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Wesleyan/Holiness Studies Center
at Asbury Theological Seminary

Bulletin

The Methodist Church in Canada: Present Scholarship on a Church Long Absent

by Marilyn Färdig Whiteley

In 1925, members of the Methodist Church (Canada, Newfoundland, Bermuda) joined with Canadian Congregationalists and with the majority of the nation's Presbyterians to form the United Church of Canada. Smaller groups with a Wesleyan heritage, such as the Free Methodist Church and The Wesleyan Church, continued as separate denominations; but the large group which had roots in Methodism from both Britain and the United States, and which had come into being through unions in 1874 and 1884, gave up its denominational identity to become part of the new body. Yet more than 70 years later, Canadian Methodism is the subject of lively and stimulating scholarly activity.¹

This is due, in part, to the historical interests of Methodists a century and more ago. The group produced a number of writers who chronicled the Methodism of a particular branch or region, and the end of the 19th century saw the organization of a historical society, and the beginning of an attempt to gather historical materials. An outstanding collection of Methodist documents and publications is now housed in the central United Church/Victoria University Archives in Toronto, and material pertaining to the

United Church conferences outside of Ontario is located in the archives of each conference. The historical society, which no longer seemed relevant at the time of union, was reorganized in 1975, and through meetings and the printing of papers it encourages contemporary scholarship.

In his presidential address to the American Society of Church

serves as the most conspicuous example of the interconnectedness of church and national history. Both historians of Canada and historians of the church in Canada have necessarily taken into account at least some aspects of Methodist history.

Some historians have given Methodism a particularly significant place in their work. One

of Victoria University. He was a worthy subject for a biography, but Van Die's book is much more than biography: it is an exploration of the changing nature of Methodism during the lifetime of Burwash. At Victoria, he had to face the impact of Darwinian science and of higher criticism, but for him the experiential nature of Methodism remained important. Thus he met these challenges with an assurance influenced by John Wesley's view of the witness of the Spirit that left him free to investigate other areas of knowledge. For Van Die, Burwash does not represent a church in decline in an increasingly secular age, but a church grappling with the perennial challenge of the changing relationship between religion and culture.

Another feature of Van Die's work is her demonstration that, contrary to the opinion of some scholars, revivalism continued to hold a significant place in Canadian Methodism past the middle of the 19th century. Revivalism is also a focus of Phyllis Airhart's book, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada*.⁵ Airhart traces the connection between 19th-century Methodist revivalistic religion, and later Methodism's concern with "serving the present age." She does not see the pro-



Canadian Methodism is the subject of lively and stimulating scholarly activity.

History in 1994, Nathan Hatch lamented the lack of attention given to Methodism in the United States by both religious historians and members of the broader historical community.² That complaint is not made by Canadian historians, for issues of Canadian history are inextricably bound up with denominational history. Methodists were leaders in the movement to reform the system of "clergy reserves" (land set aside for the support first of the Church of England, and later also for the Church of Scotland), and eventually the reserves were secularized. Egerton Ryerson, a Methodist minister, was one of the central characters in this campaign; he also became superintendent of education for Canada West (later Ontario), and was instrumental in shaping the system of public education. He

issue that has engaged writers in recent years is that of the increasing secularity of Canadian society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ramsay Cook and David Marshall are prominent among those with this focus.³ They seek answers through the practice of intellectual history, studying the ideas of the elite. The authors consider Methodists to be part of this historic movement, and many of the leaders they study are Methodists, but this is not specifically Methodist history.

A new note was struck by Marguerite Van Die with the publication in 1989 of her study *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918*.⁴ Burwash was a Methodist minister, a professor of theology and later the president and chancellor

Continued on Page 3

Recent Articles on Wesleyan/Holiness Themes

- Adell, Marian. "Caroline Matilda Pilcher. The *Ladies' Repository's* Ideal Christian Woman." *Methodist History* 35 (July 1997): 246-253.
- Bassett, Paul M. "In Honor of Melvin Dieter." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32 (Spring 1997): 195-202.
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- Bundy, David, Henry Knight and William Kostlevy. "Reflections on Mark Noll's *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32 (Spring 1997): 157-192.
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- Longenecker, Stephen L. "Emotionalism among Early American Anabaptists." In *The Dilemma of Anabaptist Piety: Strengthening or Straining the Bonds of Community?* ed. by Stephen L. Longenecker. Bridgewater, Va.: Forum for Religious Studies, Bridgewater College, 1997: 61-68.
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- Stanley, John and Susie C. "What Can Wesleyan/ Holiness Tradition Contribute to Christian Higher Education?" In *Models for Christian Higher Education*, ed. by Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997: 313-321.
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- Taiz, Lillian. "Applying the Devil's Works in a Holy Cause: Working-Class Popular Culture and the Salvation Army in the United States, 1879-1900." *Religion and American Culture* 7 (Summer 1997): 195-224.

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- Reimer, Samuel Harold. "North American Evangelicalism; A Look at Regional Variation in Evangelical Religiosity." University of Notre Dame, 1997. DA 9703853.
- Rokicky, Catherine M. "Christian Statesmen and Reformer James Monroe of Oberlin, 1821-1998." Kent State University, 1997 DA 9631203.
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Initially, funding for the *Wesleyan Holiness Studies Center Bulletin* was provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts. We are sorry to say that this is no longer the case and it has become necessary for us to begin charging a fee to cover the cost of printing and postage. For a one year's subscription (two issues), the cost will be \$5.00, \$10.00 for two years, etc. If you wish to continue receiving the *Bulletin*, please return this portion of the newsletter to the Wesleyan/Holiness Studies Center Bulletin, D. William Faupel, Director, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY 40390-1199.

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Continued from Page 1

Methodism in Canada

gressivism of the social gospel as a displacement of the earlier tradition; instead she argues that the quests for revivalist conversion and for personal holiness provided a basis for the concern with saving society.

While both these books deal with major themes in the development of the nature of Canadian Methodism, some scholars have enriched an understanding of the denomination by looking at Methodist women. The first of these studies was *Petticoats in the Pulpit: The Story of Early Nineteenth-Century Methodist Women Preachers in Upper Canada*, by Elizabeth Gillan Muir.⁶ In it she examines the life and work of women who preached in Canada, and demonstrates how their preaching activity came to be restricted, and eventually forgotten. Her explanation in terms of the conservatism of the Canadian denomination and society is open to question, but her primary research uncovering the work of these women is invaluable.

Rosemary R. Gagan identified another aspect of Methodist women's activity in her study titled, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925*.⁷ She examines the backgrounds and experiences of the more than 300 women who were employed by the Methodist Woman's Missionary Society from the time the group sent its first missionary to Japan until church union, and explores their possible motivations. Gagan sees a missionary career as a significant profession for Canadian women at a time when they had few options for professional work, and observes the feminist consciousness that developed among the women in foreign fields.

Also in the area of women's studies is a book by Johanna

Selles, *Methodists & Women's Education in Ontario, 1836-1925*.⁸ Several Methodist ladies' colleges attempted to provide young women with secondary education in a Christian environment, and women were offered university education at Victoria College and a residence there to give them a suitable home while they were students. In examining this development, Selles deals with the expectations and constraints imposed by the men responsible for these institutions, and with the development of a feminist perspective among some of the women.

Besides these three books, there are many shorter but valuable studies of Methodist women on such subjects as ladies' aids, "lady evangelists," and the social reformer Nellie McClung.⁹ Such research is facilitated by the excellent collections of Methodist records and periodicals which are available, but researchers are probably attracted also to the high level of activity and the comparative independence of Methodist women's work. This is seen, for example in the activities of the Woman's Missionary Society; while many such groups only supported the work of the denominational society, the Canadian Methodist group initiated and administered its own projects. The early history of this group and the Methodist views of women's role which helped to shape it are discussed in an article in *Methodist History*, "Canadian Methodist Women and Missions: The Transformation of 'Pious, Plodding' Females."¹⁰

In addition to this array of topical studies, there has been a major contribution to Methodist studies with the publication in 1996 of *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism*, by Neil Semple.¹¹ It is a much-needed comprehensive history of the denomination. Semple traces the development of the various branches of Canadian Methodism from the introduction of the several strands of the Wesleyan tradition, through a number of mergers, to the 1925 union, but he does not restrict

himself to this institutional history. His discussion of such distinctive features as class meetings and revivals is valuable for any readers, but particularly for most Canadians (and many others) who are distant from traditional Methodist practice. He also gives good attention to the role and contributions of women, and to Methodist involvement in education and moral and social reform.

One is tempted to label Semple's book definitive, but in an area that has produced such lively scholarship as Canadian Methodism, investigation will continue, and two books, both only partly concerned with Methodism, indicate directions of further research. In her study *Revivals and Roller Rinks Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario*, Lynne Marks offers analysis that is sensitive to both class and gender.¹² For example, using census and membership records she is able to explore the participation in church activities of women and men of different ages and classes, and to infer from that their varying attitudes.

In the recent collaborative study, *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*, two of the five sections are on English-speaking Canada, and both are enriched by the recent scholarship on Methodism. The book tells the "inner story" of Christianity in Canada, so there is much attention to popular religious practice. Particularly noteworthy is the attempt to "assess the degree of lay conformity (or non-conformity) to clerical standards of observance" at various points in the narrative.¹³

Further research giving attention to the "inner story" of Methodism and to the attitudes (like those revealed by Marks) of those Methodists who left little trace in the traditional records of the denomination, will comple-

ment future studies of the group's outer story, and together they will enhance our understanding of the people called Methodist in Canada.

Marilyn Färdig Whiteley is an independent scholar living in Guelph, Ontario. She does research and writing on the Canadian holiness tradition and women in Canadian Methodism.

This article reviews recent scholarship on the denomination which entered the 1925 union. There is much room for scholarship on the surviving Wesley-based groups. I hope that my outline of the early history of Wesleyan holiness groups in Canada may serve as a background for more detailed investigation ("Sailing for the Shore: The Canadian Holiness Tradition," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), pp. 257-270).

⁶Nathan Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism," *Church History* 63, 2 (June 1994), 175-189. Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); and David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

⁷Marguerite Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

⁸Phyllis D. Airhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

⁹Elizabeth Gillan Muir, *Petticoats in the Pulpit: The Story of Early Nineteenth-Century Methodist Women Preachers in Upper Canada* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1991).

¹⁰Rosemary R. Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

¹¹Johanna M. Selles, *Methodists & Women's Education in Ontario, 1836-1925* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

¹²"Doing Just About What They Please: Ladies' Aids in Ontario Methodism," *Ontario History*, December, 1990, 289-304; "Modest, Unaffected and Fully Consecrated: Lady Evangelists in Canadian Methodism," in *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada*, ed. Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Färdig Whiteley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 183-200. Randi R. Wame, "Nellie McClung's Social Gospel," in Muir and Whiteley, *Changing Roles*, 338-354. Wame has also written *Literature as Pulpit: The Christian Social Activism of Nellie L. McClung* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993).

¹³Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, "Canadian Methodist Women and Missions: The Transformation of 'Pious, Plodding' Females," in *Methodist History*, January, 1996, 104-118.

¹⁴Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

¹⁵Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

¹⁶Terrence Murphy and Roberto Penn, eds., *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), x. The chapters of interest are "The English-Speaking Colonies to 1854" by Terrence Murphy, 108-189, and "English-Speaking Canada from 1854" by Brian Clarke, 261-360.

THE WESLEYAN/HOLINESS STUDIES CENTER BULLETIN

D. William Faupel, Editor

William Kostlevy, Associate Editor

Rees and McKenna Papers Added to Seminary Archives

Two significant collections are now available to researchers at the B. L. Fisher Library, Asbury Theological Seminary. They are the papers of evangelist and Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS) trustee, Paul S. Rees and the presidential papers of Asbury's fourth president, David L. McKenna. These collections document the lives of two of the most significant figures in 20th-century American evangelicalism.

The papers of Paul S. Rees include correspondence, sermons, subject files and scrap-

books that document the career of one of America's most notable preachers. Although some materials (especially sermons) document Rees' early career, the bulk of the collection covers Rees' ministry from the 1950s-80s. An associate of Billy Graham and a major figure in the neo-evangelicalism of the post-World War II era, Rees moved with ease in Wesleyan, Evangelical and ecumenical circles. Rees' papers document his leadership in the National Association of Evangelicals (he was president

from 1952-54) and his career as vice-president at large for World Vision, 1958-78. The papers provide especially rich documentation of Rees' commitment to ecumenism and social justice.

The presidential papers of David L. McKenna include sermons, writings, correspondence, subject files and scrapbooks that document the presidency of Asbury Theological Seminary's fourth president (1982-94). One of the outstanding evangelical educators of the 20th century, Dr.

McKenna also served as president of Spring Arbor College and Seattle Pacific University. An ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church, Dr. McKenna has been one of the most effective gospel communicators of his generation. The papers document the growth of Asbury Seminary during Dr. McKenna's tenure as president, which included the establishment of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism. Portions of the collection are restricted.

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