Document généré le 12 oct. 2024 02:42

Ontario History

Contesting the Protestant Consensus
Voluntarists, Methodists, and the Persistence of Evangelical Dissent in Upper Canada, 1829-1854

James Forbes

Volume 108, numéro 2, fall 2016

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050594ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1050594ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)
2371-4654 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Forbes, J. (2016). Contesting the Protestant Consensus: Voluntarists, Methodists, and the Persistence of Evangelical Dissent in Upper Canada, 1829-1854. *Ontario History*, *108*(2), 189–214. https://doi.org/10.7202/1050594ar

Résumé de l'article

Dans cet article, nous allons contester la prémisse qu'un consensus protestant avait émergé dans le Haut-Canada au milieu du 19e siècle, en examinant la persistance des volontaristes évangéliques politiquement influents et dissidents qui étaient partisans de la laïcisation des réserves du clergé. Leurs efforts étaient vivement contestés par les évangélistes qui croyaient que la pureté de leur foi était centrée sur son indépendance de l'état aussi bien que sur son revivalisme. Nous analyserons le conflit entre les Wesleyens britanniques et les méthodistes plutôt volontaristes du Haut-Canada dans leurs efforts à établir la succession du Méthodisme dans les colonies. Nous allons souligner la persistance de la jeune culture évangélique dissidente, non pas comme une exception à la règle du consensus, mais comme une influence importante de la politique publique coloniale et une force vitale du protestantisme du Haut-Canada remettant en cause le modèle de consensus..

Copyright © The Ontario Historical Society, 2016

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

https://www.erudit.org/fr/

Contesting the Protestant Consensus

Voluntarists, Methodists, and the Persistence of Evangelical Dissent in Upper Canada, 1829-1854

by James Forbes

"When the battle shall be over, we shall look around for some of our brethren and miss them. There is a spirit of conformity and complaisance abroad which will be the ruin of many—to be called a dissenter requires more fortitude than many possess..."[1]

In 1842, two old rivals met unexpectedly for the first time as they shared a coach ride from Kingston to Cobourg, Upper Canada. The subject of the long-standing rivalry between Anglican John Strachan and Methodist Egerton Ryerson had been the question of church establishment, and their fierce war of words had been published for an eager audience in the Upper Canadian presses beginning in 1826. Strachan had advocated greater state support for the Church of England in order to combat what he saw to be subversive evangelical encroachment in the colony, and Ryerson had challenged his presumptions and defended Methodists against Strachan's accusations of laziness and disloyalty.[2] By 1842, however, something had changed significantly: during their amicable exchange on the coach ride, the two clergymen discussed accessing state funds to support the Methodists' new Victoria College. Historians such as William Westfall have used this meeting as evidence that a "new Protestant consensus was beginning to emerge."[3] Mark Noll said the meeting suggests "how easily the antagonisms of the 1820s were set aside for the common Protestant purposes of the 1840s."[4] These conclusions are consistent with a wider historiographical

[1] Rev. John Roaf,*Lectures on the Millennium* (1844), 94.

[2] For background on the political and religious context of this rivalry, see John Webster Grant, *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 89, 100; David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988),53-54; E. Jane Errington, *The Lion, The Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 187-88.

[3] William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 49.

[4] Mark A. Noll, "Canadian Evangelicalism: A View from the United States," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience,* ed. G.A. Rawlyk (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 4.

Abstract

This article challenges the premise that a Protestant consensus emerged in Upper Canada by the mid-nineteenth century by examining the persistence of politically influential, dissenting evangelical voluntarists who advocated the secularization of the clergy reserves. State-Chruch efforts were strongly contested by evangelicals who had come to believe that the purity of their faith was marked by its independence from the state as well as its revivalism. Using the Toronto-based Christian Guardian, *this article traces a clash between the British Wesleyans and the generally voluntarist Upper Canadian Methodists as they sought to claim the legacy of Methodism in the colony. Overall, this article seeks to highlight the persistence of an early dissenting evangelical culture, not as an exception to the rule of consensus, but as a significant influence in colonial public policy and a vital force in Upper Canadian Protestantism that calls into question the consensus model.*

Résumé: *Dans cet article, nous allons contester la prémisse qu'un consensus protestant avait émergé dans le Haut-Canada au milieu du 19e siècle, en examinant la persistance des volontaristes évangéliques politiquement influents et dissidents qui étaient partisans de la laïcisation des réserves du clergé. Leurs efforts étaient vivement contestés par les évangélistes qui croyaient que la pureté de leur foi était centrée sur son indépendance de l'état aussi bien que sur son revivalisme. Nous analyserons le conflit entre les Wesleyens britanniques et les méthodistes plutôt volontaristes du Haut-Canada dans leurs efforts à établir la succession du Méthodisme dans les colonies. Nous allons souligner la persistance de la jeune culture évangélique dissidente, non pas comme une exception à la règle du consensus, mais comme une influence importante de la politique publique coloniale et une force vitale du protestantisme du Haut-Canada remettant en cause le modèle de consensus..*

theme that traces the tempering of an older radical revivalist culture and the transformation of evangelicalism from the margins of Upper Canadian society to the mainstream.[5] Recently, Todd Webb offered a transatlantic reorientation of evangelical cultural change as a gradual integration of Canadian Methodism into a British Wesleyan world. However, his interpretation reinforces the narrative of evangelical assimilation by exhibiting what he refers to as a "transoceanic version of the Protestant consensus."[6] Others such as Margeurite Van Die insist that evangelicalism was never as radical as outsiders understood it to be, and that mid-century evangelicalism is less of a departure from an older

[5] For example, Nancy Christie and George Rawlyk have both done much to explore the distinct culture of early colonial evangelicalism, noting the democratic and populist implications of early revivalism. But they both suggest that this strain of evangelicalism began to lose its footing after 1815 and began to be incorporated into a more respectable mainstream. See Nancy Christie, "'In These Times of Democratic Rage and Delusion': Popular Religion and the Challenge to the Established Order, 1760-1815," in *The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1760-1990*, ed. G.A. Rawlyk (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 11, 42-43; see also G.A. Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), xv, 207-208. Michael Gauvreau notes a similar shift toward respectability in the 1830s. Michael Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed: Personal Piety and the Evangelical Social Vision, 1815-1867," in *The Canadian Protestant Experience*, 61.

[6] Todd Webb, *Transatlantic Methodists: British Wesleyanism and the Formation of an Evangelical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ontario and Quebec* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 101.

religious culture than an adaptation to new circumstances.[7] Either way, for most historians the famous 1842 coach ride is indicative of a natural progression for evangelicals and representative of their position in colonial politics and society.

Not everyone in Upper Canada looked favourably upon Ryerson's actions, however, or the perceived changes in evangelicalism in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Chief among the malcontents on church-state issues were those evangelicals who, for religious reasons, subscribed to *voluntarism*, the principle that churches should be supported solely by voluntary contribution and never by the state. It is this group that would continue to fight against church-state privileges long after Ryerson considered the matter settled. The longest-standing church-state controversy in Upper Canada was that of the clergy reserves, lands set aside in 1791 for the support of the Church of England. In 1840, the colonial government extended the benefit of the clergy reserves to four denominations, including the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Ryerson found the concession to be an appropriate resolution, as he expressed in a letter in December 1841: "With the settlement of the clergy reserve question ended my controversy with the Church of England, as I have again and again intimated that it would."[8] Following his coach ride with Strachan, Ryerson mused that "the settlement of the Clergy Reserve Question had annihilated the principal causes of difference between those individuals and bodies in the Province who had been most hostile to each other."[9] However, the 1840 concession kept state support for churches intact and thus did not satisfy the vocal group of voluntarists who insisted that the colonial government must eliminate all state funding for churches. For example, an anti-clergy reserves meeting in Niagara in 1848 resolved that "we hold the voluntary principle for the support of the Gospel and its institutions as sacred—being warranted by authority of the New Testament, and the only means thereby authorized."[10] Voluntarists continued to fight for the secularization of the clergy reserves until they saw that outcome achieved in 1854. Given the religious conceptions that informed this voluntarist sentiment, it is important to recognize in this controversy a significant challenge to the supposed "Protestant consensus" of the mid-nine-

[7] See Marguerite Van Die, "'A March of Victory and Triumph in Praise of 'The Beauty of Holiness'': Laity and the Evangelical Impulse in Canadian Methodism, 1800-1884," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, 75; Marguerite Van Die, "'The Marks of a Genuine Revival': Religion, Social Change, Gender, and Community in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario," *Canadian Historical Review,* 79:3 (September 1998), 528.

[8] This letter was originally written to John Kent, editor of the high Anglican newspaper *The Church*, and it was included in Ryerson's autobiography. See Egerton Ryerson, *The Story of My Life: Being Reminiscences of Sixty Years' Public Service in Canada,* ed. J. George Hodgins (Toronto: William Briggs, 1883), 293.

[9] Quoted in Grant, *Profusion of Spires,* 93.

[10] "Proceedings of the Niagara Annual Conference on the Clergy Reserve Question," *Globe,* 27 September 1848.

teenth century.

In light of this sustained dissent, Ryerson's position in 1842 was neither a natural progression nor entirely representative of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. Rather, to the strict voluntarists, it was a deliberate departure from what they had long considered to be a central principle of evangelical dissent. To uncover the dissenting voices masked by the appearance of consensus it is necessary to illustrate the interaction between three overlapping layers of discourse: the immediate political context of Upper Canada, the particular denominational traditions and their various schisms and unions, and a broader British tradition of dissent whose centuries of opposition to the established church continued to inform the identities of many evangelicals in nineteenth-century Upper Canada. This latter category transcended denominational differences as well as bridged the political contexts of Upper Canada and Britain in ways that extend beyond the scope of this article.[11] Together, these three layers of discourse shaped the mental worlds of nineteenth-century evangelical dissent in Upper Canada.

Although acknowledging the importance of a multi-denominational makeup of the dissenters' religious identities, this article will focus on Ryerson's denomination of Methodism. Using the Methodist *Christian Guardian* newspaper as its base, this article will trace evangelical engagement with the clergy reserves issue from Ryerson's tenure as the *Guardian*'s editor in 1829 to the secularization of the clergy reserves in 1854. The circumstances that determined the changing attitudes of Methodist leaders toward church-state relations, and the considerable resistance to those changes from within Methodism and the wider evangelical community, suggest the importance of pursuing alternatives to the narrative of mid-century consensus. Further, disagreement over the clergy reserves issue indicates a starting point to give voice to the distinctive worldviews that inspired such passionate dissent from the dominant discourses of Upper Canadian society.

Not all evangelicals were voluntarists, but the voluntarist position drew upon religious concepts that combined the imperatives of evangelical revivalism with the British dissenters' longstanding objections to the Church of England. As a means for identifying the basic parameters of evangelicalism, historian David Bebbington has outlined a series of four characteristics of evangelical beliefs and practices: emphasis upon the necessity of conversion (*conversionism*), high regard for the authority of the Bible (*biblicism*), expression of faith through effort (*activism*), and a message centred upon the atoning power of Jesus Christ on the cross (*crucicentrism*).[12] Voluntarists regu-

[11] Historians have already begun the important task of integrating Canadian evangelicalism into the British Atlantic world, but they have largely focused on that portion of evangelicalism that was friendly to the established church rather than interested in disestablishment. For example, see Richard W. Vaudry, *Anglicans and the Atlantic World: High Churchmen, Evangelicals, and the Quebec Connection* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); Webb, *Transatlantic Methodists*, 103-104.

[12] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*

larly drew upon the first category, conversionism, to challenge the need for state-supported churches. Evangelicals who emphasized the necessity of spiritual regeneration in the form of the "new birth" believed salvation to be rooted in an experience outside of church institutions. This form of conversionism was often subversive to the established church's doctrine of baptismal regeneration which required an authorized clergyman to perform the specific rite within the church.[13] The Upper Canadian voluntarist and reform politician John Rolph directly appealed to conversionism in an 1837 speech denouncing the clergy reserves, arguing that the state sanctioning of any church deceived men into thinking they were saved: "Lo! How easy it is to be registered a christian on earth: but it is the wrong way to secure their registry in heaven."[14] One article written under the pseudonym "Iota" in the *Christian Guardian* illustrated an evangelical view of the contrasting opinions about salvation. On one hand, "The perversity of man has sought out many inventions to accomplish this purpose [salvation], such as a connexion merely with some particular church, involving a round of outward forms..." But the true way to salvation, said Iota, was "A due exercise of faith on the vicarious sacrifice of the Redeemer, with a full surrender of the heart to him," and anyone who could not claim such an experience "is in the most imminent danger."[15]

One implication of conversionism in the hands of the dissenters was an ecclesiology that rejected an exclusive apostolic succession in favour of open denominationalism. Evangelicalism's emphasis upon the new birth had a long track record of breaking down denominational barriers and promoting an identity based upon shared concepts. For example, American revivalist James McGready, who organized the 1801 Cane Ridge revivals seen to initiate decades of evangelical revivalism known as the Second Great Awakening, said that on Judgement Day individuals would not be asked whether they were "a Presbyterian—a Seceder—a Covenanter—a Baptist—or a Methodist; but, Did you experience the new birth? Did you accept of Christ and his salvation as set forth in the gospel?"[16] The sentiment was captured by the eighteenth-century founder of Methodism John Wesley, and still quoted in a New York state Methodist tract in 1842: "You believe the Church of Rome is right. What then? Whether Bellarmine or Luther is right, you are certainly in the wrong, if you are not 'born of the Spirit.'"[17] Up-

(New York: Routledge, 1989), 3.

[13] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain,* 9-10.

[14] John Rolph, *Speeches of Dr. John Rolph, and Christop'r A. Hagerman, Esq., His Majesty's Solicitor General, on the Bill for Appropriating the Proceeds of the Clergy Reserves to the Purposes of General Education* (Toronto: M. Reynolds, 1837), 9.

[15] "The Scriptural Way of Salvation," *Christian Guardian,* 16 December 1840.

[16] Quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 611.

[17] Quoted in George Peck, *An Answer to the Question, Why are you a Wesleyan Methodist?* (New

per Canadian evangelicals likewise emphasized the necessity of working across denominational lines to advance "a common salvation."[18]

This ecclesiological position necessarily called into question the high Anglican notion that the exclusive authority of the church could be traced through a single authorized institution from the first century to their present-day institution. In place of this apostolic succession, evangelical dissenters often expressed an understanding of Christian history in which the purity of the first-century church had given way to hierarchical perversions. In 1830, Egerton Ryerson praised an English newspaper editor for his advocacy of "the primitive institutions of religion, when they were built upon the 'Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the Chief Cornerstone,' and not upon a house of Lords and Commons, which in some instances an immoral ministry and a lascivious monarch being the chief cornerstone."[19] The *Globe* editor and evangelical Presbyterian George Brown framed his pro-secularization arguments by romanticizing the New Testament days before "ambitious priests [began] to work themselves in between man and his maker, and to use their usurped authority for their own base purposes."[20]

Evangelical dissent covered a wide range of Protestant denominations, but in Upper Canada the largest evangelical denomination was Methodism. Methodism first entered the colony with Loyalist settlers from the United States, and several American preachers on horseback established Upper Canadian circuits connected with the New York conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The first generation of Methodists in Upper Canada preached an evangelical gospel in barns and fields, and claimed to produce converts *en masse* via ecstatic spiritual experiences.[21] The Upper Canadian political and religious authorities saw them as fanatics who threatened to overrun the colony with American ideas of democracy and republicanism.[22] The Methodists' subversive reputation continued in the following decades as many became associated with the reform movement of Upper Canada. The connection was so pervasive that the colony's first legislative assembly to elect a majority of members who were critical of the executive (later

York: Carlton &Lanahan, 1842; Evanston: American Theological Library Association, 1985), 15.

[18] For example, Egerton Ryerson wrote in 1831, "The various classes of Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians and Methodists are owned by the Father of lights as instruments in despossesing [sic] the 'rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness' of their usurped dominions, and in diffusing the blessings of a common salvation among the fallen family of man." "Revivals of Religion in the United States," *Christian Guardian,* 3 September 1831.

[19] "London World Newspaper," *Christian Guardian,* 25 December 1830.

[20] George Brown, "Anti-Clergy Reserve Meeting [26 July 1851]," in *The Life and Speeches of Hon. George Brown,* ed. Alexander Mackenzie (Toronto: Globe, 1882), 242-44.

[21] For example, the Hay Bay revival of September 1805 claimed an attendance of approximately 2,500 people. See Rawlyk, *Canada Fire*, 154.

[22] Errington, *The Lion, The Eagle, and Upper Canada,* 51-52.

called reformers) was known as the "saddle-bag parliament," named for the imagery of itinerant Methodist preachers on horseback.[23] It is important not to link evangelicalism too closely to partisanship because, as William Westfall has pointed out, evangelical political participation was not uniform.[24] However, the stereotype was not unfounded, as historians have noted clear links between religious affiliation and voting. For example, more than ninety percent of adherents to nonconformist Protestant sects, including non-Wesleyan Methodists, secessionist Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, and non-denominational evangelicals, supported the reform candidate in the Toronto district in the 1836 election. No other category, not even national origin, had a comparable correlation to support for reform.[25] Evangelicalism's pervasive association with the Upper Canadian reform movement suggests an underlying set of concerns, attitudes, and values which is most indicative of the state of evangelical culture in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The Methodist newspaper the *Christian Guardian* provides one lens through which to examine evangelical conceptions as they engaged with church-state issues over the course of the twenty-five years from 1829-1854. However, the denomination also underwent several changes throughout this time, which had a great effect upon the Methodist leaderships' positions on church-state issues, and what the *Guardian* chose to publish. In 1828 the Methodist Episcopal Church in Upper Canada separated from the New York conference, and after only five years of independence they united in 1833 with the British Wesleyan conference. Some Upper Canadian Methodists rejected the union and maintained their independence in 1833 under the name of the Methodist Episcopal Church.[26] Most remained with the united body, however, and they shared an uneasy union until they ended the arrangement in 1840. Seven more years of independence were followed by union with the British conference again in 1847. The *Guardian* underwent several changes in editorial leadership throughout these years: Egerton Ryerson (three non-consecutive terms, 1829-32, 1833-35, 1838-40), James Richardson (1832-33), Ephraim Evans (1835-38), Jonathan Scott (1840-43), George Playter (1843-47), and George Sanderson (1847-1851). Throughout these years, the more radical Methodists struggled to assert their populist values in the face of an increasingly conservative leadership pushing deference to imperial authorities and state-church policies.[27]

---

[23] Grant, *Profusion of Spires*, 89

[24] Westfall, *Two Worlds,* 44-45.

[25] Paul Romney, "On the Eve of the Rebellion: Nationality, Religion and Class in the Toronto Election of 1836," in *Old Ontario: Essays in Honour of J.M.S. Careless,* ed. David Keane and Colin Read (Toronto: Dundurn, 1990), 200.

[26] Grant, *Profusion of Spires,* 76.

[27] Todd Webb, *Transatlantic Methodists: British Wesleyanism and the Formation of an Evangelical*

As such, even editors who succeeded one another often represented opposing views, and it is important to keep these denominational changes in mind when using Methodism as a thermometer for assessing change in Upper Canadian evangelicalism.

The *Christian Guardian* began in 1829 as a project of the recently autonomous Methodist Episcopal Church, having just secured its independence from the New York conference the previous year. Its first editor was Egerton Ryerson, who was already something of a household name in the colony because of his widely printed war of words with Strachan. Although high church advocates like Strachan viewed the Methodists' revivalism and enthusiastic style as a sign of Americanism, it is apparent from early articles in the *Guardian* that Upper Canadian evangelicals linked them with the purity of the Christian faith. One article warned that where revivals were absent "there is something wrong in the church of God... there is a partial dereliction of duty on the part of the minister, or of the members of the church, or of both."[28] Another article lamented that "The enemies of revivals... do not teach and warn from house to house with many tears, as did the zealous and devoted Paul. They do none of these things, and therefore they ridicule others for doing what they are too cold or worldly to do."[29]

Many Upper Canadian evangelicals also associated the purity of the Christian faith with independence from the state. In 1831, Ryerson called for the people of Upper Canada to embrace "the zeal of real Christianity, [and] put an end to the abominations of Church and State union in Canada."[30] In Ryerson's 1826 critique of Strachan, he had tied separation of church and state directly to the purity of evangelical religion, and Anglican state-churchism to idolatry: "I take my leave of the Doctor's Sermon at present. He may trust in Legislative influence; he may pray to 'the Imperial Parliament'. But we will trust in the Lord our God, and to Him will we make prayer."[31] Ryerson and others looked to biblical examples for an idealized primitive church, which they characterized as both revivalist and free from state entanglements. The two often went together for evangelical dissenters because they defined themselves against an established church which usually upheld a more reserved and formal religiosity. More than a matter of taste or circumstances, by the 1830s voluntarism and revivalism had become for many evangelicals twin signs of Christian puri-

---

Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ontario and Quebec (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 70-73;Goldwin French, *Parsons and Politics. The Role of the Wesleyan Methodists in Upper Canada and the Maritimes from 1780 to 1855* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962),139, 150, 157; Grant, *Profusion of Spires,* 91.

[8] "Thoughts on Revivals," *Christian Guardian,* 27 November 1830.

[29] "Hostility Against Revivals," *Christian Guardian,* 14 December 1831.

[30] "The Doctrines and Spirit of Church and State Union in Canada," *Christian Guardian,* 15 October 1831.

[31] Originally published in the *Colonial Advocate,* 11 May 1826.Quoted in Sissons, *Egerton Ryerson,* 28.

ty in contrast to the "cold" state-supported worship of the wider Christian world.

Early articles in the *Guardian* also made it clear that the Canadian Methodists saw themselves as distinct from their British Wesleyan counterparts, particularly when it came to the question of church-state relations. In an 1831 article, Ryerson explained the similarities between Canadian, British, and American Methodism, arguing that they were all truly "Wesleyan." But he acknowledged a popular Canadian criticism of the Methodist church in England: "It has, however, been affirmed that the Methodists in England are not a distinct body from the Established Church, and that the prospect of a *complete* union between the Methodists in England and the Establishment is increasing to almost a certainty."[32] The same year, Egerton's brother George Ryerson wrote of the British Wesleyans, "I detest their politics... clinging to the skirts of a corrupt, secularized and anti-Christian church... the Wesleyan Conference is an obstacle to the extension of civil and religious liberty."[33] This contention marked a division between the Methodist Episcopal Church and British Wesleyan Church that persisted after their merger in 1833, eventually provoked their dissolution in 1840, and provided a source of continued uneasiness throughout their subsequent relations.

In August 1832, Ryerson bid farewell to his readers and introduced the *Guardian*'s new editor James Richardson. Ryerson had been assigned to go to England to negotiate the union between the Canadian and British Wesleyan conference in 1833. His farewell was an opportunity to reflect on previous years, and he noted as an important part of his legacy his "remonstrance against the introduction into this country of an *endowed political* church." Ryerson painted an optimistic picture for the future of the colony, rejoicing that "the day of political equity, religious liberty, and conciliatory government is about dawning upon us." Most importantly, Ryerson expressed his hope "[t]hat the *Guardian* may be rendered more extensively useful in the promotion of this glorious end," and he stated his confidence that his successor would "secure the confidence and support of the public in the pursuit of it."[34] Ryerson's successor would indeed be faithful in wielding the *Guardian* to that end, but it would not be long before rumblings from denominational powers across the Atlantic threatened to disrupt the outgoing editor's charted course.

James Richardson became the second editor of the *Christian Guardian* at the age of 41. A Kingston-born veteran of the War of 1812 who lost an arm in the battle of Oswego, Richardson was raised Anglican but converted to Methodism at a Haldimand quarterly meeting in 1818.[35] His first editorial in Septem-

[32] "English, American, and Canadian Methodists," *Christian Guardian,* 15 October 1831.

[33] Originally in letter from George to Egerton Ryerson, 6 August 1831.Quoted in French, *Parsons and Politics,* 137.

[34] "To the Patrons, Subscribers, and Readers of the Guardian," *Christian Guardian,* 29 August 1832.

[35] "The Late Bishop Richardson," *The Globe*, 11 March 1875.

ber 1832 mentioned a desire to leave politics to politicians; however, he reminded his readers that "civil and religious rights are often so blended together that it is scarcely possible to attend to the one without touching the other."[36] Indeed, it was not long at all before Richardson's defence of religious principles marched boldly into contemporary political concerns. In a November 1832 article titled "Another Scheme to Support, or Rather to Corrupt Religion in Upper Canada," Richardson criticized proposals to support churches with government funds. He condemned it as a violation of the "right of private judgment in matters of faith and practice," something which he believed to be fundamental to Protestantism. With likely reference to a biblical passage in the Gospel of John, Richardson equated state-supported churches with false teachers by asking, "What dependence can be placed upon a *hireling* either in politics or religion?"[37]

The following year, Richardson's criticism of state-churchism had a more tangible target, as the Church of Scotland accepted status as an established church in Upper Canada and agreed to receive government support alongside the Church of England. Richardson began his remarks by announcing, "So then, the bait is taken—the majority of the Presbyterian Synod of Upper Canada have accepted of the proffered boon from the Executive of this Province..." He went on to berate them for their lack of discernment, and mourned their departure from the voluntarism, which he associated with the purity of "a former dispensation." He predicted that their voluntary contributions would now dry up, and that at any time the government could decide to revoke their support as well. Richardson lamented that the church had accepted a state of "servile dependence" upon the executive council, rather than upon God and their parishioners. Richardson declared dramatically that, "It is high time the people were awake to this evil—this source of fearful and incalculable evil to our country."[38] It was a clear statement of evangelical principles with direct application to contemporary state decisions, and it created a stir among the *Guardian*'s diverse body of readers.

The following week, the *Guardian* published several responses to Richardson's editorial. Most indicative of the upcoming challenges within Canadian Methodism was one writer who asserted that Richardson's own denomination was currently in talks to receive government funds for missions. Richardson had been ready to answer a number of criticisms and defend the principle of voluntarism, but this statement appeared to take him by surprise: "We were not aware of any

[36] *Christian Guardian,* 5 September 1832.

[37] "Another Scheme to Support, or Rather to Corrupt Religion in Upper Canada," *Christian Guardian,* 7 November 1832. Emphasis in original. The term "*hireling*" likely refers to a passage in the Gospel of John in which Jesus is described as the "Good Shepherd" who takes care of the sheep and gives his life for them, contrasted with the "hireling" who tends the flock for a short time and abandons them when wolves come. See John 10:11-14.

[38] "Religious Grants," *Christian Guardian,* 3 July 1833.

grant being made to the English Conference... We heard a report last winter of some negotiations between the Government and the Wesleyan Missionaries respecting a grant, but we never heard the result..." He went on to reiterate his voluntarist position and declared confidently that "we hope and trust that should any such tender be made [to the Methodist Episcopal Church] it will be promptly but respectfully refused."[39] It was a moment of disjuncture, an unexpected hiccup in his bold assault on state-churchism. Most troublingly, it was a threat from within his own church.

Richardson may not have known the extent to which other Methodists were implementing an establishment-friendly direction for Upper Canadian Methodism, well under way by the time he was waging war on state support for churches. The previous year, in June 1832, the British Wesleyan Missionary Committee representative Robert Alder had arrived in Upper Canada and met with Lieutenant-Governor Colborne. The two British natives had found their views very much on the same page as they negotiated government grants for Methodist missions in the colony and identified what they both perceived to be a major problem with the Canadian Methodist conference as it then stood: "Yankeeism."[40] With these two goals in mind, introducing government funds and eliminating "American" political sentiments, Alder had entered discussions over the union of the British and Canadian conferences in summer 1832. Only a month prior to Richardson's condemnation of grants for churches, the British Wesleyan Missionary Committee had stated its intention to muzzle the *Guardian* on exactly that issue: "the *Christian Guardian*... shall not attack the principle of receiving aid from Government for the extension of religion."[41] Further correspondence following the merger reveals the extent of Colborne's negotiations with the British Wesleyans concerning their plans for Canada. In an 1834 correspondence with Colborne, Alder affirmed the British Conference's ability to "exercise as much control over the *Canadian* Methodists as was really necessary and desirable & that this great measure must be carried rather by influence than by legislative enactments." In exchange, Colborne would happily continue to provide government grants.[42]

In his final August 1832 issue as editor of the *Guardian* before his departure to England, Ryerson had denied rumours that Alder had dictated the proposed terms of union. He had further reassured his readers that, although the idea of such a union had produced "strong anxiety" in the past, he expected it would unite

[39] "Not False Accusers," *Christian Guardian,* 10 July 1833.

[40] Originally in a letter from Robert Alder to J. James, 30 July 1832. Quoted in French, *Parsons and Politics,* 138-139.

[41] Originally in *Records of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society,* Committee Minutes 10 June 1833. Quoted in French, *Parsons and Politics,* 140.

[42] Originally in report from Stinson to the Committee, Report on Indian Missions, 1834. Quoted in French, *Parsons and Politics,* 150.

Methodism in the colony and strengthen their efficiency in reaching common goals.[43] Some leaders of the independent Canadian conference, such as Ryerson, saw the potential merit of union and pursued that course despite reservations about their counterparts' coziness with the imperial state. They were likely unaware, however, of Alder's private promises to Colborne that he would silence the dissenting political views of the Canadians and promote their deference to state authority.

Some Canadians expressed deep suspicion of the British Wesleyans' intentions for the merger.[44] Back in 1831, the oldest Ryerson brother, George, visited England and wrote back to Egerton saying, "I have reason to know that they would gladly govern us... I rejoice that our country lies beyond the Atlantic, and is surrounded by an atmosphere of freedom." He further emphasized his growing concern for the British Wesleyans' close relationship to the established church: "The whole morning service of the Church of England is now read in most of the Wesleyan Chapels, and with as much formality as in the Church."[45] In December 1832, John Ryerson wrote of his own concerns in a letter to Egerton, who was then planning his upcoming spring visit to England to negotiate the union:

> The subject of the Union appears to be less and less palatable to our friends in these parts, so much so, that I think it will not be safe for you to come to any permanent arrangements with the British Conference, even should they accede to our proposals...[46]

Contrary to the hopes of his brother's parishioners, however, Ryerson went ahead in pursuit of the merger. On 5 June 1833 he met with leaders of the British conference, including Jabez Bunting and Robert Alder, and they "examined the whole question in detail" and wrote up an outline for union. Then they met again on 2 August 1833, and a committee of nearly thirty men decided to adopt the resolution. The newly appointed president of the Canadian conference, George Marsden, accompanied Ryerson back to Canada.[47] The agreement closely followed an outline drafted by British Wesleyan authorities as early as 1828, standardizing practices according to British preferences and placing Canadian Methodist institutions under British authority. As historian Todd Webb said, "The union of 1833 was more a matter of absorption than an agreement between equals."[48]

News of the merger's finalization came suddenly. Editor James Richardson included a hastily-added update from 5 p.m. the day the *Guardian* went to press for the 2 October 1833 issue, announcing that the Canadian conference had approved the union "unanimously and

---

[43] "Remarks by the Editor of the Guardian," *Christian Guardian,* 29 August 1832.
[44] French, *Parsons and Politics,* 139.
[45] Quoted in Ryerson, *Story of My Life,* 107-108.
[46] Quoted in *Ibid*., 109.
[47] *Ibid*., 119, 121.
[48] Webb, *Transatlantic Methodists,* 79.

cordially."[49] The following week, the *Guardian* announced that Egerton Ryerson would be resuming his old post to replace Richardson as editor. Richardson had only served in the position for a single year, but as Ryerson's first issues would demonstrate, the official organ of the now-united Methodist conference was moving in a new direction. Richardson's farewell message concluded with a rather suggestive admonishment: "May the *Guardian* ever continue to be distinguished as the firm, consistent and decided advocate and defender of those principles and that practice, upon which the peace, prosperity and happiness both of communities and individuals depend."[50] No doubt the "principles" he had in mind included those which he had so boldly advocated throughout his short editorial term, such as voluntarism and the right of private judgement. It was an admonishment similar to that issued by Ryerson the previous year, but it was all the more meaningful in light of the Atlantic tidal wave that was about to crash down upon Canadian shores.

The first story of Ryerson's second editorial tenure was a fuller account of the merger and conference proceedings. Below that was the publication of an "Answer of the British to the Canadian Conference," written by Wesleyan authorities in Manchester and dated 7 August 1833. The address contained well wishes for the cooperation of the two bodies and promised that the Canadians' ratification of the union was to be followed by £1,000 for missions. The British leaders concluded with a not-so-subtle hint for their Canadian brethren: "We are resolved still earnestly to recommend... avoiding the mere politics of this world, to render for Christ's sake, all due obedience to 'the powers that be.'"[51] The suggestion was not included lightly. It was another manifestation of the British Wesleyan leaders' desire to eliminate that longstanding problem Robert Alder had called "Yankeeism" and which British conference member Joseph Stinson later described as "Canadian Wigism."[52]

The most jarring news that Ryerson brought with him from England, however, was that of his political conversion. At the end of October 1833, Ryerson published an article in the *Guardian* titled "Impressions made by my late visit to England," in which he described the three major political parties in England. Upper Canadian reform supporters found in Ryerson's words a notable lack of praise for the Whigs and outright condemnation for the "Radicals" such as Joseph Hume and Thomas Attwood who had seemed so sympathetic to their plight in the colony. Ryerson denounced the "notorious infidel character" of the Radicals and lamented

[49] "Highly Important: Methodist Conference, Five o' Clock P.M." *Christian Guardian,* 2 October 1833.

[50] *Christian Guardian,* 9 October 1833.

[51] "Answer of the British to the Canadian Conference," *Christian Guardian,* 16 October 1833.

[52] Originally in a letter from Joseph Stinson to Robert Alder, 2 March 1846.Quoted in French, *Parsons and Politics,* 250.

that "some of the brightest ornaments of the English pulpit and nation have leaned to their leading doctrines in theory." Ryerson's description of the Whigs was also unfavourable, explaining that the Whig is "always pliant in his professions, and is even ready to suit his measures to 'the times.'; an indefinite term..." Again, Ryerson observed (likely with a tone of regret, given his lacklustre opinion of the party) that this party "included many of the most learned and popular ministers of Dissenting congregations." By contrast, his review of the moderate Tories was absolutely glowing. The Tory "acts from religious principles... [for] his integrity, his honesty, his consistency, his genuine liberality, and religious beneficence, [we] claim respect and imitation." Not only did the moderate Tories include "the great body of the piety, Christian enterprise, and sterling virtue of the nation," but also "a majority of the Wesleyan Methodists" with whom he had just arranged a union.[53] The "boy preacher" whom reformers had once considered a champion of their cause had apparently gone away to England and come back a Tory.

The reaction of many Canadian Methodists was nothing short of mutinous, captured in a private letter to Ryerson from a Mr. E.C. Griffin from Waterdown: "On this Circuit it is truly alarming—some of our most respectable Methodists are threatening to leave the Church. The general impression has obtained (however unjustly) that you have 'turned downright Tory'." Among Griffin's top concerns was a need for clarification regarding Ryerson's opinion on the clergy reserves: "I should be glad if you would state distinctly in the *Guardian* what you meant in your correspondence with the Colonial Secretary, when you said you had no desire to interfere with the present emoluments of the Church clergy (or words to that effect); and also of the term 'equal protection to the different denominations.'"[54] Ryerson's own brother Edwy was among a group of five Methodist preachers from the Niagara district who wrote to Ryerson condemning his recent statements and affirming their opinion that "the clergy of the Episcopal [Anglican] Church ought to be deprived of every emolument derived from Governmental aid, and what are called the Clergy Reserves."[55] Another Methodist minister wrote to Ryerson complaining of the insults that he had received because of the article, even from fellow Methodists, and that on his circuit "the preachers are hooted at as they ride by. This is rather trying, I assure you."[56]

Ryerson spent much of the remainder of 1833 utilizing the *Guardian* for damage control. The clergy reserves question featured in the discussion; Ryerson reassured his readers that he still wanted their entire proceeds to be directed to general educational purposes and he still maintained that "the minis-

[53] Ryerson, *Story of My Life,* 122-123. See also *Christian Guardian,* 30 October 1833.

[54] Quoted in Ryerson, *Story of My Life,* 129.

[55] Quoted in *Ibid*., 130.

[56] Quoted in *Ibid*., 131.

ters of each denomination ought to be supported by their own congregations."[57] He denied rumours that hundreds had stopped reading the *Guardian;* rather, he revealed that only 16 had cancelled their subscription "because of our *toryism.*"[58] Persistent confusion over Ryerson's new position must have prompted him at the end of November to lay out "Our Principles and Opinions" in a point-by-point manner. In it, he appeared to affirm a voluntarist position at least as far as direct payment of clergy was concerned: "there ought not to be any State Church or State Churches in Canada... no clergyman of any denomination ought to be supported by government grants or appropriations... Ministers of all denominations ought to be supported by the voluntary contributions of the people."[59]

Missing in Ryerson's affirmation of voluntarist principles, however, was the rejection of government funds for other church initiatives such as missions and church-run schools. In both matters, Ryerson had departed from strict voluntarism and was actively pursuing state funds for the Methodists' educational project, the Upper Canada Academy. Historian Goldwin French argued that this decision proved detrimental to the project which was initially funded by voluntary donations; a number of predominantly reform-sympathetic donors revoked their support in light of Ryerson's changing attitudes to government grants and to their political principles. In 1834, the Methodist church replaced the two most dedicated voluntarists on the school's committee and applied to the legislature for a government grant.[60] Despite Ryerson's repeated attempts at reaffirming his voluntarism, many with a background in the Methodist Episcopal Church still looked on with concern. For ex-editor James Richardson, the issue eventually resulted in his resignation from the Wesleyan Methodist church to rejoin the smaller Methodist Episcopal Church in 1836.[61]

The new direction of the British Wesleyans was brought to bear upon the political application of the *Christian Guardian* (or lack thereof) throughout the 1830s. In 1835, Ryerson stepped down from his second term as editor to be replaced by Ephraim Evans, an English-born Methodist preacher who later sided with the British Wesleyans in the 1840 split.[62] The three years of Evans' editorship from 1835 to 1838 covered a most contentious period for Upper Canadian politics, particularly with regard to the clergy reserves and rectories questions, but Evans was relatively silent on these issues. Some among the reform-

[57] "The Appropriation of the Clergy Reserves," *Christian Guardian,* 13 November 1833.

[58] "Subscriptions to the Guardian," *Christian Guardian,* 20 November 1833. Emphasis in original.

[59] "Our Principles and Opinions," *Christian Guardian,* 27 November 1833.

[60] French, *Parsons and Politics,* 152.

[61] Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 91.

[62] Semple, *The Lord's Dominion,* 95.

sympathetic Canadian Methodists ascribed this silence to Evans' compliance with British Wesleyan muzzling. John Ryerson expressed his dissatisfaction with Evans most virulently in a series of private correspondence with Egerton in 1838, in which he also denounced William Harvard, the president of the Wesleyan Methodist conference from 1836 to 1838. Harvard, he said, was "a *weak* high church despot & Evans is his *intire* tool."[63] In another letter, he stated emphatically, "It is truly laughable as well as disgusting... to see how he [Harvard] & Evans soft soap & lick each other. They concoct & write their articles together & then praise & eulogize each other for their wonderful productions."[64]

Although the *Guardian* under Evans may not have reflected it, evangelical outrage with Upper Canadian politics was rising to a climax in 1836. In a January meeting with three Family Compact men, John Colborne's last act as lieutenant governor of Upper Canada was to issue fifty-seven (later reduced to forty-four) new rectories for the Church of England, amounting to a 21,000-acre land grant.[65] Colborne's closed-door decision smacked of utter disregard for the will of the reform-dominated assembly and an affront to the majority of colonists who were not affiliated with the Anglican Church. Reform politician Peter Perry led a committee to address the matter, and the assembly decided to act by withholding funds from the government. Colborne's replacement, Lieutenant-Governor Francis Bond Head, countered the assembly's show of power by dissolving the legislature, leading to the fateful 1836 election. Reform lost their majority, the consequence, in their view, of widespread bribery and intimidation.[66] The British government responded to their petitions and grievances with a reassertion of executive power, such as the 10 Resolutions in March 1837 which defended government by executive decree.[67] The radical elements of the colony believed that they had no more options within the existing system of government. They made plans for an armed march on Toronto in December 1837.[68]

It is easy to lose sight of the issue that initiated this chain of events. The rectories controversy was the tipping point which provoked the assembly's dissolution and the 1836 "loyalty election." Although church privilege was not the only grievance on the minds of reform voters in 1836, or of the pitchfork-wielding

[63] Originally in a letter from John to Egerton Ryerson, 17 March 1838.Quoted in French, *Parsons and Politics,* 172.

[64] Originally in a letter from John to Egerton Ryerson, 26 April 1838.Quoted in French, *Parsons and Politics,* 172.

[65] Alan Wilson, *The Clergy Reserves of Upper Canada: A Canadian Mortmain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 123-24.

[66] Colin Read and Ronald Stagg, *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada: A Collection of Documents* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1985), xxvii.

[67] *Ibid*., xxx.

[68] *Ibid*., xxviii, xxx.

yeomen descending upon Yonge Street a little more than a year later in the Rebellion of 1837, it gave their respective causes an explicitly moral and spiritual point of reference.[69] On the eve of the election, six months after the land grant was issued, Egerton Ryerson's brother and fellow Methodist minister William Ryerson wrote, "everywhere the rectory question meets us, and I am compelled to believe that while a vast majority are devotedly loyal, yet many of our gracious sovereign's best & most affectionate subjects would almost prefer revolution to the establishment of a dominant church."[70] Reformer John Rolph, a doctor and lawyer who served in the Legislative Assembly from 1824 to 1830 and as a reform voice in Head's Executive Council for a brief time in 1836, minced no words in condemning the rectories: "Fifty seven rectories have in open defiance of universal sentiment, been erected within our borders... This is despotism as undeserved by Canada as it is unworthy [of] the parent state."[71] Non-evangelical reformers still had reason to oppose the clergy reserves, as they were seen as part of a broader problem with colonial land policy.[72] For dissenting evangelicals, however, the association of the reserves with "the establishment of a dominant church," provided a deeper level of negative meaning.

A renewed push to settle the clergy reserves issue followed the rebellion, as imperial authorities acknowledged it as one source of the discord. Lord Durham, charged with determining the causes of the rebellions, said in his official report that for Upper Canada, "The question of the greatest importance raised in the course of these disputes, was that of the disposal of the clergy reserves."[73] Egerton Ryerson agreed in May 1839 that "the exclusive pretensions of the Church of England in Upper Canada" had been the foundation for "a widespread and deeply seated dissatisfaction. It is rather surprising that a vestige of British power exists in the Prov-

[69] A number of grievances informed rebel sentiments, including economic hardship for farmers resulting from rising interest rates and food shortages. See *Ibid*., xxix-xxx. For some participants such as the Quakers and other nonconformist Protestants, church-state privilege provided another source of discontent: "Since the Clergy Reserves were a political hot potato for many other groups, Quakers joined non-Quakers in challenging the state support of the Church of England. This reform sentiment led directly [to] their increased involvement in politics and their role in the Rebellion of 1837." See Robynne Healey, *From Quaker to Upper Canadian: Faith and Community among Yonge Street Friends, 1801-1850* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 164.

[70] Quoted in Gordon Barkwell, "The Clergy Reserves in Upper Canada: A Study in the Separation of Church and State, 1791-1854" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1953), 186.

[71] Rolph, *Speeches of Dr. John Rolph*, 10.

[72] For example, Alan Wilson said, "Regarded simply as badly administered land, the Reserves were not unique... In 1837, their singular guilt was guilt by association." See Wilson, *The Clergy Reserves of Upper Canada,* 136. Arthur Lower offered a similar interpretation. Arthur R.M. Lower, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, 1946), 187.

[73] The Earl of Durham, "Report on the Affairs of British North America, from the Earl of Durham [11 Feb. 1839]," in *Lord Durham's Report on the Affairs of British North America, vol. 2: Text of the Report,* ed. C.P. Lucas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 149.

ince."[74] His language escalated later that same month in a letter to Governor General Normanby. Ryerson warned that the government had to decide "whether our resources are to be absorbed in support of pretensions which have proved the bane of religion in the country; have fomented discord; emboldened, if not prompted, rebellion..."[75] The resolution that the government pursued under the direction of the new Governor Sydenham was The Imperial Act of 1840. The act extended the benefits of the clergy reserve funds so that more denominations were now qualified to draw from their coffers: half of the funds were to be set aside for the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, and the rest were to be divided among other denominations including the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church.[76]

In addition to the Imperial Act's compromise on the clergy reserves question, 1840 also produced important changes for the Canadian Methodists; most importantly, the breakup of their union with the British Wesleyan conference. The primary reason was a reaction against the British leaders' attempts to muzzle Canadian criticism of church establishment.[77] In 1838, Egerton Ryerson had taken on the editorship of the *Christian Guardian* for the third time, following the establishment-friendly Ephraim Evans. The following year, Ryerson had stated in the *Guardian* his perception of the Canadian-British conflict as it played out in a Methodist conference in Hamilton: "apprehensions were entertained that the leading object of the mission of the Representative of the British Conference was to minify Methodism in Upper Canada into a branch of the Church of England—to encourage the erection of a dominant Church establishment in the Province, and otherwise to promote the encroachments of power."[78] The split was official the following year, and the Canadians justified their decision to secede by asserting freedom of opinion on church-state matters. The anonymous writer identified as "Iota" conveyed an understanding of the separation as resulting from a difference between the Canadians' true evangelical piety versus the British Wesleyans' high church worldliness:

> "...Every one acquainted with Methodism in England knows, or ought to know, that the Conference in that country occupies a very high ecclesiastical position... their natural

[74] Ryerson, *Story of My Life,* 250.

[75] *Ibid*., 252-253.

[76] C. Fahey, *In His Name: The Anglican Experience in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's, 1991), 174; Wilson, *The Clergy Reserves,* 158-59.

[77] The disagreement resulted from a divergence in understanding about the nature of the church, which often carried over into political positions. As John Grant summarized, "The two groups differed in their basic conception of Methodism. The British regarded themselves as a religious society, auxiliary and in some ways subsidiary to the Church of England... The Canadians, by contrast, inherited the conviction of American Methodists that they constituted a church and were entitled to recognition as such." Grant, *Profusion of Spires,* 76.

[78] "The Late Conference," *Christian Guardian,* 26 June 1839.

> and unavoidable tendency is to produce a conformity to the world, a fawning and cringing demeanor towards the rich and great, an overbearing disposition towards inferiors."

Iota further praised the Canadian Methodists for resisting the "dictatorial arrogance of the English Wesleyan Secretaries."[79] The Canadians' assertion of conscience on church-state matters ultimately divided the Canadian and British Wesleyans until 1847. Although Ryerson's efforts toward Canadian denominational autonomy were applauded by the voluntarists of the organization, Ryerson's willingness to accept state funds through the Imperial Act compromise was not shared by all in his denomination.[80]

In June 1840, Ryerson bid farewell to his readers for the third time as he handed the reins of his editorial position to Jonathan Scott, a committed voluntarist and critic of the Church of England. A lifelong reform supporter, Scott first came to Upper Canada as a missionary for the British Wesleyan conference in 1833, but he made the colony his permanent home and sided with the Canadians in the 1840 schism.[81] Scott reported on the Imperial Act in October of 1840, wherein he praised Egerton Ryerson for his commitment to settling the clergy reserves question. However, he intentionally avoided stating his own opinion on the resolution at that time: "The Clergy Reserve Bill passed by the Imperial Parliament will be found in another column of to-day's *Guardian*, where we shall leave it, almost without remark, for the community to form their own judgment of it. We have formed ours. Should the Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, at some future period, have an opinion to give, we shall be ready to express it..."[82] Scott's opinion came out in later issues, however, and it appears that, unlike Ryerson, he was not satisfied with the multi-headed establishment as a long-term solution to religious equality.

Less than a month into his tenure Scott entered into a war of words with the editor of the high Anglican newspaper, *The Church*. The latter asserted that dissenters needed to live in a country with an established church in order to enjoy their own religious freedom, to which Scott responded in strong language:

> We wonder at the audacity of those who would attribute repose and freedom to the workings of a National Establishment, when almost every page of ecclesiastical history assures us in characters of blood, that when such an establishment has had its full play, it has produced confusion, and bondage, and martyrdom.[83]

This editorial was followed in 1841 by a series called "Sectarianism," which criticized several Anglican doctrines.

---

[79] "The Secession of the British Conference," *Christian Guardian,* 14 October 1840.

[80] For an overview of Ryerson's position on church establishments in the 1840s, see Webb, *Transatlantic Methodists,* 81-83.

[81] "The Death of Rev. Jonathan Scott," *The Globe,* 10 May 1880.

[82] "Decision on the Clergy Reserves Question," *Christian Guardian,* 14 October 1840.

[83] "The Course of the Editor of 'The Church,'" *Christian Guardian,* 22 July 1840.

A central concern was the Church of England's perceived similarities to Roman Catholicism, but also key was the church's strong ties to the state:

> Have not ministers been made for the church by the world, Popes by Emperors, in opposition to the desire of the church? Have not our own Bishops been created and annihilated by Kings—often wicked, perhaps infidel Kings? ...And, finally, must not the articles, and liturgy, and laws of established churches, be sanctioned by the *civil legislature,* before they are binding on the church of Christ? These, and other questions, might be asked...[84]

Ryerson wrote privately to Scott in 1841 expressing concern with his views: "We have no controversy with the Church of England as a Church Establishment. We have disclaimed opposing, or doing anything to disparage the Church Establishment in England..."[85] Ryerson was attempting to navigate a conciliatory middle path, one which denied both Anglican exclusivity and total disestablishment. It is not clear how many evangelicals shared Ryerson's penchant for compromise, but it is apparent that a belief in strict voluntarism continued within Canadian evangelicalism. Although Ryerson wrote to *The Church* editor John Kent expressing his confidence that Scott "has at length yielded to my reasonings and recommendations,"[86] Scott's compliance was not permanent. In 1843, for example, he challenged the British government's grants to the established clergy because they were used "for inculcating Popish principles, and observing Popish practices in their place of worship..."[87]

Jonathan Scott served as editor of the *Christian Guardian* from 1840 to 1844, after which he was succeeded by the voluntarist George Playter who served from 1844 to 1847. Although Playter had a British Wesleyan background, he immigrated to the Canadas in 1832 and sided with the Canadian connexion when the union fell apart in 1840.[88] In an undated tract titled "Thirty-five reasons why I am not a member of the Episcopalian Church, commonly called the Church of England," Playter offered a critique of the Church of England, his points regularly stemming from an evangelical aversion to church-state connections. The first point was his objection to the English monarch being "head of the church," stating that the Church of England "suffers the sovereignty of Christ to be shared, and his purchased right to be invaded."[89] He also criticized "the large and unsuitable *emoluments* bestowed on and received by most of the bishops of the church," and

[84] "Sectarianism—No. II," *Christian Guardian,* 13 January 1841. Emphasis in original.

[85] Ryerson, *Story of My Life,* 295.

[86] Ryerson told Scott that the Methodists could not claim apostolic and scriptural authority by attacking the legitimacy of the Church of England: "To prove that our neighbours are black, does not prove that we are white. We do not profess to build up ourselves upon the ruin of any body else..." *Ibid*., 294.

[87] "Origins, Character, and Prevalence of Puseyism," *Christian Guardian,* 16 August 1843.

[88] Webb, *Transatlantic Methodists,* 90.

[89] George F. Playter, "Thirty-Five Reasons why I am not a member of the Episcopalian Church, commonly called the Church of England [18--?]," WD Jordan Special Collection, Queen's University Library, 1.

compulsory tithes.[90] Like other evangelicals, Playter associated the Anglicans' church-state connection with worldliness and a departure from biblical example: "The end of the Gospel is to bring a sinful world to repentance of sin, and to faith in a crucified Christ... Now this end, it is well known, is often attained in some churches and by some ministers, and very seldom in our ancient Gothic buildings, and by our modern apostolicals."[91] Playter brought this outlook to his post at the *Guardian*. For example, in 1847 he explained that the evangelical revival of 1739 had been necessary because "religion had again become corrupted" under the Anglican Church, and that a similar (if not worse) situation existed in his own time, and demanded the purification of revivals.[92]

The voluntarist voice that had spoken through the *Christian Guardian* from 1840 to 1847 came to an end with another denominational arrangement and another change in editorship. In 1847, the Canadian and British Wesleyan conferences embarked on their second attempt at union, which would allow them to pool their resources while this time offering greater Canadian autonomy over leadership appointments and property.[93] Also in 1847, the voluntarist editor George Playter was replaced by the more conservative George Sanderson who supported the status quo on the clergy reserves.[94] Born in Kingston, Upper Canada, Sanderson was trained in theology at the Methodist Upper Canada Academy and ordained a clergyman in 1841.[95] When Methodists in Britain challenged the hard-handed leadership of Jabez Bunting through a series of tracts in the 1849 "Fly Sheet" controversy, Sanderson rallied the *Guardian* to Bunting's defense.[96] Once again the controversy centred upon the close relationship of the Wesleyan leadership with the established church, which the detractors saw as a departure from Methodism's revivalist legacy.[97] The fact that Sanderson fell on Bunting's pro-establishment side of the debate said a lot to contemporaries about the direction of the Wesleyan Methodists in Upper Canada.

Whereas the largest body of Methodism in Upper Canada had by the late 1840s nearly silenced its previously re-

[90] *Ibid*., 3, 7.

[91] *Ibid*., 10.

[92] "Religious Revivals," *Christian Guardian,* 20 January 1847. Although the practice of revivals did not originate in 1739, the year is considered the beginning of the Great Awakening because evangelicals began to see their local revivals as parts of a larger intercontinental phenomenon. Some historians have credited well-travelled revival preachers such as George Whitefield for linking these otherwise localized events into a transatlantic movement. See Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 95.

[93] Semple, *The Lord's Dominion,* 97-98.

[94] French, *Parsons and Politics,* 249, 264.

[95] "Dr. Sanderson Dead: The Passing Away of a Veteran Methodist Clergyman," *The Globe,* 22 March 1898.

[96] Webb, *Transatlantic Methodists,* 159.

[97] Semple, *The Lord's Dominion,* 97.

sounding condemnation of state-church alignment, other evangelicals in the colony were perfectly willing to pick up the cause. In May 1850, when a group of anti-clergy reserves activists met as The Anti-Clergy Reserves Association in Knox Church in Toronto, the attendees saw themselves as acting in notable absence of the Wesleyan Church, which they believed had failed to pursue the issue. In attendance were some of the aforementioned evangelicals who had long spoken out against the clergy reserves, including George Brown, John Roaf, and former editor of the *Guardian* James Richardson. Attendees decried the Weslyans' "love of power and patronage." *Guardian* editor George Sanderson condemned the meeting, referring to attendees as "revolutionists" and "unscrupulous assailants of the Wesleyan Church," and he further warned against their zealous agitation against the clergy reserves as "subversive of the foundations of our civil relations and government."[98]

Dissenters in Upper Canada joined the battle with vigour at the start of the 1850s. Evangelical Christians appeared to make up the majority of the instigators and intended audience of the voluntarist message, based upon the known attendees at anti-clergy reserves meetings and the content of their speeches. Portions of George Brown's speech at an Anti-Clergy Reserves Association meeting on 26 July 1851, for example, would have made little sense outside of evangelical crowds. He made no secret of his opinion that true Christianity was "a religion of the heart" and lamented that "The very preaching of an established church is cold and lifeless."[99] Brown's formal election address in November 1851 similarly suggested that "pure religion will prosper for better if left dependent on the voluntary contributions of the Christian people than when pampered by the State."[100] Although Brown saw his voluntarism as a means to provide religious equality for all, he rooted the concept firmly in his evangelical faith and framed his pro-voluntarist arguments in ways that appealed primarily to evangelicals. Evangelical churches responded enthusiastically. Following the successes of the Grits at the polls in late 1851, John Roaf proposed a resolution at the annual Congregational conference in June 1852 to acknowledge "indications of the decline of a purpose to prevent the civil equality of religious denominations in Canada," and further resolved that "encouraged by this circumstance, [they] recommend a continued attention to the subject at once zealous and candid."[101]

On 10 October 1854, conservative John A. Macdonald undercut what political momentum the voluntarists had accumulated over the past four years by proposing a revised version of their own

[98] "Clergy Reserves—The Wesleyan Church and Its Assailants," *Christian Guardian,* 22 May 1850. See also "Great Clergy Reserve Meeting," *The Globe,* 9 May 1850.

[99] George Brown, "Anti-Clergy Reserve Meeting [26 July 1851]," in *The Life and Speeches of Hon. George Brown,* ed. Alexander Mackenzie (Toronto: Globe, 1882), 242-44.

[100] Quoted in Careless, *Brown of the Globe,* 150.

[101] "Congregational Union," *The Globe,* 26 June 1852.

brainchild, the secularization of the clergy reserves. Voluntarists struggled with their opponents' move, initially hoping their long-awaited moment had come but cautious about the details of the bill. The *Globe* articulated some of this concern: "Their bill is very skilfully worded, so as to alarm as little as possible Upper Canadian Reformers, but it will be found upon examination, to contain provisions to which no voluntary could possibly give his assent." Most troubling was what came to be known as "the commutation clause," which reserved the government's right to offer further stipends to existing claimants of the clergy reserves, either directly to individuals or to the church with which they were affiliated.[102] The *Globe* claimed that, with such an allowance, the bill would only "perpetuate all the practical evils of state-churchism in the Province."[103]

The Tory-led coalition pushed the bill through despite these objections, retaining the commutation clause.[104] Thus the clergy reserves issue finally ended not with dissent delivering a knockout punch, but with the Tory-led coalition ushering establishment out of the ring. Voluntarists continued to challenge the commutation clause, but Brown's attempt to pass a bill against the clause in 1855 failed, and his supporters again took up petitioning, holding public meetings, and opining in the press, in lieu of active parliamentary action.[105] Although the issue ended in less than a triumph for evangelical dissent, there is no denying that they were responsible for keeping the issue alive for more than two decades. John Webster Grant suggested that the voluntarist struggle had profound long-term psychological effects upon what would become Ontario. The secularization of the clergy reserves "led Ontarians to take for granted henceforth that the state had no business in the sanctuaries of the province," the fruits of which appeared in an 1866 court ruling "that the Church of England had no special legal status of privilege..."[106] Dissenters did not achieve the clean break for voluntarism they intended, but ultimately it was their vision for the separation of church and state that triumphed in Canada.

Some historians of religion in Canada have downplayed the role of religious beliefs in the secularization of the clergy reserves. Michael Gauvreau suggested that New World circumstances brought about the downfall of the clergy reserves in 1854, rather than evangelical conviction: "What occurred between 1841 and 1854 was less a revolt against the idea of church

[102] "The Clergy Reserve Bill," *The Globe,* 23 October 1854. See also Grant, *Profusion of Spires,* 142.

[103] "The Clergy Reserve Bill," *The Globe,* 23 October 1854.

[104] The total amount of state funds paid directly to churches under the commutation clause was £381,982, divided among the Church of England (64%), the Church of Scotland (28%), the Wesleyan Methodist Church (2.6%), and the Roman Catholic Church (5.4%). See John Sargent Moir, *Church and State in Canada West: Three Studies in the Relation of Denominationalism and Nationalism, 1841-1867* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), 79.

[105] Moir, *Church and State in Canada West,* 78-79.

[106] Grant, *Profusion of Spires,* 143.

establishment itself than a growing realization that the old High Church rationale for the alliance of church and state did not work in the peculiar religious environment of British North America."[107] William Westfall credited secularization to the colony's newly-acquired taste for materialistic "progress," saying "the alliance of church and state broke down because the state decided it no longer needed the church."[108] Without the voluntarist movement, however, the government would have had little impetus to address the clergy reserves when it did. Before 1854, all major political parties in the United Province of Canada, including the moderate reformers, supported the status quo on the clergy reserves.[109] Indeed, John A. Macdonald's proposal to secularize the clergy reserves was an unexpected reversal of policy, following on a change in consensus at a Conservative caucus meeting only the previous June.[110] Before Macdonald's change of mind, however, a core of dedicated voluntarists had fought for the separation of church and state for more than two decades. If indeed the clergy reserves resolution came about because of New World circumstances, a rise in secular values, or a stroke of beneficence from the Macdonald conservatives, it was also the result of years of grassroots activism that the government could only ignore for so long.

Several historians interpret the legacy of the 1854 bill within the narrative of steady progress toward Protestant consensus, the secularization of the clergy reserves removing the final barrier to interdenominational cooperation.[111] Alan Wilson called the clergy reserves question a "family quarrel among Canadian Protestants" whose resolution allowed them to move on and form "a new coalition."[112] William Westfall said that the removal of Anglican privilege helped enable a convergence in which "the two sides now saw themselves and the world in a similar way."[113] John Webster Grant described contentions over the clergy reserves as a "series of convulsions" that had to occur "before the churches could settle down to their normal pursuits."[114] In other words, in these historians' views,

---

[107] Michael Gauvreau, "Protestantism Transformed: Personal Piety and the Evangelical Social Vision, 1815-1867," in *The Canadian Protestant Experience*, 88.

[108] Westfall, *Two Worlds*, 107-108, 111.

[109] The union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1840 to become the United Province of Canada meant that in order to form the government, a political party had to maintain an alliance between members representing both regions. The Roman Catholic-majority of Lower Canada had little interest in the secularization agenda advocated by Upper Canada's voluntarists, and so the reform movement that had previously been the main political voice for secularization pre-1840 had subsequently side-stepped the issue throughout the 1840s and '50s. See Careless, *Brown of the Globe,* 135; David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty,* 116-17, 121.

[110] Donald Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1952), 210.

[111] Moir, *Church and State in Canada West,* 80-81.

[112] Wilson, *The Clergy Reserves,* 221.

[113] Westfall, *Two Worlds,* 86.

[114] Grant, *Profusion of Spires,* 93-94.

what pitted Protestants against one another was a mere formality, an anomaly to an otherwise natural alliance, an external veneer of difference which masked their latent sameness.

The idea that the secularization of the clergy reserves removed one of the final barriers to Protestant cultural convergence is reasonable *only if* all that divided Canadian Protestants by the mid-nineteenth century was a single political issue. But as some of these same scholars have argued, contention over the clergy reserves was indicative of a deeper set of cultural and theological differences. William Westfall referred to this cultural rift as "two contrasting patterns of interpretation through which different groups of Protestants attempted to reconcile the Bible and their own existence."[115] However, by focusing on the Egerton Ryersons of Canadian evangelicalism and by downplaying the significance of continued sectarian-political controversy such as the clergy reserves question, Westfall's analysis loses sight of those who carried on the distinct cultural legacy of the evangelical "religion of experience." At the start of the nineteenth century the evangelicals had a distinct culture, Westfall demonstrated, and that culture derived from and is identified by their *beliefs and attitudes* about salvation, emotion, authority, human nature, and society. Because opposition to the clergy reserves were *strongly* motivated by those same beliefs and attitudes, the 1854 resolution reveals the unrelenting persistence of a distinct evangelical culture. If the culture of evangelical dissent converged with its very antithesis immediately following the passing of the Clergy Reserves Secularization Bill, it would be an uncharacteristic compromise that demands a more satisfactory explanation than those presently available.

Framed in terms of the British dissenting tradition, controversies over the clergy reserves were not simply minor disruptions to an otherwise natural family relationship. Rather, concern over the spiritual consequences of state-church entanglement was central to dissenting culture and identity. For many outspoken evangelicals, Methodist and non-Methodist alike, the movement of Methodism under Ryerson and the British Wesleyans toward participation in a Protestant consensus was a matter of sheer betrayal, and an artificial construction rather than an organic reality. It is possible to see these voices as simply a reactionary minority, and a vanishing exception to a larger conciliatory trajectory.[116] However, the voluntarist dissenters' continued virility in the political sphere is one indication that their cultural values still held a formidable presence on the Canadian religious landscape in 1854. Although further research is required to determine the extent of its influence in subsequent public affairs, evangelical dissenters continued to challenge presumptions of Protestant consensus throughout the following de-

[115] Westfall, *Two Worlds,* 30.

[116] William Westfall addressed one defender of "old Methodism" as an exception to the new rule, saying, "history was not on his side..." Westfall, *Two Worlds,* 70.

cades as well. For example, the colony's education policy under Egerton Ryerson pursued some semblance of religious "consensus," but the popular response again suggests that no such consensus existed. Ryerson's attempt to establish a public school curriculum based on "common Christianity" generated much controversy through the 1850s, particularly from Protestants who saw the removal of the Bible from classroom instruction as "godlessness."[117] Controversies within Protestantism throughout the remainder of the century—biblical criticism versus biblical literalism, social gospel versus individual salvation, and into the early twentieth century with modernism versus fundamentalism[118]—suggest that even if the Protestant consensus model is applicable to some portion of the nineteenth century, such a "consensus" was tentative at best. A better alternative would be to understand Protestantism in Canada as persistently divided by incompatible worldviews and occasionally punctuated with cooperation and loose alliances, rather than fundamentally the same and occasionally disrupted by minor controversy. This new interpretation can allow a more coherent long-term analysis of Protestantism in Canada that bridges earlier and later periods of divergence and takes into greater consideration the contested legacy of British dissent and evangelical revivalism.

It is important to recognize that the cultural changes historians have long observed took place within particular *denominational* contexts, shaped explicitly by leaders such as Ryerson and Bunting, but that such changes are not necessarily reflective of a change in the systems of meanings important to evangelical dissenters of the day. In other words, the distinctive culture of the early nineteenth-century revivalists did not vanish as Wesleyan Methodism downplayed its earlier expressions and perspectives. Evangelical dissenters continued to draw upon these conceptions throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century despite great pressure from religious leaders to abandon them. In the face of efforts to amalgamate evangelical and establishment sentiments into a single Protestant consensus, dissenters remained committed to countering the powerful Anglican-Wesleyan perspectives with their own distinct beliefs that emphasized an experiential rather than sacramental soteriology, an allegiance to the first-century apostles rather than an apostolic succession, and a rejection of any collaboration between church and state. Despite inclinations of some among their ranks to join with old rivals for common purposes, Upper Canadian dissenters continued to dissent.

---

[117] Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, ON: Falmer Press, 1988), 275.

[118] Phyllis D. Airhart, "Ordering a New Nation and Reorde-ing Protestantism, 1867-1914," in *The Canadian Protestant Experience*, 124-25; Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 8-10, 176-80; Robert A. Wright, "The Canadian Protestant Tradition, 1914-1945," in *The Canadian Protestant Experience*, 158-61.