

## The Origins and Nature of the Holiness Movement Church: A Study in Religious Populism

Louise A. Mussio

Volume 7, numéro 1, 1996

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/031103ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/031103ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Mussio, L. A. (1996). The Origins and Nature of the Holiness Movement Church: A Study in Religious Populism. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 7(1), 81–104.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/031103ar>

### Résumé de l'article

Le présent article examine le développement au Canada de la dissidence d'inspiration sainte, en se penchant plus particulièrement sur le cas de la Holiness Movement Church, une secte dirigée par l'évangéliste méthodiste R.C. Homer et fondée en 1895 en réaction au méthodisme officiel. L'auteure cherche à comprendre le lien existant entre la sainteté et le méthodisme, et découvre que le schisme hornérite a servi à discréditer la doctrine aux yeux des leaders méthodistes. La crise de la sainteté dévoile l'ampleur de l'appui culturel en faveur de l'expérience et démontre que la pression exercée par la dissidence sur le méthodisme fait partie intégrante de sa transformation. Le schisme a renforcé la critique que le Holiness Movement faisait des élites libérales et de la classe moyenne. L'hornérisme et le perfectionnisme chrétien de la fin du XIXe siècle peuvent de la sorte être considérés comme des manifestations d'un vaste mouvement populiste cherchant à défendre les valeurs sociales traditionnelles contre les forces de la modernisation.

# The Origins and Nature of the Holiness Movement Church: A Study in Religious Populism

LOUISE A. MUSSIO

IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, UNITED STATES PROTESTANT popular culture was consumed by a desire for Christian perfection, or sinlessness in Christ. In the zealous pursuit of this goal, a sizeable number of Eastern Methodists banded together into national, state and local organisations which sponsored a number of publications and hundreds of camp meetings and revivals, and attracted a large flock from both inside and outside the Methodist faith. Horrified by their perception that the Methodist Church was becoming increasingly worldly, formalistic and lax in both spiritual rigour and doctrine,<sup>1</sup> leaders in Christian holiness endeavoured to spread the word that justification by faith had to be followed by what John Wesley called "entire sanctification." This state of "perfect love" was so complete that no evil thought, word or deed would intrude in the mind or the life of the sanctified one.<sup>2</sup> Wesley himself believed that the experience could be attained only gradually. However, American Holiness advocates, under the direction of such leaders as Phoebe and Walter Palmer, believed that entire sanctification was experienced as suddenly as conversion.<sup>3</sup>

In Canada, the first references to this kind of holiness stretch as far back as the late 1830s. However, the doctrine began to catch fire only in the 1850s when American Methodists James Caughey and the Palmers held a number of revivals in central Ontario. From 1853 onwards, the annual pastoral address of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada made it clear that it was the duty of each member to seek the blessing of entire sanctification.<sup>4</sup> Similar to the experience of their American counterparts, the majority of Canadian Holiness advocates eventually broke with the mother church in the years 1893-1907, as

---

1 Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism*, 1867-1936 (Metuchen, 1974), xiv.

2 Timothy L. Smith, "Righteousness and Hope: Christian Holiness and the Millennial Vision in America, 1800-1900," *American Quarterly* 31 (1979): 28.

3 Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 4.

4 Marguerite Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Kingston, 1989), 79-80.

25 separate Holiness denominations were formed.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most prominent example of this phenomenon was the rise of the Holiness Movement Church in the 1890s.

The leader of this schismatic group was Reverend Ralph Cecil Horner, who in 1887 had been ordained in full connection with the Montreal Conference of the Methodist Church, which recognised his enthusiasm for conversion by appointing him a Conference Evangelist. Problems arose when the Conference ordered him to a specific circuit, which Horner refused to travel, preferring instead to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in special evangelism. During this time, Horner managed to secure significant followings in the Ottawa Valley, the St. Lawrence River counties, Montreal and Ottawa, so that by mid-decade, when his differences with the mother church could no longer be resolved, a strong basis of support for his ideas had been established.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the fact that it has received some attention from Canadian church historians, the larger significance of the Holiness Movement Church, its cultural appeal and ideological origins have been more or less ignored. The sect must be looked at in the larger context of the changes wrought to late-nineteenth-century Canadian life by the synergistic forces of urbanisation and industrialisation. Contrary to what some scholars have suggested, Methodism in the 1880s and 1890s was not a monolith. While there is some truth in the assertion that the Church was becoming increasingly concerned with middle-class urban conceptions of social and religious respectability, it is arguable whether or not a complete transition from a "traditional" emphasis on personal conversion and spirituality to a social reform focus was made, even by the 1930s. As far as Holiness was concerned, Methodist leaders in the 1880s and early 1890s trod carefully. The only agreement on Holiness teaching at this time was that the experience of entire sanctification was an important part of spiritual life, something that the individual should work towards. What nobody seemed to agree upon was how entire sanctification should be obtained, and how necessary it was for individual salvation. The basic division was as follows. Certain members believed that holiness was an important, but supplementary goal of religious life which should be attained gradually, without tasteless displays of enthusiasm. In addition, these people feared the antinomian tendencies associated with claims to Christian perfection and direct communication with the Holy Spirit. Other members believed that sanctification was as essential as, or even more important than, conversion. It was attained suddenly or not at all, and was generally accompanied by an outpouring of emotion in the context of

---

5 Ron Sawatsky, "Unholy Contentions About Holiness: The Canada Holiness Association and the Methodist Church, 1875-1894," *Papers of the Canadian Society of Church History* (1981-82): 1.

6 *Ralph C. Horner, Evangelist: Reminiscences From His Own Pen* (Brockville, n.d.), xvi-xvii.

revival. Methodist élites tried to maintain unity by means of compromise.

What was important was that people struggled towards holiness in their own lives, by whatever means, and that they experienced the fruits of this blessing. This became increasingly difficult to do when Holiness leaders such as R.C. Horner began to flout church authority directly, in favour of the "leadings of the Spirit." Horner in particular combined a disrespect for Methodist authority with a zeal for enthusiastic religion that did not sit well with Methodist leaders. It could be argued that the Methodist leadership's latent distrust of emotional display was galvanised by the Hornerite schism. This led to a growing consensus on the dangers of holiness-centred theology and revival from the mid-1890s onwards.

The schism forced Horner and his followers to justify the separate existence of the Movement by developing a systematic critique of Methodism that caricatured the church as a spiritually bereft, worldly, élitist organisation that had abandoned the values of both "Oldtime Methodism"<sup>7</sup> and the "true believers." In opposition to this conception of faith, Holiness Movement members argued for the superiority of religious experience, freely available to all, over formal learning which was restricted to a majority of the population. As a reaction against "worldliness" in the mother church and the decline of Methodism's ascetic behavioural standards, Holiness advocates adhered to a number of prohibitions governing personal character, dress, consumption of food and drink, political and associational involvement, and financial decisions.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, North American society experienced a transition characterised by the decline of an economy based on production by small entrepreneurs and farmers. The next century would be dominated by the corporation and the ethic of mass consumption. In its attack on Methodism's tendencies towards middle-class respectability, its waning passion for enthusiastic revival and its increasing participation in consumer culture, Hornerite Holiness asserted a desire for the preservation of the pre-industrial, rural island community with its emphasis on thrift, sobriety, personal responsibility and mutual cooperation.<sup>8</sup> In the eyes of Holiness members, Methodism had compromised with the values of the age in making common cause with consumerism, and in applying the values of rationality and

---

7 The pillars of "Oldtime Methodism" included the itinerant preacher, the conversion experience, the camp meeting the love feast, the class meeting and the prayer meeting. This term connotes a quality of spiritual life that was focused on the simple, emotional expression of individual piety in conversion, ordinary religious life and revival.

8 See Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: American Society, 1877-1920* (New York, 1967). Wiebe's work describes how industrialisation, urbanisation, and immigration helped shift American life away from the small town, with the help of a new, bureaucratic-minded middle class who saw their opportunity to advance in society by applying the values of functionality, rationality and scientific management to the problems of modernity.

functionality to religion. By contrast, the Holiness Movement Church developed a defence of the rural island community of the nineteenth century. It did not constitute just another form of modernity. As such, Holiness can be seen as an integral part of the larger fabric of populist protest in late-nineteenth-century Ontario. Holiness was, in many ways, the religious counterpart of the Patrons of Industry, which arose in the 1890s as a political movement of farmers in Ontario who were critical of big government, monopoly capitalism, professionalisation and the protectionist impulse.<sup>9</sup> While the latter movement sought to counteract the effects of rapid urban-industrial growth and the decline of rural values legislatively, via political involvement, the former sought to redress its economic and cultural grievances by reinforcing the bonds of community through Christian perfection.<sup>10</sup> In this way, Hornerite Holiness presented a counter-cultural alternative to the compromise with modernity that mainstream Methodists and urban and small town élites were making.

Before the place of the Holiness Movement Church in the larger fabric of late-nineteenth-century social and religious life can be discussed, it is necessary to delve more deeply into the background of R.C. Horner and the context of his ministry. Horner was born on 22 December 1854 on a farm near Shawville, Quebec, the eldest son of parents James and Ellen. Growing up in

---

9 Although there is some difficulty in describing a religious movement as "populist" due to the secular, political connotations of the word, what I am trying to suggest here is that the Holiness Movement tapped into certain elements of populism's critique, especially *vis-à-vis* professionalisation. Furthermore, Lawrence Goodwyn, in *Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York, 1978), has suggested that populism can be best understood as a cultural assertion of mass democratic aspiration on the part of late-nineteenth-century American farmers. Populism attempted to create egalitarian communities based on economic self-help and democratic autonomy, as bulwarks against monopoly capitalism and the corporate state. Similarly, the Holiness Movement argued for a kind of faith that made ample room for lay people to get involved in the important work of evangelisation and preaching. In doing so, it attacked the declining emphasis on lay participation in the Methodist Church, which Neil Semple describes in *The Lord's Dominion* (225-29). In addition, the Holiness Movement drew much of its strength from rural areas and from farmers of the Ottawa Valley.

10 See S.E.D. Shortt, "Social Change and Political Crisis in Rural Ontario: The Patrons of Industry, 1889-1896," in *Oliver Mowat's Ontario*. Donald Swainson, ed. (Toronto, 1972), 210-35, and R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1994), 303-17. Gidney and Millar suggest that the Patrons represented the rough edge of a larger political culture which had become increasingly suspicious of professional privilege. The desire to exert individual authority against the claims of experts and professional people to superior knowledge was evident not only in the populist press, but also in the mainstream press and among Liberals and Conservatives who shared space with the Patrons in the Ontario Legislature. My study corroborates their findings by illustrating that this phenomenon was much larger and more widespread than previously imagined. It also makes the point that rural populism was far more extensive and diverse than its political incarnation in the Patrons of Industry would suggest.

the exclusively Protestant milieu of Clarendon Township, Horner was converted in July 1872 at a Methodist camp meeting near his home, less than two years after his father had been killed by a kick from a horse.<sup>11</sup> Horner implied that the shock of his father's death, and the way it made him dwell on "the solemn realities of the great eternity," led him to Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Two months after his conversion, he heard of the doctrine of entire sanctification and began to seek deliverance from sin, without any doubt that he would receive it. He was given this privilege on a camp ground where "instantly the second work of grace was wrought and God seemed to let the whole heavens upon me, and the witness of the Spirit was clearly received. A heaven of love was upon my head, and love went through me to the soles of my feet. It destroyed the body of sin and purged out all carnal affections. I was melted, moulded, refined, and enflamed [*sic*] with holy, consuming love . . . Wave after wave of glory filled me and expanded my soul and filled it again . . . I felt that I was in the heavenlies with Jesus."<sup>13</sup>

Shortly thereafter Horner received the call to preach, and at the age of 25, while he led all manner of special revival services, travelling and converting people to Christ, he began a course of study to prepare himself for entrance into the high school at Renfrew. This was no small feat, considering that he had to acquire for himself the rudiments of education.<sup>14</sup> In 1883, he was accepted on a trial basis for the ministry with the understanding that he would always have the privilege of being engaged in evangelistic work.<sup>15</sup> Between 1883 and 1885, he studied at Victoria University in Cobourg, and in 1887 he was ordained to the Methodist ministry by the Montreal Conference of the church.<sup>16</sup>

From the time of his ordination to the schism of 1895, Horner demonstrated difficulties in accepting the limits of the office of minister in the Methodist Church. He balked at the idea that the Conference with its committee structure was the formal representation of God's will, with the power to order Horner to serve in places and in ways contrary to the leadings of the Spirit within him. In an effort to appoint Horner to a task that recognised his special evangelical mandate, he was given a position as one of two designated Conference Evangelists. After this, he proceeded to convert the Ottawa Valley, and by his own accounts he achieved much success in the task.<sup>17</sup> A "revival flame" swept across the area, and in the years leading to his schism with the mother church, Horner began to encourage half a dozen or more untrained but

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ralph C. Horner*, v-xvi.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-33.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-40.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-58.

zealous young people to assist him in the evangelistic ministry.<sup>18</sup> As the Montreal Conference of the Methodist Church became increasingly suspicious of the kind of wild enthusiasm that Horner inspired, it began to try to exert more control over his efforts. This plan eventually failed; in 1895, Horner was ejected from his evangelistic office and, with his band of followers, started the Holiness Movement Church.

Horner's church was based in Ottawa, but the majority of its members came from a number of villages, small towns and rural centres in the Ottawa Valley – places such as Athens, Arnprior, Kemptville, Matilda and Williamsburg. Of 90 Holiness Movement Church members traced to Lanark, Dundas, and Leeds and Grenville counties, 58 per cent lived in rural areas, while 42 per cent resided in small towns or villages. Fifty-six per cent of the sample were listed as farmers, or as the wives and grown children of farmers. Sixteen per cent were listed as skilled labourers or artisans, or as their wives and grown children. Thirteen per cent identified themselves as ministers or evangelists, or as their wives and grown children. Eight per cent of the sample was made up of those classified as labourers, or the wives and grown children of such. Two per cent were domestic servants. Two per cent were boarders. The remaining members included one merchant, one widowed boarding-house keeper and one widow. Fifty-six per cent of the sample were female and 44 per cent male. In terms of ethnic origin, 37 per cent of the sample were Irish, 36 per cent English, 14 per cent Scottish, 11 per cent German, 1 per cent Dutch and 1 per cent French.<sup>19</sup>

The Movement was concerned with advancing the doctrine of Christian perfection by means of almost continuous "flaming revivals." Both men and women could receive the privilege of ordination in the church as either preachers or evangelists. If women did not wish to be ordained, they could become deaconesses. In 1895, a Holiness Movement Church college was established in Ottawa to train candidates for ordination. As the church grew, conferences were organised in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Michigan. Eventually, the work spread to Ireland, Egypt and China, where native preachers were enlisted for the cause.<sup>20</sup> By 1911, the group had attracted 3,800 members, 3,000 of whom were in Ontario.<sup>21</sup>

In 1916, Horner left the church and, in his own words, organised the Standard Church of America "to uphold the same radical principles and to promulgate the same scriptural doctrines which he had maintained from the

---

18 Brian R. Ross, "Ralph Cecil Horner: A Methodist Sectarian Deposed, 1887-1895," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 19, 26 (1977): 98.

19 Ontario. Archives (AO), 1901 Ontario Census, Microfilm Reels T6477, T6478, T6493, T6462. 20 *Ralph C. Horner*, xv-xvi.

21 Ross, "Ralph Cecil Horner," 101.

beginning.”<sup>22</sup> Evidently, he believed that the Holiness Movement Church had strayed from the traditional and time-honoured standards of Christian holiness. The majority of Holiness Movement Church members did not follow him. The group merged with Canada’s Free Methodists in 1959.

There is a consensus among scholars of Canadian history that 1890-1920 was a period of accelerated urbanisation. During this time, the populations of both Montreal and Toronto nearly tripled and surpassed the half-million mark. Between 1901 and 1911, there was a 63 per cent growth in urban population in general.<sup>23</sup> In *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada*, Phyllis Airhart argues that, during this period, the traditional forms of nineteenth-century evangelical Methodism were in a process of decline. Apathy, affluence, expansion and urbanisation had combined to trigger the demise of the itinerant preacher, the camp meeting and the conversion experience. Furthermore, standards of behaviour had begun to be liberalised, so that by 1910 drinking, card-playing, dancing and theatre attendance were no longer prohibited. Rules of specific conduct were replaced by an emphasis on the educated Christian conscience as a guide to morality.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau have suggested that historians such as Airhart have produced a distorted image of late- nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Methodism, by basing their arguments on the opinions of the Toronto-based Methodist leadership, who supported the shift away from revivalist piety to progressive social service. Christie and Gauvreau argue that conservatism and populist evangelicalism persisted at the local, congregational level. As a result, many people in smaller cities and towns continued to support old-style revivalism, even into the 1930s.<sup>25</sup>

Holiness represented the radical edge of this persistent, locally based culture of populist evangelicalism. Working from outside the Methodist Church, Hornerites were able to criticise those elements within Methodism that sought to “modernise” the faith by steering it into unacceptable directions. A number of indications in the documents pertaining to the Holiness Movement Church suggest that its members were highly critical of both the style and the substance of this emergent form of Methodism. Indeed, in his autobiography, Horner makes frequent reference to the soul-destroying formalism of mainstream Methodism. In the following example, Horner, still on probation for the ministry, describes

---

22 Ralph C. Horner, xvi-xvii.

23 See R. Louis Gentilcore, ed., *Historical Atlas of Canada, Vol. II: The Land Transformed, 1800-1891* (Toronto, 1993), 77-80; and Donald Kerr, ed., *Historical Atlas of Canada, Vol. III: Addressing the Twentieth Century* (Toronto, 1990), 1-5.

24 Phyllis Airhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal/Kingston, 1992), 94-122.

25 Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal/Kingston, 1996), xii-xiv, 56-61.

his work in igniting the revival flame, and the opposition he encountered:

When the power of God would fall upon the people, and fifty of them would commence to pray at once, the heavens would come down and formalists would be terrified. It was more than a preacher who wished to be popular could endure. The Christians who were aiming to build up a fashionable, popular society had no use for such demonstrative services. They were obliged to repent or fight. In some places the people were brought under such strong conviction of sin that they had to die or seek salvation. The devil tore some and made them foam at the mouth before he would come out of them.<sup>26</sup>

The suggestion was that Methodism, in moving away from its early emphasis on revivalistic repentance and conversion, had lost the core of its faith. Years later, this theme would be revisited time and again in the pages of the *Holiness Era*, the official publication of the Movement. For example, in the 24 March 1897 edition of the paper, the following assessment of “mainstream” churches is given:

Numbers and financial influence evidently stand for more in most churches than piety. So far as we are able to learn, very little real piety is required to persons who are now admitted to church membership. Generally speaking, a person wholly sanctified is more objectional in the average church than a score or more dancing, theater going, and card playing, professors.<sup>27</sup>

To Horner and Holiness members, lack of revivalist piety, an overweening emphasis on higher learning and participation in worldly amusements were part of the same package. They thought that the pursuit of intellectual and cultural attainments in the Methodist Church had reached the level of idolatry,<sup>28</sup> and they criticised the ministerial training system that produced leaders “way ahead of the people in learning and away behind them in spirituality.”<sup>29</sup> Methodist ministers, ruined by vanity, had lost their nerve and their zeal, and feared to “preach of hell to sinners, or of holiness to believers.” Instead, they adopt the methods of medicine vendors on the street; [they] strive to be eloquent, humorous, pathetic and witty. [They] get them to laugh at their funny anecdotes, and cry over touching incidents . . . . Under the excitement and enthusiasm of such meetings, hundreds of people are induced to make professions of faith in Christ, when really they have had no true conviction for their sins. The Holy Ghost has not revealed to them their real condition, neither has he witnessed to them that they are born of God. Take such people in your church and they make a fine

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ralph C. Horner*, 90-93.

<sup>27</sup> Canada. United Church Archives (UCA), *Holiness Era*, 24 March 1897, p. 44. This publication will heretofore be referred to as *Era*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, “Sermon – Power,” 7 April 1897, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, “Holiness in Spiritual Life,” 27 January 1897, p. 15.

strawberry brigade [*sic*], they will rattle dishes at your festivals . . . . Poor deluged, lost souls . . . . They will woop for Doctor anybody who writes against sanctification, it matters not what his theory is.<sup>30</sup>

Holiness Movement members equated the hallmarks of urban sophistication – wit, eloquence and humour – with the chicanery of the snake oil salesman. To them, the excitement created in a middle-class revival meeting was only a bastardisation of true revivalist enthusiasm, lacking in heartfelt contrition and in the witness of the Spirit. Such “converts” would never be soldiers of Christ in the battle to win souls. Rather, they would take their place in the strawberry social brigade, wasting their time with amusements and middle-class pleasantries, while their souls were lost on the battlefield of perdition.

A brief discussion of T.J. Jackson Lears’ *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* will help to illuminate and contextualise the Holiness Movement’s critique of the Methodist minister as patent medicine vendor. Lears argues that the period 1880-1906 was a transitional one in American advertising. Commercial image production was idiosyncratic in nature, and still largely based on local entrepreneurial enterprise. By 1906, national, corporate advertisers, fired by a secularised vision of postmillennial Protestantism and intent on professionalising their craft, had consolidated control over the industry. This resulted in increased systematisation and standardisation of images, and an emphasis on the physical and psychological perfection of “man” as an efficient and well-regulated machine. The animistic, sensual and carnivalesque tendencies of image production that characterised the earlier period were marginalised, as the celebration of fleshly excess gave way to the championing of industrial efficiency. Concomitantly, desire was disembodied, as the urge to accumulate more and more consumer goods triumphed over pleasure in the possession of things.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to the marginalisation of animism, the American commercial vernacular sustained a number of conflicting idioms. Nineteenth-century America’s official culture of moralism contrasted sharply with subcultures of fantasy and sensuality. The latter was represented by seedy promoters and performers, magicians and mesmerists, and most importantly by peddlers promising “seductive enchantments” to those who purchased their lush fabrics and transformative elixirs. Lears argues that continued expansion of commercial life created and reinforced fears of losing control, and of losing oneself in the formlessness of overabundance. Two Protestant ethics merged as a means of controlling the carnivalisation of American life. The first was Max Weber’s Protestant Ethic, which was based on the Puritan drive towards disciplined hard work and self-control. The excesses of frivolous consumption were avoided by channelling wealth into

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., “A Pitiful Sight,” 14 July 1897, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, 1994), 4-12; 154-180.

investment. Divorced from the world of material pleasures, moneymaking was transformed into an etherealised process of self-definition. Coexistent with this world-view was what Colin Campbell has called the "Other Protestant Ethic." This ethic was based on the emotional core of ecstatic conversion, when the soul transcended the limits of the human body, becoming one with God via Christian rebirth. The individual was transformed by this inward experience, as the gap between the material and spiritual worlds narrowed. As such, the "Other Protestant Ethic" promoted a longing for spontaneously flowing spiritual abundance. In secular terms, longing was directed towards material things, not for their inherent sensual value, but for their transformative possibilities.<sup>32</sup>

The patent medicine vendor of the 1880s and 1890s, with his materialist version of Protestant regeneration, was the main icon of this culture.<sup>33</sup> Seen in this context, Holiness's equation of Methodist minister with medicine vendor was more than just a means of ridiculing middle-class pretensions and religiosity. The patent medicine man was untrustworthy for two reasons. First of all, with the zeal of a hot gossamer, he attempted to sell "salvation in a bottle," which both parodied and carnalised the claims of evangelical religion. Secondly, the claims he made about his product's efficacy were rarely, if ever, borne out in reality. In short, the elixirs did not work, and the consumer, having been tricked and fast-talked into purchasing the medicine, was left uncured, disillusioned and short of cash. Proponents of Holiness viewed the Methodist minister in a similar light. Not only was he a sham artist who dealt in false grace and false conversion, but he was pandering to the base instincts of a deluded, mindless congregation who stubbornly refused to validate the claims of Christian perfection. In doing so, they demonstrated that the "carnal mind," the source of all human baseness, sin and imperfection, continued to rule the soul, thus negating all claims to conversion and regeneration.

Instead of this kind of flaccid religiosity, what was needed, according to Horner and his followers, was faith rooted in revivals spurred by the power of the Holy Spirit. The true seeker in Christ must groan under the weight of sin, and through God's grace be regenerated and justified by faith. Following this, he or she must move on to a higher state of entire sanctification, as testified by the presence of the Holy Spirit and by the fruits of clean living and victory over sin.<sup>34</sup> In the editorial pages of the *Era*, Horner explained that:

The grace of entire sanctification destroys every unholy tendency of the nature of God's people and gives them the complete mastery over all their natural propensities and appetites. The souls of the entirely sanctified are filled with all the fullness of faith, joy, love, goodness, meekness, patience, temperance, etc.<sup>35</sup>

---

32 *Ibid.*, 38-48.

33 *Ibid.*, 142.

34 *Era*, "Editorial Notes," 13 January 1897, p. 1.

35 *Ibid.*

Sin remained in Christians who were not yet entirely sanctified, but it did not reign. Once the Christian moved beyond regeneration to holiness, the soul was purged of inbred sin, and all tendencies towards anger, pride, selfishness, envy, fretting, murmuring and fear were eradicated.<sup>36</sup> It was not enough for one to repress one's sinful tendencies, for the carnal mind was to human nature as cancer was to the body. It could be removed without destroying anything inherent to the human soul, provided that the individual struggled willingly towards this experience.<sup>37</sup> If the cancer of carnality was allowed to remain within the human soul until the time of death, the individual would face certain perdition.

This was one of the lines of division separating Hornerite Holiness from the kind of Methodism propagated by church élites. The columns of the *Christian Guardian* in the 1870s-1890s tell an interesting story about the tensions surrounding Holiness. In the earlier part of this period, the editors of the paper published all manner of letters and articles on Holiness and, when asked to cast their vote in favour of one kind of Holiness over another, they consistently demurred, preferring instead to emphasise the importance of seeking perfection over the various means by which it could be obtained. Methodist leaders sought unity in diversity by allowing its members the freedom to pursue the experience gradually, or suddenly within the context of revival.

This compromise became increasingly difficult to maintain by the late 1880s and early 1890s, when reports of doctrinal irregularities and enthusiastic excess sullied the reputations of such Holiness preachers as Nelson Burns, president of the Canadian Holiness Association, and later Ralph Horner. Burns and his followers crossed the line of theological acceptability when they began to claim that the experience of perfection under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit had made them infallible in all areas of judgement. This led them to downplay the centrality of the Scriptures to Christian life, and even to contradict Biblical authority when it conflicted with the leadings of the Spirit.<sup>38</sup> The editors of the *Christian Guardian* were forced to speak out against the antinomian tendencies of this kind of Holiness, cautioning readers to guard against unscriptural and unWesleyan teachings on sanctification. They strongly criticised the tendencies of certain Holiness evangelists and associations to disparage the conversion experience by suggesting that it was "of no account compared with the second blessing." Regeneration of the heart and justification by faith marked the Christian's "passing from death unto life." An overweening emphasis on sanctification caused many a good and earnest Christian to become disheartened if his or her experience was not similar to the type of experience that such Holiness advocates portrayed as essential.<sup>39</sup>

36 *Era*, "Editorial Notes," 24 March 1897, p. 1.

37 *Ibid.*, "Be Ye Holy," 18 October 1899, p. 166.

38 *Christian Guardian*, "Holiness and Divine Guidance," 12 March 1890; "Unscriptural Teaching," 22 July 1891; "A Dangerous Tendency," 20 May 1891.

39 *Ibid.*, "A Dangerous Tendency," 20 May 1891.

Similar objections were raised against Hornerite Holiness in the mid-1890s. The editors increasingly warned readers to take great care in pursuing the experience of Holiness. They were told to guard against pride which brought division in the Church of Christ; to “beware of that daughter of pride, enthusiasm”; and to avoid antinomian tendencies by constantly performing good works.<sup>40</sup> Dr. Nathanael Burwash was called upon by the editors of the *Christian Guardian* in October 1895 to respond to a letter written by W.J. Conoly of the Montreal Conference, which described the divisions and confusion created “in many places in the Montreal Conference [by] the teachings of R.C. Horner.” In this letter, Conoly lamented the fact that Horner’s books had been recommended by some of the best-educated and most reliable men of the Church, and that the Conference, while condemning his methods, refused to disavow his doctrine. In this matter, Burwash referred to Wesley’s teachings on the subject, and criticised Horner’s view that regeneration was insufficient for salvation. Through conversion, individuals were made joint heirs with Christ. Contrary to Horner, Wesley believed that sanctification was simply the perfection of the love experienced through regeneration. It was not a more important experience, nor a more marked experience. Furthermore, Burwash cast grave doubts on Horner’s assertions that entirely sanctified people were freed from desire for “forbidden objects” or from temptation. He argued that sanctification did not destroy the natural appetites, but rather restored them to “something of the original simplicity of innocent action.” What was more, Burwash underscored Wesley’s “careful avoid[ance of] refinements on accidental forms of subjective or individual experience as leading to a dangerous and foolish enthusiasm which magnified frames and feelings above practical Christianity.”<sup>41</sup>

Methodist élites felt that they could no longer tolerate Hornerite Holiness. In short, there were a number of reasons why, by the mid-1890s, Ralph Horner was removed from the Methodist ministry ostensibly because of his refusal to serve any specific circuit assignment. Yet, it is clear from the 6 June 1893 Report of the Committee on Evangelists and Evangelism, which was appointed to investigate his conduct, that the opposition to Horner went far beyond questions of obedience to Church authority, and indeed hinged on allegations that he wilfully promoted enthusiasm among his “followers.” The report found that

... there have been serious irregularities in the prosecution of our evangelistic work, especially in the following particulars, viz: In the mode of conducting prayer and inquiry meetings, in which the people were permitted and sometimes encouraged to pray aloud simultaneously, tending to confusion and disorder. We find that physical manifestations not calculated to commend our common Christianity to the hearts and consciences of men, but tending rather to bring it into dis-

---

40 Ibid., “Advice to Those Sanctified,” 28 August 1895.

41 Ibid., “Doctrines,” 2 October 1895.

repute, such as prostration, ecstasy, immoderate laughter, etc., are common; and we judge that sufficient effort is not exerted toward their restraint and control.<sup>42</sup>

As such, Methodist élites differed from Horner and his followers over both the style and the substance of true Holiness. To Hornerites, entire sanctification was sudden, emotionally charged and necessary for eternal life.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, they believed that the "radical and uncompromising" presentation of the doctrine was essential in keeping it before a world not easily shaken from its formalist foundations.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, during and after this "Holiness crisis," the *Christian Guardian's* official editorial position on perfection hardened. The editors increasingly championed the gradualist approach to Holiness over all other means, and defined the "holiness movement" as the movement of the *whole* Church when each member seeks heart purity, and the progressive perfecting of the image of Christ within.<sup>45</sup> Not all Methodist leaders supported this view. For instance, Albert Carman, general superintendent of the Church at the time, feared the effects that Holiness heresy would have on the vital doctrine of Christian perfection. Carman, one of Horner's initial supporters, joined the Church in censuring the evangelist, but feared that the controversies over Holiness would discredit the doctrine in the eyes of Methodist ministers and leaders.<sup>46</sup> He writes:

From observation in [Lanark] and other parts of our extended operations, I feel justified in the apprehension that the blessed doctrine of scriptural holiness will be discounted, and its enforcement slackened by the follies and extravagances that are abroad. Happy the man who sifts the wheat out from the chaff and holds onto the wheat . . . What with prostrations, floor-poundings, hysterical screaming, the substitution of self-exaltation and censorious and uncharitable arraignment of others for Christian testimony, the loud claims of a sinless perfection, of superiority to other Christians . . . the scorn of the Church of God and her ministers and opposition thereto, there is evident danger that these and other monstrosities and irregularities will be laid at the door of Christian perfection, and the temple of perfect love will, by many, be considered quarantined as infectious and dangerous. Even ministers may be caught in such a delusion of the adversary, and turn against the Gospel they ought to proclaim.<sup>47</sup>

---

42 UCA, Montreal Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, Minutes, "Report of the Committee on Evangelists and Evangelism," 6 June 1893.

43 *Era*, 24 March 1897, p. 48.

44 *Ibid.*, 19 May 1897, p. 78.

45 *Christian Guardian*, "Holiness Special - What and Why," 17 July 1895.

46 It is interesting to note that, in the quarrel over the higher criticism that emerged publicly in 1909, Carman headed up the "conservative" faction which opposed the introduction of theological liberalism into the Methodist curriculum. Nathanael Burwash was the key proponent of the "modern" camp. (See Ross, "Ralph Cecil Horner," 97; and Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind*, 91.)

47 *Christian Guardian*, "Lanark," 15 January 1896.

Carman emphatically argued that, if the Methodist Church did not attend to people's desires to attain holiness as a vital and even sudden experience, and if it did not accept the emotional aspects of holiness cleansing, people would leave the Church. Carman's remarks were prescient. The *Christian Guardian* had almost totally lost interest in discussing Holiness by the late-1890s. Letters and articles on the subject were few and far between. This was in stark contrast to the situation of a few short years earlier, when the experience of Holiness and its relation to individual salvation were subjects of lively debate. It would seem that the Methodist media, at least, consciously sought to distance themselves from questions surrounding Holiness teaching.

Early in the century, Methodism had been successful in the scattered rural communities of Upper Canada, partly because of its emotional appeal and its concern with simple, ascetic personal piety. By the 1890s, Methodist officials had become increasingly uncomfortable with this kind of religious experience. Holiness was too volatile. It promoted antinomianism, fanaticism and schism. The Holiness crises of the late 1880s and early 1890s proved this, and served to solidify the resolve of many Methodist leaders to guard the respectability of institutionalised Methodism against those who too easily trespassed over the line separating ardent zeal from ignorant enthusiasm.<sup>48</sup> Gradualism and the intellectual quest for salvation were officially victorious. This no doubt served to alienate not only members of Horner's group, but also many Methodists who continued to hunger and thirst for a more "authentic" religious experience, one less bound by concerns over middle-class propriety and respectability.

Once the Hornerites separated from the Methodist Church, their message became more "radical and uncompromising." This was deemed to be necessary if the doctrine were to survive and flourish. In *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*, R. Laurence Moore argues that, historically, new religions have acted as "vehicles through which people have nurtured a sense of antagonistic culture."<sup>49</sup> In the case of Holiness, "outsiderism" nurtured a sense of separate identity. Holiness defined itself in opposition to the "dominant" culture, and mercilessly caricaturised the deficiencies of that culture. Members of the Holiness Movement Church were engaged in a contest with middle-class Methodism over questions of religious integrity. Horner and others cultivated Holiness's outsider identity as a means of appealing to converts' zeal to defend their new-found faith against Methodist apostates and other unbelievers. The discourse of battle was often epic in nature, as the following excerpt from R.C. Horner's editorial for 29 December 1897 suggests:

The enemies of Jesus are more numerous and more bitter than ever they have been in the past. They are foaming out their shame. When they learn that the

---

<sup>48</sup> Semple, *The Lord's Dominion*, 212-15.

<sup>49</sup> R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York, 1986), xi.

holiness movement is going to move on with increased rapidity, vigour, and power, they will rise up in their hatred, spite and devilishness. We do not know how much it means to be pressing this battle. But we will know if we follow the pillar, we will learn that there are hundreds of men in every section of the country that are ready to persecute this way to the death. The war between right and wrong, between sin and holiness, between heaven and hell, and between God and the devil, never was stronger or more persistent than at this time.<sup>50</sup>

Such passages were designed to reinforce the commitment of Holiness members and empower them in their struggle against the forces of evil. Unlike their middle-class Methodist counterparts, advocates of Holiness had the Holy Spirit on their side, and with his help could strike terror in the hearts of evildoers everywhere, and “pray down a flaming revival of religion . . . [to] deluge the whole community.”<sup>51</sup> Time and time again, Holiness leaders asserted that the radical presentation of the doctrine of Christian perfection was necessary to the success of the movement. Stylistic radicalism was integral to the Holiness message, and those ministers of the Gospel who were not despised, persecuted and rejected by the “fashionable churches of [the] age” were “guilty of blood.”<sup>52</sup>

These findings point to some deficiencies in Lynne Marks’ recently published *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario*. Marks argues against the notion that religion in small-town Ontario was strongly and monolithically Protestant. She finds support for her argument in the popularity of the Salvation Army among members of the working class, in “vocal” minorities of middle-class secularists, spiritualists and freethinkers, and in the division and decline of religious loyalties that occurred as leisure opportunities became more widely available.<sup>53</sup> The problem with Marks’ argument is that she simultaneously downplays the ability of the mainstream churches to broker compromise, while ignoring expressions of religious alienation that occurred outside the Salvation Army paradigm. In the 1890s, the Salvation Army suffered a loss of evangelical zeal and was transformed into a social rescue agency.<sup>54</sup> The reader is left with the impression by the end of the book that religious dissent died in the 1890s, and that the only real challenge to middle-class religion and hegemony had to come from a secular direction. This could have been avoided had the author examined the Salvation Army as part of a larger context of Holiness dissent.<sup>55</sup> As support for the Salvation Army declined in the 1890s, Hornerite Holiness, and

---

50 *Era*, “Editorial Notes,” 29 December 1897, p. 204.

51 *Ibid.*, “Prayer,” 13 January 1897, p. 4.

52 *Ibid.*, “Editorial Notes,” 11 August 1897, p. 122.

53 Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto, 1996), 44-50, 208-19.

54 *Ibid.*, 165.

55 Other groups within this larger culture of Holiness included the Free Methodists, the Gospel Workers Church, the Canada Holiness Association and, later on, Pentecostalism.

indeed other forms of Christian perfection, were on the rise. In this way, Holiness articulated the principal critique of the mainstream churches in small-town and rural Ontario. Contrary to what Marks asserts, those people who were alienated by the “respectable” classes, most often farmers and skilled labourers, were not thus denied the experience of conversion or participation in church life.<sup>56</sup> Affiliation with the religious alternative of Holiness empowered the marginal and gave them a voice.

Hand in hand with this attack on middle-class Methodism went Holiness’s critique of the increasing importance of wealth and social distinction within its communities. American historians such as Charles Jones, Melvin Easterday Dieter and Timothy Smith echo Robert Wiebe’s thesis in arguing that one can place Holiness in the larger context of the search for order in American society in the face of urban, industrial change. As “island communities,” the dominant social unit of pre-industrial capitalist America, were broken down and reordered, the individuals who came to populate the rising towns and cities of late-nineteenth-century America banded together into institutional units. Holiness associations and churches were but one kind of institutional grouping created in reaction to a crisis of confidence in the powers of community to provide individual members with a sense of meaning and cohesion.<sup>57</sup>

In the Canadian case, it was farmers who flocked most eagerly to Holiness churches, but a significant minority of adherents were members of the working class, some of whom had only recently made the transition from rural to town life. These people would be most likely to feel out of place in churches and congregations that tended to put their wealth on display, however tastefully. This sense of discomfort is reflected in the numerous exhortations in the *Era* for Holiness preachers and members to bathe frequently, comb their hair, change their linen, brush their teeth and trim their fingernails in order to appear presentable.<sup>58</sup> Clearly, many adherents of Hornerite Holiness were separated from their more prosperous Methodist brethren by such distinctions. Indeed, as Methodism became the church of the tea social or fund-raiser, of the hired opera singer and the university-educated guest lecturer – in short, as it became almost synonymous with middle-class culture – it began to alienate those who did not share its values. In response to this, members of the Holiness Movement Church offered an alternative faith and class paradigm based on what they believed to be a retrenchment of Wesleyan ideas of perfect love, and on a return to the strict behavioural standards of early-nineteenth-century Methodism.

In an effort to minimise class distinctions among Christians and to eliminate sophistication and wealth from the top of the cultural hierarchy, Holiness

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 23-25.

<sup>57</sup> Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (New Jersey, 1980), 236-7; Wiebe, *The Search for Order*.

<sup>58</sup> *Era*, “Keep Clean,” 8 September 1897, 143.

advocates claimed that preachers in the Spirit “know no difference between men,” and that “rich and poor are alike.”<sup>59</sup> In reality, however, their view was that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven. The following excerpt is taken from the Editorial Notes of the *Era* for 13 January 1897:

Men who have any desire to accumulate wealth in this world are not consecrated to God, and are in great danger of going to the bottomless pit. No man is ready to go in through the gates into the city until he is entirely separated from the world, fully dedicated to God, and all the desires of the world taken out of his heart. There are no earthly desires in the New Jerusalem. Every desire is for God and those alone who are seeking His glory, need hope to enter into His presence.<sup>60</sup>

Instead of pursuing wealth in the world, people were urged to “lay up a treasure in heaven” and to “have a single eye to the glory of God.”<sup>61</sup> Contrary to what Nathanael Burwash and many of his contemporaries believed, Holiness Movement Church members thought that the pursuit of wealth was inherently evil because of the fact that it was inextricably linked with the desire for pleasure, ease and amusement. They did not agree that the wealthy could exercise Christian stewardship over their money and that development of character and moral good could be the result.<sup>62</sup> Instead, the accumulation of wealth was the antithesis of personal religion, as the following example from Section XV of the Holiness Movement Church Discipline suggests:

How little faith is there among us! How little communion with God, how little living in heaven, walking in eternity, deadness to every creature! How much love of the world! Desire of pleasures, of ease, of getting money! How little brotherly love! What continual judging one another! . . . What want of moral honesty! To instance only one particular: who does as he would be done by, in buying and selling?<sup>63</sup>

The intensity of the Holiness Movement Church’s criticism of wealth, ease and pleasure-seeking must be viewed in the context of the economic transition that was occurring in the late-nineteenth century. Prior to this time, the North American economy was based on production by small entrepreneurs and farmers. The Protestant ethos of salvation through self-denial, perpetual toil, compulsive saving, civic responsibility and a rigid sense of morality rationalised this economic order. As society moved away from a producer-

---

59 *Ibid.*, “Editorial Notes,” 24 February 1897, p. 28.

60 *Ibid.*, “Editorial Notes,” 13 January 1897, p. 1.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

62 Van Die, *Nathanael Burwash*, 84.

63 *Era*, “Discipline – Section XV – Of Visiting From House to House, Guarding Against Those Things That Are So Common to Professors, and Enforcing Practical Religion.”

based economy to one of mass consumption dominated by bureaucratic corporations, people's values changed. The new consumer culture of the twentieth century was one characterised by periodic leisure, compulsive spending and a seemingly permissive morality of individual fulfilment.<sup>64</sup> In light of this, one can better comprehend the strict behavioural standards of Holiness, its insistence on plainness of dress and household furnishings, on abstinence from not only tobacco and liquor, but also tea, coffee and strong foods, and its prohibition of various amusements and financial practices. These things constituted a retrenchment of Oldtime Methodist values as a means of expressing dissent from the rising ethic of consumerism in middle-class Methodist culture.

One need glance only casually at the contents of Canadian Methodism's official newspaper, the *Christian Guardian*, in the latter years of the nineteenth century to appreciate how strongly consumerism had penetrated its larger message. Column upon column of advertisements compete with the printed word for the reader's attention. Everything from the latest in women's fashion to the finest of dining-room suites is advertised by means of drawings and slogans in large print. The pages of the *Holiness Era* are a contrast. Indeed, it was a matter of pride for the editor of the paper to announce to his readership that the publication was intended to float without advertisements and that, despite the dire warnings of the printer that this would not be possible, the paper had indeed survived on subscriptions alone.<sup>65</sup> What this implies was a desire to preach a pure kind of holiness, unsullied by the consumerist message.

Indeed, Holiness advocates warned against treating religion as a commodity to be had at the cheapest price. They equated consumerism, which increased the availability of goods on the market while decreasing their value and workmanship, with "cheap religion" which required no self-denial or sacrifice. People who internalised the consumerist ethic "made their religious

---

64 T.J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*. Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds. (New York, 1983), 3. In *Fables of Abundance*, Lears revises his view of consumer culture by suggesting that it was "less a riot of hedonism than a new way of ordering the existing balance of tensions between control and release." With the rise of consumerism, sensual fulfilment was subordinated to the larger goal of personal efficiency. Sensuality survived in the world of advertising, but it was "increasingly clothed in the sterile idiom of clinical frankness." Interestingly, Holiness attacked the consumerist tendencies of middle-class churchgoers by caricaturising them as hedonists and carnally minded pleasure-seekers. Holiness advocates used this discourse to undermine middle-class cultural values, and to argue for the superiority of their particular brand of spirituality, which sought to transform people's fascination with material abundance, into an enjoyment of free-flowing spiritual abundance. (See *Fables of Abundance*, 10-11.) One should not mistake such rhetoric for full-blown reality. Methodists as a group were not monolithic. The Church had room to accommodate those with ascetic tendencies, along with others who were more self-indulgent.

65 *Era*, "Special Notice," 11 January 1899, p. 8.

calculations chiefly on the basis of dollars and cents.” This cheapness was reflected in their revivals, camp meetings and conversions, which were treated like articles of consumption and as a result bore the fruit of such spiritual pollution – backsliding.<sup>66</sup>

In addition, Holiness members desired to return to the old producer-based economy, as evidenced by their critique of those who incurred personal debt. In an article entitled “Owe No Man Anything,” based on Romans 13:8, the editor of the *Era* wrote:

In these days of hurry and rush in the business world, we are not surprised if business men overlook their obligations in money matters, and lack promptness in meeting them. But we are surprised when Christian men and women, who testify to the highest religious experience, are seemingly so negligent about their financial obligations . . . . [T]here are multitudes who contract debts with very little thought as to how they are to be liquidated, and afterwards feel no burden of responsibility with regard to meeting them. “These things ought not so to be.” The word of God is clear and explicit . . . . [W]hen the title to the heavenly treasure is secured, it cannot be retained unless there is prompt attention given to the settling of these monetary claims.<sup>67</sup>

While more lenient towards those who had fallen into debt through no fault of their own and who desired to meet their obligations honestly, Holiness Movement members believed that the incursion of dishonest debt represented a breach of the “old covenant” of producer-oriented society. Bankruptcy and debt were suggestive of the economic sins of fiscal irresponsibility and greed. These sins prevented the attainment of Christian perfection and, concomitantly, salvation because they reflected the larger immorality of the pursuit of success, pleasure and profit.<sup>68</sup>

The question of dress was also intricately woven through with threads of anti-consumerism and strict personal morality. Male members of conferences and local preachers were not allowed to wear white or showy fronts, velvet or high collars. Members of conferences were not allowed to wear showy neck-

---

66 *Ibid.*, “Cheap Religion,” 6 October 1897, p. 158.

67 *Ibid.*, “Owe No Man Anything,” 7 February 1900, p. 19.

68 In reference to this, it is instructive to consult Boyd Hilton’s *In the Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1885* (New York, 1986), 155-223. Although Hilton’s work refers to an earlier period, it nonetheless suggests some deeper reasons for Holiness Movement Church members’ great wariness of bankruptcy and the new consumerism. British evangelicals of the first half of the nineteenth century lived in an Age of Atonement in which self-improvement was not construed as an end in itself, as it would later be, but as a means of attaining personal and public salvation. In this era of great uncertainty caused by the convulsions of the French Revolution, the rise of English Jacobinism, increasing industrialisation and urbanisation, many conceived of life as a time of moral trial during which the human soul was suspended between the warring forces of sin and grace, depravity and salvation. Social and economic life was ordered by divine Providence. Bankruptcy was seen as a disruption of this divine social order, and a logical result of sin.

ties, and preachers were prohibited from wearing neckties altogether.<sup>69</sup> Members of the church were required to wear plain clothing, and nobody could be received into the Movement “until they have left off the wearing of gold and superfluous ornaments.”<sup>70</sup> For women, tight skirts, waistbands of a different colour from the skirts, large sleeves, pleats, yokes, gathers, frills, ruffles, netting, velvet, high-heeled boots with narrow toes, corsets, fancy hats, pins, buckles, belts and fashionable hairstyles were all off limits.<sup>71</sup> This plainness was to act as an outward symbol of the internal reality of holiness, and a Christ-like spiritual life. Following fashion did great evil by engendering pride, breeding vanity, inflaming anger and lust, impoverishing families and begetting dishonesty.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, there was no excuse for spending one’s money on fancy clothes and expensive furniture when the poor and unevangelised continued to exist.<sup>73</sup> The end result of such greed and vanity was temporal ruin and eternal perdition.<sup>74</sup>

These attacks on fashionable dress represented a critique of the rising consumer culture, and an attempt to retrench early Methodist plainness, when this value was itself falling out of fashion. As such, the Holiness critique of fashion was an expression of the continued cultural resilience of the rural “island community” with its adherence to “the Bible standard [of] self-denial.”<sup>75</sup> It was a means by which Hornerites fostered common bonds of holy community at a time of significant social and cultural dislocation. It was also a way for Holiness members to separate themselves from the apostate practices of the mother church. Plainness was the uniform of outsider Holiness, easily distinguishable as the garb of the virtuous. The ideal of the plainly arrayed Christian stood in stark contrast to the following description of Methodist church goers by R.C. Horner:

If we want to see the latest style, in blazing colours, in plumes and feathers, in lace and ruffles, in silks and satins, in kids and glasses, in gold and diamonds, we may go to the Methodist Church: the minister in the pulpit with his gold watch and chain, buttons and studs, and his wife dressed up in the very latest from Paris; the officials of the church trimmed up in all the pomp and vanity of this proud age, and their wives as if they had slipped out of the band box.<sup>76</sup>

---

69 UCA, Minutes of the General Conference of the Holiness Movement Church of Canada, 1899, p. 64.

70 *Era*, “Discipline – Section XV,” 28 July 1897, pp. 34-35.

71 *Ibid.*, “Worldly Conformity,” 25 July 1900, p. 116.

72 *Ibid.*, “Victim of Senseless Fashion,” 6 October 1897, p. 158.

73 *Ibid.*, “Discipline – Section XV,” 10 March 1897.

74 *Ibid.*, “Victim of Senseless Fashion,” 6 October 1897, p. 158.

75 *Ibid.*, “Dress,” 22 February 1899, p. 25.

76 R.C. Horner, *Original and Inbred Sin* (Ottawa, 1896), 105.

The Holiness Movement's stand on the use of tobacco, coffee and tea served similar ends. As well as being a means of creating allegiance to the group as an "outsider" community, such prohibitions extended Holiness's critique against consumerism and carnality. Section XVIII of the Discipline prohibited tobacco users from being received into membership in the church.<sup>77</sup> Tobacco was a consumer item of dubious merit, and a waste of money that could be used for better purposes. Tobacco use was blamed for "blunt[ing] the moral sense" in that it destroyed true gentlemanly regard for the rights of others to breathe pure air. The very craving for the substance suggested corruption of appetites and morals. Once indulged in, it robbed the user of freedom by making him a slave to habit. Tobacco, in undermining health, also undermined the ability of the individual to make solid and sober moral decisions. In this way, the drug was the handmaiden of the devil, who was consistently trying to undermine the power of the Holy Ghost as divine Comforter and moral guide.<sup>78</sup> Although the use of coffee and tea was not prohibited by the Discipline, almost the same arguments were put forward to warn against their consumption.<sup>79</sup>

There were a number of other behavioural standards that governed the lives of Holiness Movement Church members. Dancing, card-playing, novel-reading, amusements, political involvement, drink, participation in secret societies and the purchase of insurance were all forbidden. It was incumbent upon members to express themselves with "great plainness" in trying to eliminate

---

77 Ibid., "Discipline – Section XVIII," 28 July 1897, p. 35.

78 Ibid., "Reasons for Abstaining from the Use of Tobacco," 4 October 1899, p. 155.

79 Ibid., "Tea Tippling," 7 March 1900; and "The Training of Children," 16 June 1897. Many churchgoing Protestants in Canada did not think twice about the potential dangers of drinking coffee and tea. In fact, many churches structured social gatherings and business meetings around the ritual of tea drinking. Perhaps tea drinking was frowned upon by Homerites because of the fact that the Methodist tea meeting, traditionally an opportunity to find spiritual succour among members of one's religious community, had been transformed in the latter part of the century into an opportunity for fund-raisers to collect money for church building and other projects. By abstaining from tea, Holiness advocates might have been trying to dissociate themselves from tea as an icon of middle-class culture. It is interesting to note, however, that the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) which in the nineteenth century served the same Protestant constituency, opposed tea drinking as harmful to one's health. In *"Through Sunshine and Shadow": The Women's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930* (Montreal/Kingston, 1995), Sharon Cook argues that, according to the WCTU, physical health formed the basis of the "pyramid of character." Bodily vigour was undermined by numerous threats, including poor ventilation, spicy foods, pork, "unbalanced exercise" and constricting dress. Strong tea and coffee were placed in the same category as alcohol and narcotics, which led the body to compulsive excess by first exciting it, then depressing it and finally deranging it. Such a state allowed the basest of human passions to upset the sober equilibrium of good character. Both WCTU and Holiness members believed that once this happened, it became exceedingly difficult for the individual to achieve redemption. See Cook, *"Through Sunshine and Shadow,"* 87.

these sins from their midst. Members were exhorted to prevent the “ghost of unpopularity, the ghost of starvation or lack of support, the ghost fear of criticism and the ghost fear of offending” from standing in the way of their task.<sup>80</sup> This was one of the means of enforcing the peculiar culture of Holiness in a decreasingly supportive environment.

Additionally, the role of the travelling preacher was exceedingly important, in theory at least, in ensuring the continuation of the bonds of Holiness communities. It was the duty of travelling preachers to “meet the societies and classes” that constituted their circuit, and to visit the sick. Preachers were expected to “tell every one under [their] care, what they thought was wrong in [their] conduct and temper, and that lovingly and plainly, as soon as may be.”<sup>81</sup> Those in charge of the administrative details of circuits were to oversee the behaviour of preachers, to appoint class leaders in conjunction with the wishes of the class, to receive, try and expel members according to discipline, to regularly hold watch-nights and love-feasts, and to ensure that each society was duly supplied with books.<sup>82</sup> Presiding elders were appointed to oversee the spiritual and temporal business of the church in their districts. They were given the power to enforce discipline in the districts.<sup>83</sup> Travelling deacons and special evangelists also took part in the creation of Holiness culture, urging sinners to seek conversion, and pressing the converted to go on to entire sanctification. Bonds of community were thus maintained, through a system that reinforced the discipline and style of social relations of an earlier form of Methodism.

Methodist élites entered the twentieth century with a desire to effect a rapprochement between religion and culture. This would be accomplished by applying the bureaucratic method of reform and intervention to society in an effort to bring forth the Kingdom of God on earth. Methodist leaders increasingly emphasised the organic nature of social relationships and the interconnectedness of home, community and nation, and of personal and social well-being. According to Phyllis Airhart, Methodism became part of a broad new “capitalist-socialist, reformer-revolutionary” intellectual and social consensus, based on values created in the crucible of the mid- to late-nineteenth-century growth of urban life, prosperity, professionalism, voluntarism and scientific knowledge.<sup>84</sup> The problem with this assessment is that it assumes that

---

80 *Era*, “Plainness of Speech,” 6 October 1897, p. 154.

81 *Era*, “Discipline – Section X,” 10 February 1897, p. 20.

82 *Ibid.*, “Discipline – Section XI,” 10 February 1897, p. 20.

83 *Ibid.*, “Discipline – Section VII,” 10 February 1897, p. 19.

84 Airhart, *Serving the Present Age*, 123-41. It is true that Holiness was a reaction against this new intellectual and social consensus. However, Airhart’s claim that Methodism was transformed with very little opposition must be revised. My evidence suggests that these changes were accompanied by a great deal of dissent.

Methodism was transformed with very little reference to, or opposition from, antagonistic forces. In addition, it takes a part for the whole in assuming that desires for change were supported unequivocally by all members of the Church élite and by the larger membership. In contrast, this paper has demonstrated that Methodist leaders were cautiously supportive of Holiness evangelisation until the mid-1890s, when conflicts with R.C. Horner and other Holiness preachers over the proper style and substance of Christian perfection led to a hardening of the Methodist position on Holiness. These conflicts cast suspicions on the quest for instant sanctification because, henceforth, the experience was closely linked to heterodoxy, schism, and fanaticism. The last of these was a thorn in the side of Methodist leaders, who were embarrassed by reports of members transgressing the bounds of middle-class propriety through experiences of religious ecstasy.

As élites came to a consensus on the parameters of acceptable belief, elements of the old evangelical consensus became fragmented. Part of this fragmentation, according to historians, was the rise of fundamentalist groups claiming to be the true heirs of the nineteenth-century evangelical tradition.<sup>85</sup> The Holiness Movement Church can be understood in this context of reaction and retrenchment. Similar to their Calvinist proto-fundamentalist counterparts, members of the Holiness Movement emphasised personal religion, and held tenaciously to literal over figurative explanations of Biblical text.<sup>86</sup> They also emphasised supernatural interpretations of God's work on earth over natural ones. But, unlike Baptist and Presbyterian proto-fundamentalists, adherents of Hornerite Holiness put forward an optimistic vision of human destiny, based on a belief in boundless spiritual progress as exemplified by the doctrine of entire sanctification.

For Holiness members, the betterment of society hinged on evangelisation and convincing all people of the necessity of attaining Christian perfection in this lifetime, in order to obtain salvation in the hereafter. If all people adhered to this righteous doctrine, with its concomitant emphasis on strict behavioural standards and the responsibility of Christian individuals to see to the needs of their neighbour, then there would be no need of social reform on a grand scale. If all people sought their rightful inheritance of perfect love, then the world itself would become a model of millennial perfection. This message was

---

85 See Airhart, *Serving the Present Age*, 134-35, and Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1928* (Toronto, 1971).

86 See Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (Grand Rapids, 1983); Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago, 1970); Ronald G. Sawatsky, "'Looking for that Blessed Hope': The Roots of Fundamentalism in Canada," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1984.

particularly appealing to the people of small towns and rural communities in Ontario and Quebec, who were spared many of the problems peculiar to big city life problems that required a more organised and massive plan of attack. As such, this study in religious counter-culture implies the existence of a significant divide in late-Victorian social, religious and cultural life based on the divergent experiences of small-town and city folk.