

The Impact of Urbanization on the Methodist
Church of Canada, 1854-1884

by
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Methodism, as a distinct institution in Canada, has gone through three major phases. In the first, its 'Heroic Age', up to the 1850's, it was preeminently a missionary church serving the needs of the scattered Canadian population. During this period, there was created a viable and growingly influential Upper Canadian church. It had survived both the machinations from within and the battles with the Family Compact and Anglican toryism. It would no longer be deemed disloyal nor an upstart, unrespectable body of fanatics. These struggles permitted an optimistic quest for an enlarged role in the Ontario and broader Canadian communities.

The third period, beginning about 1884 with the creation of one national Methodist church, commenced with a mature organization and renewed vigour. The church had become a comfortable middle class urban institution that was now forced to deal with a generation of scientific discoveries, rising urban social problems and the requirements of its expanding missionary operations.

These trials were especially significant in western Canada where the church hoped to recreate the Ontario Protestant society. Missionary evangelism held little

meaning either for congregations trained in eastern Canada or for the Methodist church itself, yet the area could not support a sedate urbane ministry. What developed, therefore, was a more secular, scientific approach to religion which culminated in the social gospel movement that was to severely strain the entire church.

The middle period, 1854-1884, was, therefore, a time of major transition for both Canadian society and the Methodist church. The early 1850's marked the effective close of Ontario's agricultural frontier. Improved transportation facilities combined with increased population meant a more intensive use of the land and the consolidation of the farm community. They also signified the elaboration of an urban hierarchy binding the Ontario community together under a more coherent value system. This required an alteration in the institutions that would serve this society.

By 1854 as well, with the union of the Wesleyan Methodist church in Canada East and Canada West and the acquisition of the missions in western Canada, the Methodist church felt prepared to meet the challenge of this advancing urban society. Not only was Methodism prepared, it was anxious to prove that it was a mature, respectable social institution. For it, too, the period

was one of consolidation and growing prosperity; a base from which to fulfill its primary missionary function in the west and to the rest of the world.

Part of the ability of the church to adapt so readily to these new demands was the interplay of local initiative and a well structured centralized control. Despite its role among the scattered homesteads, the Methodist church had never been a frontier institution. Congregational independence or democracy had little place in the church. The doctrines and discipline of John Wesley, along with other directives from headquarters, forced conformity among both laymen and ministers.

The gradual devolution of control, originally from the American and later from the British parent churches, did not represent a lessening of this metropolitan influence. Rather authority was transferred to Toronto and the other local metropolae where the printing, publishing and missionary establishment was centred. The major element limiting this centralized influence was the variety of opinions among church leaders. However, all respected the need for centralized control in properly serving the best religious interests of the Canadian people. With this leadership, therefore, gradually the Methodist Church of Canada was transformed into a sophisticated middle class institution fulfilling the role desired by a wealthy, confident and broadly Protestant

urban society.

Although this was a period of population growth in the towns and cities, urban means more than merely living in large centres. It reflects as well a pattern or style of life, an openness to new ideas, heterogeneity in relations, a high rate of personal interaction, rationality in reaching decisions and an exposure to ideas through the media and travel.¹ Central Canada was all gradually meeting these conditions after 1850.

Two of the central pillars of Methodism were its itinerancy and its 'means of grace'. Methodism was "Christianity in Earnest"², that is the absolute obligation to strive for a state of grace. This was a never ending struggle. To help in the fight, Methodism provided a variety of means of grace that were, "...the divinely appointed medium of communicating spiritual knowledge, comfort and prosperity."³ If conscientiously followed these might lead to salvation.

Interwoven with these means of grace was the Methodist ministry itself. Originally the shortage of pastors for the small scattered congregations forced the creation of a travelling ministry. Being well suited to pioneer conditions, it was later adopted in Canada. The itinerancy had become more than a convenience however. It was glorified as especially Christ like, lacking the ritualistic despotism of a settled clergy. In order to

illustrate the broad changes in the Methodist church, this paper will analyse the specific transition within these two core elements of Methodism.

Although the church constantly warned its members to keep the old truths, utilising the traditional means of grace, there was in fact a clear alteration in their nature. Of these, the essentially private means of grace were especially vital to the achievement of personal salvation. The admonition to,

Often pray to our Heavenly Father who
seeth in secret-often read regularly
and prayerfully the Holy Scriptures
which are able to make us wise unto
salvation-every morning and every
evening assemble your family and present
the supplications of your household to
God....,

this, if earnestly followed was often accompanied by a change of heart—a conversion experience.

Only converted individuals could be members of the Methodist church, and while this kept actual members to only a fraction of the congregations, it maintained a high level of emotional force within the body of the church. This stress on constant personal perseverance was one of the keys to Methodist success. By never abandoning this world for millennial social solutions it suited the instinctive aspirations of the hard working, rising middle class.

This intimate association of secular and religious

labour meant that with advancing economic stability came a more optimistic view of one's religious security. By the 1850's, with the growing prosperity of the church and many of its members, the role of the individual means of grace was significantly reduced. Secular wealth was an unmistakable sign of God's favour. This buoyed the perception of the future, reducing the psychological need for fervent emotional appeals to God. Special days of prayer and fasting also lost their appeal, emotional zeal being replaced by Christian fellowship.⁵

This formalism even altered the reliance on family worship. The church and Sunday school partially replaced the home as the centre of the quest for an intimate relation with God. Strict limits on personal behaviour within the extensive system of Victorian Protestant morality, mediated against the decline of grace, but also reflected a satisfaction with the religious condition already achieved.

These same elements were prevalent to an even greater degree in the social means of grace. Combined with the ordinary church services, and on special occasions revivals and camp-meetings, were gatherings for lovefeasts, prayer, class, and band meetings. These provided a communion of believers where shared experience mutually strengthened the spiritual life of the individual. In the early church, where the minister was present for only a short time on scattered occasions, these gatherings were vital for the

maintenance of an ongoing zealous church. The Methodist church believed that,

Class-meetings, Lovefeasts, and bands are among our most precious and essential privileges...and perhaps no means with which the God of grace has blessed us conduce more effectually to the sanctification of the spirit. They are necessary for you if you are to retain the glow and simplicity of your first love, your closet communion with God.⁶

With the growing urbanization of the Ontario community, there was a decline in the role of these instruments of the church as well. By 1875, the Connexion was plainly aware of this decline. In addressing its members it stated,

It is commonly reported to us that in some parts of our Conference there is a great neglect of the social means of grace. Your social and religious instinct, your vital union one to another as believers, the experience of true **Christians** in all past times, the unmistakable seal of the divine approval, indicate their great value. To neglect them is to wither and die. They are, too, among the best indices of the Church's life; and as such, the neglect of them excites within us grave apprehensions of the decline of piety. Never were these precious means of grace...more necessary than in this age of increased luxury and covetousness.⁷

Despite these warnings, however, the church accepted this decline in its quest for a new role in the community.

In 1878, band meetings, which had been voluntary assemblies of small groups of members for a strengthening of faith, ceased to be recognized by the Methodist

Discipline.⁸ This merely formalized their nearly complete disappearance from Canadian Methodism. Love-feasts and prayermeetings, more religiously intensive than band meetings, also lost most of their adherents.⁹ Where they were sustained, they were opened to the unconverted. Since these individuals had not been 'set apart' by a religious experience, they were less ready to accept the necessity of emotional fervour. This was especially true in the larger centres where emotionalism appeared to threaten social respectability.

It was not only the membership, however, that was losing its zeal; the institution too sought a respectable place in society. It was embarrassed by unseemly emotionalism induced by earnest sermons or exhortations.¹⁰ While always mistrusting the power of formal, written sermons, it nevertheless came to expect intelligent, well argued approaches, void of unnecessary excitement. William Morley Punshon, one of the great 19th century preachers, who was President of the Canadian Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist church from 1867 to 1872, was a model for young preachers. His style was powerfully grandeloquent in imagination, but always learned and restrained in emotion.¹¹

Even tea meetings, which were originally designed for spiritual refreshment in a social atmosphere, became, instead, practical means of raising subscriptions for

churches. They also came to emphasize entertainment for the general public rather than being specifically Methodist functions.¹² The line between good fellowship and sinful pleasure was a fine one among Methodists and often the more conservative members became indignant with certain types of behaviour. As sophistication and wealth advanced, however, many diversions entered Methodist homes that would have shocked an earlier generation.¹³

Aside from the providential means of grace, special services also changed to meet the demands of the urbanizing society. Principal among these were camp-meetings and revival services. Methodism in fact meant a revival in interest in religion, in faith in God's truth and concern for the salvation of sinners. Special internal revivals expanded these spiritual dimensions. Old truths were given free vent in a salutary communion with fellow searchers.

(Although)...every individual must face his God alone, mass evangelism rests on the belief that some people can, and do, come to this moment...while in the midst of a crowd of people....In this corporate setting a man's mind, heart, and will are so strongly touched that he must make a decision one way or the other. The crowd is not the important factor in a man's conversion, but it has a significant place in helping man to that condition of loneliness in which he must seek God or die.¹⁴

A revival, therefore, evinced a conviction of sin and

renewed faith by providing a fresh impulse toward salvation.¹⁵ By using the excitability in man, the church was able to prevent stullification, enlarging the sinner's natural desire to obey God's call.¹⁶

Although revivals took many forms, only the Methodists extended its use to camp-meetings to evangelize both church and non-church members.¹⁷ In the public imagination, the emphasis on these revivals in the early part of the nineteenth century, clearly bound the Methodist church, for good or ill, to this particular means of grace. The first camp-meeting recorded in Upper Canada occurred at Adolphustown in 1805, but it was based on the success of one in 1804 in upstate New York.¹⁸ However, while inspired by American sources, camp-meetings in Canada differed considerably from those in the United States. Rather than appearing well away from settlement, they were usually located in the most established parts of the Province. Existing chapel facilities were integrated into part of the services. They were also usually situated in a partially cleared field, not, "...in a secret place in the gloom of the sinister forest against which the flames of the fires and the blaze of the torches might play with awesome effect."¹⁹ They thereby avoided many of the props that gave American revivals a semi-pagan aura without losing the fervour of a truly religious gathering.

The problem basic to all early camp-meetings was the interference from entertainment seekers. Drinking and rowdyism were an integral part of most social gatherings and great care was necessary to prevent these from interfering with the camp-meeting.²⁰ Camps were often surrounded by a high wall with a guard posted at the heavy gates.²¹ If anyone attempted to disrupt the services he could be physically ejected.

The meetings, themselves, were also well organized and closely controlled by the preachers present. A regular, often rigid, timetable with sermons, exhortations, and prayer at their appointed time maximized the religious impact on the worshippers. Systematizing the proceedings also reduced emotional excesses. Though not always successful, the preachers hoped to maintain sound Methodist doctrine.²²

By the 1850's, however, the Methodist church's prosperity was no longer in doubt. Camp-meetings and extended services became instruments of consolidating local congregations and with this accomplished their evangelical value sharply decreased.²³ Concurrently, with the fixing of the village and town pattern, substantial churches replaced school rooms and private dwellings as the focus for public worship. Revival services tended to be centred in the larger city churches. But the unconventional conduct associated with the open air meetings was extremely unwelcome in God's house.²⁴ With

the greater refinement of tastes, revivals were either abandoned in a locality or took on a role of Christian refreshment and education. Symptomatic of this transition was the emphasis on sermons and lectures to inculcate a Christian morality. Exhortation and prayer became secondary in this context.

At the same time, the churches were available for regular sabbath services. Revivals tended to disrupt these services forcing the minister to abandon his pastoral duties until their conclusion. Neighbouring circuits were also adversely affected since their preachers and several members of the congregations were inevitably involved. As important, very few revival converts continued to attend the regular means of grace of the Methodist church.²⁵ They were not prepared for the long term commitment to religious struggle. Nor was the Methodist church, by the 1870's, the fervent body of converts the revival had implied.

Even where revivals continued to be popular, they lost their spontaneity, the "free movement of the spirit".²⁶ This was especially visible in the surviving camp grounds. Sermons became even more intellectually oriented.²⁷ The concern for increased membership statistics, maintaining historical traditions and educating the children of members replaced the quest for actual conversion.²⁸ They became essentially moral recreation centres, offering

summer retreats to the urban middle class. Cottages and croquet replaced the religious emphasis of an earlier day.²⁹ The St. Lawrence Camp Ground, by 1878, was even advertising building lots as coveted summer retreats from the extreme heat of city life and a favourite resort for fishing and bathing.³⁰ Although there was a slight increase in interest after the Methodist union of 1883, true revivals retained only a sporadic role in the Methodist church.³¹

Emotionalism seemed out of place in the overall plans of an institution now gaining a diverse following and an increasingly respectable role in society. Many Methodists were educated, sophisticated members of the commercial elite. In sedate Victorian society, unbecoming behaviour marred the status conscious in the church.³² While this speaks harshly of the vitality of religion of many Methodists, even the most conscientious had reasonable reservations about the intellectual soundness of the early revival techniques. With the new scientific, theological inquiries of the 1870's and 1880's undermining the role of such primitive religion, it would have been unreasonable for Methodism to continue unaffected. The availability and openness to new ideas of an urban population made this impossible.

Methodism relied instead on the increasingly less demanding regular means of grace.³³ By far the most

important of these was the class-meeting. It consisted of about twelve converted individuals under the guidance of a lay leader. Although originally designed to raise money for the poor societies, it soon became a test of membership in the Methodist church. Unaccounted absence constituted separation from the fold.³⁴

Each class member was expected to frankly discuss his religious experiences, seeking help in bolstering his resolve for salvation. This voluntary group confessional, without priestly interference, Morley Funshon described as, "...the 'upper room'", renowned for the presence of God's spirit, where, as sympathetic wayfarers on the quest for salvation, they might mutually encourage the failing spirit.³⁵ In early Canada, therefore, the class-meeting was the "germ cell of Methodism",³⁶ the basic unit by which the purity and spirituality of the ongoing religious ~~experiment~~ was preserved. It also supplied meaningful social intercourse; furnished a systematic basis on which to raise money; and tightened the control of the Methodist Doctrine and Discipline.³⁷

In the absence of the travelling preacher, the class leader was the major bulwark against encroaching sinfulness.³⁸ Not only did he strive to keep the class spiritually alive, he oversaw the entire religious condition of its members, visiting the sick and, when necessary, organizing charity for the poor.³⁹ By

deciding who was fit to remain a member of his class, he also helped administer the church's rules. The class and its leader, therefore, furnished the essential continuity binding the early congregation together.⁴⁰

The class-meeting, however, was not immune from the altering requirements of the British Canadian community. In the larger centres especially, both attendance and vitality were on the wane. Egerton Ryerson was perhaps the first major figure to recognize that under these conditions the class-meeting was becoming a liability to Methodism. The church lost many of its most beneficial members because they did not attend class. At the same time, he believed that the reliance on the class-meeting limited the adaptability of Methodism in becoming a mature social institution existing in an ongoing Christian community.⁴¹

In 1854, in his characteristically abrasive fashion, he argued that there was no substantial basis for sustaining the class-meeting as a test of membership and that, while it was of immense value, it should not be given such preeminent stature.⁴² When the church chose to ignore the issue, Ryerson resigned. The breach lasted only until the Conference of 1855, however. Ryerson had no real desire for a permanent separation and, despite the opposition of a few, the church was not prepared to lose Ryerson either. In their quest for respectability

and able leadership, he was still their brightest star.⁴³

Neither, however, was the church prepared to give up the class-meeting. The Conference of 1856 reaffirmed it as a vital means of grace necessary for membership.⁴⁴ What the controversy did achieve was to further divide the church. The primitive faction was led by James Spencer, editor of the Christian Guardian, and John Borland, a prominent preacher from Canada East; while Egerton Ryerson and several prominent younger ministers, including Samuel Nelles, opposed them.⁴⁵ Most of the clergy did not want the issue to divide the church and, through the negotiations of Enoch Wood, President of the Conference, and John Ryerson, perhaps Methodism's best politician, harmonious relations were reestablished.⁴⁶

It did not end the questioning of the class-meeting, however. During the 1860's and 1870's, as it further declined, more and more pressure was put on the church to at least discuss the question. Finally in 1878 the second General Conference of the Methodist Church of Canada, under pressure from Henry Bland, established a special committee to analyse the matter. The committee recommended that the class should be maintained as a Christian privilege, but not as a test of membership.⁴⁷ Egerton Ryerson and Anson Green led the support for the report; Edward Ryckman and Samuel Rice led the opposition. But when George Douglas, the President, as Bland bitterly

recorded, "...ratted and without making a speech, funerally recommended Caution, the result was a large majority in favour of no change".⁴⁸ Even the compromise of maintaining the class-meeting as a test of membership, but allowing also the devout, who did not attend class, to join in the sacraments as 'communicants', "...under the special pastoral care of our ministers, to induce them to seek the attainment of higher Christian life and spiritual blessings," even this was defeated.⁴⁹ The Conference felt this move would seriously divide the church and jeopardize broader Methodist union. Also, with the loss of so many providential means of grace, the church could not afford to sanction an alteration in so basic an element of Methodism.

Although this officially settled the matter, it did little to reestablish the class-meeting as an important means of grace. Most ministers simply did not enforce attendance. Where it was kept up, the class became a mere formality. Bible study and discussion of general religious questions replaced the confession of individual faults.⁵⁰ The urban Methodist was not prepared for shows of emotion even in small familiar groups. He used the class for its general moral value and for the Christian fellowship it offered, but not as a source of advancing piety.⁵¹

The transition within the class-meeting and the

other means of grace reflected a much deeper debate over the very nature of the Methodist church. Was it a body of converts, bound together in a zealous quest for salvation, or was it a church with obligations to broaden its base and bring Christian morality to Canada? The fact that both factions could co-exist in the same church indicated that this transition was already in progress. It was further confirmed by the special status achieved by moral, though unsaved, members of the congregations.⁵² Although the Methodist church officially followed Wesley's rules, in reality, it took its place as a respectable institution serving the perceived needs of the urbanizing Canadian society.

Parallel developments within the itinerancy also clearly established this transition. In the best traditions of the Methodist church, the pioneer itinerant was a man of deep personal piety with an unquestioning loyalty to the doctrines and discipline of Methodism. He spread a simple straightforward message for he had neither the education nor the inclination for boundless theological questions. While self-improvement was mandatory, his constant travel on the circuit and transfer to new circuits precluded the collection of a library larger than the Bible, Wesley's sermons and a few Methodist biographies. His meagre salary, combined with the absence of a permanent home also made the collection

of personal possessions difficult.

In place of these, he relied on boundless energy, a broad range of useful information on frontier farming, and a sympathetic understanding of pioneer life. His religion reflected a joyful optimism, not an austere premonition of doom and while his piety was respected, these other qualities made him a welcome guest by Methodist and non-Methodist alike.⁵³

This type of preacher had been the backbone of early Methodism, nevertheless, he was extremely out of place in the large, settled church of central Canada. The 1851 Census registered some 230,000 Methodists in central Canada of which the Wesleyans represented 97,000 in Canada West and 6,000 in Canada East. This meant about 29,000 saved Wesleyans. In 1854, when these two Conferences united, the Wesleyan church had grown to over 36,000 saved individuals. Between 1861 and 1871, Methodism expanded from 372,000 to 496,000 of which the Wesleyans went from 245,000 to 315,000. This indicated not only the spectacular growth of Methodism, but also the pre-eminence of the Wesleyan branch.

With the formation of the Methodist Church of Canada in 1874, the Ontario and Quebec section had grown to over 83,000 members. About 7500 of these came from the New Connexion Methodists. The Toronto Conference also ministered to a further 2400 members in western Canada

and Japan. By 1881, the Methodist Church of Canada represented about 437,000 of the 622,000 nominal Methodists in Ontario and approximately 38,000 of the 39,000 in Quebec. In fact, it brought about 71% of the actual members into the final union of 1883.⁵⁴

More important than the contribution of each individual branch, however, was the creation of one national Methodist church taking its place among the major ¹⁸⁷⁷ Christianizing forces in the world. As the prospect of this role emerged, tremendous obligations were placed on the institution. The stress on numerical expansion reflected the basic priority of the church. It systematized its operations in central Canada, where most of its members were located, so as to enlarge the base necessary for serving its western and overseas work. To accomplish this it was obliged to more broadly serve the needs of the Ontario community and consolidate its hold on the large number in each congregation who were not technically members.

During the 1850's, the Methodist church followed the new settler up the Ottawa valley, into the fringes of the Shield and along the north shore of Lake Superior, but in the 1860's and 1870's real growth was derived from infilling, especially in southwestern Ontario.⁵⁵ At the same time, its primary aim was consolidation in the rising towns. By centring here, the church took advantage

of the expanding influence this urban hierarchy held over the surrounding territory.⁵⁶ It was indispensable, if Methodism was to continue to grow relative to the other denominations, that the prosperous local elites be drawn into the Methodist church. To facilitate this, circuit and district headquarters were shifted to the most viable villages and towns.

As important, this was a period of rapid change in the style and size of church buildings. Elaborate brick churches appeared in the towns and only slightly smaller versions replaced the primitive buildings in the countryside.⁵⁷ Even in their architecture they spoke of a solid, prosperous, proud institution, reflecting the new breadth and permanence of the church.⁵⁸ Sunday schools and temperance meetings could also be housed here, permitting greater moral supervision of the community. All these moved the Methodist church ever closer to the centre of a broadly Protestant Victorian society.

This same pressure induced the church to build, "magnificent structures, centres of power and denominational influence..."⁵⁹ in the larger cities. Largely underwritten by the wealthy commercial interests, both Hamilton and Ottawa gained such landmarks by the early 1870's. However, no church better exemplified Methodism's search for denominational respectability than Wesleyan Metropolitan church in Toronto. Finished in 1872 at a cost of over

\$150,000, it was the largest church in Toronto. As Methodism's central monument it reflected glory on all Methodists and reemphasized Toronto's hegemony in the church.⁶⁰ It also illustrated the transition from personal piety to Christian civilization as the central function of the church.⁶¹ The rapid numerical growth of the Methodist Church of Canada also seemed to prove the righteousness of this transformation into a reputable urban institution.

Associated with this reorientation and consolidation was a reduction of the physical size of districts and circuits. In fact, the traditional long rides of the saddle bag preacher all but disappeared in central Canada. In explaining this move, the Annual Conference of 1870 declared,

...as one of the concomitants of our four or two weeks circuits, we have been compelled to neglect unduly our centres of population, especially thriving villages, to our denominational injury, inasmuch as other denominations have reaped, but too largely, the harvest of our sowing by giving the people preaching once or twice each Sabbath.⁶²

This meant that by the early 1870's most of the city congregations were served by a minister with only one station and perhaps a few nearby missions.⁶³

These physical changes in the itinerancy would have been meaningless, however, without a corresponding transition in the ministry. Not only was there a

tremendous growth in the number of ministers, but the vast majority were native Canadians. The end of the reliance on British clergy was an important prerequisite of a mature national church. Meanwhile, the improved working conditions of the itinerant made the ministry an attractive profession. With less travel, a better salary, and usually a comfortable parsonage, the preacher could expect a fairly settled existence.

This, in turn, permitted more young ministers to marry. Originally a preacher marrying before he had travelled for two years would probably have been dropped by the Connexion.⁶⁴ Poor circuits still had trouble supporting ministers with families, but, by the 1870's, this was not a major liability. The church recognized this change and rarely enforced its rule against marriage.⁶⁵ When these advantages were added to the enhanced social status of the clergy, the traditional sacrifices of the Methodist itinerancy were greatly diminished.

Not only were conditions improving on the individual circuit, but reforms also attempted to limit the weaknesses of transferring preachers to different localities. The frequent introduction of new ministers to different circuits had always been perceived as one of the strengths of Methodism. A settled clergy, it was felt, lost the vitality in conveying its fundamental truths,⁶⁶ leading to the rise of ritual and the loss of evangelism so

prevalent in the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. In the scattered communities, it also precluded a minister and his congregation from growing away from the main body of Methodists. This congregational independence could undermine the unity so vital to the church.

The Methodist church recognized, however, that it lost many positive elements in its ministry by the too frequent shuffling of its preachers. In 1850, when Egerton Ryerson proposed extending the maximum term on one circuit from three to five years in the Wesleyan Methodist church, it was considered heretical, yet this change was adopted in 1855.⁶⁷ While this experiment was never put into general practice, the three year limit being readopted to ease church union, it was kept for special mission fields and at educational institutions.⁶⁸ Throughout the 1870's and 1880's there remained a considerable pressure to either reinstate the five year maximum term or to permit some ministers to cease moving altogether.⁶⁹

The major block to any such reform was the Stationing Committee which was extremely jealous of its prerogative. It believed these changes would undermine the missionary nature of Methodism. They would also drastically reduce the centralized authority within the church. Rather than reducing the transition within the itinerancy,

however, it felt it could successfully direct this change without abandoning Methodism's vital elements. Being essentially controlled by the Methodist establishment, this committee rarely hesitated to use its significant power to maintain its own priorities.

Henry Bland, for example, was moved from Montreal to Pembroke in 1880. This overruled a strong pressure to situate him in either Ottawa or Kingston. However, both these centres were too prominent for a man who led the fight against class-meetings and who opposed Methodist union.⁷⁰

The Stationing Committee and, after 1874, the Transfer Committee also placed men where their individual talents could be best utilised.⁷¹ They recognized that if the church was to attract the respectable urban middle class it was necessary to locate the most able ministers in the larger towns and cities. Complaints that the rural and less well developed circuits suffered as a result were largely ineffective.⁷² In fact the London and Toronto Conferences of 1877 and 1879 respectively condoned this kind of distinction among the circuits.⁷³

Despite this, the preachers throughout the settled parts of the country did their best to fulfill the increased demands on their office. Since they were present on a more regular basis, they expanded the moral supervision over their congregations both through regular church

services and by playing a more active role in the temperance and sabbatarian movements.⁷⁴ They also administered a tighter denominational control over auxiliary church agencies such as the Sunday school. In a more general sense the preacher became a source of refinement to his congregation providing a natural focus for the local community.⁷⁵

In more conscientiously visiting the sick, praying with individual members, administering the discipline and preaching on a weekly basis, the pastor also diminished the traditional reliance on the class leader and lay preacher. Even their direction of the local church's financial operations was more carefully managed by the preacher and lay trustees. These vital agencies in the early church became instead useful auxiliaries in times of absence of the regular minister.⁷⁶

Coinciding with the enlarged pastoral duties was the gradual loss of emotional fervour in the itinerancy. By the late 1870's, it was recognized that only by dealing rationally with the educated congregations could the church maintain a relevant role in society. The Toronto Conference in 1877 for instance, called for,

some systematic endeavour to instruct our congregations more comprehensively in the truths of the Holy Writ. The fervent horatory appeals that met the needs and swayed the hearts of the people, when the population was sparse, churches far apart and opportunities of hearing few, will

not meet the demands of today. Intelligence is now widely diffused, the public mind is awake; skepticism is abroad in every direction... heresy taints the currents of religious thought, and the only antidote for this is a fuller knowledge of the Word of God. The demand is for biblical instruction; and if this is to be met, there must be a great change in much of the preaching of the day. 77

This departure from emotionalism was also symbolized by the creation of a distinct evangelical agency in the Methodist Church of Canada. Although not considered by the quadrennial General Conferences, the question had a major place in several annual assemblies. Recommendations for assigning certain ministers to full time evangelical work were initially dismissed since all ministers supposedly fulfilled this role.⁷⁸ By 1875, however, the Montreal Conference permitted any suitably endowed minister, authorized by the Stationing Committee, to be relieved of his circuit responsibilities and employed as a full time evangelist.⁷⁹ The London and Toronto Conferences followed in 1880 and 1881 respectively.⁸⁰ While these appointments might indicate a renewed interest in revivals, in reality they illustrated the decline of fervour in the general itinerancy coupled with a fear of the unsound theological teachings of independent professional evangelists.⁸¹

This fear also reenforced the need for a thoroughly trained clergy to transmit orthodox Methodist theology to its congregations. Despite Methodism's birth in the

rich environment of Oxford, theology and even the Bible did not possess the central place in Methodism they achieved in many Reformation churches.⁸² Catholic Anglicanism, revitalized by Wesley's doctrine and discipline, had generally precluded intensive biblical study. This was further reduced in early Canada by the limited sources or time for formal education. What the church relied on, therefore, was self training and independent mental cultivation. The early probationer's educational requirements, beyond the basic ability to read and write, were supplied by the Bible, Mosheim's Church History, and Wesley's writings.⁸³ Under the supervision of the church elders, the young preacher then expanded his knowledge from whatever sound readings he could find.⁸⁴

As the Canada Conference grew, however, so to did the emphasis on education. Victoria College opened in 1842 and by 1856 candidates for the ministry could attend if authorized by the Conference.⁸⁵ By 1858 most of the Connexion agreed with Samuel Nelles, President of Victoria College, when he reported,

Judging from present indications, the College is destined to furnish very valuable accessions to the Christian Ministry...It is confidently believed that in no other way is the church likely to be supplied with efficient and devoted labourers. ⁸⁶

Education was not perceived as necessarily a threat to personal piety, especially if controlled in a sound

environment. The converted and trained preacher satisfied all factions in the church by being able to help lead individuals to God and answer contemporary secular threats to religion. The pious, uneducated minister became a rather painful reminder of an earlier less respectable era. This image also helped diminish the credibility of the lay preacher.

Indeed, so strong was the demand for a systematic training that a distinct theological department was established at Victoria College in 1871. Under Nathanael Burwash, this was expanded into a separate faculty two years later. Parallel developments occurred at the Wesleyan Theological College in Montreal and later in the Methodist colleges in Halifax and Winnipeg. But the clearest indication of the emphasis on an educated clergy was that, between 1874 and 1878, two thirds of the ministers received into the Methodist Church of Canada had received some university training.⁸⁷

Accompanying the greater dependence on an educated ministry was the growing acceptance of education as a distinct means of grace. Sound training could lead to a consciousness of sin and increased personal piety. This gave a positive element to Bible study in the class-meeting or theological sermons from the pulpit. While these were important for bringing adults into the church, education was especially crucial in the greater

consolidation made possible by bringing children to the denomination.

In the early Canadian church, except for rare exceptions, Methodism was a body of adult converts. Children, because they shared Adam's fall from grace, would have to make a conscious, personal decision for Christ to achieve salvation. Yet children, by definition, lacked responsibility for their actions and could only be truly converted as they accepted personal sin in young adulthood. But to many leading Methodists young children stood in a different relationship than the rest of the world. Before they reached the age of responsibility, they could not be part of man's original sin. Christ himself had declared, "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," when discussing children and God was not so cruel as to condemn those too young to seek salvation.⁸⁸ This concept of a benevolent God was much more appropriate to the secure and prosperous urban society.

The interpretation therefore laid new significance on the sacrament of Baptism. The Methodist church officially held that by Baptism,

They are made members of the visible Church of Christ; their gracious relation to Him as the Second Adam, and as Mediator of the New Covenant is solemnly ratified by divine appointment; and they are thereby recognized as having a claim to all those spiritual blessings, of which they are the proper subjects.⁸⁹

They were dedicated to God, but in no way regenerated by

Baptism. To men such as Egerton Ryerson, however, children, still in a state of grace, when baptised, joined the invisible as well as the visible church.⁹⁰ Much of his opposition to class-meetings hinged on the rights of baptised individuals to be real members of the Methodist church.⁹¹

While this theory was never officially adopted, it did strengthen the belief that young children could be saved. It thereby enlarged the church's role in training children to a deliberate acceptance of Christ. This acceptance of a gradual growth to grace also helped undermine the necessity of a conversion experience⁹² and emotional revivals.⁹³ More specifically, the church recognized that its future growth into an institution serving the Canadian community depended on bringing the children of its members into its active body.⁹⁴

The principal agency for reaching young people was the Sunday school. It had always been one of the vital evangelizing forces in the community, but it was generally left to interdenominational lay control.⁹⁵ Beginning in the 1860's, the Methodist church began a concerted effort to bind the Sunday school to the Connexion under the close supervision of the preacher. It could thereby be used to inculcate proper Methodist doctrine in the young.⁹⁶ The Sunday school also became particularly crucial for the needs of the urban community by providing a nursery

for future members and by disseminating Christian culture and Victorian morality. Temperance, the work ethic, respect for authority, decent conduct, all were part of Christian education.⁹⁷

In order to finance these vastly enlarged educational, pastoral, and physical obligations of the church, Methodism relied even more on the wealthy in society. When this was coupled with the falling off of many of the regular means of grace, monetary contributions gained a new doctrinal status in the church.

Always in need of money, the Methodist church had early recognized 'Christian liberality' as a sign of faithfulness.⁹⁸ By the 1850's, these contributions had grown to the stature of an, "evidence of the growth of grace"⁹⁹ Man was only a steward of his wealth and had a scriptural obligation to use it in God's work. Such use indicated a personal dependence on God, a gratitude for providential favours, was a check to extravagant living, and, "...uplifted business from the mere drudgery of an earthly calling into a divine service."¹⁰⁰ Giving became, then, an act of worship, a test of individual piety.¹⁰¹

By the 1870's systematic benevolence had been transformed from an act of faith to a sign of personal consecration and, in fact, a means of grace.¹⁰² The General Conference in 1878 even discussed and tabled the motion that,

...any member of our church who is able to support the ministry and institutions of the Church, and does not do so, be dropped from the membership of the church. 103

This would have placed financial contributions above most of the other means of grace by establishing it as a test of membership.

This acceptance of the religious quality of wealth finally confirmed the church's alliance with the established business elements in society. As a wealthy institution itself, it had a vital concern for stable economic progress. 104 In return for their support, the church bolstered the respectability and virtue of the business ethic and reemphasized the traditional link between sin and poverty. 105

The Methodist church also conceded a significant place in church counsels to leading laymen. The introduction of lay delegates to the Conferences of the church by the late 1870's did not represent a democratization of the church, but, rather, it recognized the church's dependence on the business class. In return for their assistance and managerial skill, businessmen demanded some control over financial policy.

An integral part of this church/business alliance was also a growing separation from the poor in society. Few rents and the stress on liberality made it impractical for the poor to continue to attend the Methodist church.

The reliance on education and status also made the church, for many, a meaningless religious experience. For its part, the church was blindly ignoring the social problems developing in the cities. Even its ad hoc charity programmes in time of emergency were extremely stingy and sparse in relation to the church's overall work. By the middle 1880's, the poor and the church had grown so far apart that only a revolution in the Methodist church could reestablish an organic relationship.

By 1884, the Methodist church had successfully transformed itself into a respectable middle class institution. The itinerancy and the means of grace had been brought into line with these new priorities and the church felt a sincere trust that the future would bring religious progress to the entire country. A benevolent God smiled on all their labours. The old leaders were gone, but they were replaced by better trained men who were more comfortable in this urbane church. It was a proud national institution that reflected the sedate Victorian morality of comfortable, secure Ontario.

The social problems that would threaten the self-confidence of the middle class and question the validity of the church itself were coming uncomfortably close, but could still be ignored for the present. The church that the (social gospel) attempted to revitalize, and

finally abandoned, was not an individualistic, earnest, spiritual Methodism, but the sophisticated, broadly moral, social Protestantism of the 1880's.

Nevertheless, this institution was much more able to deal with future problems than the early church. The decline in the reliance on a personal conversion experience and openness to new ideas made the quest for social progress much more understandable. Both the ministry and general membership were much better read and could appreciate the wave of social criticisms levelled at modern industrial society. The church was also able to maintain a broader range of religious and social attitudes within its bounds. In general it was more adaptable to the secular and religious needs of Canadians and had the wealth and respectability to see these needs satisfied.

Notes

- ¹ Stewart Crysedale, The Changing Church in Canada (Toronto: Bd. of Evangelism and Social Services, 1965), p. 25
- ² Anson Green (ed.), Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada, 1824-1845 (Toronto: A. Green, 1846), p. i
- ³ Ibid., 1835, p. 102
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 103
- ⁵ Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1864, p. 78; Minutes of Montreal Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1880, p. 84.
- ⁶ Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1863, p. 90
- ⁷ Minutes of London Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1875, p. 89
- ⁸ Minutes of General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1878, p. 31
- ⁹ Lachlin Taylor Papers, Journal, July 23, 1865; United Church Archives, hereafter cited UCA
- ¹⁰ Minutes of Toronto Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1877, p. 67
- ¹¹ Anson Green, The Life and Times of the Reverend Anson Green (Toronto: Methodist Book Room, 1877), p. 412 or see any of Punshon's sermons, for example, W. Morley Punshon et al, Sermons (Toronto: Methodist Book Room, 1870)
- ¹² Minutes of Montreal Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1881, p. 55
- ¹³ Ryerson Correspondence, John Borland to Egerton Ryerson, February 11, 1858; UCA
- ¹⁴ Arthur Kewley, "Mass Evangelism in Upper Canada Before 1830", (unpublished Th.D. thesis, Victoria University, Toronto, 1960), p. 2
- ¹⁵ James Watson, Helps to the Promotion of Revivals (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), p. 12

- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 82; Charles Grandison Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion (Halifax: Milner, 1848), pp. 8-10
- ¹⁷Arthur Kewley, p. 4
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 22
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 43
- ²⁰James and Ogle Gowan Papers, Mrs. Elizabeth Gowan to James Gowan, June 7, 1835; Ontario Archives
- ²¹John Carroll, Past and Present (Toronto: Alfred Dredge, 1860), p. 64
- ²²Arthur Kewley, p. 83
- ²³John Carroll, Case and His Contemporaries (Toronto: S. Rose, 1867-77), V., pp. 132-35
- ²⁴Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1835, p. 102; J. Watson, p. 93; John Carroll, The School of the Prophets (Toronto: Burradge & Magurn, 1876), p. 32; S.C. Swallow, Camp Meetings (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1879), p. 15
- ²⁵Missionary Society Annual Report, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1871, p. lix
- ²⁶I. B. Aylesworth, (ed.), Sermons by the Reverend T. DeWitt Talmage, et al. at St. Lawrence Camp Ground, 1878 (Ottawa: J. Loveday, 1878), p. 23
- ²⁷The key sermons at the above camp-meeting were concerned with the history of Methodism, skepticism and the authenticity of the Bible.
- ²⁸Arthur Kewley, p. 15
- ²⁹S.C. Swallow, p. 12
- ³⁰I. B. Aylesworth, (ed.), p. i
- ³¹Stephen Bond, Notes on Methodism (no publication data, about 1885), p. 38
- ³²Christian Guardian, January 12, 1870, p. 6
- ³³Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1870, p. 102

- ³⁴ Stephen Bond, Church Membership (Toronto: Wm. Briggs, 1887), pp. 64-70; Jeremiah Chapman, The Class Meeting (Toronto: Wm. Briggs, n.d.), p. 12
- ³⁵ W. Morley Lunshon, Tabor; or The Class-Meeting (no publication data), pp. 13-14
- ³⁶ Jeremiah Chapman, p. 13
- ³⁷ John Miley, Treatise on Class-Meeting (Cincinnati: Swornstedt & Poe, 1854), p. 32
- ³⁸ Henry F. Bland Papers, Diary, 1860, p. 280
- ³⁹ John Atkinson, The Class Leader (Toronto: S. Rose, 1875), p. 29; John Carroll, The School of the Prophets, p. 32
- ⁴⁰ J.G. Laird Papers, "Lectures", unpublished, "The Class-Meeting", n.d.
- ⁴¹ letter Dixon to E. Ryerson, 1847; in Egerton Ryerson, The Story of My Life, (ed.) J.G. Hodgins, (Toronto: Wm. Briggs, 1883), p. 407; Ryerson Correspondence J.G. Hodgins to Egerton Ryerson, September 8, 1855
- ⁴² Ryerson Correspondence, E. Ryerson to Enoch Wood, January 2, 1854
- ⁴³ Ibid., J. Ryerson to E. Ryerson, April 26, 1855
- ⁴⁴ Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1856, p. 359
- ⁴⁵ James Spencer was editor of the Christian Guardian from 1851-1860 and was considered, "fearless and faithful to disciplinary laws and usages of the Connexion", and a, "champion of the older way". see obituary, Minutes of Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1864, p. 7. Borland was on several occasions chairman of districts in Canada East. He was always ready to condemn any unnecessary innovation. see Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection #27, Ontario Archives Samuel Nelles was Ryerson's protégé and became President of Victoria College in 1858.
- ⁴⁶ Egerton Ryerson, The Story of My Life, p. 508; John Ryerson's correspondence with Egerton also reflected an accurate grasp of most situations and usually a subtle means, completely lacking in Egerton, of accomplishing their ends.

- ⁴⁷Minutes of General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1878, pp. 18, 119-120
- ⁴⁸Henry Bland Papers, Diary #8, September, 21, 1878, pp. 352-53
- ⁴⁹Minutes of General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1878, p. 124
- ⁵⁰Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1873, p. 114
- ⁵¹Minutes of Montreal Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1883, p. 71
- ⁵²for example see, Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1864, p. 96; Out of the Fold (Toronto: Wesleyan Printing Establishment, 1871), p. 3
- ⁵³drawn from obituary of Stephen Brownell, 1801-1871 in Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1871, p. 8
- ⁵⁴statistics drawn from- Census of the Canadas, 1851-52, pp. 70-71; 1860-61, p. 122; Census of Canada, 1870-71, p. 144; 1880-81, p. 197; and from the Minutes of Annual Conference, 1851, 1854, 1874, 1883
- ⁵⁵Missionary Society Annual Report, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1870, p. lvi
- ⁵⁶Ibid., 1870, p. lvi
- ⁵⁷Ibid., 1869, p. lxii
- ⁵⁸Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1866, p. 93
- ⁵⁹Nathanael Burwash, Memorials of the Life of Edward and Lydia Jackson (Toronto: S. Rose, 1876), p. 19
- ⁶⁰Christian Guardian, April 10, 1872, p. 116
- ⁶¹Ibid., January 18, 1871, p. 10; Ibid., July 31, 1870, p. 136
- ⁶²Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1870, p. 94
- ⁶³drawn from changes in circuits in Ontario, see Minutes of Annual Conferences, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1870's

- ⁶⁴Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1828, p. 20; Henry Bland Papers, Diary 7a, 1858, p. 30
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- ⁶⁵Henry Bland Papers, June 12, 1871, p. 74; UCA
- ⁶⁶Alexander Sutherland, Counsels to Young Converts (Toronto: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1871), p. 42
Earnest Christianity, I, "The Advantages of the Itinerancy, #2", p. 266
- ⁶⁷Ryerson Correspondence, E. Ryerson to J.G. Hodgins, June 9, 1855; UCA
- ⁶⁸see stationing of preachers in each Minutes of Conference.
- ⁶⁹Minutes of Toronto Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1882, p. 126
Minutes of General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1878, pp. 39-40
- ⁷¹In 1874, along with the union of the Canadian and Maritime Wesleyans and the New Connexion Methodists, the church was divided into three Conferences in central Canada. The Transfer Committee administered the movements of ministers from one conference to another. There was a major struggle for control of this committee between the Annual and General Conferences. John Potts was continually posted to good Circuits because of his urbane manner.
- ⁷⁰Henry Bland Papers, Diary, July 1, 1880, p. 75; UCA
- ⁷²Christian Guardian, January 2, 1867, p. 1
- ⁷³Minutes of London Conference, 1877, p. 126; Minutes of Toronto Conference, 1879, p. 98, Methodist Church of Canada
- ⁷⁴Henry Bland Papers, Diary, 1870, pp. 5-6, UCA
- ⁷⁵Christian Guardian, April 13, 1870, p. 57
- ⁷⁶Ibid., February 2, 1872, p. 18
- ⁷⁷Minutes of Toronto Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1877, p. 67
- ⁷⁸for example, Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1872, p. 119

- ⁷⁹ Minutes of Montreal Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1875, p. 53
- ⁸⁰ Minutes of London Conference, 1880, p. 65; Minutes of Toronto Conference, 1881, p. 96, Methodist Church of Canada
- ⁸¹ constant debate over problems with professional Evangelists, for example, Wesleyan Metropolitan Church, Toronto, Minute Book, during 1870's, UCA
- ⁸² for example, Minutes of Montreal Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1880, pp. 84-85
- ⁸³ John Carroll, Past and Present, p. 189
- ⁸⁴ Minutes of Annual Conference, 1825, p. 8; Methodist Church, Wesleyan; Ibid., 1835, p. 95
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., 1856, p. 361
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 1858, p. 76
- ⁸⁷ Minutes of General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1878, pp. 180-81
- ⁸⁸ see among others, Nathanael Burwash, The Relation of Children to the Fall (Toronto: Wm. Briggs, 1882) Alexander Sutherland, The Moral Status of Children (Toronto: Bell & Co., 1876) John Borland, Dialogue Concerning Class-Meetings and the Relation of Children to the Fall (Toronto: J. Dough, 1856)
- ⁸⁹ Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1853, pp. 230-31
- ⁹⁰ John Carroll, The School of the Prophets, p. 159
- ⁹¹ Egerton Ryerson, Scriptural Rights of the Members of Christ's Visible Church (Toronto: Brewer & McPhail, 1854), see all of pamphlet
- ⁹² The Encyclopaedia of Sunday Schools (New York: T. Nelson, 1915), p. 318
- ⁹³ H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism (New York: 1957), p. 63
- ⁹⁴ Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1866, pp. 92-3

- 95 J.E. Sanderson, First Century of Canadian Methodism (Toronto: Wm. Briggs, 1910), II, p. 220
W.L. Brown, "The Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Church in Canada, 1875-1925" (unpublished M.Th. thesis, Emmanuel College, Victoria University, 1959), p. 1
- 96 W.L. Brown, p. 54
Minutes of Toronto Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1881, p. 21
- 97 W.L. Brown, p. 8
- 98 Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1836, p. 133
- 99 Ibid., 1850, p. 127
- 100 Minutes of London Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1876, p. 77
- 101 Christian Guardian, February 23, 1870, p. 30
- 102 Minutes of Annual Conference, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1872, p. 144
- 103 Minutes of General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1878, p. 33
- 104 By 1883, the Methodist Church of Canada owned over four million dollars worth of property in Ontario
- 105 John G. Laird Papers, unpublished lecture notes, file #10, UCA