for justice, equality, and political reform. One of its chief leaders, Egerton Ryerson, fought relentlessly for a system of non-sectarian, public, universal education, designed not solely for spiritual advancement, but also for pragmatic purposes.¹¹ Seeing promise in young Shahwahnegezhik, William Case undertook to teach him the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic as well as some elementary artisan skills such as gardening, carpentry, and construction. Within four years, the child, born into a hunter-gathering economy, had learned the rudiments of a settled agricultural society.¹²

Despite the strict discipline that paralleled the mission's regimen, the mission school did adopt some of the educational principles of Johann

Heinrich Pestalozzi who thought that education, begun the day a child was born, should continue inside and outside the classroom. Because Pestalozzi taught that children learned through their senses rather than by abstraction, he suggested teachers must cultivate students' sensory skills through observation and communication, by guiding them through manageable steps from the simple to the complex, and by avoiding rote memorization. Children learn best, he explained, by means of visual and tactile aids. They should, for example, study vegetation, animals and insects by direct observation.¹³ Pestalozzi appealed especially to the Wesleyan Methodist's moral objectives of education. Although, they would have rejected his Jean Jacques Rousseau inspired belief that babies were born innocent and pure, they embraced his assumption that children were constantly bombarded by evil, corrupting forces. They needed, therefore, to be taught faith in God, as the best moral defence against temptation.¹⁴

While teachers at the Grape Island school adopted some of Pestalozzi's pedagogical ideas, particularly that children needed constant discipline to fight evil, corrupting spirits, they clung dogmatically to the belief in strict discipline. The principle that the child needed corporal punishment in order to tame the evil tendencies of the human will and to establish uniformity of behaviour and discipline in the class room, was common not only on Grape Island, but also elsewhere in Upper Canada, the United States, and Great Britain.¹⁵ Rooted in the Bible and deeply embedded in the early nineteenth-century Christian psyche, parents and educators often employed severe physical punishment to instill in children a sense of honour and responsibility as well as devotion to duty.¹⁶ At Grape Island, bells and whistles regulated the student's activities and, following contemporary practices, corporal punishment was common and harsh. Consequently, Shahwahnegezhik experienced, or at best witnessed, the methods that Methodist missionaries employed to transform supposedly undisciplined children, attached to their native heritage, into supposedly obedient students, receptive to European culture.¹⁷

By moving into the Methodist community, Shahwahnegezhik also absorbed its religious milieu. By embracing Christianity, he also accepted the doctrine of one transcendent God, who did not dwell in either plants or animals, and of the salvation of his soul not solely by good conduct, but by abstractly receiving Jesus Christ as his personal saviour. He learned these basic principles through rote memorization of Scripture texts, catechism lessons, and hymns. Very influential in this regard were the catechism and hymns of Isaac Watts. Although an eighteenth-century

dissenting clergyman, Watts' work was still popular in the early nineteenth century. His hymns, initially published in 1715 for the moral improvement of children, had been reissued well over 500 times with more than 6 million copies printed. In keeping with the ethos of the time, the hymns touched on positive aspects of praise and worship, but most often deliberately frightened children by emphasizing the horror of eternal punishment for continued bad behaviour like lying, quarrelling, swearing, idleness, and disobedience. Direct, and written in simple blunt language, the songs were sung so often that they were imprinted on the minds of the students.

Song XI is typical of the genre. Like the vast majority of his hymns, Watts painted the stark reality of eternal damnation and pointed to pious behaviour as the only means of avoiding it:

There is beyond the sky
A heaven of joy and love,
And holy children when they die
Go to that world above.

There is a dreadful hell,
And everlasting pains;
There sinners must with devils dwell
In darkness, fire, and chains.

Can such a wretch as I
Escape this cursed end?
And may I hope whene'er I die
I shall to heaven ascend?

Then I will read and pray,
While I have life and breath;
Lest I should be cut off today
And sent to eternal death.¹⁸

Victorian children were from birth exposed to this stark dichotomy of eternal reward and punishment as parents and teacher used not only Watt's hymns, but also his catechism as the foundation of Christian education. The second set, for example, written for those from eight to twelve years of age, contained a catalogue of sins including swearing, cursing, lying, scoffing, gluttony, drunkenness, and quarrelling. With

evangelical fervour, it encouraged a mindset of industry, piety, obedience, honesty, sobriety, and politeness.¹⁹ In addition to the hymns and catechism, teachers and ministers used exhortations, admonitions, and sermons to inculcate good behaviour. Undoubtedly harsh, and not necessarily effective, their overriding and usually genuine concern was the eternal welfare of the child's soul.

Several educators had a great influence on Shahwahnegezhik. Perhaps the most influential was Rev. William Case. While at Grape Island, Shahwahnegezhik lived in the home of the missionary. The two developed a deep relationship of mutual respect, the latter becoming like a father for the former.²⁰ Case, physically diminutive, was very personable and charismatic. A persuasive preacher and mellifluous singer, tender and deeply religious, he served superbly as a model of Wesleyan Christianity. Sensitive to the importance of cultural differences and language, his school was bilingual, opening to its graduates the opportunity to become translators. Moreover, he had an abiding faith in the intellectual abilities of native children, encouraging both genders to become teachers or, alternatively, for boys to train as preachers and girls as homemakers. Seeing in Shahwahnegezhik a promising student and potential translator, Case enrolled him in New York's Cazenovia Seminary in 1832 to study classical languages in preparation for a career in translation.

Case may have been responsible for the renaming of Shahwahnegezhik to Henry Bird Steinhauer, possibly in honour of a wealthy Philadelphia businessman who underwrote the youth's education. Whatever the origin of the new name, Steinhauer, assumed it slowly; he continued to use his birth name for another twenty years, albeit gradually less and less frequently. By adopting his new name gradually, he demonstrated that neither the conversion from the ancestral to Christian religion, nor the shift from an aboriginal to an European culture was neither instantaneous nor complete but incremental and a life-long process.²¹

William Case also exposed Steinhauer to a life-affecting experience. In the late winter of 1829, he took him and several other children on a fund-raising tour along the eastern seaboard. Regularly singing and speaking for large audiences, at times numbering more than 1,000, the small group of five boys and two girls, aged eight to fourteen, aroused the sympathy of the crowds. It was a heady experience for Steinhauer and must have affected him deeply.²² Exposed for the first time to large cities, and what must have seemed to him unheard of wealth and luxury, he

would have come to understand the power of the newcomer society. Clearly, he was living in a revolutionary time for the First Nations as almost nightly, he heard Case belittle his heritage and former religion and hail Christianity embedded in a supposedly superior culture.

Another person who had an effect on Steinhauer was Peter Jones, a convert to Christianity whose mother was Ojibwa and father European. An ordained Methodist missionary, Jones believed his former native spirituality to be false and also felt that the aboriginal hunter-gatherer economy would soon give way to a settled agricultural society. Relentlessly, he preached that the only way for his people to survive the new order would be to adopt the ways of the newcomers.²³ His tireless efforts to assimilate the Mississauga into Upper Canadian society earned him considerable resentment among the adult population. When he tried, for example, to persuade his council to put children to work on the mission farm in order to prepare them for the rigours of work and to instill in them a sense of duty and virtue, two significant groups balked. Most strongly opposed were the traditionalists, who resented any erosion of ancestral customs and who believed Jones was going too far in transforming the mission into a rural British village. Less defiant were those who were willing to remain Christians, but wanted to practice a number of traditional feasts within the new faith. Although not in the majority, the two groups working together to block Jones' most extreme policies.²⁴

The critics especially resented Jones' authoritarian European-driven pedagogy. They agreed, in keeping with their native child-rearing principles, that no one, not even parents, should command a child to do anything. They also deplored Jones' drive to teach the children only in English.²⁵ Ojibwa was still the working language of the Credit mission, but he believed that this hindered the desired erosion of traditional ways. Learning, speaking, and writing only in the English language would, he believed, facilitate a more rapid integration into English society.²⁶ Jones was convinced only a few of the adults at the Credit Mission would adopt European habits. He, therefore, concentrated his efforts on the children, imposing a totally European curriculum on the mission school. In 1835, he unsuccessfully moved that "all the children be placed entirely under the charge and management of the teachers and missionaries: so that their parents shall have no control over them."²⁷ Obviously, Jones recognized that parents and grandparents taught their children traditional cultural values. Committed to training his charges to compete effectively with their

white peers, Jones wanted as much as possible to erase Mississauga culture.

In 1833, Steinhauer interrupted his studies to teach at Jones' Credit Mission School. Although his tenure there was short, Jones' aims must have influenced Steinhauer. While he accepted the older missionary's goals, he rejected his methods. To be sure, in his later career, he too wanted to train his charges to become farmers and to speak English, but he worked diligently on translating the gospel and usually preached in the native tongue. Although he never explicitly articulated his personal missiology, Steinhauer's writings implicitly suggest that he never fully denounced his Native heritage. To him the primary objective was always the creation of a Christian faith community. So he used familiar Ojibwa expressions and idioms to explain Judeo-Christian theology. Spiritual goals were, to him, more much more important than temporal achievements. Moreover, he enjoyed the outdoors and later, when stationed at Norway House, accompanied his charges on the customary autumn goose hunt whenever he could. As late as 1881, he wrote, "Often when engaged in secular labor [sic], the want of food was felt. The larder being empty, if in summer go into bush, pick a few berries for his dinner, or take his gun and shoot a partridge or a rabbit." Switching immediately to the spiritual, he continued,

and thus the missionary went on, at the same time not neglecting to keep the old gospel musket in trim, ready for use at every opportunity. The game of this kind that could be reached was at first shy and wild, and far down in the valley and dark wilderness; but by-and-by groans were heard, and sobs, with cries of great pain; then it was known the old musket had taken effect. As the aim at first was to kill, now the object was to heal and make alive. If the case of the humble worker has been reached by the skill of the Great Physician, so can these dark and benighted ones. Then the "shout of a king" was in our camp. This was the first indication of the coming day upon the darkness of this people.²⁸

Steinhauer's express labelling of his own people as "dark and benighted" referred first of all to their ignorance of the Christian gospel, but also pointed to their lack of basic skills such as reading and arithmetic and no knowledge of contemporary European learning. Thus when still at the Credit Mission, he and other teachers taught their charges an entirely new science. Thunder was not the great eagle flapping its wings nor was

the world an island.²⁹ Moreover, he and the others deliberately demonstrated that hunting, fishing, and gathering was no longer an acceptable economic basis for society and had to be replaced by agriculture. Along with that came a whole new perspective on nature--one that taught that the forest had to be removed and the land cultivated into productive fields.³⁰

The third person who influenced Steinhauer's education was Egerton Ryerson, the noted Methodist minister and educator. In 1836, when the Wesleyan Methodist conference perceived a need for more translators, Ryerson enrolled Steinhauer in the Upper Canada Academy, which had just opened at Coburg. The coeducational Academy, largely inspired by Ryerson, intended to provide secondary education to Methodist and other students. Supposedly non-sectarian because it did not teach systematic theology, it offered a broad classical college education in which students would "be faithfully instructed in the various branches of human learning, which the present state of society renders essentially necessary, in order to respectability and usefulness."³¹ More important than these temporal objectives, however, was the college's spiritual aim to train youth "in the knowledge and obedience of God." While Steinhauer increased his understanding of the classics, he was also exposed to a general infusion of a Protestant and biblical milieu.³²

While the Academy emphasized mathematics and classical literature, it also strengthened Steinhauer's grasp of English grammar, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. In addition, he studied French, Logic, Rhetoric, History, and natural philosophy. In Latin, he read *Roman History*, *Caesar's Commentaries* and Horace, and in Greek, *Jacob's Greek Reader*, *Idylls of Moscus*, and *Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles*. At the 1838 annual public examination, Steinhauer read a segment in Latin, supposedly "with ease, fluency and appropriate emphasis."³³ He also spoke "On the Diffusion of Wisdom and Religion." The oration "delineated in an interesting manner the signs of the times," wrote the *Christian Guardian*, and it "averted to the bloodless conquests of revealed truth and closed with a glowing anticipation of its approaching universal triumph."³⁴

After graduating from Upper Canada Academy, Steinhauer taught for one year at the Alderville Mission.³⁵ In the early summer of 1840, the Wesleyan Methodist Conference sent him to Rupert's Land, a mission field that the British Wesleyan Missionary Society was opening at the request of the Hudson's Bay Company. He was to assist Reverend William Mason, a British-born missionary at Lac la Pluie as interpreter, translator, and schoolmaster. The two did not make much headway in their mandate

and in 1844, James Evans, the field's supervisor requested Steinhauer to come to Norway House, located at the northern tip of Lake Manitoba.³⁶ At this well-established mission, he worked mainly as Bible translator and schoolmaster.³⁷ In 1850, he was transferred to Jackson Bay Station, near Oxford House, which was located over 200 kilometres from Norway House on the Hayes River. Here he experienced considerable difficulty with the Hudson's Bay Company postmaster, who opposed the mission as a perceived threat to the fur trade. Steinhauer also had to cope with poor agricultural land and failed fisheries, suffering extreme hunger and misery. He was greatly relieved when John Ryerson, the brother of Egerton and president of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada, invited him to come along on a publicity trip in England for the 1854-55 winter.³⁸ On his return to Canada, the Canadian conference ordained him into the ministry of the Methodist Church. He was posted to Lac la Biche [in northeastern Alberta], but facing stiff competition from Roman Catholic missionaries, he moved southward in 1858 to Whitefish Lake where the land was arable and the fish plentiful. Within years, he and his converts had built a small village surrounded by cultivated fields. Although never entirely independent from the nearby buffalo herds and fishery, the Whitefish mission was relatively successful. Steinhauer tended the community until his death in 1884.

Steinhauer built his missionary career on what he had learned in the Upper Canadian and New York school systems. Like all the privileged young men of the time, he emerged a Victorian gentleman--at least in demeanour if not in social status--displaying the virtues inculcated in all British and Canadian school boys of the time--politeness, disinterestedness, and above all the ability to use one's time usefully and productively. Moreover, he was an accomplished speaker armed with a strong command of the classical languages and the techniques of rhetoric, logic, and dialectics.

Steinhauer differed from his classmates in that he was weaned from the aboriginal understanding of nature and religion. He had been born into a society of ecological time and religion. The primary means of communication among his peoples was oral and their basic social values were continuity, tradition, and a sense of place. Time was measured by the changing seasons--mainly the heat of summer and the cold of winter--and by passing generations as well as cataclysmic events. Seasons also dictated the timing of religious ceremonies because the people experienced an intimate connection between the real and sacred worlds. The knowledge

and secrets that explained the natural and spiritual worlds were passed by word of mouth from person to person and from generation to generation. All that changed dramatically when, as Shahwahnegezhik, he stood quietly in the doorway of the Grape Island school house and moved through the intersection of two cultures to what Gerald Friesen has labelled, an oral-traditional to a textual-settler society.³⁹

Even as a pre-teenager, Steinhauer understood that literacy was at the heart of Euro-Canadian society. Books not only recorded dreams and wisdom more accurately and enduringly than word of mouth, but they duplicated exactly what had been recorded, a feat that only the greatest of shamans could accomplish. For Steinhauer, as for many native people, the Christian missionaries were more powerful than the indigenous priests because their Bible contained direct references to the deity. Moreover, they were willing to share the printed word with all who appeared receptive to Christianity and thus permit them to obtain for themselves the tangible, preserved, and apparently constant truth. "Literacy and Christianity constituted a powerful challenge to aboriginal cultures," Friesen writes, "and were wielded like weapons within them."⁴⁰

To be sure, Steinhauer recognized the power of the religion of the book and used it to his advantage. If as a youth, he had only dimly and naively perceived the nexus of literacy, language, religion, power, and empire, he understood it clearly when he graduated from the Academy. He consciously rejected a faith that was energized by many spirits immanent in the environment and embraced one that served a monotheistic God, transcendent from nature. He did so willingly, even eagerly, because he saw the religion of the book as superior to his own and its God as authoritative. The imported religion, based on literacy, he felt had made its followers powerful and ready to control the continent.

Steinhauer's educators had made him aware of the enormous might of the British empire and had linked that power directly to its religious basis. How often had he lustily and voluntarily intoned the words written in Watt's hymn book--"Praise for Birth and Education in a Christian Land."?

'Tis to thy sovereign grace I owe
That I was born on British ground;
Where streams of heavenly mercy flow,
And words of sweet salvation sound.

How do I pity those that dwell
Where ignorance and darkness reign,
They know no heaven, they fear no hell,
Those endless joys, those endless pains.⁴¹

Perhaps those words by which his contemporaries had so bluntly connected Christianity with the supposed superiority of British culture, may have jarred when he sang it for the first time, but repeated use assured him that he had become a member of a select community within a powerful empire.

Closely associated with this influential new religion, so he learned, was a whole new system of knowledge. Geography, for example, provided insight into cultures other than his own; astronomy furnished a new cosmology. Moreover, he no longer viewed nature like his aboriginal ancestors. The forest had become a wilderness. Writing to a prominent British Wesleyan, he fondly recalled his trip to England, and “though buried in this waste howling desert,” he remembered its landscape, especially the impressive bustling cityscape of London.⁴² Although his reference to the Old Testament reflected a similar hyperbole, the expression suggested that he no longer considered the pristine forest and plains of Rupert’s Land a homeland.⁴³ He often asked British and Canadian Methodists to pray for the advancement of the gospel and for “the salvation of thousands in this benighted land!”⁴⁴

While Steinhauer’s discourse reflected commonly held nineteenth-century perceptions, it also indicated an alienation from his ancestral people. In his 1867 report, he noted that his devoted and zealous congregation gave him “much consolation in my lonely toils among them.”⁴⁵ On one level this statement signalled his isolation from other missionaries and the church. “Separated far away from the fellowship and kindly counsel of maturer Christians,” he noted in the *Christian Guardian*, “I often feel keenly the loneliness of my position in this far-off land.”⁴⁶ But the suggestion that he was lonely, while working among First Nations people, also alludes to a certain aloofness from both unconverted and converted natives. Rhetorically, he believed that his uneducated, indigenous peers, although Christian, were inferior to himself. In one instance, he observed that he hoped the gospel would prevail “throughout the length and breadth of this dark land.” And, he added, “The heathen around us are looking with astonishment at the transition of their brethren of the White Fish Lake from a wretched degradation to our improved, happy condition, clothed

and in their right minds; raised, in some small degree, in the scale of being.”⁴⁷ He implicitly echoed in this statement a generally held European belief that humanity progressed in stages from savage to civilized; and, he expressly articulated his assumption that, while the Christianized Natives of Whitefish Lake had taken one step towards civilization, they had not yet reached his level of maturity.⁴⁸ Obviously, Steinhauer, who seemingly had absorbed current assumptions in anthropology and Linnaean Science, believed that North American Natives had to adopt completely the economics and science, as well as religion, of the European settlers.

Properly educated, however, aboriginal men were, he thought, well suited for missionary work. He argued passionately that the church should employ Indigenous mission workers as much as possible. Only a native, he suggested, could fully understand the nature, habits, and way of Aboriginal life. “A foreigner, either as Missionary or otherwise, will never take so well with the native of this country, let him be ever so good and kind to them,” he asserted, “there is always distrust on the part of the native to the foreigner, from the fact that the native has been so long downtrodden by the white man.”⁴⁹ Clearly, the bitter lessons of race relations in America had made a deep impression on Steinhauer and he understood the devastating impact European settlers could have on native peoples unless they were literate and educated.

Central to Steinhauer’s work at Whitefish Lake was the belief, inherited from William Case and Peter Jones, that the natives of Rupert Land’s could survive the impending onslaught of European colonists only by becoming like them, that is, settled cultivators of the land. He believed that they, too, had to transform with axe and plow the vast, open plains, and the forests that fringed them, into agricultural fields and villages, towns and cities. He no longer appreciated the incredibly complex, dynamic territorial ecologies that for centuries had sustained a comparatively small human population with a wealth of animals and plants; he accepted the assumption that only cultivated fields could support the impending enormous increase in people.⁵⁰

However much he considered agriculture and settlement central to the survival of the natives of Rupert’s Land, he was most concerned with the salvation of their souls. In all his formal education, and later in his own private studies, the central message always focussed on eternal life. Although troubled about the material welfare of North America’s aboriginal people, he worried immeasurably more about their spiritual health. As a missionary, he may have unwittingly served the purposes of

imperial expansionists, but that was only a secondary corollary to his evangelistic mandate. Steinhauer, like his Methodist, Anglican, and Roman Catholic contemporaries took Christ's injunction, to bring the gospel to all the world, literally. Formal learning as well as informal experience and observation had taught him that central message. Like his peers, he placed the humanitarian or spiritual mandate well above the secular or economic objective.⁵¹

By sharing with his fellow missionaries the assumption that spiritual and material objectives went hand in hand, Steinhauer reflected well the lessons his teachers had imparted to him. He understood that Christianity was an integral part of British culture, or as his instructors put it, civilization. Steinhauer's reports to his fellow Methodists were no less authentic than those of his Euro-Canadian colleagues. In all his communications, he clearly articulated his personal faith. To be sure, his voice was no longer that of North America's non-Christian First Nations. Instead it was the word of an indigenous person who had voluntarily chosen a literary culture and its written faith over his voiced heritage and oral religion. If he had been unduly influenced by his teachers and his books, so had all his Methodist peers.

Endnotes

1. *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, 1 May 1869.
2. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 7.
3. C.L. Higham, *Noble, Wretched, & Redeemable: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians in Canada and the United States, 1820-1900* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000), 1-16. See also Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992).
4. Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 53-70; and Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994).
5. Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780 to 1870* (St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1994), 25-26, 45-46.

6. Isaac Kholisile Mabindisa, "The Praying Man: The Life and Times of Henry Bird Steinhauer" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1984). Mabindisa's dissertation is the most comprehensive biography of Steinhauer. An admirer of Steinhauer's fortitude and sincerity, he lambasts the Hudson's Bay Company for its obstructionist policies in Rupert's Land and chides the Missionary Society for keeping the native-born missionary in relatively obscure positions. In the end, Mabindisa concludes that Steinhauer formed a valuable buffer between the native peoples of western Canada and the encroaching settlers, preparing the former for the latter's lifestyle. Not surprisingly, the brief account of Krystyna Z. Sieciechowicz, "Henry Bird Steinhauer," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 11: 848, is a relatively dispassionate version that does not evaluate the role of aboriginal preachers in Rupert's Land. The name Shahwanegezhick may have meant southern sky while Bird, his middle name, may have been a mistranslation from the Ojibwa words meaning fastest boat or big sail (see, Mabindisa, "Praying Man," 73-74).
7. *Christian Guardian*, 10 May 1854.
8. Mabindisa, "Praying Man," 73.
9. Benjamin Slight, *Indian Researches or Facts Concerning North American Indians* (Montreal: Miller, 1844), 88-90. Slight, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary who described the customs, manners, and traditions of Upper Canada's natives, viewed their religious ceremonies sympathetically and on at least one occasion drew instructive parallels. Donald B. Smith, *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) and the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) provides an account of Jones' childhood that can be applied to Steinhauer. Incidentally, Smith's thesis argues that Jones, by converting to Christianity, was able to save some of his own people the Mississauga from extinction by settling them on farms. Steinhauer held many of Jones' ideas. Catherine Stoehr, "Kahkewaquonaby (Peter Jones) and the Great Spirit (Jesus)," Unpublished Paper, Canadian Historical Association, 2002, suggests that Jones built his Methodist doctrines on the kernel beliefs of his Aboriginal ancestors. See also, Michael D. McNally, *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native Culture in Motion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
10. Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 119-21; and Semple, *The Lord's Dominion*, 121.
11. Semple, *The Lord's Dominion*, 239-420.
12. Mabindisa, "Praying Man," 77-80.

13. George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (London: Warburg Institute, 1966), 36-41; Richard Grivil, "'Knowledge not purchased with the loss of Power': Wordsworth, Pestalozzi, and 'The Spots of Time,'" *European Romantic Review* 8 (1997): 233-34, 239; William J. Reese, "The Origins of Progressive Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 41 (2001) 1-24; and, Clem Adelman, "'Over Two Years, What did Froebel say to Pestalozzi?'" *History of Education* 29 (2000): 104- 107.
14. Boas, *Cult of Childhood*, 36-41.
15. Donald R. Raichle, "School Discipline and Corporal Punishment: An American Retrospect" in Heather Berkeley, Chad Gaffield, and W. Gordon West, eds., *Children's Rights: Legal and Educational Issues* (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1978), 108-120.
16. Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, trans. Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1983), 3-91, takes an extreme position calling nineteenth-century discipline "poisonous pedagogy." The use of strong physical and psychological measures, Miller argues, resulted in the suppression of emotion and any sort of self-will in children. Priscilla Robertson, "Home as a Nest: Middle Class Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Europe," in Lloyd deMause, ed. *The History of Childhood* (New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1974), 407-408, 421, disagrees suggesting that educators were interested more in changing rather than replacing personalities. References to physical punishment are common in the Bible. Proverbs 13: 24, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him," and Proverbs 29: 15, "The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother." The Bible repeatedly refers to God physically punishing those who disobey his injunctions.
17. Peter Jones, *History of the Ojebway Indians; with Special Reference to their Conversion to Christianity* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 67, 277.
18. Isaac Watts, *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 225-226.
19. Isaac Watts, *The Second Set of Catechisms and Prayers or Some Helps to the Religion of Children* (London: J. Buckland and T. Longman, 1768).
20. While Steinhauer only occasionally referred to his mother and rarely visited her, he never mentions his father.

21. McNally, *Ojibwe Singers*, contends that religion is more than a system of belief, but a practice is useful for its insight into the notion of conversion as a process that may never be completed.
22. Mabindisa, "Praying Man," 83-87; and Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 115.
23. Jones, *History of the Ojebway*; and Smith, *Sacred Feathers*.
24. Smith, "*Sacred Feathers*," 154-160.
25. Smith, "*Sacred Feathers*," 157-159.
26. Ironically, George Copway, was another Mississauga preacher, but in contrast to Jones he held a romantic view of Ojibwa culture. I am indebted to Robin Jarvis Brownlie who persuasively argued this point in a paper at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association at Dalhousie University in May 2003. Copway also valued English instruction, but for more sophisticated reasons than Jones. He believed that knowledge of English provided an entry to the riches of English literature (G. Copway, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibwa Nation* [Boston: Benjamin B. Mussey and Co., 1851], 245-246).
27. Peter Jones, "Memorandum, Thoughts on Indian Schools, delivered at Toronto - February 1835," Sermons and Addresses, Peter Jones Collection, Victoria University Library.
28. *Missionary Outlook* I, Mo. 7, July 1881, 74
29. *Christian Guardian*, 10 April 1830.
30. Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
31. *Minutes of the Annual Conference*, 1830, 38, Methodist Episcopal Church.
32. Semple, *Lord's Dominion*, 241-245.
33. *Christian Guardian*, 9 May 1838.
34. *Christian Guardian*, 9 May 1838.
35. Steinhauer interrupted his studies at the Academy in 1837 for one year to help Case reestablish the faltering Grape Island mission at Alderville. Within years, Alderville became the first Canadian Methodist residential school.

36. Steinhauer to Evans, 19 December 1840; Jacobs to Alder, 23 May 1844; Mason to Secretaries, 20 August 1844; and Jacobs to Alder, 20 August 1844, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Collection, United Church of Canada, Victoria University Archives (hereafter cited as UCCA). See also, Peers, *Ojibwa of Western Canada*.
37. Mason to Fathers, 22 December 1845; and Mason to Fathers, 29 August 1850, UCCA.
38. Steinhauer to Mason, 25 June, 5, 21 and 22 July 1851, 25 June 1852; and, extracts from Mason's Journal, 1852-3, 29 April 1853, UCCA. Thomas H.B. Symons, "John Ryerson," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), X: 638; and Mabindisa, "The Praying Man," 371-400.
39. Gerald Friesen, *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). See also Peers, *Ojibwa of Western Canada*.
40. Friesen, *Citizen and Nation*, 46.
41. Watts, *Divine Songs*, 215-216.
42. Steinhauer to Hoole, 29 December 1859, Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Collection, UCCA.
43. See for example, Deuteronomy 8:15, 32:50, and Isaiah 5:6-7, 5:3. For a fuller exposition on western Canadian missionaries and the wilderness see my, "'The wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus:' Bishop David Anderson's Perceptions of Wilderness and Civilization in Rupert's Land," *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (2001): 81-100.
44. *Annual Report*, 1866-67, xiv. Missionary Society, Wesleyan-Methodist Church in Canada.
45. *Annual Report*, 1866-67, xiv, Missionary Society, Wesleyan-Methodist Church in Canada.
46. *Christian Guardian*, 3 April 1867.
47. *Annual Report*, 1866-67, xiv, Missionary Society, Wesleyan-Methodist Church in Canada.
48. John G. Burke, "The Wild Man's Pedigree," in Edward Dudley and Maximilian E. Novak, eds. *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972).

49. *Annual Report*, 1874, xx, Missionary Society, Wesleyan-Methodist Church in Canada.
50. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999) provocatively suggests that environmental conditions permitted Europeans to adopt agriculture centuries before native North Americans and subsequently acquire the technology and political organization that assisted them in the conquest of the New World.
51. For three randomly selected examples see: *Christian Guardian*, 10 May 1854; *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, 1 May 1869; *The Missionary Outlook*, 3 April 1883. In an extended argument, John Ryerson, *Hudson's Bay; or, a Missionary Tour* (Toronto: G.R. Sanderson, 1855), 124-125 makes the same point, noting at one point that "the souls of the Indians are of infinitely more value than their furs."