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The Search for a Professional Ministry: Samuel Elder and 19th-Century Maritime Calvinistic Baptists

“WAS EVER A MINISTRY MORE BARREN than mine”?¹ This was the self-critical and searching question that Samuel Elder asked himself on 27 July 1851. Only 34 years of age and, dying of consumption, Elder had laboured since 1845 as the minister of the Regular Baptist Church in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Elder’s question reflected his profound disappointment over a lacklustre career as a Maritime Calvinistic Baptist preacher. Having been raised in the revivalistic and enthusiastic religious tradition of his denomination, he was well aware that “barrenness” meant a preacher’s failure to trigger conversions in significant numbers. While, intellectually, Elder embraced a broader understanding of what a useful ministry might include, the traditional definition of success held by ordinary members of his denomination was the only one that mattered to him as he faced almost certain death.² He had spent his relatively short career caught in the middle of a debate in his denomination over the direction of Regular Baptist life and ministry in the region. On one side the rural grassroots majority embraced the traditional 18th-century revivalist and anti-formal faith inherited from New Lights who became Baptist between the 1790s and the 1810s.³ They were opposed by a small but powerful Baptist minority of colonial professionals from the petite bourgeoisie class who gained power in larger centres

1 Samuel Elder Diary, 27 July 1851, D1939.001, Acadia University Archives [AUA], Wolfville, N.S. No secondary literature exists on Elder. The literature on Maritime Regular Baptists in the first half of the 19th century includes: G.A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline* (Montreal, 1984); G.A. Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812* (Montreal, 1994); Dorothy May Lovesey, *To Be a Pilgrim: A Biography of Silas Tertius Rand 1810-1889* (Hantsport, N.S., 1992); Daniel C. Goodwin, “‘The Faith of the Fathers’: Evangelical Piety of Maritime Regular Baptist Patriarchs and Preachers 1790-1855”, Ph.D. thesis, Queen’s University, 1997; Jonathan Wilson, “Leading the New Epoch: Charles Tupper, Ingram Bill, and Richard Burpee and the Regular Baptists of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, 1800-1850”, M.A. thesis, Queen’s University, 1995; T.W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto, 1985).

2 For details of one petite bourgeois church, consult Philip G. A. [Griffin-] Allwood, “First Baptist Church, Halifax: Its Origin and Early Years”, M.Div. thesis, Acadia University, 1978. For Saint John consult *The History of German Street Baptist Church . . . 1810-1910* (Saint John, 1910). The traditional denominational histories include J.M. Cramp, “History of the Maritime Baptists”, AUA; I.E. Bill, *Fifty Years with the Baptist Ministers and Churches of the Maritime Provinces* (Saint John, 1880); E.M. Saunders, *History of the Baptists of the Maritime Provinces*, (Halifax, 1902); George Levy, *The Baptists of the Maritime Provinces* (Saint John, 1946).

3 For an examination of this transition see Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit*, pp.71-106.

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such as Halifax, Saint John, and Fredericton in the 1830s.⁴ This latter group saw denominational marginality as a liability, whereas many rural Baptists regarded it as a sign of divine favour.

Elder identified with both camps on key points and charted a middle road that became the accepted norm in the late 19th century. During his lifetime, however, his wish to synthesize learned and polite Baptist faith with traditional revivalism was incomprehensible to many of his contemporaries. Samuel Elder ultimately reckoned himself a failure because he was unable to reconcile the anti-formal religion of his youth with the genteel evangelicalism he aspired to as an adult. His attempt to merge Victorian middle class values of order and respectability with the religion of his youth highlights broader shifts in colonial society, as economic prosperity (although erratic at times) and urbanization brought to prominence members of denominations whom Anglican leaders in the region considered to be “enthusiastic” and even politically dangerous.⁵

In many ways, Samuel Elder’s life reflects the transitional nature of Maritime society as it was played out in Baptist circles. While somewhat successful in redefining the nature of pastoral ministry as a “profession”, he was unable to create an effective ministerial model that integrated “genteel” sensibilities with the faith paradigm he had inherited from his denomination’s New Light past.⁶ Nevertheless, his short ministry may be understood as one that anticipated the respectable and consensual nature of mainstream Maritime religion as it developed in the second half of the 19th century. Maritime Baptists provide a useful window from which to view these transitions because of their numerical significance. In 1871 they accounted for the largest general Protestant grouping in New Brunswick and the second largest in Nova Scotia, at 24.7 per cent and 19.0 per cent respectively.⁷ In light of the changes Elder witnessed during his life, he was convinced that Baptists would have to alter their approach to Christianity if they were to have a future.

4 R.D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar in their *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1994), p. 5, argue that a classical college education was necessary for one to be a true professional. Elder was one of the few Maritime Regular Baptist ministers of his day who had such an education.

5 For one Anglican response to New Lights and Baptists, see Brian Cuthbertson, *The First Bishop: A Biography of Charles Inglis* (Halifax, 1987), pp. 167-98. For an examination of broader shifts in Maritime society, consult Rosemary E. Ommer, “The 1830s: Adapting their Institutions to their Desires”, in Phillip A. Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History* (Toronto and Fredericton, 1994), p. 297. For an examination of one urban clique that included a number of prominent Baptists, see David Sutherland, “The Merchants of Halifax, 1815-1850: A Commercial Class in Pursuit of Metropolitan Status”, Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1975.

6 “Genteel” serves here to denote the refined, elegant politeness which characterized the urban Baptist elite in Halifax and Saint John. It is not used in its current derogatory or humorous sense. See also E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham, N.C., 1978), pp. 36-50. Holifield links education and the urban environment with gentility. See too, Barry M. Moody, “Edmund A. Crawley”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, XI (Toronto, 1982), pp. 214-15; David Sutherland, “James W. Johnston”, *DCB*, X (Toronto, 1972), pp. 383-8.

7 See the tables in Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit*, pp. 170-1. While the emergence of the Protestant consensus in the Maritimes has not received much attention from historians it has been examined at some length in Ontario. See William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal, 1989), pp. 50-81.

Samuel Elder was born in Halifax on 6 February 1817, the son of William and Elizabeth Fraile Elder. At that time William Elder, while working on the port docks, came under the preaching influence of John Burton, who served a largely black Baptist congregation in the city. Soon after his conversion, William Elder decided to preach, relocating to Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, where he served as a minister for more than a decade.⁸ Religion played a prominent role in Samuel Elder's early life. As he noted in his diary, his mother was not "contented with our being able to read the sacred word; she explained its truths and endeavoured to impress them upon our hearts".⁹

As a child and adolescent attending school under the careful instruction of Andrew Henderson, it became clear that Samuel Elder was especially gifted intellectually. Indeed, Charles Spurden, Elder's biographer, noted that "his very boyhood gave promise of those fruits of genius and talent" which he became known for in his maturity"; "[t]hirsting for information and ardent in the pursuit of knowledge, he stood foremost among his school-fellows".¹⁰

Although Elder's extant diaries and biography do not explore his teen years, it is likely that even though he excelled intellectually this period of his life was filled with strife because of his father's involvement in the region's baptismal controversy.¹¹ Samuel Elder was six in 1823, when his father wrote the first Baptist response in the baptismal debate, defending passionately the position of the immersionists. Samuel Elder was a vulnerable 17-year-old in 1834, when his father renounced his formerly held Baptist position and embraced pedobaptist (infant baptism) principles, and was unceremoniously ejected from the Nova Scotia Baptist Association in disgrace.¹² The stress and crisis caused by his father's change in religious sentiments and the family's persistent poverty probably raised serious questions in Samuel's teenage mind about the efficacy of organized religion.¹³

By 1838, Elder had begun to teach school in Pleasant Valley, Cornwallis Township, Nova Scotia, and had come to despise the Baptists. From his perspective, they had treated his father unfairly, forcing him to supplement his income from preaching by working in the "secular world", leading to frequent absences from home. Samuel's cynicism and his keen mind prompted him to reject vital, conversionist Christianity in favour of universal salvation.¹⁴ Even if he had been open to evangelical Christianity at this time, Samuel Elder would not have considered uniting with the Baptists because of what he considered to be their "ignorance and contractedness of

8 Franklyn Hicks, "William Elder" in *DCB, VIII* (Toronto, 1988), pp. 271-3.

9 "Samuel Elder Diary, 26 May 1851, D1939.001, AUA. See also the entries for 31 October 1848 and 2 November 1848, Samuel Elder Diary, MC233, Public Archives of New Brunswick [PANB].

10 Samuel Elder Diary, 6 August 1852.

11 For a brief outline of the debate and its issues, see Daniel C. Goodwin, "The Very Vitals of Christianity: The Baptismal Controversy and the Intellectual Awakening in Nova Scotia 1811-1848" *Nova Scotia Historical Review*, 15, 2 (1995), pp. 72-87.

12 For the details on William Elder's involvement in the baptismal controversy, consult Goodwin, "Faith of the Fathers", chapter IV.

13 *Christian Visitor* (Saint John), 6 August 1852. Details concerning this period of Samuel Elder's life are sketchy. It is possible that Elder remained in the care of his father's brother, Samuel Elder, who lived in Cornwallis, Nova Scotia.

14 *Christian Visitor*, 6 August 1852.

view, the[ir] weakness of mind, and faults of character".¹⁵ However, in a revival during the winter of 1838-39 Samuel Elder's

mind was powerfully exercised by invisible realities; the hand of God had touched him, strange terrors shook his soul; the struggle between the powers of darkness and light commenced in his mind; unable to bear the conflict alone, and craving relief for his troubled spirit, he rose up, at one of the public meetings, and in the midst of the congregation, besought with impressive voice, deep solemnity of manner and subdued feelings of heart, the prayers of God's people on his behalf.¹⁶

Those present at this revival meeting were amazed to see one of their church's greatest detractors and critics requesting prayer for his troubled and unconverted soul. Bowed "in soul before God, and seeking the sympathy of the once despised Baptists", Samuel Elder was converted. This permanently altered the course of his life. After relating publicly his new-found faith, he was baptized by William Chipman on the following day – 5 January 1839. His own soul searching had combined with the excitement of revival to create an atmosphere in which Elder was prepared to humble himself before God and, as well, before a denomination he had once scorned.¹⁷ Ironically, even though Elder was converted in the midst of a revival he would never lead one himself.

Elder's conversion and church membership occurred during a time in the denomination's history when there were many preachers who could lead revivals, but still relatively few men of his intellectual ability and academic potential. Consequently, when Elder expressed his longing to become a preacher, shortly after his conversion, his pastor, William Chipman, and church were supportive. Chipman, who was not known as an enthusiastic preacher, immediately provided opportunities for the new convert to exhort, pray publicly and preach.¹⁸ Those who witnessed his early ministerial efforts became convinced he should enter the pastorate. William Chipman's wife, Eliza Ann, recorded in her journal after one of Elder's early sermons that, "His mind was fruitful, and he spoke interestingly. What a wonder God hath wrought for this youth! five months ago he was strong in the Universalist doctrine, and a stranger to grace".¹⁹ Since Elder was especially gifted intellectually, he considered attending the recently founded Acadia College, still an unusual route in preparation for the ministry because many Regular Baptists parishioners were suspicious of higher education, believing that it undermined genuine piety.²⁰ Nevertheless, Elder disregarded his denomination's distrust of higher education for clergy and enrolled at Acadia College in 1840, graduating four years later.²¹

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid. See also Cornwallis Baptist Church Records, 1838-39, AUA.

18 Bill, *Fifty Years with the Baptist Ministers and Churches*, p. 306; Elder Diary, 7 September 1848, MC233, PANB; *Christian Visitor*, 13 August 1852.

19 Allen B. Robertson and Caroline E.B. Robertson, eds., *Memoir of Mrs. Eliza Ann Chipman* (Hantsport, N.S., 1989), p. 130.

20 See Barry M. Moody, "Breadth of Vision, Breadth of Mind: The Baptists and Acadia College", in G.A. Rawlyk, ed., *Canadian Baptists and Christian Higher Education* (Montreal, 1988), pp. 3-30.

21 *Christian Visitor*, 13 August 1852.

During Elder's first two years at Acadia, the surrounding area was in the midst of a revival that affected many Acadia students.²² Thus, when Elder entered the school, it paradoxically represented both the elitist, urban, respectability-seeking perspective of the Granville Street Baptist Church, Halifax, as well as the grassroots revivalist ethos of the denomination. Although a direct connection between the early years of Acadia and the formation of Samuel Elder's worldview is impossible to identify, given the available evidence, it would seem that professors John Pryor and Isaac Chipman were particularly influential in Elder's education. John Pryor, an Anglican-turned-Baptist from Halifax, represented his clique's ideal of the genteel urban minister whose rank in society was equal to that of any cleric in the Anglican Church or other professionals such as lawyers and physicians. Isaac L. Chipman, a student of Horton Academy in its early days and later a graduate of the Waterville College in Maine, embodied, perhaps even more than Pryor, the aspirations and approach that came to characterize Samuel Elder. Under his tutelage, Elder studied mathematics and the natural sciences which continued to interest him long after his graduation.²³ I.E. Bill's scholarly assessment of Isaac Chipman could apply equally to Samuel Elder. "He was always in his element when surrounded with books; and by a close and careful reading of the best works he kept himself fully abreast of his age".²⁴

While attending college, Elder preached in the Horton-Cornwallis area and as far away as Halifax. The congregation of the Granville Street Baptist Church in Halifax found Elder's preaching to be acceptable, promising and much closer to that of the ideal genteel urban pastor than the self-taught fishermen-farmers-turned-ministers who served most of the churches. Indeed, Samuel Elder spoke with clarity, reserve and polish, and peppered his sermons with classical illustrations.²⁵ Elder's "heroes of the faith" were not New Light-turned-Baptist "Fathers" such as Edward Manning, Joseph Crandall or T. H. Chipman; rather, they were his teachers at Acadia College, and Edmund A. Crawley of the Granville Street Baptist Church. Crawley's polished sermons and professional demeanor inspired Elder, who recorded in his diary: "I always feel a reverent sentiment towards him [Crawley] as towards a parent".²⁶ One critic of the grassroots approach to the faith was "Crito" – quite possibly a pseudonym for Edmund A. Crawley – who wrote in the *Christian Messenger* on 19 February 1847 that:

Gifts which were acceptable in the past may not be so at the present, and that declamatory strain of preaching which may have profited the fathers will not now benefit the sons, having their powers of mind more expanded by the progression of knowledge, and who, although they may not have their father's simple piety, yet must have their intellect fed by the ministrations of the Gospel.²⁷

22 J.M. Cramp, "Sketches of the Religious History of Acadia College and Horton Collegiate Academy", in *Memorials of Acadia College and Horton Academy* (Montreal, 1881), p. 46.

23 E.A. Crawley, "The Rise and Progress of Higher Education in Connection with the Baptist Denomination in the Maritime Provinces", in *Memorials of Acadia College*, p. 38.

24 Bill, *Fifty Years*, p. 736.

25 *Christian Visitor*, 13 August 1852.

26 Samuel Elder Diary, 26 June 1848, D1939.001, AUA.

27 *Christian Messenger* (Halifax), 19 February 1847.

“Crito’s” commitment to an educated and cultured ministry was typical of many emerging middle-class Baptists in urban centres who were embarrassed by the emotional abandon and theological heterodoxy of many Regular Baptist preachers in the region. This professional and educated view of the ministry clashed with that of the anti-formalists who criticized ministers who “venture before a congregation on the Sabbath with a lamp-soiled manuscript”, instead of relying upon the power of the Almighty to speak.²⁸

Upon graduation, Samuel Elder was faced with the difficult challenge of finding a church to serve. In the mid 1840s most Regular Baptist churches were in rural areas where an “educated ministry” was considered suspect if not dangerous. Furthermore, the denomination’s few urban churches were divided on the issue of whether a pastor should be educated and genteel, or an enthusiastic revivalist trained and inspired by the Holy Spirit alone. Elder was known in some circles as “a metaphysical preacher whose profound speculations were far beyond the range of ordinary intellects”.²⁹ While his reputation may not have been fully deserved, the evidence suggests that Elder always took a scholarly and orderly approach. Therefore, at his graduation in 1844, few churches were open to having him as their settled pastor. He waited almost a year before the Regular Baptist Church in Fredericton, New Brunswick, invited him to be their full-time minister.³⁰

This Fredericton church had a long history of distancing itself from the New Light origins of the Regular Baptists, choosing instead to seek acceptability within the society of the province’s capital. For example, as early as 1814 the church complained in a letter to the Baptist Association that they were often incorrectly categorized as New Lights whose “tenets and morals . . . are so far from corresponding with his unerring word and so derogatory to the Saviour’s Name and Merits, that we feel it our duty, as we are commanded to come out from among them, and touch not the unclean thing”.³¹ The church was closely associated with the denomination’s Fredericton Seminary, which provided a basic post-secondary education for men and women, and wanted to have a minister who was as well educated and “cultured” as the institution’s principal, British-born and trained Charles Spurden.³²

Soon after he began his first and only pastoral charge, Elder gained a renewed appreciation of the example set for him by the Baptist lay people in the Annapolis Valley.³³ While Elder was enamoured with the genteel professionalism of denominational leaders such as Edmund A. Crawley, he owed what little success he achieved as a minister to the evangelicalism of his youth. The tension between his rural Baptist piety and the urban formal evangelicalism to which he aspired was a defining mark of his ministry and spirituality.

Elder insisted that all public meetings be conducted in an orderly fashion with

28 *Christian Messenger*, 6 February 1852.

29 *Christian Visitor*, 13 August 1852.

30 “Fredericton Regular Baptist Church Records”, AUA. See January 1845 and November 1845.

31 Records of the Regular Baptist Church, Fredericton, 24 May 1814, AUA.

32 For a summary, see A. A. Trites, “The New Brunswick Baptist seminary, 1836-1895”, in B.M. Moody, ed., *Repent and Believe: The Baptist Experience in Maritime Canada* (Hantsport, 1980), pp. 103-23.

33 *Christian Visitor*, 13 August 1852.

emotional restraint. He differed from his contemporaries, Ingram Bill and Charles Tupper, in that he tolerated little, if any, emotional expression in worship services and advocated a largely privatized faith. Although Elder certainly had no difficulty in speaking in public, he saw little advantage to expressing emotions through the tears, cries and groans which were still commonplace at mid century. Religious feelings were to be internalized, or at least tightly controlled:

In too many parts of the country religion assumes a passionate, excitable and fitful character, without showing much evidence of mental culture or of steady religious principle. It is the more pleasing therefore when we find a group of disciples who are manifestly not only growing in grace but also in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁴

For Elder, divinely assisted self-control, not emotional impetuosity, was the necessary key for the stable and lasting growth of his church and denomination. Although converted in the 1838-39 revival in Cornwallis, he was suspicious of the intense “soul-stirring” that he believed so clouded the judgment of people that they substituted religious feeling for authentic conversion and dedication to holy living.

Elder believed that the traditional emotionalism displayed in Regular Baptist revivals weakened the churches, instead of bringing vital spiritual strength. For example, in June 1851 Elder attended a discouraging Baptist Association meeting in Annapolis in which the reports indicated that many churches were in spiritual decline.³⁵ He recorded in his diary that it had only been a year or two since this area was convulsed by revival: “An awful deadness follows [revivals] . . . creating the suspicion that excitement was little else than unwholesomeness [and] elation of natural passions”.³⁶

In spite of his reservations, it would be a mistake to assume that Samuel Elder was not open to revival. Indeed, the contrary was true. He longed for revival to come to his church, recognizing “I must become an instrument far better adopted to the winning of souls to him”.³⁷ However, Elder’s models or heroes of the faith (John Pryor, Edmund A. Crawley and William Chipman) had not been effective revivalists. Consequently, his understanding of the appropriateness of emotion in evangelical Christianity tended to limit his efforts to spark revival. He became anxious in the early years of his ministry because people were not being converted, which meant his church was not growing. Given the success-driven and convert-counting orientation of 19th-century evangelicals in general, and the Regular Baptists in particular, Elder was in a dilemma. He prayed:

Make me a true minister of the gospel, a servant of Christ, and then for his sake grant me the blessed reward of winning even one soul to him. O Lord I ask not for distinguished success. To be employed by thee in leading one

34 Samuel Elder Diary, 3 January 1848, D1939.001, AUA.

35 In 1846 the two associations, one for New Brunswick the other for Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, merged to form a convention including a number of smaller associations. See Levy, *The Baptists of the Maritime Provinces*, pp. 151-74.

36 Samuel Elder Diary, 21 June 1851, D1939.001, AUA.

37 Ibid., 6 April 1848.

spirit from the path of the destroyer, and guiding it to the way of life, were an infinite favour!³⁸

Even if Elder attempted to remove emotional excesses of his tradition, he was nevertheless an avid advocate for his denomination's central and most sacred ritual. Samuel Elder probably understood the social and cultural meaning of believers' baptism by immersion better than anyone of his generation. Although he had few converts in his ministry, he cherished those occasions when he immersed them in outdoor baptismal services. Elder conducted his first baptismal service on 2 October 1848, and he ensured that all of the details were carefully carried out:

Bro' Spurden read an appropriate hymn, which sung by many voices rose in strong harmony through the quiet air, and floated towards heaven. He then prayed a simple, beautiful, scriptural prayer, whose influence seemed to hallow yet more the sacred scene.

I addressed the large number of interested and serious spectators present – showing the reasons for the performance of the solemn rite about to be administered, and dwelling upon its meaning and significancy. I closed by an appeal to the unconverted.³⁹

Following the baptisms, Elder joyously declared that “I never felt more collected or more happy in my life”.⁴⁰ Heaven and earth had become one along the banks of the St. John River, and it had been choreographed by Samuel Elder. He had not led a revival, but in his mind, he had accomplished something more important. In an orderly manner, he had made the gospel visible in a sacred space for a sizable crowd to witness.⁴¹

Two months later, in December 1848, Elder organized a second baptismal service in the province's capital. Having instructed his people to maintain self-control and decorum in public worship, he was delighted to discover that not only the Baptists, but also the pedobaptist onlookers conducted themselves with appropriate reverence.

A large number of people witnessed the solemn scene, with serious attention. The day seems past when this religious observance could not be solemnized without the indecent and impious scoffs of bystanders, from other denominations. Whether the change be owing to a general refinement in public manners, to a growing conviction of the scriptural nature of the ordinance, or the increased respectability of the Baptists – it is a change I hail with pleasure. But I ascribe it more to the restraining power of God than to any gracious revolution in the public mind.⁴²

38 Ibid., 3 April 1848.

39 Ibid., 2 October 1848.

40 Ibid.

41 For a discussion of the ritual of outdoor baptisms by immersion, see D.C. Goodwin, ““The Faith of the Fathers””, pp. 24-56.

42 Samuel Elder Diary, 4 December 1848, MC233, PANB.

While one might not wish to challenge Elder's conclusion that the "solemn attention" of the crowd was due to the "restraining power of God", the historical evidence suggests that those urban ministers of his generation consciously steered their denomination in the direction of social and religious acceptability.

Elder's need for order was also evident in his attitude toward women in the church. Allowing women to speak and exhort in worship services and other religious meetings was, Elder thought, "disorderly", and it certainly was inconsistent with his attempt to create a genteel, professional and irenic ministry. To a great degree, Samuel Elder advocated the privatization of women's faith.⁴³ In a revealing diary entry of 13 December 1848, Elder questioned the propriety of women assuming a public role during a Daughters of Temperance meeting held to raise funds for the poor.

The design is good, whatever may be said of the organization of the Daughters of Temperance. I can hardly reconcile myself to these societies of women which bring them so boldly out to public observation, and seem to remove that veil of retirement which forms the graceful covering of the sex. It appears to me that the objects contemplated might be attained without such modes of combination.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Elder praised the women for their efforts and for not violating public order (as the Daughters of Temperance were known to do in the United States). He embraced the separate sphere ideology that prevailed during this period. On one occasion he remarked, "It is touching and beautiful to see how strong and pure motherly affection is in all conditions of life".⁴⁵ For Elder, women were especially blessed with a nurturing spirit that he believed belonged in the home, not the pulpit. Female piety could be "fervent and rational", but its primary function was to nourish the souls of children and influence the behaviour of others.⁴⁶ One way for a minister to sustain professional decorum was to control public meetings so that lay women and men would not exhort or preach.

While committed to the ideals of restrained religion, Elder was a thorough-going conversionist. In fact, he spent much of his ministry attempting to be an evangelist of sorts, even though he was "poorly prepared both from native temperament and from habit".⁴⁷ Consequently, he attempted to use what abilities he did possess to "redemptive purpose". Although too introspective to embrace completely the

43 At mid century, the Regular Baptist leaders were not in agreement on the proper public role for women in church life. See *Christian Messenger*, 15 and 22 May, 1855, 4 and 7 August 1855. For a discussion of Methodist women in this period, see Hannah M. Lane, "'Wife, Mother, Sister, Friend': Methodist Women in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, 1861-1881", in Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century* (Fredericton, 1994), pp. 93-118.

44 Samuel Elder Diary, 13 December 1848, MC233, PANB.

45 Samuel Elder Diary, 21 July 1851, D1939.001, AUA.

46 Samuel Elder Diary, 2 January 1849, MC233, PANB. For a discussion of the separate sphere ideology, see Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womenhood: Women's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, 1977). For a discussion of New England Baptist women from the revolutionary period, consult Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994).

47 Samuel Elder Diary, 9 June 1851, D1939.001, AUA.

progressive spirit of the Victorian age, Elder was optimistic about the unlimited potential of the human mind to learn and understand. Elder believed that there were:

[no] experienced limits in many directions to the enlargement of all conceptions, the increase of all knowledge, or the progress of our mental power. Even the love of the beautiful grows by its own exercise. Taste becomes more refined by use. Thus our capacity of delighting in the works of God may be amplified indefinitely, and sources of happiness be opened continually, of which before we had no intimation.⁴⁸

Although hindered by “original sin”, Elder contended that human beings had only begun to unlock the mysteries of the created world and the implications of the gospel and the Bible for Christian life. Hence, he wanted a career that was not only educated and professional, but also educating and civilizing.

Elder knew that it was unlikely his ministry in Fredericton would spark a revival that would convulse the Saint John River Valley as other Baptist preachers had done in previous decades.⁴⁹ However, he was convinced that he had an important role to play in uniting evangelism and education. Rejecting the common practice of preaching only evangelistic sermons, Elder attempted to preach on a variety of themes from both the Old and New Testaments that were poetic and evangelistic in intent.

Early in his Fredericton ministry, Elder longed to gain the same social status as ministers in the Anglican Church. For example, in September of 1848, Elder travelled by steamship from Annapolis to Saint John, following a visit to his parents in North Sydney. One of the passengers on his return trip was Bishop Medley of Fredericton, who showed absolutely no interest in striking up a conversation with Samuel Elder. Obviously in awe of someone at the height of social and religious standing in colonial society, Elder defended this slight in his diary:

The bishop of Fredericton, I am persuaded, from what I have heard of him, is too intelligent, too wise and courteous, to make his clerical rank a barrier against communion with those of less exalting title. He would doubtless, both from principle and kindness allow any respectful stranger to converse with him. It is difficult therefore to assign a reason why he and many other men into whose company I have been thrown for hours, do not take the pains to make themselves more agreeable and useful.⁵⁰

Elder’s desire to achieve the status held by respectable Anglican priests within colonial society was later replaced, however, by a cynical view of the undue homage given to them. By May 1851, he spoke of meeting “one of the bishop’s neophytes” who “is a tall, gaunt, solemn and ridiculous personage, with a very small modicum of brain and an aspect of silliness”. Elder stated that the cleric did not know the difference between a “dissenting minister and one of the Episcopal church”, which led

48 Ibid., 19 November 1847.

49 For an example of earlier Baptist revivals along the St. John River Valley, see J.M. Bumsted, ed., “The Autobiography of Joseph Crandall”, *Acadiensis*, III, 1 (Autumn 1973), pp. 79-96.

50 Samuel Elder Diary, 13 September 1848, MC233, PANB.

the rather smug Baptist to recall an “impertinent assertion in one of the Oxford tracts, to the purport that a true and apostolically ordained minister, tho’ an idiot, should be treated with reverence”.⁵¹ In the end, Elder was committed to a professional and respectable ministry, based not on denominational social status, but upon a minister’s character, education and hard work. On this important point, he seems to have differed from some of the Baptists in Halifax and Saint John who wanted a “genteel” pastor who could elevate the social standing of the entire denomination. Elder believed that personal respectability was ultimately tied to individuals, not organizations.

If Elder’s goal of producing a “professional” and orderly ministry differed from many of his colleagues, his approach to pastoral care was not unlike that of his contemporaries. Samuel Elder spent much of his time visiting among those in his congregation, not allowing “his love of study to interfere with the faithful discharge of pastoral duties”.⁵² His mild temperament and good listening skills assisted in this task and he was especially diligent in calling upon the sick, dying and the socially and economically disadvantaged.⁵³ In the fall of 1847, Elder came upon a desperate family in which the mother was dying with “pulmonary disease”, the father mentally ill and the children starving.

As soon as I was informed of the miserable condition of the family I called upon several benevolent ladies and gentlemen, who at once interested themselves on behalf of the sufferers and provided food and clothing for them. I called frequently to see the sick woman, the mother of eight young children, and administered to her spiritual wants as far as I could. It was pleasing to find her acquainted with the gospel and manifestly deriving peace and hope for its divine truths. Death speedily released her from further trials.⁵⁴

For Elder, developing a respectable and professional ministry did not involve ignoring those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. In fact, serving a church with petite bourgeois members meant that there were “ladies and gentlemen” who could be called upon for aid in such crises.

During his many pastoral visits, Elder read the scriptures, prayed for individuals and inquired about the state of their souls. Always the gentleman, Elder sought to convert unbelievers, but he noted: “I never urge the individual so as to give them pain, from a conviction that it would be unkind and injurious”. He believed that it was “better to wait till their confidence strengthens, and they can reveal their hopes with freedom”.⁵⁵ This is not to suggest that he was not persistent in his evangelistic efforts through the course of his pastoral care, but it does indicate a gentle or “genteel” approach to evangelism. Any fears that the Fredericton congregation may have had about Elder’s education making him ineffective with pastoral care were put to rest when it became clear that he visited indiscriminately, attempting to meet the spiritual

51 Samuel Elder Diary, 23 May 1851, D1939.001, AUA.

52 *Christian Visitor*, 20 August 1852.

53 *Ibid.*, 27 August 1852.

54 Samuel Elder Diary, 21 December 1847, D1939.001, AUA.

55 *Christian Visitor*, 27 August 1852.

and physical needs of those he encountered. Elder's success as a pastor and counselor endeared him to his congregation, even if there is no evidence that he ever led a revival in the provincial capital. This explains, partially, why his congregation was content with his ministry. As ministers became more settled, the basic criteria for determining success broadened to include pastoral care and counselling.

If Elder was acceptable, at least in part because of his pastoral calls, promoting the education of the laity was his passion. His teaching emphasis was best known through his efforts as a "public lecturer" and Sabbath School advocate. This educational emphasis was consistent with a "professional" view of the ministry. Public lecturing had become a recognized profession by the mid 19th century in the United States. Donald M. Scott has suggested that millions of Americans flocked to hear American lecturers address a variety of issues and subjects. "Lecturing also appeared to have become an important and honored profession that rivaled press and pulpit in its influence over the mind of the public".⁵⁶ While Elder never considered himself to be a "professional lecturer", presenting public discourses certainly fell within the boundaries he set for a "professional clergyman". Embracing the classical notion that educated persons had a civic duty to "raise" the level of culture and knowledge within society, Elder spoke at temperance rallies and the Mechanics' Institute in Saint John. He was especially attached to speaking for the temperance cause as his brother John had suffered from alcoholism. Furthermore, he was "disgusted with the low trash called anecdotes collected from . . . Yankee newspapers, and retailed by temperance declaimers to grinning auditories who relish only coarse humour".⁵⁷ For the temperance cause to improve society, the message needed to be rational and presented in an orderly and seemly fashion.⁵⁸

In February 1848, Elder was invited to address a crowd at the Mechanics' Institute in Saint John. As he began to prepare two lectures entitled "The Expansive Power of Mind" and "The Influence of Poetry", he welcomed the opportunity to select "some topic of discourse of a novel kind, one which entirely throws me beyond the circle in which my thoughts have been moving, in order to break up the uniformity which marks my style of sermonizing".⁵⁹ He delivered his first lecture on 18 March to a small, but reportedly "respectable" crowd, which received his oration "with more approbation than it deserved".⁶⁰ Two days later, the audience received his second lecture with "more favour than the first". This he attributed "to its being extemporaneous", since an illness leading up to his appointments in Saint John had prevented him from preparing a full text.⁶¹ Elder seems to have enjoyed not only the intellectual challenge of preparing lectures, but also their actual delivery. The venue

56 Donald M. Scott, "The Profession that Vanished: Public Lecturing in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America", in Gerald L. Geison, ed., *Professions and Professional Ideologies in America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1983), p. 12.

57 Samuel Elder Diary, 13 May 1848, 13 January 1848, D1939.001, AUA; Samuel Elder Diary, 1 December 1848, MC233, PANB.

58 Samuel Elder Diary, 29 August 1848, D1939.001, AUA.

59 Ibid., 28 February 1848. For a discussion of this movement in the region, see Martin Hewitt, "The Mechanics' Institute Movement in the Maritimes, 1831-1889", M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1974.

60 Samuel Elder Diary, 18 March 1848, D1939.001, AUA.

allowed him to model an approach to ministry that could be both “redemptive” and “civilizing”. He was expressing what historian Curtis Johnson has called a kind of “formal evangelicalism”, which was concerned about creating a self-disciplined, moral, righteous and “orderly” society through voluntary organizations.⁶² Public education through mechanics institutes and temperance meetings were two of many ways for advancing this agenda.

If expanding the education of people in society was important to Elder, enhancing the learning in Regular Baptist congregations was a central concern, and especially in the area of Sabbath Schools. By the time Elder entered the ministry, his denomination was beginning to explore the place of children in a believers’ church which stressed revival and life-changing conversion experiences. When church growth came primarily from the unchurched and pedobaptist sectors of the population, the revivalist paradigm inherited from the First and Second Great Awakenings worked well. However, as new members increasingly came from Baptist families, where children fit in church life became an important question. The Baptist side of the baptismal controversy argued that children were not automatically Christians because of the faith of their parents, nor were they necessarily damned to hell if they died in infancy, or before they reached the undefined “age of accountability”. Fully aware of these questions, Elder proposed promoting and improving Sabbath Schools throughout the denomination.⁶³ To that end, he published a series of 25 articles on Sabbath Schools in the *Christian Visitor*. Taken as a whole, the articles were a handbook for the Christian education of children. Given Elder’s optimism about the role of knowledge in enhancing piety and increasing the Christian character and morality of society, it is not surprising that he assumed an important role as an avid Sabbath School advocate:

It is an unassailable truth that right education is favourable to virtue, that the tendency of knowledge is to harmonize and refine the heart, to remove not only the grossness of vice, but instil the principles of moral purity. It is equally certain, that ignorance is not only devoid of all good in itself but is invariably and actively evil in its effects. It adds to the corruption of the heart the darkness of the understanding, and while it repels truth and religion from the soul, confirms and augments the power and turpitude of sin. Knowledge then, and mental cultivation possess intrinsic excellence; their tendency is to do good. . . .⁶⁴

Since Elder believed that acquiring knowledge could create the necessary

61 Ibid., 20 March 1848.

62 Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War* (Chicago, 1993), p. 7.

63 On the history of American Sabbath Schools as a “civilizing institution”, see Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution* (New Haven, Conn., 1988). For the Canadian context, see Neil Semple, “‘The Nurture and Admonition of the Lord’ Nineteenth-Century Canadian Methodism’s Response to ‘Childhood’”, in *Histoire sociale/Social History* XIV, 27 (mai 1981), pp. 157-75.

64 *Christian Visitor*, 16 November 1849. The 25 serialized articles by Elder on the history, function and benefits of the Sunday School are found in *Christian Visitor*, 13 April 1849 to 18 January 1850.

preconditions for a moral Christian life and even Christian conversion, he argued that the church should be in the vanguard of educational innovation within society.⁶⁵ Building upon the notion forged in the Protestant Reformation that the ability to read with understanding was a requirement for the development of truly biblical piety, Elder envisioned a Sabbath School program that went beyond a rote-memory centred approach.⁶⁶ He insisted that teachers instruct their students to read so that they might appropriate printed information on their own. Reading was to take priority over teaching large portions of the Bible, because more scripture could ultimately be learned if the child became literate. Elder counseled his teachers to teach literacy by selecting a short simple sentence from the Bible which had a basic doctrinal principle. As the children learned to read, they would also learn the central idea.

Not surprisingly, Elder also promoted the establishment of church libraries to assist the development of teachers and cultivate the reading habits of young people.⁶⁷ By judiciously selecting “volumes composed with so much thought and anxiety, bearing the striking impressions of minds solicitous for the salvation of the young”, he hoped that the library would serve an “evangelistic” purpose. Indeed, Elder’s goal in promoting the Sabbath School was not just to advance the polite culture of the middle class, but also to “convert” souls.⁶⁸ To this end, he warned teachers not to be content with teaching “manners” and “morality”. They should concern themselves with “the chief and engrossing concern – the faithful and energetic endeavor to communicate the knowledge of Christ and thereby instrumentally to convert the soul”.⁶⁹

Elder’s attempt to provide a balance between educating for civility and educating for conversion was as much a reflection of his own internal struggle as it was that of Regular Baptists in general. He knew that many of his colleagues tended not to stress the importance of Sabbath Schools, let alone provide leadership in them because religious education was not an essential component to the revivalist paradigm. In an 1849 letter to the *Christian Visitor*, Elder challenged his fellow ministers to promote Sabbath Schools as an extension of their evangelistic strategy. By subtly linking the education of children to revival, he attempted to demonstrate the connection between the religious awakenings of the past and the development of better-educated Christians and citizens. He knew that by creating a sense of continuity with the denomination’s evangelical heritage, he could mount a compelling argument for pastors to take leadership in the religious education of children:

. . . where can the pastor find an auxiliary so potent so easily managed and so effective as the Sabbath School to aid him in advancing the spiritual welfare of the children and youth of his charge? By entering those for whose salvation his tenderest thoughts and sympathies should be employed, and with whom it is essential that he should cultivate a friendly and intimate intercourse.⁷⁰

65 Ibid., 27 April 1849.

66 Ibid.

67 Samuel Elder Diary, 31 July 1851, D1939.001, AUA.

68 *Christian Visitor*, 15 June 1849.

69 Ibid.

70 *Christian Visitor*, 24 August 1849.

Elder had witnessed the evangelistic potential of his own Sabbath School, and was convinced that if someone as modestly gifted in evangelism as he was could make effective use of this institution, those truly gifted in this area would experience dramatic results.⁷¹

Consistent with his petite bourgeois values, Elder also contended that a Sabbath School education was important for those who would never be converted. The influence of this institution would “soften, refine, and improve [their] deportment”, helping to create and extend Christian society and civilization. As a formal evangelical, Elder felt compelled to foster a ministry that would not only lead to conversions of the soul, but also to the general refinement of society’s morals, manners and education. These advantages alone were justification enough for Elder to promote Sabbath Schools, even if they represented “the least important of the benefits”.⁷²

Samuel Elder’s short life and ministry defy easy categorization (he lived to be 35, dying on 23 May 1852).⁷³ He chose a “professional” approach to ministry⁷⁴ and was one of the leading formal evangelicals of his generation, celebrating the virtues of church order and privatized religious experience. However, in spite of his efforts to the contrary, Elder could not escape the long shadow of the late-18th-century revivalist tradition in his own life. Elder’s struggle was a testimony to the power of this paradigm to influence Baptist piety in the 19th century. Clearly, Elder was unable to shed his spiritual heritage of revivalism, although he never measured up to its ideal. To a great degree, he achieved his goal of becoming the professional, learned and urban pastor, and yet was disillusioned by his ministry’s lack of success in the vital areas of conversion and numerical growth. These tensions were not just part of Elder’s experiences, but reflected the broader struggles of his denomination to find its place in a rapidly changing Maritime colonial society.

Elder may have failed to create a synthesis of the old and the new, but his attempt to merge revivalist religion and middle-class Victorian sensibilities was a mission that others would assume, ultimately with success. It is ironic that Isaiah Wallace, the college-educated revivalist who came to dominate the denomination during the second half of the 19th century and sparked thousand of conversions, was one of Elder’s few converts from his Fredericton church.⁷⁵ Perhaps Samuel Elder’s ministry was not as “barren” as he had concluded at the end of his life.

71 Samuel Elder Diary, 12 October 1848, MC233, PANB.

72 *Christian Visitor*, 12 October 1849.

73 *Ibid.*, 17 September 1852.

74 During November and December 1851, the Germain Street Baptist Church in Saint John communicated with Elder concerning extending a call to him to serve their church. All indications are that he would have gone to the port city if invited. However, rumours that John Pryor, one of Elder’s former Acadia professors, might like to be their pastor quickly brought the negotiations with Elder to a close. See Samuel Elder Diary, 25-8 November 1851, D1939.001, AUA.

75 Isaiah Wallace, *Auto-biographical Sketch with Reminiscences of Revival Work* (Halifax, 1903).