

REVIVALISM AND THE ORIGINS OF NEWFOUNDLAND  
METHODISM: 1766-1774

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**REVIVALISM  
AND THE ORIGINS OF NEWFOUNDLAND METHODISM:  
1766-1774**

by  
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## ABSTRACT

Laurence Coughlan, SPG missionary in Conception Bay from 1766 to 1773, published An Account of the Work of God in Newfoundland, North America (1776), containing his parishioners' first-hand accounts of their religious experiences. The thesis seeks to interpret these accounts in the context of the religious revival that produced them, with emphasis on its sociological, historical and theological horizons.

Societal conflict, based on long-standing enmity between merchants and boat-keepers, was exacerbated in Conception Bay in the 1760's by a wave of Irish immigration. Harbour Grace merchants responded by building a church in order to control the populace. In neighbouring Carbonear, many of whose inhabitants originated from Poole in Dorset where dissenting religions predominated, steps were taken to have Laurence Coughlan, a former Wesleyan lay preacher, ordained for the Newfoundland ministry.

The dysphoria caused by social stress predisposed an emotional and ecstatic religious response. The needed catalyst was provided by Coughlan, whose sermon contrasting the agonizing death of a man who opposed his "born again" theology with the joyful death of a redeemed sinner initiated a religious revival in the winter of 1768-69.

The conversion narratives indicate that Coughlan was preaching an experiential "heart religion" in which

justification was described in emotional and ecstatic terms. A comparison with the theology of John Wesley indicates that perfection, the central Methodist doctrine, received little emphasis, and the soteriological principles espoused approached those of the London enthusiasts whom Wesley had repudiated and with whom Coughlan had previously associated.

Central to the community's religious experience was the sharing of conversion narratives and the relating of "after-walk accounts" at weekly class meetings. Conveying their personal experience of the grace of God to others marked a decision to surrender to a new ideal, and involved a change in self-concept and the emergence of a new social persona. The "after-walk accounts" illustrate the integration of the new ideal into the personality of the convert, a period marked by emotional disequilibrium, which the converts interpreted as attacks from the jealous Devil.

Also interpreted as attacks of the Devil was opposition from Harbour Grace merchants who petitioned the Governor to remove Coughlan. The converts, mostly boat-keepers and their wives from Carbonear and surrounding villages, referred to the Anglican merchants as "the Enemy". The polarization which resulted from their support of their ostracized religious leader formed a basis for the denominational strife which became a mark of religious life in Newfoundland in the ensuing years.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ACC The Archives of Anglican Church of Canada, located at Anglican Church House, 600 Jarvis Street, Toronto.
- CNS The Centre for Newfoundland Studies, located in the Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- MHA The Maritime History Archive, located in the Henrietta Harvey Building, Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- PANL The Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador, located in the Colonial Building, Military Road, St. John's.
- SPG The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. This charitable organization, which received its charter from King William III in 1701, had as its aim the support and maintenance of clergy to "plantations, colonies, and factories beyond the seas".

### INTRODUCTION

In 1766 Laurence Coughlan, who for a decade had been an itinerant lay preacher in John Wesley's Methodist Connexion, arrived in Conception Bay. Following his return to England seven years later, Coughlan requested from some of his former parishioners first-hand accounts of "the work that God had wrought upon their souls". Thirty-six letters received in reply were incorporated into Coughlan's book, An Account of the Work of God in Newfoundland, North America,<sup>1</sup> along with his own account of his Newfoundland ministry and some death-bed narratives, a form of devotional writing at which he excelled. Captured within the letters in this book are conversion narratives and a genre which I have labelled after-walk account, forms of oral expression which have been preserved here in writing only through Coughlan's need to prove that his ministry in Newfoundland had not been a failure.

Coughlan's little book reflects the religious and social milieu of the community from which it sprang. The forms of oral expression encapsulated in the letters were created out of the need of real men and women to express a religious experience that had transformed their lives. They reveal a

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<sup>1</sup>Laurence Coughlan, An Account of the Work of God in Newfoundland, North America (London: W. Gilbert, 1776). Hereafter referred to as Account.

vibrant faith. They also reveal the struggles encountered by a small but determined group of converts who sought self-determination.

In this thesis I will place Coughlan's book in its social, historical and theological context. However, the emphasis will not be on the historical events per se, but on how they were experienced by the community, how they affected its theology and its self-understanding, and how they came to be interpreted by the people living them. I will explore the process by which a number of individuals shaped themselves into a group with a unique identity. I will describe that identity, showing how it was influenced by history and how it in turn influenced the religious and social history of the area.

Most authors who have traced the growth of Methodism in Newfoundland give scant coverage to the Coughlan years, contenting themselves with the briefest of facts about Coughlan's origins and his service as an itinerant lay preacher, along with some details of his missionary work in Newfoundland. Much information contained in biographies and encyclopedia entries is erroneous. An exception is the excellent article by Patrick O'Flaherty in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>George Brown, David Hayne and Frances G. Halpenny, eds, Dictionary of Canadian Biography vol. IV (Toronto, Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), s. v. "Coughlan, Laurence" by Patrick O'Flaherty.

Several writers have dealt with the period in more depth from an historical point of view. The earliest, William Wilson,<sup>3</sup> who accepted at face value Coughlan's statement in his 1772 letter to Wesley "I am and do confess myself a Methodist..", has been widely quoted. T. Watson Smith<sup>4</sup> quotes at length from Coughlan's book and from correspondence between Coughlan and John Wesley. Although he comments little on the quotations, his selection falsifies the emphasis. Naborah Winsor has confined his work<sup>5</sup> to historical research, and succeeded in extending the known facts about the era, but repeats the mistakes of these earlier writers.

Some work has been done on the theology of early Newfoundland Methodism. A thesis by Jacob Parsons<sup>6</sup> identifies Coughlan's converts as "enthusiasts" but, approaching the topic from the viewpoint of the organization and administration of the Methodist communities, does not explore further the theological perspective.

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<sup>3</sup>William Wilson, Newfoundland and its Missionaries (Cambridge: Dakin & Metcalfe, 1865).

<sup>4</sup>T. Watson Smith, The history of the Methodist Church within the territories embraced in the late conference of eastern British America, including Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Bermuda, 2 vols. (Halifax: Methodist Book Room, 1877).

<sup>5</sup>Naborah Winsor, Hearts Strangely Warmed: A History of Methodism in Newfoundland. 1765 -1925, 2 vols (Gander: B.S.C. Printers (1982) Limited, 1982).

<sup>6</sup>Jacob Parsons, "The Origin and Growth of Newfoundland Methodism 1765-1855" (MUN thesis, 1964).

Arthur Kewley's insightful paper<sup>7</sup>, which somewhat overstates the case, contends that "...Methodism, as found in Newfoundland, was unique in its beliefs, operation and discipline. It was unrelated, except in name, to John Wesley or to any of the other Methodist bodies."<sup>8</sup> He attributes the withering of the movement after Coughlan's departure to "his failure to understand the church as an organized structure, considering it rather to rest on an emotional response without a sound doctrine of grace and growth...."<sup>9</sup> A second paper by Kewley,<sup>10</sup> which deals with subsequent developments, identifies areas in which, as he argues, the isolation of Newfoundland Methodism and its lack of emphasis on theological teachings have distorted the theology of John Wesley. Drawing his data from Conference minutes, sermons, and short histories of a number of individual circuits, he identifies as distortions such factors as the predominance of conduct over theology, emotion over reasoning, and the After-Meeting over the Class Meeting. He questions whether Coughlan knew and accepted Wesley's doctrine of Assurance, but does not

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<sup>7</sup>Arthur Kewley, "The First Fifty Years of Methodism in Newfoundland 1765-1815. Was it Authentic Wesleyanism?" (A paper read at the meeting of the Canadian Methodist Historical Society, Victoria University, 28 June 1976).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>10</sup>Arthur Kewley, "The Influence of Isolation on the Theology of Methodism in Newfoundland 1874-1924" (A paper presented to the Canadian Society of Church History, 29 May 1971).

otherwise connect Coughlan's theology with the distortions he perceived in this later period.

An article by Hans Rollmann,<sup>11</sup> which corrects the polemic distortions of previous authors and contributes significantly to the known facts about Coughlan, identifies him as "a Wesleyan apostate" whose religiosity was experiential and whose theology, like Thomas Maxfield's, emphasised realized perfectionism and enthusiasm. Rollmann also establishes the connection between Coughlan and the dissenting congregation at Poole, and questions early assumptions of a close relationship between Coughlan and John Wesley. While he discusses the revival in terms of its seasonal, demographic, economic and social influences, he concludes that it was primarily religious in nature and resulted in a "human horizon of meaning...which could now be endured with fellow believers, illuminated by ultimate meanings, and grounded in ontological certainty." In many ways my thesis is a further extension of directions established in this article.

In summary, research on the Coughlan years in Newfoundland has so far concentrated on his historical presence on the island. Coughlan has been identified as an enthusiast, and some differences between his theology and John Wesley's have been noted. No study has focused primarily on the theology of

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<sup>11</sup>Hans Rollmann, "Laurence Coughlan and the Origins of Methodism in Newfoundland" in The Contribution of Methodism to Atlantic Canada, edited by Charles H. H. Scobie and John Webster Grant (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1992), 54-76.

Coughlan and his converts, or on the nature of the religious experience of the community. Nor has there been any in-depth analysis of the conversion narratives of his converts. This thesis will attempt to fill these gaps.

Chapter One will situate the Coughlan era within its social and religious context. It will begin by describing and defining Newfoundland society at the time of Coughlan's arrival. Special emphasis will be placed on the demography of the Conception Bay communities, including social conflict, class structures, and religious life in the communities of origin. Diversity of religious expectation among different communities and classes of people will be identified. The motivations which led the inhabitants to build a church and seek a minister will be explored.

Chapter Two will identify the evangelist, Laurence Coughlan, and his role in stimulating a religious revival in Conception Bay. I will review his known background, and detail the connections which brought him to Newfoundland to play a peculiar dual role as Anglican parish priest and evangelical preacher to a gathered church. His early ministry in Newfoundland will be investigated, with special attention paid to his preaching style and his pastoral method. I will identify and describe the technique he used to inspire a religious revival.

Chapter Three will categorize the message Coughlan preached, and compare and contrast it with the soteriology of

John Wesley. Special emphasis will be placed on "Christian perfection" as understood by the early Newfoundland Methodist community. Where the theological understanding of Coughlan's converts diverges from Wesley's, I will locate their ideas within the broader range of Christian thought.

Chapter Four will examine the response to Coughlan's message, as expressed through the conversion narratives and after-walk accounts of his Conception Bay converts. I will identify the religious experience behind their words, and examine it in relationship to modern theories of personality change and development. I will investigate how the conversion narratives and after-walk accounts contributed to the normative self-definition of the converted community.

Chapter Five will examine the effect the small group of inspired converts had on the larger community. This chapter will survey the demography of those who responded favourably to Coughlan's "gospel trumpet", and introduce the individuals most opposed to his revival. The controversy that arose will be investigated from the point of view of the theological response it elicited, and its effects on the converts, the wider community, and Coughlan's career in Newfoundland.

Coughlan's arrival in Newfoundland marks the introduction of Methodism to the island. The period of Early Newfoundland Methodism may be considered to extend from his arrival to just prior to the turn of the nineteenth century when Methodism became an organized religious denomination. This thesis will

focus only on the earliest years of the period, co-inciding with the time span of Laurence Coughlan's ministry in Newfoundland, and the events immediately preceding and following it.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Sitz im Leben

#### 1.1 Introduction

The middle of the eighteenth century was a period of considerable social and political change in Newfoundland. The era was characterized by a sudden burgeoning of population and a resultant shift in both ethnic balance and class structure. The infant political and judicial systems were hard pressed to deal with the ensuing social problems.

Events which occurred far beyond its shores affected daily life in the young colony, as European nations struggled for dominance while at the same time groups within each nation struggled for religious freedom and political power. The inhabitants were also influenced by religious ideas current in Europe and America, and by the revivalism that was endemic on both continents.

#### 1.2 Social Conflict in Conception Bay

British mercantile policy, which assigned varying tasks to the different colonies of the empire, decreed that Newfoundland was to be a supplier of fish and a training ground for British seamen. When John Guy, on behalf of the Bristol Society of Merchant Adventurers, set out to establish

a colony at Cuper's Cove in 1610,<sup>1</sup> he received the following instructions:

Upon your first arrival there the sooner to operate our patent and to prevent ye murmuring of suspicious and jealous persons that perhaps will not [fail] to spread abroad that this enterprise wilbe to the prejudice of ye fishermen as well of our nation as others. We do hould it expedient that you call an assembly of all fishermen that shall be nere thereabouts and there in their presence openlie and distinctlie cause to be read the graunt under the King's Majesties great seal...<sup>2</sup>

Despite this precaution the owners of fishing vessels from the Channel Islands and North Devon, who had for a century or more been migrating seasonally to Conception Bay to catch and cure cod, remained suspicious and jealous. Fifteen years later when Charles I, facing civil war and empty coffers, sold a monopoly of the Newfoundland fishery to the West Country Adventurers, these influential merchants began to challenge the right of anyone to live in the fishing colony. By 1660 captains were forbidden to transport passengers to Newfoundland, and by 1670 they were required to post a bond of one hundred pounds as surety against doing so.<sup>3</sup> The West

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<sup>1</sup>For an account of this settlement see Gillian T. Cell, Newfoundland Discovered. English Attempts at Colonization, 1610-1630 (London: the Hakluyt Society, 1982), 60-99. Also, by the same author, English Enterprise in Newfoundland 1577-1660 (Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1969).

<sup>2</sup>D. W. Prowse, A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial and Foreign Records (London: Macmillan, 1895), 94.

<sup>3</sup>Christopher English, "The Development of the Newfoundland Legal System to 1815," Acadiensis, 20/1 (Autumn 1990), 98.

Country Adventurers continued to petition for the deportation of the present inhabitants to another of His Majesty's colonies. For example, in 1675 the mayors of Barnstable and Bideford, the two North Devon towns then most prominent in the Newfoundland fishery, made representation to the Council for Trade and Plantations that "no planters be suffered to winter in that barren wilderness at all" because they debauched the seamen by selling them liquor on the Sabbath, sheltered them from press gangs in wartime, and took possession of the best fishing places for themselves.<sup>4</sup> Despite these attempts to curb the population, it continued to climb and by 1699 numbered about three thousand.<sup>5</sup> In that year a grudging concession was made to the existence of settlement by King William's Act which, although it legitimized the holding of private property, was designed to control further settlement and encourage the migratory fishery.<sup>6</sup> The lack of designated penalties made this act impossible to enforce, but it discouraged settlement by neglecting to stipulate a form of government for this British possession. The absence of local government and corresponding lack of infrastructures, social

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<sup>4</sup>Richard Hooper and Thomas Gearing, Mayors of Barnstable and Bideford, to the Council for Trade and Plantations, 30 March 1675. CO 34/40.

<sup>5</sup>CO 194/21 and 194/23.

<sup>6</sup>Statute 10 & 11. Wm. III. Cap. 25. A copy may be found in appendix i of John Reeves, History of the Government of the Island of Newfoundland with an Appendix; containing the Acts of Parliament made Respecting the Trade and Fishery (London: J. Sewell, 1793).

institutions and military establishments added considerably to the difficulty of establishing family life in the wilderness. The inhabitants, defenceless against the depredations of pirates, made an uneasy accommodation to them.<sup>7</sup> But French soldiers were not as easily accommodated. During Queen Anne's War military sorties by French forces stationed at Placentia attacked the Conception Bay settlements, taking hostages and burning homes. The population decreased as many inhabitants returned to the mother country.

Also limiting population growth was the fact that the fishery, the sole resource, provided only seasonal employment. The rocky, barren landscape and short growing season made the land unsuited for agriculture, a deteriorating relationship with the native Beothucks made fur trading impossible, and early schemes to exploit the mineral and forest resources failed.<sup>8</sup> The uncertain climate, the isolation, the absence of extended family, and the lack of parish charity to fall back on when the fishery was a failure also contributed to make Newfoundland an inhospitable place to spend the winter.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Peter Easton who in 1612-13 fortified Harbour Grace and made it headquarters for his fleet of ten pirate ships, was given two pigs by the settlers, and the settlement was left unmolested. Gillian T. Cell, "The English in Newfoundland, 1577-1600" (PhD. thesis, U. of Liverpool, 1964), 183.

<sup>8</sup>C. Grant Head, Eighteenth Century Newfoundland: A Geographer's Perspective (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), 30-48.

<sup>9</sup>Keith Matthews, Lectures on the History of Newfoundland (St. John's, Breakwater Books, 1988), 18-14. Cell, English Enterprise, 77-79.

Nevertheless, by the first quarter of the eighteenth century the permanent population of Conception Bay numbered approximately a thousand persons.<sup>10</sup> Some of these were descendants of the immigrants who had peopled John Guy's plantation a century earlier. Although the refusal of the principals of the Bristol Society of Merchant Adventurers to invest more money in this enterprise after its first two years proved unprofitable meant its official demise, some of the sixty colonists had remained in Conception Bay and established themselves as independent planters.<sup>11</sup> Settlement seems to have been continuous since that time, although few individuals remained throughout their lifetimes. A dozen nuclear families who remained throughout Queen Anne's War formed the basis of the early eighteenth century inhabitant population.<sup>12</sup> Their

<sup>10</sup>Letter of Mr. Roope to the Council of Trade and Plantation, 11 Jan. 1706 enumerates as living in Conception Bay "Inhabitants 800 men, 130 women, 200 children." Gordon Handcock, ed., "Selected Newfoundland Extracts 1667-1738 from Great Britain. Public Record Office. Calendar of State Papers. Colonial Series: America and the West Indies".

<sup>11</sup>Matthews, Lectures on the History of Newfoundland, 60-65; Gillian T. Cell, English Enterprise, 77-79. Handcock notes that there were only six women recorded among the colonists, and points out that although records indicate the descendants of Nicholas Guy remain in Nfld. to this day, permanent inhabitation by other members of this colony is speculative. W. Gordon Handcock, So longe as there comes noe women: Origins of English Settlement in Newfoundland (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1989), 34-35. However, Handcock's method traces patrilineage only.

<sup>12</sup>Handcock has identified these as the Batten, Butler, Butt, Davis, Edwards, Garland, Guy, Pynn, King, Mugford, Varder and Webber families. Together they made up a third of the population. W. Gordon Handcock, So longe as there comes noe women, 40.

numbers were augmented by employees of mercantile firms who were left behind during the winters to protect their masters' premises and to cut wood or build boats for use during the fishing season. Although most of these considered their abode in the colony to be temporary, during the long wintertime many lonely young men formed relationships with the daughters of planters and decided to make the colony their permanent residence.

There was also another type of settler present in the colony - the type that McLintock has poetically described as "waifs and strays, evil-doers and vagabonds, the flotsam and jetsam of the fishery, left stranded upon the shore by the receding tide of summer fishermen..."<sup>13</sup> In the early seventeenth century the absence of military and judiciary forces and its nearness to trans-atlantic shipping lanes had made Newfoundland a convenient base for pirates, some of whom retired to the colony. By the end of the century some individuals still found it convenient to reside in Newfoundland because law was indifferently enforced by Fishing Admirals during the fishing season and not enforced at all during the winter.<sup>14</sup> A number of "waifs and strays" were in

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<sup>13</sup>A. H. McLintock, The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Newfoundland. A Study of Retarded Colonization (London: Longmans, Green and Company Ltd., 1941), 9.

<sup>14</sup>The Report of the Council of Trade and Plantations to the King, Whitehall, 19 Dec. 1718 states "However as some of the looser sort, both of planters and mariners remained in the country, because they vainly imagined, that they could not be impeached there for such injuries and wrongs as they had

Newfoundland unwillingly. Some were servants abandoned by unscrupulous ships masters saving the expense of transporting them home.<sup>15</sup> Other servants were forced to remain because bankrupt planters were unable to pay them, and they could not afford the eight to ten pounds for their homeward passage.<sup>16</sup> English lads, some as young as ten years old, who were made wards of their parishes through the death, illness or poverty of their parents, were indentured as servants to planters in Newfoundland or merchants from the South Devon ports, usually for a period of seven years or until their twenty-first birthday.<sup>17</sup>

This was a predominately masculine population, lacking the humanizing effect of family life and the influences wrought by religious, educational and judicial institutions. The social mores of the societies from which they had come were abandoned in the harsh reality of life in a remote land where might meant right and conflict was rampant.

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committed..." CO 5/1318.

<sup>15</sup>Capt. Passenger to Mr. Popple, 16 July 1718 states that "The masters of ships neglect to bring their men home to save charges, etc." and recommends that ships' masters be obliged to forfeit a bond of ten pounds for every man not brought back home, death only excepted. CO 194/6.

<sup>16</sup>This occurred when masters of ships trading in Newfoundland seized the planters' fish in payment of debt, leaving them unable to pay their servants. Remarks on the present state of the English settlements in Newfoundland by Capt. Taverner. 19 March 1714. CO 194/5. Commodore Clinton to Mr. Popple, 30 March 1732. CO 194/9.

<sup>17</sup>Dorset Apprenticeship Indentures. Matthews Series 4. Coll. 24, Box 5/6. Subseries #04-016, MHA.

The relationship between these permanent inhabitants and the large numbers of seamen who frequented the island during the fishing season was fraught with conflict. The captain of the first ship to arrive in each harbour for the fishing season became Fishing Admiral, a position whose absolute authority was mitigated only by appeal to the Commandant of a naval vessel if one could be located. Every spring the crews of the migrant ships competed to secure the title of Fishing Admiral for their captain and the best locations to dry fish for themselves. The inhabitants, whose property rights were by no means legally secure, were frequently dispossessed, and these property disputes were settled by the same Fishing Admirals, regardless of their vested interest. In autumn the inhabitants retaliated by destroying the flakes and stages of the departing migrants,<sup>18</sup> and encroaching upon the ships' rooms.

Yet bad as the relationship was between the inhabitants and these representatives of the great merchant families of Southwest England, the inhabitants were dependent on them. Unlike the fishery in the rest of the colony, where both ships masters and crews were servants of the West Country merchants, the boat-keepers of Conception Bay in the seventeenth and

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<sup>18</sup>An action understandable in the context of a provision of the "Star Chamber Rules" which forbade their cutting wood within six miles of the coastline.

eighteenth centuries were independent entrepreneurs.<sup>19</sup> In the month of April each made arrangements with a particular merchant who supplied him or her with "provisions, salt, canvas, cordage, hooks, lines, cloathing, and other necessities for persecuting the ensuing voyage", advancing credit which in the latter half of the eighteenth century normally amounted to one to three hundred pounds, a considerable sum for the day.<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of May servants were hired by the boat-keepers from among the passengers who had arrived aboard the merchants' boats. During the summer the local merchants provided ships to collect the cured fish and fish oil from the inhabitants in their various coves. At the end of the fishing season the merchant paid the servants' wages, recovered the sum advanced to the boat-keeper, and paid the balance due in bills of exchange.<sup>21</sup> Thus boat-keepers were dependent upon the merchants and ship captains who provided both their supplies and their means of marketing the cured fish, and controlled their capital.

Since the local economy produced little besides fish,

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<sup>19</sup>Carew, Patrick et al. (Merchants and Planters of Conception Bay), Petition to Governor Mark Milbanke, Great Britain Board of Trade. BT 1/2, 89-90v (1791); from the Keith Matthews Collection 17-A-4-014, MHA.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>C. Grant Head, The Changing Geography of Newfoundland in the Eighteenth Century (Ph.D. thesis, U. of Wisconsin, 1971), 212-216. Also, Head, Eighteenth Century Newfoundland, 141-143.

every item needed by the inhabitants had to be purchased from these same merchant ships.<sup>22</sup> This monopoly over fishing supplies enjoyed by the British merchant ships meant that they were able to fix their own prices. Crucial to the fishery was the supply of salt, and it was in the context of the sale of salt that much abuse took place.

Ships from Lisbon and other foreign parts....carry great quantitys of wine and brandy, to Newfoundland ...When salt is scarce, they generally use this method; when the planter comes to buy a certain quantity of salt, yes says the ships master, you may have it, but you must take a butt of wine, and a quarter cask of brandy, with every ten hogsheads of salt, this the buyer is often obliged to do, otherways his men must sit still and catch no more fish...by those means every inhabitant's house is a tavern...drunkenness abounds exceedingly. I have often seen from 100 to 200 men drunk of a Sabbath day, in the month of Sept. at some places when rainy weather, it is rare to see a fisherman sober etc....I realy believe, that for the profanation of the Sabbath, swearing and drunkenness no place in the world is like it.<sup>23</sup>

The merchants' practice of advancing supplies on credit

<sup>22</sup>"From England they get their bread, clothing, malt, flesh and pease, from Ireland both provisions and clothing, from New England tobacco, sugar, molasses, rum, flesh, bread, and flour. What relates to the fishery comes solely from England in English ships....The colony and bye-boats are supplied with brandy, wine, salt, &c., from France, Spain and Portugal, but only in English ships." Charles Talbot to Sir Robert Southwell. St. John's, Nfld., 15 Sept. 1679. "Answers to enquiries respecting Newfoundland." Colonial Papers, Vol. XLII., No. 121i, reprinted in W. Noel Sainsbury and J. W. Fortesque (eds.), Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1677-1680, Preserved in the Public Record Office (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1896), 417-419.

<sup>23</sup>Remarks on the present state of the English settlements in Newfoundland by Capt. Taverner. 19 March 1714. CO 194/5.

against the catch left the boat-keepers in a precarious financial position. If the fishery was a failure, they were left indebted. If the fishery was a success, the Mediterranean markets were glutted and the price of fish went down, possibly still leaving them indebted. The boat-keepers resented the dependence they were forced into, and commonly believed the merchants purposely lowered the price of fish and raised the price of goods to keep them indebted. This heightened the traditional enmity between the two groups.

The merchants, too, had cause for complaint. If the fishery was a failure, as happened from time to time, the boat-keepers were unable to repay them. In the early eighteenth century American trading ships began plying the Newfoundland waters; some boat-keepers sold them their fish and oil for cash and emigrated to the American colonies without first settling their bills. This led the merchants to attempt to collect what they could, when they could.

...great complaint has been made to mee by many of the inhabitants, boatkeepers and others that severall of the masters of the fishing ships and tradeing people to this place do take an unwarrantable liberty of entring in a violent manner on the said people's flakes and stages, and seize under pretext of debt (by force) what quantity of fish or other goods they please, without having any authority for so doing...by which illegal practices masters are disabled from paying their servants wages, the poore servants are induc'd to beggary, etc.<sup>24</sup>

Amidst the charges and counter-charges levied by

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<sup>24</sup>Commodore Clinton to Mr. Popple, 30 March 1732. CO 194/9.

merchants and inhabitants against each other, one thing remains clear. Between these two groups there existed a state of permanent discord which at times resulted in open enmity. This discord, which was based on differing ideas of how a common resource should be utilized, was intensified by British government policies which left the inhabitants bereft of power. When, during the ensuing century, merchants also became inhabitants, the enmity between the two groups was to remain. The stage was set for political and economic differences to escalate into religious differences as well.

### **1.3 A Population Shift**

The social problems of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century were exacerbated by the sudden increase in population which began in the 1720's.

The Treaty of Utrecht, signed in 1713, meant the cessation of fourteen years of hostilities between England and France, and the supremacy of Britain over the Newfoundland fishery. The British migrant fishery, which had from time to time been interrupted by the vagaries of wartime, entered a period of steady expansion, and the next three decades saw a period of slow but steady growth for the colony of Newfoundland. The inhabitant population increased through the immigration of single adult men and a smaller number of servant girls, and settlement in Conception Bay expanded from

the ten settler sites of the century before.<sup>25</sup> The economy diversified as inhabitants supplemented their summer income by ship-building and trapping. Some of the merchants who had long been trading in Newfoundland began to set up permanent mercantile premises; by 1715 there were forty established in Harbour Grace alone.<sup>26</sup> The merchants, especially those of Poole, Dartmouth and Teignmouth, began to make a transition from fishery to trade,<sup>27</sup> so that by the second half of the century sack ships from Britain outnumbered fishing ships.<sup>28</sup> The year 1729 saw the inauguration of a system of justice for the island, with the naval Commodore being appointed Governor and given authority to appoint Justices of the Peace from

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<sup>25</sup>The census of 1677 showed ten sites occupied in Conception Bay. Each had two to five nuclear families with the exception of Carbonear which had six to nine. Handcock, "So longe as there comes noe women", 40. The census of 1698 showed fifteen sites occupied; of the 82 planters, 67 had wives. CO 194/1. This indicates the expansion had already begun before the turn of the century, was interrupted by hostilities, and resumed at an increased pace when peace was established.

<sup>26</sup>Cyril F. Poole, ed., Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, Vol II, s.v. "Harbour Grace" by Linda E. Russell, 807.

<sup>27</sup>W. Gordon Handcock, "English Migration to Newfoundland", in The Peopling of Newfoundland, Essays in Historical Geography, edit. by John J. Mannion (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press for ISER, 1977), 18.

<sup>28</sup>In the Year 1766 there arrived in Conception Bay from Britain 28 fishing ships and 27 sack ships. Another 9 traders arrived from America. Palliser "A General Scheme of the Fishery and Inhabitants of Newfoundland for the Year 1766," CO 194/27.

among "the inhabitants and Planters of the best character".<sup>29</sup> A Church of England missionary was stationed at St. John's and another at Bonavista. The colony was beginning to take on a settled mien.

The West Country merchant ships voyaging to Newfoundland had long been stopping at the Irish ports of Waterford and Cork to pick up supplies and to contract there for Irish crews. They also provided passage for those who hoped to engage themselves as servants to the Newfoundland planters. By 1732 it was reported that

few ships come purely on acct. of catching and  
cureing of fish, except it be from Biddesford and  
Barnstable, but from Dartmouth, Tinmouth, Topshamm,  
Bristoll, etc., instead of comeing directly on ye  
fishery, leave Britain with just a saileing crew  
(ships that bring the passengers excepted) and many  
of them proceed for Ireland and load with  
provisions, soap, candles, linnen and woollen goods  
and great numbers of Irish Roman Catholicks...the  
greater number of men now there are <sup>30</sup> Irish Romans  
and those the scum of that kingdom...

This trend was to become even more pronounced in the 1740's when war with Spain created an acute shortage of British manpower for the fisheries. It also caused unemployment in Ireland, and this, combined with failure of the potato crop due to severe frosts in 1740 and drought in 1741, led to a mass emigration of Irish in the early years of

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<sup>29</sup>Prowse, History of Newfoundland, 285.

<sup>30</sup>Commodore Clinton to Mr. Popple. Received 30 March 1732.  
CO 194/9/148.

the decade.<sup>31</sup> Many of those who had been voyaging annually to Newfoundland now decided to reside there permanently rather than return to their turbulent homeland.<sup>32</sup>

By mid-century the permanent population of Conception Bay had increased from the one thousand who had made the area their permanent residence at the beginning of the century, to six thousand.<sup>33</sup> In the early years of the century ninety per cent of the permanent population of Newfoundland had been English; by mid-century the English formed only a slight majority of the population of the colony as a whole.<sup>34</sup> In Conception Bay itself the Irish composed a quarter of the permanent population.<sup>35</sup>

This shift in the ethnic make-up of the colony caused

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<sup>31</sup>Head, Eighteenth Century Newfoundland, 93.

<sup>32</sup>"...early in the eighteenth century westcountry fishing ships, especially from North Devon, began to call at Waterford to collect cheap provisions...and cheap Irish labour for the summer fishery. These Irish were mainly seasonal migrants and throughout the eighteenth century the settled Irish population in Newfoundland was far less than the English. There were probably no more than 500 in the 1730's...The Irish did, however, begin to dominate the seasonal flow in the second half of the eighteenth century, and at its apogee in the 1770's over 400 Irishmen travelled to Newfoundland each year." John Mannion "The Irish Migrations to Newfoundland". Summary of a public lecture delivered to the Newfoundland Historical Society, 23 Oct. 1973, 1-2.

<sup>33</sup>Head, Eighteenth Century Newfoundland, 56.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>35</sup>Laurence Coughlan noted "For the district of this Bay there are 5621 souls. Families 408. English Men, Women and Children there are 4494. Irish Men, Women and Children there are 1127." Laurence Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 20 Oct. 1767. B.6/170.

much consternation to the governor and naval officers. British policies in Ireland following the Treaty of Limerick had left the Irish embittered against the British crown.<sup>36</sup> The introduction of penal codes against Roman Catholicism in the early eighteenth century had deprived three-fourths of the Irish population of the right to vote or to hold office. Roman Catholics were prohibited from attending university, from educating their children other than in Protestant schools, from bearing arms, from inheriting land, from leasing land where the profits exceeded one-third of the rent, and even from owning a horse worth more than five pounds. Roman Catholic priests were forced to take the oath of abjuration<sup>37</sup> under penalty of exile, and if they returned, of death. Although small numbers of Roman Catholic priests took the oath, the majority remained in Ireland illegally and were hidden by the people, celebrating Mass in secluded fields and private homes. In addition, commercial restraints against Irish industry, designed to favour British trade and industry, kept the country poor. The result of this repression was to create in the Irish Roman Catholic a lack of respect for the law and a hatred for the British crown. Their reputation in Newfoundland was one of general lawlessness, and a propensity

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<sup>36</sup>W. E. H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century. Vol. I. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892), 136-169.

<sup>37</sup>This oath denied the claim of the Roman Catholic son of James II to the crown and pledged the swearer to perpetual loyalty to the Protestant Hanoverian line.

towards drunken brawling and petty theft.

While the Justices of the Peace and the leading citizens of Conception Bay were concerned about this lawlessness, of paramount concern to the governor was the fact that the Irish, being Roman Catholic, might be inclined to collaborate with the French, whose continued presence at Placentia was a constant threat to the English settlements.<sup>38</sup>

The attitude of the English settlers in Conception Bay towards the Irish is depicted in a petition of 1755 to the governor from "the Principal traders and inhabitants at Harbour Grace". In denouncing the Irish who had recently settled at nearby Riverhead, they claimed

that your petitioners have for some time past been  
greatly injured by loosing their cattle, sheep  
etc., which they suspect have been stolen by

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<sup>38</sup>These fears came to be realized during the Seven Years War. St. John's was captured by French forces on June 27, 1762. The Anglican missionary, the Rev. Edward Langman, reported that following its recapture several months later there were but few Protestant families left in the town, the majority of them having been deported by the French. The Irish, however, had been permitted to remain, and an Irish Roman Catholic priest as well as three French ones had been appointed to serve the populace during the occupation, using the Anglican Church as their own. (SPG Journal, 1763, 38-39.) He was later to write: "Witness the year 1762 when the whole number of Irish Roman Catholicks in this place and also in the neighbouring Harbours were aiding and assisting to the French, were the greatest plunderers of the English and did the most mischief to the habitants and a great many of them voluntarily offered their services to the French, to get and bring intelligence to them, from distant Harbours and places." Edward Langman to SPG Secretary, 8 Nov. 1766. B.6/167. See also, Hans Rollmann, "Religious Enfranchisement and Roman Catholics in Eighteenth Century Newfoundland", in Religion and Identity. The Experience of Irish and Scottish Catholics in Atlantic Canada, edit. by Terrence Murphy and Cyril J. Byrne (St. John's: Jesperson Press, 1987), 34-52.

persons which inhabit the same place but  
renvendousing in several little houses lately  
erected in the upper end of said Harbour. That the  
persons who dwell in the said huts or houses are  
people of loose and bad character harbouring  
numbers of idle persons which from their not  
entering service make them suspect of being guilty  
of said crime.<sup>39</sup>

In the decade before the arrival of Laurence Coughlan in Newfoundland, relations between these two major ethnic groups were particularly strained. In 1755 a group of nine Irish men and women, bent on robbery, brutally murdered a prominent citizen of St. John's; they were hung on a gallows erected the day before their trial began,<sup>40</sup> and Governor Richard Dorrill began a series of repressive measures against the Irish population. During that same year a Roman Catholic priest was discovered to have been active in the Conception Bay area, and although he was never apprehended by the troops sent for that purpose, those who had attended his Masses were fined and deported, and the homes and fishing stages where Mass had been said in Harbour Grace, Carbonear, Harbour Main and Crocker's Cove were burned to the ground. That same summer George Tobin, master of the brig St. Patrick, was fined ten pounds for threatening the life of an English merchant at Harbour Grace. The court documents charge

...it likewise did appear that he frequently wore

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<sup>39</sup>Michael J. McCarthy, The Irish in Newfoundland 1623-1800. (St. John's: Creative Printers, 1982), 24-25.

<sup>40</sup>Charles Pedley, The History of Newfoundland from the Earliest Times to the Year 1860 (London, Longman, 1863), 89-90.

Irish colours and sometimes hoisted them at the ensign staff, and his English ensign hoisted on his jack-staff to bid defiance to the English and Jersey men of the Harbour, and it appears all this was done to stir up a spirit of rebellion among the Roman Catholicks of this Harbour, they being so far superior in number to the Protestants, insomuch that it is sometimes a difficult matter for them to bury their dead, and they have been obliged to make use of all the force they could assemble to prevent their insolence whilst they were burying their dead...<sup>41</sup>

These and similar incidents led to increasingly severe restrictions against the Irish in Newfoundland, and many were deported. By 1765 relations had deteriorated to the point of riot at Harbour Grace. When the magistrate attempted to arrest a crew member of the Irish ship Frances and Elizabeth for involvement in the riot, the whole crew rose up with muskets to prevent the arrest. The rioters and mutineers were publicly whipped and the ship's owner, Felix McCarthy, levied a fine of "thirty pounds towards building a goal at Harbour Grace".<sup>42</sup>

In the following year the Anglican missionary at St. John's reported

There was a greater number of poor Irish men brought here this spring from Waterford, than has been known in one year before, for 14 years past, great part of whom could not get employ in the fishery, being obliged to wander and walk from place to place, unemployed the whole summer. I'm strongly imagined, that many of them were White Boys in Ireland, getting a passage to this place, for fear of being apprehended. But our Hon'd. Governor Captain Palliser, has taken care to order the said again a great number of them back to Ireland, and also to order out of this place for

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<sup>41</sup>Pedley, History of Newfoundland, 96.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 29.

Ireland several disorderly and bad Roman Catholick families, by no means to return here again. It would be much better for the peace and quietness of this place, if there were not so many Irish families suffered to live and settle here.<sup>43</sup>

Deportations of those most unsympathetic to the British government solved some immediate problems, but could hardly be considered a permanent solution during a period when the Irish already composed a substantial proportion of the population. A way had to be found to combat the lawlessness of the colony and to maintain control over the Irish element. In the view of many, the establishment of religion was a viable solution.

#### 1.4 Religion as a Means of Social Control

Prior to the mid-eighteenth century church and state were not separate in England.<sup>44</sup> Religion and nationality were so closely linked in the minds of people that the establishment of the Anglican religion in the colonies was viewed as the prime means of securing loyalty to the British empire. The persecution of Roman Catholics was justified not on religious grounds, but on the basis of their potential disloyalty to the English crown. In Newfoundland, guns and ministers were inextricably linked as a solution to the threat of assimilation by foreign powers.

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<sup>43</sup>Edward Langman to SPG Secretary, 8 Nov. 1766. B.6/167.

<sup>44</sup>Although it could be argued that a legal separation has still not occurred, the religious toleration evident by the last half of the eighteenth century led to a de facto separation in the minds of the masses.

In 1677 John Downing, who styled himself agent for the hundred and fifty English planters then living in Newfoundland, pointed out that in Placentia "the French have at least 250 families of about 2000 men and 400 soldiers, and that the King of France daily encourages the Plantation, so that it is much increased since 1670..."<sup>45</sup> Two years later he presented a petition on behalf of the inhabitants of Newfoundland to the Lords of Trade and Plantations requesting "government, a minister and fortifications" lest the King's interest be lost, the fishing trade discouraged, and the inhabitants not only disturbed but supplanted by the French.<sup>46</sup>

A second petition from Newfoundland, also presented in 1677, likewise pleaded for "a settled government, great guns, ammunition and an Orthodox minister". In this case, although the perceived threat came from the merchant class rather than the foreign presence, the combination of state and church was again assumed to be the remedy for the lawlessness prevalent in the colony.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Journal of Lords of Trade and Plantations, 3-4 March 1677. Colonial Entry Book, Vol CV, 31-38, reprinted in Sainsbury and Fortesque, Calendar of State Papers, 77.

<sup>46</sup>Petition of William Downing, on behalf of the inhabitants of Newfoundland, to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, 10 Feb. 1697. From the Colonial Entry Book, Vol. CV, 31-38, reprinted in Sainsbury and Fortesque, Calendar of State Papers, 76-78.

<sup>47</sup>"Petitioner and his predecessors have owned houses and stages in St. John's for seventy years past, but of late years he has not been able to call anything his own through the

Although inhabitants and merchants disagreed as to which group was responsible for the lawlessness, they were alike in assuming that the answer lay in establishing judiciary and religious systems. An assembly in St. John's of "the commanders of merchant ships, merchants, and chief inhabitants" recommended in 1711 that

the Fishing Admirals should have power to inflict corporal punishment on all persons profaning the Lord's Day, and all common drunkards, swearers, and lewd persons; that a sufficient number of ministers should be sent to the principal harbours to instruct the inhabitants, and that they might be paid from England, the country being very poor.<sup>48</sup>

By the 1760's the source of the threat to law and order had changed. The establishment of rudimentary government and judiciary systems in 1729 had done much to stem the abuses of the Fishing Admirals.<sup>49</sup> The French had been decisively

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violence and oppression of certain West Country owners, who pretend to priviledge by the King's patent not only to take petitioners houses &c., but to injure his person and have driven him and his family to quit the place. Last year they did such damage in several harbours that 1,500 men in the harbour of St. John's will hardly make it good. Prays therefore for a settled government with some great guns, ammunition, and an Orthodox minister, all of which people of Newfoundland are ready to maintain at their own cost." Petition of Thomas Oxford to the King and Privy Council, 2 April 1679. Colonial Papers, Vol. XLIII, No. 41, reprinted in Sainsbury and Fortesque, Calendar of State Papers, 348.

<sup>48</sup> Reeves, History of the Government of the Island of Newfoundland, 61.

<sup>49</sup> Although the problem was not entirely eliminated since the Fishing Admirals, whose authorization came from an Act of Parliament, did not accept the authority of the Justices which came merely from an Order in Council. A fuller account of this dilemma can be found in Frederick W. Rowe, A History of Newfoundland and Labrador (Toronto: McGraw-Hill-Ryerson Limited, 1980), 178ff.

defeated and the Treaty of Paris had regulated their presence in Newfoundland. The lawlessness and drunkenness which had been present from the earliest days of the colony was now being attributed by the inhabitants to the presence of the Irish. In the 1760's the inhabitants of Harbour Grace decided to build a jail and a church.

The concerns which prompted the building of the church are revealed in a petition sent in the fall of 1766 to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Their church, they indicated, had been constructed because they had taken the laws of God and Christ to heart and wanted to prevent "Popery's getting Footing in these parts where so great a number of Roman Catholics are employ'd". They had chosen their minister and agreed to pay him a stipend, but because of a bad fishery were unable to meet their pledges. Therefore, they recommended him to the SPG whom they hoped would provide financial support to the ministry, since they wanted to "have the Gospel of Christ...preached to them, to their great benefit and satisfaction".<sup>50</sup>

The petition was signed by the merchants and chief inhabitants of Harbour Grace and Carbonear. The twin threats of lawlessness and "popery"<sup>51</sup> were clearly identified as

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<sup>50</sup>Petition to the SPG from the inhabitants of Harbour Grace, Carbonear and parts adjacent in the Bay of Conception, Newfoundland, 30 Oct. 1766. B.6/166. The complete text can be found in Appendix A.

<sup>51</sup>That is to say, foreign control.

motivating factors behind the establishment of the church at Harbour Grace. The personal satisfaction to be derived from hearing the Gospel of Christ was added almost as an afterthought. Yet there were individuals among those who signed the petition to whom religion meant something other than a means of pacifying the masses. Among the signatories were Clement Noel, Joseph Martin, Robert Ash, Ham Andrews, John and Thomas Pike, and several members of the Parsons family. These individuals represent families who later formed the core group of Coughlan's converts. Some of them also had connections to the dissenting Congregationalist churches of Poole.

### 1.5 Religion as Personal Faith

Religious individualism, which was already coming to flower in the late Middle Ages, was popularized and institutionalized by Martin Luther's insistence that justification occurs through faith alone. The religious Reformation which sprang from this idea transformed the concept of Christianity from a collective reaction to the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ to an individual and subjective response. Believing faith to be a gift received through the grace of God alone, those who accepted the Reformed doctrine became accustomed to examine their hearts to ascertain whether the saving faith was present. They became conscious of the secret workings of their own hearts, their

feelings and "affections", and they learned to express this in a language readily understood by the simple and unlearned. Thus there developed throughout Europe a body of theory, a technique of introspection, and a symbolic language which abandoned abstract philosophical descriptions of the nature of God for the more readily described workings of God within the heart of the individual. The process of spiritual transformation became the centre of attention, and with it came the development of the conversion narrative.<sup>52</sup>

The cultural expression of this "heart religion" in England commenced during the early Elizabethan age when the Marian exiles, who had migrated to the continent to await a more favourable political and religious climate in England, returned home transformed by their experiences. Frustrated throughout Elizabeth's reign by the conservatism of the episcopal hierarchy, and thwarted in their efforts to have Parliament wrest control of the church from the monarchy, they reacted in one of two ways. Many, inspired by the goal of establishing a model Christian community, joined the Great Migration to New England in the 1630's, where Puritanism soon reached its cultural epitome, forming the political and social milieu as well as the religious one. Those who stayed at home supported Cromwell during the civil wars, and the return of

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<sup>52</sup>A full account of the origins of the conversion narrative may be found in Patricia Caldwell, The Puritan Conversion Narrative. The Beginnings of American Expression (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 45-80.

the Stuart monarchy saw them cast out of the Church of England. Thus what had begun as a reform movement within the Church of England eventually became nonconformist and spawned new denominations. Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers, and Methodists all trace their roots to the ethos that was disparagingly referred to as Puritan.<sup>53</sup>

It was the Puritan insistence upon the centrality of the conversion experience for every believer that had formed the basis of the dividing line between Puritans and the Established church, and this dividing line was inherited by the English non-conformist denominations. The emergence of revivalism in the eighteenth century brought a changed context and role for the conversion experience, as the focus shifted from the covenantal community to the individual.<sup>54</sup>

Elie Halévy<sup>55</sup> has observed that the tendency of historians to dramatize the Methodist revival, by contrasting its universal exultation with absolute irreligion and immorality, portrays a false picture. Methodism was not created ex nihilo. Puritanism, which had only begun to wane in the half century prior to the Methodist revival, had left its

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<sup>53</sup>Mircea Eliade, ed.-in-chief, The Encyclopedia of Religion Vol. 12 (New York: Macmillan, 1987) s.v. "Puritanism" by Francis J. Bremer.

<sup>54</sup>Jerald C. Brauer, "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism," Journal of Religion 58 (1978), 227-243.

<sup>55</sup>Elie Halévy, The Birth of Methodism in England, trans. by Bernard Semmel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971).

mark on the consciousness of the population.<sup>56</sup> Also, within the Established church existed numerous and flourishing societies to combat vice and enlighten the faithful.<sup>57</sup> These voluntary associations established a powerful moral authority over both their own members and society as a whole, and they fashioned the character of the English middle class.<sup>58</sup> Eighteenth century England had become the heart of European Protestantism, in which zealous French and German Protestants, who preferred expatriation to apostasy, found a haven. London alone had thirty-five Huguenot churches and a strong Moravian presence which was to have a profound influence on the young John Wesley.

John Wesley and George Whitefield, who emulated the methods of Welsh revivalists Griffith Jones and Howell Harris, began preaching to working people of the mining and woollen

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<sup>56</sup>Randall G. Phillips, Irish Methodism (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1897), 20.

<sup>57</sup>Henry D. Rack, "Religious Societies and the Origins of Methodism," Journal of Ecclesiastical History, 38/4 (Oct. 1987), 582-595. Rack describes the societies as follows: "Religious societies appear to have begun in or about the year 1678 when anxious young men in London approached the Rev. Anthony Horneck, preacher of the Savoy Chapel, for spiritual advice. They were organized into small societies restricted to members of the Established Church and of a rather high church ethos. They met with clerical advice for set prayers, the discussion of religious books and occasional voluntary exchange of spiritual experience together with some charitable work. Frequent communion was encouraged." He notes that Horneck's rules, with later elaborations, continued to influence societies of this type for a century or more.

<sup>58</sup>It was within one of these voluntary associations, the Holy Club at Oxford, that Methodism was formed.

manufacturing towns of south-west England who had suffered social upheaval and economic uncertainty, and were "accessible to the prompt contagion of all violent emotions".<sup>59</sup> They appealed to the Protestant piety of the masses, a piety which firmly adhered to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and looked for salvation in personal experience.

Likewise, in Newfoundland, religion was not created ex nihilo. Among the English inhabitants of mid-eighteenth century Conception Bay, most of whom were first-generation immigrants, we find exhibited the same Puritan consciousness that coloured life in New England and the Protestant piety that had made Methodism so readily accepted among the poorer classes in England. Their own words in later testimonials sent to Coughlan testify to the moral conventionality of the lives of some of these inhabitants:

I had my education in New England, in a religious Family, and was early taught the Fear of the Lord; in this Fear, I was preserved; and by the restraining Grace of God, I was kept from the gross Pollutions that are in the World.<sup>60</sup>

From my Youth up, I was moral, and regular in my Conversation, of a sober, reserved Disposition...<sup>61</sup>

You have heard, no doubt, that I have lived a regular Life from my Youth up; through the restraining Grace of God, I was preserved from the many Pollutions of the Place wherein I was born;

<sup>59</sup>Halévy, Methodism in England, 75.

<sup>60</sup>Jane Noseworthy to Laurence Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 90.

<sup>61</sup>M.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 98.

and I endeavoured to serve God in the best Manner I was able.<sup>62</sup>

...I do not feel my great depravity by Nature, although I see it very clearly. My life has been regular, therefore the Guilt of Sin does not lie so heavy upon me as it otherwise might...I have not many Sins of Commission to accuse myself with, yet I must certainly have many sins of Omission lying heavy upon my Soul, notwithstanding, I am not truly sensible of their weight.<sup>63</sup>

Under the leadership of Jones and Harris in Wales, Wesley in England and Ireland, and Whitefield in England and America, great religious revivals began in the 1730's to reawaken the slumbering religious consciousness of the masses. The people of Conception Bay could not help but be aware of these revivals. Annually, ships from England and America plied the waters of Newfoundland, bearing rumours as well as goods. In addition, some of the more recent immigrants had been converted before their arrival in Newfoundland.<sup>64</sup>

It is evident from the foregoing that prior to Laurence Coughlan's arrival in Conception Bay there resided in the area individuals whose moral standards were high and whose religiosity was derived from the Protestant tradition of interiority, of searching within themselves for signs of a saving faith. The fact that this is not reflected in the

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<sup>62</sup>J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 100.

<sup>63</sup>W.P., Jun. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 November 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 147-148.

<sup>64</sup>Samuel Greatheed, Evangelical Magazine, (November 1800), 202

petition sent to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel indicates that these people were not among the acknowledged leaders of the community.

#### **1.6 Class Structure in Conception Bay**

There were in Conception Bay in the mid-eighteenth century three classes of people - merchants, boat-keepers, and servants.<sup>65</sup> The most prominent members of society were the merchants and agents of the great merchant firms of west-country England. Wealthy and educated, they controlled the economic life of the communities. The judiciary was hand-picked by the governor from among its ranks. Many had a sense of noblesse oblige which led them to expect to be the community decision-makers. Successive governors relied upon their advice, and it was taken for granted that a petition from "the merchants and chief inhabitants" would carry considerable weight. When the fleet arrived the merchant class was expanded by the presence of the ship captains. Accustomed to command, they enforced discipline both on ship and ashore, and in their role as fishing admirals shared judicial authority with the naval surrogates, being responsible for settling differences between the masters of fishing boats and the inhabitants, while the authority of the justices was confined to breaches of the peace among the

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<sup>65</sup>Head, Eighteenth Century Newfoundland, 142. Or, as Joey Smallwood reputedly phrased it "the rich, the poor, and the damn poor."

inhabitants.<sup>66</sup> For this class of people, many of whom commonly wintered in England, loyalty to the crown was a way of life,<sup>67</sup> and went hand in hand with loyalty to the Established religion. Pre-eminent among these leading citizens were Charles Garland, the Justice of the Peace, and Nicholas Fiot, the Fishing Admiral.

Most of the permanent inhabitants were boat-keepers. The poorest ran family operations, with the men fishing, and the women and children remaining ashore to cure the fish. The more well-established inhabitants were planter-fishermen, owning several boats, and hiring servants from among the influx of passengers who arrived each spring. These long-term residents were generally more well-to-do than later immigrants; they had been able to add to their property by the simple expedient of cutting down woods, or, if they could get away with it, by appropriating waterfront footage from ship's rooms during the winter. Among these resident boat-keepers of long standing was Clement Noel, whose property in Freshwater, and that of his brother John who lived next door, had been bequeathed them by

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<sup>66</sup>McLintock, Establishment of Constitutional Government, 56-57. This was the situation until 1791 when an Act of Parliament established a regular judicature, the first in a series of legal reforms. English, "The Development of the Newfoundland Legal System to 1815", 99-102.

<sup>67</sup>Kerr concludes that although Newfoundland in this period experienced a great deal of social, economic, religious, and judicial discontent, the overwhelming force of British nationalism prevented the revolutionary fervour of the New Englanders from affecting the island. W. B. Kerr, "Newfoundland in the Period before the American Revolution," Pennsylvania Magazine 65 (1941), 56-78.

their father. Clement Noel owned three houses, three gardens and a meadow, as well as a fishing stage and two flakes.<sup>68</sup> Despite his long-standing residence and his relative prosperity, Clement Noel was not an acknowledged community leader. Neither was Thomas Pottle, clerk in a Carbonear firm, who in 1766 bought a house and garden in Cloun's Cove for the meagre sum of eight pounds.<sup>69</sup> Both men were, however, to become leaders in the subsequent history of the Methodist movement in Carbonear.

Also belonging to the boat-keeping class were the bye-boatmen who arrived annually with the fishing fleet and returned to England at the end of the season. The bye-boatmen bought passage on the fishing ships, leased fishing equipment and property from the inhabitants, and fished on a share system with two or three partners per boat. Many of them returned year after year to the same locations, and formed a semi-permanent though fluctuating population.

The lowest class were the servants. In the early eighteenth century the majority of these servants had originated from the towns and villages which formed the hinterlands of the West Country fishing ports. The good wages paid in Newfoundland provided one of the few opportunities for

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<sup>68</sup>Return of possessions and inhabitants in Conception Bay 1702-1807. CO 199/18; MHA FA/41.

<sup>69</sup>This sum may be contrasted with the fifty pounds paid by Charles Garland in 1770 for land cut and cleared on the Southside of Harbour Grace, which he purchased from Nicholas Fiott. Ibid.

upward mobility; younger sons of farmers apprenticed themselves to Newfoundland planters and merchants for a period of seven to ten years, earning enough money to buy a farm of their own on their return. Those who stayed permanently in Newfoundland advanced to the status of boat-keepers, and this was the major source of population growth in eighteenth century Newfoundland. Most, however, eventually returned to England to marry.<sup>70</sup>

Attracted by the relatively high wages paid in the Newfoundland fishery following the depression of the early eighteenth century,<sup>71</sup> many men and boys arrived as passengers with the fleet and speculated on signing themselves on as servants to the merchants and boat-keepers. Since the usual contract was for two summers and a winter, this class formed an unstable population, whose numbers and personnel fluctuated greatly from year to year. They considered Newfoundland a temporary place of abode, consequently, few men brought their wives and children with them. Their living was precarious, for if the fishery failed they would be left destitute and far from home. The practice of advancing credit against the next summer's wages left some permanently indebted to their masters and unable to return home, so they whiled away the long

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<sup>70</sup>Handcock, "So longe as there comes noe women," 85-87.

<sup>71</sup>"A sober, industrious man could pocket twenty pounds for four months' work." Kerr, "Newfoundland Before the American Revolution", 61.

winters of unemployment by drinking and carousing.<sup>72</sup>

By the 1760's the ethnic origin of the servant class had changed. Indentured servants had been largely replaced by passengers, who did not have to be fed and housed during the winter. The inhabitants could, in fact, earn money by renting their tilts to those who over-wintered and selling liquor to them. Whereas the indentured servants had originated mainly from the hinterlands of the fishing ports of Dorset and Devon, by the year 1766 the fishing ships did not bring any passengers from England to Conception Bay; 486 passengers originated from Ireland and 567 from the Channel Islands.<sup>73</sup>

There were, then, in mid-eighteenth century Conception Bay three classes who differed remarkably in ethnic origins, life experience, educational level, and religious expectations. The upper class, overwhelmingly English,<sup>74</sup> lived comfortably, and had a great deal of control over their own lives and some say in the direction of the community. Their religion emphasised moral responsibility, and they

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<sup>72</sup>"The presence of young, robust, often 'masterless' men, often living in wretched and starving conditions, with unlimited access to rum and virtually no female company, combined with the lack of restraining institutional and legal influences..." Handcock, "So longe as there comes noe women," 87.

<sup>73</sup>Palliser "A General Scheme of the Fishery and Inhabitants of Newfoundland for the Year 1766". CO 194/27.

<sup>74</sup>Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland*, notes that during this period a third of the ship captains were from Jersey (p. 166), and many American ships were trading in Newfoundland (p. 197f) but that few of either settled in the area (p. 83).

tended to view religion as a way to combat lawlessness and the threat of foreign domination. The boat-keepers, most of whom were also English,<sup>75</sup> lived an economically perilous existence which was dependent upon wind and weather, the inconsistent catch, the vicissitudes of the European market for fish, and the favour of the local merchants. Those who had been born in Newfoundland had little experience of organized religion. The more recent immigrants, who by now outnumbered the original residents, came from varied religious backgrounds. Although some could point to lives of devout piety, they had not emigrated for religious reasons, and religion was not central to their existence. Those to whom religion had been important were now separated from their home communities and their usual pattern of religious connections, and were struggling to establish themselves within a new network of relationships. The servant class, the majority of whom were Irish Roman Catholics, did not for the most part look on Newfoundland as their permanent home, but as a place of economic opportunity. Their religious loyalties remained with their home communities, to which most intended to return.

Could the establishment of religion in Conception Bay

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<sup>75</sup>McCarthy writes "Although some historians would have us believe that the Irish in Newfoundland were 'hungry and destitute Irish peasants', the records prove otherwise...some of the Irish at least were masters who hired servants for the fishing voyage. Others were agents for English firms...it would appear that by the middle of the eighteenth century some of the Irish had risen to the lower middle class social position in the island." McCarthy, Irish in Newfoundland, 12.

simultaneously satisfy the differing needs and expectations of all three groups?

#### **1.7 Community Variations in Migration Patterns**

Mannion's study of migration patterns in eighteenth century Newfoundland indicates that both place of origin and place of destination were determined by kinship ties, merchant selection and a network of trading links.<sup>76</sup>

In the year 1580 Denmark placed restrictions on the Icelandic cod fishery, making it less attractive to English fishermen who turned their thoughts westward to the Newfounde-land whose shores had been reported by Sir Humphrey Gilbert to be teeming with fish. In the Devon fishing towns of Dartmouth and Exeter fishermen began to fit out a ship, get together a crew, and seek their fortune in the newly discovered land.<sup>77</sup> So popular did these voyages become in Devon and neighbouring Dorset that one fortnight in 1593 witnessed the return of fifty ships laden with Newfoundland cod.<sup>78</sup>

Although it was individual initiative that led fishermen from these ports to engage themselves in the Newfoundland fishery, their tri-partite system of dividing profits - one-

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<sup>76</sup>Mannion, The Peopling of Newfoundland, 4.

<sup>77</sup>W. G. Hoskins, Devon (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1954), 217-218.

<sup>78</sup>C. W. Bracken, A History of Plymouth and Her Neighbours (Plymouth: Underhill, 1931), 111.

third to the ship's owner, one-third to the merchant who outfitted the ship, and one-third to the captain and crew - led to the development of a privileged class of ship owners and merchants. The availability of capital was the deciding factor as to which ports remained involved in the Newfoundland fishery over extended periods of time. In Bristol, the Company of Adventurers was established early in the seventeenth century, giving it a leading edge over other ports. Bideford and its neighbouring town of Barnstable achieved the prominence and enjoyed a period of unprecedented prosperity when the Bideford mayor, Sir Richard Grenville, initiated trade with the American colonies in the early seventeenth century.<sup>79</sup> By the early eighteenth century Barnstable and Bideford were eclipsed by the larger town of Poole, where immense fortunes amassed by inter-related family firms who were both ship owners and merchants allowed it to gain the ascendancy.<sup>80</sup> The influence of Bristol on Newfoundland was also waning by the mid-eighteenth century; its merchants had discovered that shipping slaves from Africa to the West Indies and sugar and rum from the West Indies to England was more profitable than trading in fish.

During the period when fishermen from Dorset and Devon were first discovering the richness of the Newfoundland

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<sup>79</sup>Hoskins, Devon, 208-209.

<sup>80</sup>Bernard G. Short, Poole. The Romance of Its Early and Later History (London: Hunt, Bernard & Co, Ltd., 1932), 152-157.

fishery, Sir Walter Raleigh, half-brother of Sir Humphrey Gilbert who in 1583 had claimed Newfoundland on behalf of the English crown, was Governor of Jersey. In 1600 Raleigh obtained a grant of application in Newfoundland and induced Jersey seamen to start a fishery there. By 1650 so many were making the annual voyage that the parish of St. Brelades complained of impoverishment due to the number of men missing during harvest season. Consequently two Actes des États required that a license to leave for the Newfoundland fishery be obtained from the Governor or Captain of the Parish. Jersey firms remained prominent in the Newfoundland fishery until the 1770's, when many of them moved their base of operations to the Gaspé, replacing the St. Malo and Quebec merchants who had left the region following the defeat of 1763.<sup>81</sup>

Thus it was mainly from Dorset, Devon and Jersey that the early settlers in Conception Bay originated. Yet there were striking local differences. By gentlemen's agreement ships generally availed of the same locations year after year. Individual merchant firms set up their premises in different harbours of the Bay. When recruiting servants for the fishery they recruited mainly from the regions around their own home. Immigrants from a particular town in West Country England or

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<sup>81</sup>George W. Croad, A Jersey Album. (Jersey, Channel Islands: Dingel & Nel Ltd., n.d.), 142. Rosemary Omner "The Cod Trade in the New World," A People of the Sea: the Maritime History of the Channel Islands, edited by A. G. James (London: Methuen, 1986), 245-268.

the Channel Islands tended to settle in the harbour which was served by the merchant ships from their home town, establishing a continuing communications link with their place of origin.

Merchants from Bristol focused almost entirely on Harbour Grace, those from Poole favoured Carbonear and Brigus. Merchants from the Channel Islands also preferred Harbour Grace, as well as Port de Grave, Bay Roberts and Cupids.<sup>82</sup> The region from Carbonear to Bay de Verde was settled predominately by emigrants from Dorset, Somerset and Hampshire.<sup>83</sup>

The Irish, who were later arrivals in Newfoundland, originated almost exclusively from the hinterlands of Cork and Waterford, ports which supplied provisions to the English ships en route to Newfoundland. Irish merchants chose Harbour Grace as their main centre of influence.<sup>84</sup> Thus the Irish joined the earlier settlers there and in nearby Carbonear, and formed communities of their own at Harbour Main, Conception Harbour and Holyrood,<sup>85</sup> locations which had until then been

<sup>82</sup>C. R. Fay, Channel Islands and Newfoundland (Cambridge: Heffer & Sons, 1961) identifies Carbonear, Harbour Grace and Bay Roberts as the early Jersey settlements in Conception Bay. The communities listed here have been named by Handcock, whom I consider more reliable.

<sup>83</sup>Handcock, "English Migration to Newfoundland", 29-30.

<sup>84</sup>Thomas F. Nemeć, "The Irish Emigration to Newfoundland," The Newfoundland Quarterly, 4/4 (July, 1972), 18.

<sup>85</sup>Mannion, The Peopling of Newfoundland, 30.

vacant because they were farthest from the fishing grounds.

Given the fact that Harbour Grace was settled mainly by people from Jersey, Bristol and South-East Ireland, while Carbonear was settled primarily by families from Poole, one might expect that the religious backgrounds of the inhabitants in these settlements would reflect that of their places of origin.

#### 1.8 Variations in Religious Life in Communities of Origin

Ninety percent of the Irish in Newfoundland came from the counties of Wexford and Waterford, from areas within two day's walk of the ports of Cork and Waterford.<sup>86</sup> This was the region of Ireland in which the repression of Roman Catholicism had least impact. The survival of a landed gentry of Norman descent had given local leadership to Roman Catholics and provided the finances to hire priests from the Continent as private chaplains and tutors. This practice gave an impetus to the resurgence of institutional Catholicism which began in the region in the 1750's and spread from there throughout the rest of Ireland. Thus the Irish who arrived from Cork and Waterford were among the most loyal to the Roman Catholic church.<sup>87</sup> In Newfoundland, as in Ireland, their lives were

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<sup>86</sup>Poole, ed., Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador Vol. III., s. v. "Irish Settlement in Newfoundland" by Thomas F. Nemec, 75.

<sup>87</sup>Kevin Whelan, "The Regional Impact of Irish Catholicism. 1700-1850," Common Ground. Essays on the Historical Geography of Ireland, edited by Wm. J. Smith and Kevin Whelan (Cork:

fraught with political unrest, social ferment and the threat of racial repression. Their experiences had created in them a partisan spirit which influenced most to maintain their Catholicism in the face of all odds.

In contrast, the people of Jersey, whose roots were also Norman, were staunchly Protestant by the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>88</sup> Its special political status as a fief of the British crown kept Jersey steadfast, mainly through the influence of local administrators whose positions depended upon their loyalty. The thirteen parish churches, eleven of which had been established prior to the early fourteenth century, had obediently become Anglican during the Reformation. However, a lack of French-speaking Anglican clergy led to the recruitment of two francophone pupils of Calvin. Soon after, the Channel Islands served as a refuge for large numbers of Huguenots who had been bitterly persecuted in France and who also attached themselves to the parish churches. The result was a church system nominally Anglican, which was Calvinist in its teachings and Presbyterian in its government. Jersey remained politically loyal during the English Civil War and its citizens were pleased to entertain the refugee King, who resided there for several months with his retinue of three hundred followers.

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Cork Univ. Press, 1988), 253-277.

<sup>88</sup>Marion G. Tulk, The Quiet Adventurers in America: Channel Island Settlers in the American Colonies and in the United States (Cleveland, Ohio: Genie Repros, 1975).

Isolated by geography, government and often language from the mainstream of British life, Jersey was little affected by religious movements in England. The religious revivals which had been influencing two continents since the 1740's had little impact there.<sup>89</sup> The people of Jersey in the mid-eighteenth century remained conservative in religion, and firmly attached to the Church of England.<sup>90</sup>

Bristol, the second largest city in England, had long been named "the city of churches".<sup>91</sup> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was also a city controlled by merchant princes,<sup>92</sup> sensible men who were not inclined to let religious passions interfere with business. In the English Civil War, Bristol, under their leadership, maintained a position of neutrality, co-operating without fuss with the Royalists when they stormed the city, and, when they were

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<sup>89</sup>When the revival did occur, it was through the influence of Pierre le Sueur who had been introduced to Methodism by Coughlan in Newfoundland. Peter le Sueur, "A Short Account of Peter le Sueur of Jersey, by his Eldest Son," Methodist Magazine (Nov. 1820), 401-408.

<sup>90</sup>Raoul Lemprière, History of the Channel Islands (London: Robert Hale & Co., 1974), 41-90. Edith F. Carey, The Channel Islands (London: A & C Black, 1904), 91-98.

<sup>91</sup>Bristol earned this epithet in the medieval period when it boasted an Augustinian abbey, a convent and monastery of the Benedictines, a Carmelite house, a Franciscan friary, and a house of the Dominican Friars. (Alfred Harvey, Bristol: A Historical and Topographical Account of the City (London: Methuen and Co., 1906), 119-183.

<sup>92</sup>McGrath estimates that in the 1640's there were 200 merchants in a population of 15,000. Patrick McGrath, Bristol and the Civil War (Bristol: The Historical Association, 1981 [1914]).

defeated, with the Puritans.<sup>93</sup> This lack of religious fervour carried over to the next century. Pluralism, non-residence and political patronage had affected the Established church in Bristol and the surrounding Dorset countryside. Lack of persecution had diminished the fervency of Dissenters in the region, although Presbyterians, Quakers and Anabaptists existed in large numbers especially in nearby towns such as Dorchester, Weymouth, Shaftesbury and Bridport which had been staunchly Puritan in the previous century.<sup>94</sup>

This was the climate in which John Wesley began his career as an open air preacher in 1739. In the first years in Bristol he ran the risk of bodily injury from the mobs who gathered. This threat ceased only when the mayor made it clear that he would not tolerate rioting in his city. Although Bristol can be considered the cradle of Methodism, the new movement does not seem to have created much excitement in the city as a whole. The majority of Bristol Methodists in the 1760's were concentrated in the fast-growing parish of the Temple, near Kingswood. Bishop Thomas Newton, on his annual visitation to the city parishes in 1766, noted in his Diocese Book concerning this parish:

In 1/66 about 250 families, of these about 10 Presbyterians, 5 Anabaptists, 5 Quakers, also a

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<sup>93</sup>McGrath, Bristol and the Civil War.

<sup>94</sup>Joseph Bettey, "A Note on the Dorset Parishes in Bishop Seecker's Diocese Book," A Bristol Miscellany edited by Patrick McGrath (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1985), 76-77.

Jewish synagogue where about 40 Jews assemble. About 50 Methodists who assemble in the Weavers' Hall and Tucking Halls, both which places are licensed. In the Weaver's Hall, John Wesley or his brother Charles or some of their deputies officiate twice in the week. In the Tucking Hall, one, Holloway, an old illiterate fellow preaches Sunday evening and some other evening in the week. One family of papists consisting of only two persons... <sup>95</sup>

His successor, Bishop Christopher Wilson, later commented:

In 1784 Families 628 of them 15 Independents, 3 Quakers. All Arminian Methodists attend the church. No papists...Communicants about 300.<sup>96</sup>

This comment is a reflection on the personal influence of Charles Wesley who insisted that Methodism remain a movement within the Anglican church. The early Methodists in Bristol and environs continued to attend the services of the Church of England, and the effect of large numbers of Methodists in a parish served only to increase the number of communicants. The Methodists of Bristol lived at peace with their neighbours, and the Established church did not feel threatened by them.

Although the Jersey Islanders could be considered loyal subjects of church and crown, and the inhabitants of Bristol peaceable in both religion and politics, the same can not be said of the citizens of Dorset, where dissent had long been the strongest religious force in the county. It was from Dorset that John White, "the Patriarch of Dorchester" and founder of the Massachusetts Bay Company, gathered the

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<sup>95</sup>Elizabeth Ralph (ed.), "Bishop Seecker's Diocese Book," A Bristol Miscellany, edited by Patrick McGrath, 49.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

pilgrims who set sail in 1629 for the New World in search of religious freedom.<sup>97</sup> In 1662 seventy to eighty Dorset clergy were ejected from their livings for their refusal to conform. Archbishop Laud's high church reforms were frustrated in nearly every Dorset parish in 1664 by Puritan churchwardens who found ways to avoid carrying them out.<sup>98</sup>

The Puritans were particularly strong in the towns, and Poole, then the largest and most prosperous of the Dorset towns, led them all. Poole had been a Puritan stronghold since the beginning of the reign of Edward VI, when Thomas Hancock, a zealous and energetic Protestant minister, had championed the cause of the Reformation.<sup>99</sup> During the Civil War, the town declared itself for Cromwell's Roundheads and fortified itself against the armies of the king.<sup>100</sup> As non-conforming in its religion as in its politics, Poole welcomed George Fox,

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<sup>97</sup> Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, Vol 21 (Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), s.v. "White, John", 59-61.

<sup>98</sup> J. H. Bettey, Dorset (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1974), 100-106.

<sup>99</sup> J. S. S. Armour, "Religious Dissent in St. John's 1774-1815" (M.A. thesis, Memorial U. of Nfld, 1988), 42. Garrett's biography of the Marian exiles indicates Hancock preached against Bishop Stephen Gardiner and was forced to flee. Following two years in France, he joined John Knox's congregation at Geneva, returning to London when Elizabeth ascended the throne. Christina Hollowell Garrett, The Marian Exiles. A Study in the Origins of Elizabethan Puritanism, 2nd. edit. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966 [1938]), 175-176.

<sup>100</sup> Bernard C. Short, Poole. The Romance of its Later History (London: Hunt, Bernard & Co, 1932), 3-36.

founder of the Quaker movement, who visited there on at least four occasions between 1655 and 1662 and witnessed "a great gathering in the name of Jesus of a very tender people who continue under Christ's teaching".<sup>101</sup> Around the same period the Rev. John Wesley, whose grandson and namesake was to found the Methodist movement, was "called by a number of serious Christians at Poole to be their pastor".<sup>102</sup> Wesley had already been imprisoned for his non-conformist views, and four more imprisonments during his years at Poole only served to strengthen the resolve of his congregation there. This Dissenting congregation remained steadfast through persecution and was still in existence a century later.<sup>103</sup> By the turn of the century a Congregational church, Presbyterian in name if not in faith and teaching, had also been established in Poole.<sup>104</sup>

And what of the Poole parish church of St. James' during this hundred year period? It, too, displayed a tendency towards non-conformity. Built in 1142, it had belonged to the Augustinian priory. When Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries of England in 1539, he named it a "Royal Peculiar". This meant it was not under the control and discipline of a Bishop, but

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<sup>101</sup>From George Fox's journal, as quoted by Short, Poole...Later History, 70.

<sup>102</sup>John Whitehead, The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M. A. (Philadelphia: John E. Potter and Co.), 18.

<sup>103</sup>Short, Poole...Later History, 74-80.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 79-84.

answered only to the monarch who leased it for a fee to anyone agreeing to provide church services. A change of monarch meant a change of religious affiliation, as the church fell into the hands of wealthy and politically correct individuals. It also meant the church was deeply involved in national religious controversies. During Cromwell's victory the Corporation of Poole seized the opportunity to acquire the freehold of the church, and the privilege of appointing its Rector, for the sum of one hundred pounds. In succeeding years appointments were surrounded by controversy as burgesses, vestry members, and townspeople (including Quakers, Congregationalists and Dissenters) all claimed the right to select the minister. In 1755 the mayor and burgesses elected a new Rector and processed through town to the church for a formal installation service, only to find themselves locked out and the installation of a rival candidate in progress. The churchwardens and vestry members had sneaked their own candidate through the belfry door and changed the locks.<sup>105</sup>

Thus by the 1750's the Poole population of six thousand was served by a Quaker meeting house, a Dissenting congregation, a Congregational chapel, and an Anglican church with low church leanings. It was at the close of this decade that a second Dissenting church was formed in the community, one that more than all the others was to influence the

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<sup>105</sup>Derek Beamish, John Hillier and H. F. V. Johnstone, Mansions and Merchants of Poole and Dorset (Poole: Poole Historical Trust, 1976), 151-175.

direction of religion in Conception Bay.<sup>106</sup> In the Congregational church a previous pastor had revived the Arian heresy by asserting that the three persons of the Trinity were not of one substance. His followers, after the death of some of their leading opponents, seized the church, locked out the succeeding pastor, and took possession, renaming it "The Unitarian Chapel".<sup>107</sup> The dispossessed, under the leadership of Martin Kemp whom they made Deacon, built themselves an Independent chapel.<sup>108</sup>

This Martin Kemp was a prominent merchant, owner of one of the six Poole firms who were then trading in Carbonear.<sup>109</sup> Others of this congregation also associated with Carbonear included members of the Lenthorne, Pike, Ash and Andrews

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<sup>106</sup>This congregation also actively supported the establishment of a Congregational meeting house in St. John's, providing training and ordination for its preacher, John Jones, and raising money in England for the construction of the building. Armour, "Religious Dissent in St. John's. 1775-1815".

<sup>107</sup>This tactic was copied with less success by Carbonear Methodists who in 1775 locked the Rev. James Balfour, the Anglican missionary, out of the chapel in Carbonear. James Balfour to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 9 Nov. 1774. B.6/203.

<sup>108</sup>Beamish, Hillier and Johnstone, Mansions and Merchants, 65-66. Originally located on Leg Lane, this church became better known as Skinner Street Church when it moved to that new location following the Ashburner revival in the 1760's. Short, Poole...Later History, 101.

<sup>109</sup>The others were Fryer, Gosse and Pack, Pike, Green, and Slade. Beamish, Hillier and Johnstone, Mansions and Merchants, 63.

families.<sup>110</sup> It was in this congregation that a revival began in Poole in the early 1760's under the leadership of the young Rev. Edward Ashburner. Short writes

Mr. Ashburner put the whole gospel story before his listeners in simple earnest language, and so confidently did he speak and so steadfastly did he adhere to his teaching, that eventually people flocked to his side. Men accepted his teaching gladly and the heart of the church throbbed with an earnest longing to become a power for good. Only a year after the arrival of Mr. Ashburner among these people, they realized that their Meeting House was certainly no longer large enough...<sup>111</sup>

It was through members of this congregation living in Conception Bay that the movement to establish a church received its momentum. An unidentified elderly inhabitant of Harbour Grace, who had been accustomed to holding prayers on Sunday evenings and reading a sermon to his family and neighbours, was joined by some young men who had led the singing for Ashburner's congregation in Poole. Greatheed, an eighteenth century Dissenting historian and former resident of Newfoundland, wrote "the notice it attracted was so general that the inhabitants determined to build a place of worship, and to apply for a minister from England..."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Records of the Poole Dissenting Church, Skinner Street, FA 46; Collection 24, Box 5/6, Subseries #04-016, MHA; and "Return of possessions and inhabitants in Conception Bay 1702-1807" CO 199/18: FA/41, MHA.

<sup>111</sup>Short, Poole... Later History, 101.

<sup>112</sup>Samuel Greatheed, "The Life of the Rev. John Jones, Late of St. John's, Newfoundland," Evangelical Magazine (November 1800), 441-2; as quoted by Hans Rollmann, "Laurence Coughlan", 13-14.

Thus, the two major population centres in mid-eighteenth century Conception Bay were composed of people with very different religious backgrounds. Harbour Grace contained Irish Roman Catholics, staunch Anglicans from Jersey, and Anglicans from Bristol where religious considerations generally took second place to commerce. Carbonear was settled principally by people from Poole, where "heart religion" dominated the religious scene, and a recent revival had been led by Edward Ashburner. It was from members of this Poole congregation that much of the impetus came to establish religion in Conception Bay.

#### **1.9 Summary**

Mid-eighteenth century Conception Bay was a society fraught with conflict.

British mercantile policy had inhibited the growth of the resident population until the 1720's and prevented the development of effective governmental and social structures. The suspicion which existed from the beginning between migrant fishermen and inhabitants had by the mid-eighteenth century developed into a state of enmity between the merchant class and the boat-keepers. This enmity set the stage for political and economic differences to escalate into religious differences as well.

The immigration of large numbers of Irish Roman Catholics beginning in the 1740's created repeated social tensions. The

history of repression in Ireland had made the Irish bitter towards the British crown. This bitterness was expressed in lawlessness, hostility, and drunken brawling which sometimes led to riot. There was also a well-grounded fear that the Irish might side with Britain's traditional enemy, the French, who continued to pose a serious threat to the struggling settlements in Newfoundland.

Prevailing opinion concerning the role of the church in society in mid-eighteenth century England equated state religion with loyalty to the crown. The church was also seen as a partner with government in guarding the morals of the nation. Faced with the Irish threat, leading citizens of Conception Bay determined to build a jail and a church. In 1766 a petition was sent to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel requesting financial help in supporting Laurence Coughlan, who was already known to them, as their minister.

But there were others in Conception Bay, as in Europe and New England, to whom true religion was defined as "heart religion", an individual and subjective response to the grace of God which led to a personal spiritual transformation. This spiritual transformation was generally expressed in a conversion narrative.

An investigation into the class structure in mid-eighteenth century Conception Bay reveals a fluctuating population of three classes of people - merchants, boat-keepers and servants - of which only the merchants could be

considered wealthy and powerful. Generally speaking, the merchant class, of whom Charles Garland and Nicholas Fiott are representatives, viewed religion as a moral force and a form of social control. The boat-keepers, who must be considered poor, came from varied religious backgrounds. None of them had emigrated for religious reasons, and religion was not a relevant issue in the lives of most. The servants, many of whom were recent Irish Roman Catholic immigrants, retained a loyalty to their home communities and an aversion to Protestantism. Thus, prior to the establishment of institutional religion in Conception Bay, there were class differences in religious background.

As well, there were local variations in ethnic and religious background. The waxing and waning of the fortunes of various European towns influenced the origin of settlers in different periods. Migration patterns were also determined by trading routes, merchant selection, and kinship ties. Of the two leading towns in Conception Bay, Harbour Grace had been settled mainly by families from Bristol and Jersey, while in Carbonear settlers from Poole predominated. Both towns also had significant numbers of Irish.

Of special significance to the future direction of religion in Conception Bay was the presence in Carbonear of persons who had been influenced by religious events in Poole, where there was a Puritan consciousness, a reputation for dissent, and a tradition of locking undesirable clergy out of

the churches. A revival led by Ashburner at the Independent Church, of which Carbonear merchant Martin Kemp had been the leading founder, had influenced individuals in Carbonear to initiate family services with hymn singing, and provided an impetus towards the establishment of religion in Conception Bay.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Awakening<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.1 Introduction

In mid-eighteenth century Conception Bay there existed many of the factors which have been identified as making a community ripe for religious revival.

The social stress caused by lack of law and order infected all of society, and for the boat-keepers there was the added stress of having justice determined solely by the merchant class whom they had learned to distrust. To this were added the problems caused by assimilating in a relatively short period of time large numbers of immigrants, many of whom differed in ethnic origin from the early settlers. Family life was underdeveloped; educational, recreational and cultural institutions were lacking.

There were also economic and political stresses. The fishery-based economy was uncertain and success depended upon

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<sup>1</sup>McLoughlin defines awakenings as "periods of cultural revitalization that begin with a general crisis of beliefs and values and extend over a period of a generation or so, during which time a profound reorientation in beliefs and values takes place". William G. McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform. An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1609-1977 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), xiii. I use the term here in the same sense that Laurence Coughlan used it, as the initial phase of a religious revitalization. Coughlan's converts also used the term to refer to the initial phase of their crisis of belief.

the vagaries of foreign markets as well as weather, fish stocks, and servants of unknown character. Social ferment, caused by the presence of disaffected Irish, was profound. The communities were emerging from a period of war in which they had no means to resist conquest. For the two lower classes, there must have been a sense of utter powerlessness over economic and political life.

In these conditions existed potential for the eruption of religious fervour. The missing ingredient was the presence of a charismatic revivalist preaching a doctrine to which the people could easily relate. This missing ingredient was supplied when Laurence Coughlan arrived in Conception Bay.

## **2.2 Factors Influencing Religious Revivals**

Social scientists have frequently noted the coincidence of religious revivals with periods of social, political and economic unrest. Halévy's hypothesis<sup>2</sup> identifies pauperism, economic crisis, political ferment, and social despair as the underlying conditions which formed "the seeds of religious renovation". These seeds, which had existed for a considerable time, sprouted luxuriantly when there arose a strong leadership preaching a doctrine that answered present needs as well as being rooted in the Puritan past. Consequently, concluded Halévy, in the eighteenth century the working class of England found a religious solution to the same conditions

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<sup>2</sup>Halévy, Birth of Methodism.

which in France led to the radical political solution expressed by the French Revolution.

Walker,<sup>3</sup> on the other hand, while acknowledging that economic depression, if not too severe, favours revivalism, concludes in his study of Victorian revivals in England and Wales that there is no clear pattern of relationship between religious revival and economic change. Other kinds of adversity were more important in prompting people towards religious consolations. But even more important than adversity, he feels, is a period of prayerful expectation and the influence of great charismatic revivalists who were remarkable for their infectious confidence more so than their learning or their oratorical skills. He also notes that these revivalists placed more emphasis on the terrors of Hell than other preachers.

Carwardine<sup>4</sup> examined features common to the Welsh revival of the 1840's and those of the American frontier of the 1820's and 30's. He identifies isolation, a socially unsettled population, the absence of a large educated middle class, the precarious nature of life, and the fact that the preachers came from the same social and intellectual background as their audience as predisposing factors. He also acknowledges the

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<sup>3</sup>R. B. Walker, "The Growth of Wesleyan Methodism in Victorian England and Wales," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 24/3 (July 1973), 267-284.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Carwardine, "The Welsh Evangelical Community and 'Finney's Revival,'" Journal of Ecclesiastical History 29/4 (October 1978).

role played by society meetings, which featured mutual encouragement and rebuke and the relating of religious experiences, in sustaining repeated revivals. He believes, however, that the major instrument of these revivals was a type of preaching adapted to produce emotion and religious fervour.

Sweet<sup>5</sup> identifies institutionalism with stable societies and notes that migrations result in a lessening of social pressure, a decline in institutions, and a corresponding growth in individualism. Revivals emphasise that religion is an individual matter, and provide a non-institutionalized pathway to salvation. To personalize religion is to emotionalize it. Therefore, he concludes, societies in motion tend to produce revivals which are personal and emotional in nature.

The anxiety of social upheaval is also acknowledged by Timothy Smith<sup>6</sup> as the cause of the exaggerated emotions which characterized congregational life in the New World. He notes that on the American frontier family life was lonely and insecure, death rates were high, units of belonging were non-existent, and family status, with its accompanying set of duties and privileges, had not yet developed within the

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<sup>5</sup>William Warren Sweet, Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth and Decline (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

<sup>6</sup>Timothy L. Smith, "Congregation, State and Denomination: The Forming of American Religious Structure," William and Mary Quarterly Series 3, 25 (April, 1968), 155-176.

settlements. Church membership, he believes, satisfied the need to belong to a community and to have status within that community, as well as providing an authority which could stabilize behaviour under the threat of social disorder. Smith concludes that "Revivalism in American history has generally served communal purposes....What was called 'an effusion of the Holy Spirit' signified to participants divine sanction upon their new arrangements."

Burridge's<sup>7</sup> morphology of revival emphasises the role of the prophet figure who articulates to a community experiencing dysphoria a seemingly imperative program of action sanctioned by threats from the transcendent. He adds that the development of a prologue, consisting of an ambience of general dissatisfaction and an expectation of transformation, seems essential to the effectiveness of the prophet figure.

Whereas the social historians cited above have argued that religious revivals coincide with social, economic, and political trends, or with the experience of dysphoria or fragmentation, Luker<sup>8</sup> points out that this approach depreciates the internal developments within the churches themselves in favour of external circumstances. In his study of the 1814 Great Revival of Wales he acknowledges that the

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<sup>7</sup>Mircea Eliade, ed.-in-chief, The Encyclopedia of Religion Vol. 12 (New York: Macmillan, 1987) s.v. "Revival and Renewal" by Kenelm Burridge, 368-374.

<sup>8</sup>David Luker, "Revivalism in Theory and Practice," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 37/4 (Oct. 1986), 603-619.

external circumstances of isolation, social dislocation, and externally-controlled trends of boom and depression predisposed that the revival would be emotional and ecstatic. He identifies two internal developments which occurred as a result of the revival - the indigenization of Methodism and a transfer of power from connexional orthodoxy to popular control - and concludes that an unexpressed need for this power shift influenced the course of the revival.

Social historians, then, have identified four predisposing conditions which influence the eruption of religious revivals - external circumstances such as social, economic and political stress, internal circumstances such as the need for community-building or the transfer of power, a doctrine which both meets present needs and is not inconsistent with what is already believed, and the presence of a strong prophet figure who can articulate a program of action.

The pronounced conditions of community fragmentation and individual dysphoria evident in mid-eighteenth century Newfoundland indicate a situation ripe for religious revival. Yet these conditions were not new in Conception Bay. For nearly half a century<sup>9</sup> they had been awaiting the catalyst which would set events in motion. There was needed a strong prophetic figure who would preach a doctrine which was both rooted in the past and able to answer the present needs of the people - needs for community-building, for power-sharing and

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<sup>9</sup>Dating from the population explosion.

for self-affirmation.

This catalyst was to be found in the person of the Rev. Laurence Coughlan.

### **2.3 Laurence Coughlan**

In 1753 the Irishman Laurence Coughlan was converted by Methodist itinerants who had been well received in Drummersnave (presently Drumsna), his native home,<sup>10</sup> an idyllic village<sup>11</sup> all of whose people, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, would turn out to hear Methodists preach.<sup>12</sup> Accounted a "pious, faithful and zealous man", he was invited, two years later, when four of the ten itinerants then in Ireland were incapacitated with illness, to be received on trial as a Methodist lay preacher.<sup>13</sup>

The first two years of Coughlan's ministry were spent as a probationer accompanying one of the more experienced preachers in Ireland. At that time, Ireland had been divided

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<sup>10</sup>C. H. Crookshank, History of Methodism in Ireland, Vol. I. Wesley and His Times (Belfast: R. S. Allen, Son & Allen, 1885), 100, 107.

<sup>11</sup>John Wesley, following a visit there in 1758, described it thus: "Wood, water, fruitful land, and gently-rising hills, contribute to make this place a little paradise. Mr. Campbell, the proprietor of the whole, resolved to make it such: So he planted groves, laid out walks, formed a new plan of the town, with a barrack at one end, and his own seat at the other." Journal entry for 25 May 1758, in John Wesley, The Works of John Wesley. 3rd. edit., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1986). 2:446.

<sup>12</sup>Journal entry for 10 June 1760, in Wesley, Works, 3:6.

<sup>13</sup>Crookshank, Methodism in Ireland, 1:104-107.

into six circuits - Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Athlone, Wexford, and the North - and preachers spent three months in each successive circuit.<sup>14</sup>

Following this probationary period, Coughlan, accompanied by "the weeping prophet" John Murlin, travelled from Dublin to London to attend the Conference of 1757.<sup>15</sup> Here he was accepted as a full preacher and appointed to England.<sup>16</sup> He served first in the country town of Colchester in Essex, where Dissenters were numerous but Methodism had not yet been established. Within three months he had gathered together a society of a hundred and twenty persons, many of whom had already begun to experience a need for conversion.<sup>17</sup> Although local Anglican clergy began repelling from the Lord's Table those who went to hear the Methodist preacher,<sup>18</sup> only a dozen of these original members fell away, and soon forty more members were added.<sup>19</sup> Following a visit there shortly

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<sup>14</sup>This had been decided at the first Irish Conference held in Limerick on August 14-15 of the previous year. John S. Simon, John Wesley and the Advance of Methodism, 2nd. edit. (London: Epworth Press, 1955), 242-3.

<sup>15</sup>John Telford, Wesley's Veterans. Lives of Early Methodist Preachers Told by Themselves, 8 vols. (Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers, Rare Reprint Specialists), 2:161. John Murlin's autobiography was previously published in The Arminian Magazine, 1779.

<sup>16</sup>Crookshank, Methodism in Ireland, 1:122.

<sup>17</sup>Journal entry for 28 Nov. 1758, in Wesley, Works, 2:462.

<sup>18</sup>Journal entry for 21 March 1759, in Wesley, Works, 2:469.

<sup>19</sup>Journal entry for 5 March 1759, in Wesley, Works, 2:468.

before Coughlan's departure, John Wesley was so impressed by the congregation that he mentioned them twice in his correspondence.

At Colchester, likewise, the word of God has free course - only no house will contain the congregation.<sup>20</sup> On Sunday, I was obliged to preach at St. John's Green; the people stood on a smooth sloping ground, sheltered by the walls of an old castle,<sup>21</sup> and behaved as men who fear that God was there.

About a hundred and sixty simple, upright people are there united together, who are as little children, minding nothing but the salvation of their souls.<sup>22</sup>

These remarkable results can not be attributed only to the effects of Methodist preaching; nine months after Coughlan had left Colchester John Wesley revisited the society there and remarked in his journal

I found the society had decreased since L. C. went away; and yet they had full as good Preachers. But that is not sufficient: By repeated experiments we learn, that though a man preach like an angel, he will neither collect, nor preserve a society which is collected, without visiting them from house to

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<sup>20</sup>A slight exaggeration. In his journal Wesley noted "In the evening, and on Sunday morning, the house contained the congregation tolerably well; but in the afternoon I was obliged to go out; and I suppose we had on St. John's Green five or six times as many as the Room would contain. Such is the advantage of field-preaching." Journal entry for 3 March 1759, in Wesley, Works, 2:468.

<sup>21</sup>John Wesley to Lady Huntingdon, March 1759; from Life and Times of Lady Huntingdon, 1:399; quoted by Luke Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M. A., Founder of the Methodists, 2 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1973 [1872]), 2:324.

<sup>22</sup>John Wesley to Ebenezer Blackwell, 12 March 1759 in Wesley, Works, 8:326.

house.<sup>23</sup>

In August of 1758 Coughlan attended the Conference at Bristol, where he received appointments for the ensuing year to Newcastle and London.<sup>24</sup>

The centre of the Newcastle circuit was the town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where the Orphan House, the largest Methodist meeting-house in England<sup>25</sup> had been erected some sixteen years previously.<sup>26</sup> The Orphan House was patterned after the Pietist institution of the same name established by Francke at Halle.<sup>27</sup> It served simultaneously as a place of worship, a school for orphans, a refuge for the ill and oppressed, the northern home of John Wesley, and an institution in which young preachers received such concentrated instruction that Wesley claimed they could learn more philosophy there in six months than is commonly learned

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<sup>23</sup>Journal entry for Friday, 29 Jan. 1759, in Wesley, Works, 2:466.

<sup>24</sup>Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Vol. I. (London, John Mason, 1862). The account of the Bristol Conference of 1758 was taken from the notes of the Rev. John Jones.

<sup>25</sup>Tyerman, Life and Times, 1:393. Tyerman notes that one of the first Sunday-schools in the kingdom was established there, with not less than a thousand children in attendance.

<sup>26</sup>Wesley's journal records that he remained in Newcastle during the whole month of December, 1742 in order to choose a site and begin construction. Wesley, Works, 1:404ff.

<sup>27</sup>Edward Langton, The History of the Moravian Church (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1956), 108.

in four years at Oxford.<sup>28</sup> During Coughlan's time at Newcastle the Orphan House was home to four itinerants,<sup>29</sup> who, as well as serving a large and well-established circuit claiming eighteen hundred society members,<sup>30</sup> laboured to extend the influence of Methodism northwards.<sup>31</sup> The record does not indicate how many months Coughlan spent at this centre of learning and missionary effort.

London, where he was next stationed with seven other itinerants under the leadership of John Wesley, and, in his absence, Thomas Maxfield, was very unsettled in early 1759 because of a threatened invasion by the French. February 16th was declared a day of public fasting and on that day John Wesley preached four sermons in London, at the final of which Selina, the Countess of Huntingdon, was present. Feeling a need to do something to alleviate the peril of the country, this devout, wealthy aristocrat invited George Whitefield,

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<sup>28</sup>Tyerman, Life and Times, 1:543.

<sup>29</sup>In addition to Coughlan, Christopher Hopper, Alexander Mather, and Jacob Rowell were appointed to this circuit.

<sup>30</sup>Journal entry for 28 July 1759. Wesley, Works, 2:491.

<sup>31</sup>Alexander Mather noted "In the year 1758, being stationed in Newcastle Circuit (which then reached as far as Musselburgh)..." (Telford, Wesley's Veterans, 2:99.) In the spring of 1759, Christopher Hopper set out for the north and preached at Placey, Morpeth, Alnwick, Berwick, Dundee, and Musselburgh, then continued further on to preach at Leith, New and Old Aberdeen and Peterhead, returning to Newcastle by the same route. (Telford, Wesley's Veterans, 1:142) See also Thomas Rankin's autobiography, which details how Methodism spread into Aberdeen and Edinburgh via preachers stationed at Newcastle. (Telford, Wesley's Veterans, 6:131-2 and 136-7).

John and Charles Wesley and the preachers of their respective connexions to conduct a series of prayer meetings at her London mansion. These meetings were attended by many persons of distinction, including William Legge, the second Earl of Dartmouth who as President of the Board of Trade had responsibility for oversight of the Newfoundland fishery. Methodist preachers in the vicinity of London were invited, and, following the sermon, each prayed in turn.<sup>32</sup> Among them was Thomas Maxfield, and, presumably, Laurence Coughlan, whose career was subsequently influenced by his acquaintance with both Lady Huntingdon and the Earl of Dartmouth. His acquaintance with Thomas Maxfield was to prove less fortunate.

Coughlan was transferred in March of 1759 to Whitehaven,<sup>33</sup> a port situated in close proximity to the coal-mining centres of the mountains of Cumberland, which were included in the circuit. A strong Methodist society had been established in Whitehaven by John Wesley himself a decade previously.<sup>34</sup> He described the people of the area as plain, serious, and quiet; they assembled in large numbers to listen attentively to the open-air preaching, and responded willingly to the Methodist message. Their earnestness caused Wesley to

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<sup>32</sup>Tyerman, Life and Times, 2:323.

<sup>33</sup>John Wesley to Matthew Lowes, 6 March 1759, in John Telford (ed.) The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M. S sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1960 [1931]), 4:56f.

<sup>34</sup>Tyerman, Life and Times, 2:117.

remark "surely here, above any other place in England, 'God hath chosen the poor of this world'".<sup>35</sup>

However, in the year following Laurence Coughlan's appointment to the Whitehaven circuit, problems began to be evident. Their earnestness appears to have been improperly directed. Wesley noted in his journal on Saturday, 25 April 1761,

As the people at Whitehaven are usually full of zeal, right or wrong, I this evening showed them the nature of Christian zeal.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps some of them may now distinguish the flame of love, from a fire kindled in hell.<sup>37</sup>

The sermon which Wesley preached on this occasion distinguished between true Christian zeal and its counterfeit. True Christian zeal, he said, is always joined with fervent love and is directed towards the church and its ordinances, works of piety and mercy, and the cultivation of holy tempers. It leads to humility, patience and love. Its counterfeit is wrongly directed. It leads to bitterness, anger, and hatred. Was the strong sectarian feeling which Wesley felt he must address in Whitehaven a result of Coughlan's preaching? Or, did Coughlan merely fail to deal with it adequately? It is impossible now to tell, however, the incident is significant in the light of the kind of zeal which his presence in

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<sup>35</sup>Journal entry for 11 April 1753, in Wesley, Works, 2:284.

<sup>36</sup>A reference to his sermon "On Zeal", found in Wesley, Works, 7:57ff.

<sup>37</sup>Journal entry for 25 April 1761, in Wesley, Works, 3:51.

Conception Bay later aroused among his converts there.

The Bristol Conference of 1760 reappointed Coughlan to Ireland. His voyage home in the company of two fellow itinerants<sup>38</sup> proved to be the stuff of legend. Mocked by fellow passengers as they began their journey with prayer, they found all on board more amenable to join them in prayer later, when a terrible storm arose, seas rolled over the deck to the height of half-mast, and death seemed inevitable. The crew being forced to go below and leave the ship to her own devices, they fully expected to perish during the night. In the morning they were astonished to find the ship, unguided by human hand, safely entering Dublin Bay, their appointed destination. This incident, which caused fellow passengers to both acknowledge the power of their prayer and gratefully receive their exhortations to repentance, made an auspicious beginning for Coughlan's mission to Waterford, where "his labours were greatly blessed".<sup>39</sup>

Although the record is silent concerning his whereabouts during the intervening period, sometime before the year 1762 Coughlan returned to London. During the height of the Maxfield controversy, when internal dissent was raging within the Methodist fold, he again earned the praise of John Wesley who commented to his brother Charles "I have scarcely one

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<sup>38</sup>William Thompson, a compatriot, and Thomas Tobias, who was Welsh.

<sup>39</sup>Crookshank, Methodism in Ireland, 1:148f.

hearty helper but Laurence Coughlan".<sup>40</sup> This good relationship was not to last. Tyerman records that "For nine years, Lawrence Coughlan was one of Wesley's itinerants. In 1764, he was ordained by Erasmus, the Greek bishop, and was put away from the Methodist connexion."<sup>41</sup>

Whether or not this was the cause of the breach or merely one more incident in a deteriorating relationship remains uncertain. The first of the Erasmus ordinations was instigated by John Wesley himself early in 1763, during a period when the Rev. John Richardson was his only ordained assistant and the bishops of the Church of England were unanimous in refusing to ordain men for the Methodist movement. Thus Wesley was distressed by his inability to have the Lord's Supper administered at the Foundery, his London headquarters, when he himself was travelling. After checking the credentials of the destitute foreigner who called himself Erasmus, Bishop of Arcadia in Crete, he asked him to ordain his assistant, Dr. John Jones, "a man of considerable learning, of good abilities, and of deep piety",<sup>42</sup> who had been seventeen years a lay preacher. Charles Wesley and others were incensed; not only was such an act illegal under the Act of Uniformity, it could seriously affect their relationship with those clergy of

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<sup>40</sup>John Wesley to Charles Wesley, 6 March 1763, in Telford, Letters, 4:204.

<sup>41</sup>Tyerman, Life and Times, 3:25.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 3:486.

the Church of England with whom they still enjoyed a cordial relationship. Out of deference to his opinion, John Wesley did not allow Jones to celebrate the sacrament until March of 1764 when the exigencies of the situation, always an important consideration for him, seemed to dictate it. What Charles Wesley had feared came to pass. Others who had been denied ordination for various reasons approached the compliant foreign bishop. A furore erupted in the press. John Wesley, trying to vindicate himself in a letter to the St. James' Chronicle, admitted only that the ordination of Jones had been at his request. He added

When I was gone out of town, Bishop Erasmus was prevailed upon to ordain Lawrence Coughlan, a person who had no learning at all.

Some time after, Mr. Maxfield,<sup>43</sup> or his friends, sent for him from Amsterdam, to ordain Mr. S\_t<sup>44</sup> and three other persons, as unlearned as any of the Apostles, but I believe not so much inspired.

In December last he was sent for again, and ordained six other persons, members of our society, but every way, I think, unqualified for that office. These I judged it my duty to disclaim (to waive all other considerations) for a fault which I know not who can excuse, buying an ordination in an

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<sup>43</sup>Thomas Maxfield, the first Methodist lay preacher, had become the leader of the London enthusiasts by 1763. He quarrelled with John Wesley and left the Methodists. Ordained by an Irish bishop, he was at this time preaching independently.

<sup>44</sup>Sampson Staniforth mentions this incident in his autobiography, as follows: "In the year 1764 I was sent for by Mr. (Maxfield) to his house. The messenger told me he wanted to speak with me, and I must come immediately. When I came I found the Grecian bishop with him, who ordained me and three more. But finding, it would offend my brethren, I have never availed myself of it to this hour." Telford, Wesley's Veterans, 6:97.

\* unknown tongue.<sup>45</sup>

The following disclaimer was also published:

1. None of those six persons lately ordained by a Greek bishop were ordained with my consent or knowledge.
2. I will not, cannot, own or receive them as clergymen.<sup>46</sup>

Two days after that letter was written a Conference held at the Foundery, the Methodist headquarters, declared that the six gentlemen in question "Can no more be owned as clergymen, and can no more be received as preachers, nor as members of society".<sup>47</sup> No mention was made of Laurence Coughlan or of John Jones in this disclaimer. Both had already left the Methodist connexion; Jones to be re-ordained by the Bishop of London and presented the living of Harwich,<sup>48</sup> and Coughlan to become "Preacher of God's Word" at an independent meeting house registered in his own name in the Parish of St. Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey, in Surrey.<sup>49</sup>

Future efforts by Coughlan to rejoin the Methodists were

<sup>45</sup>John Wesley to the Printer of St. James' Chronicle, 10 Feb. 1765. Telford, Letters, 4:290.

<sup>46</sup>John Wesley to the Printer of St. James' Chronicle, 5 Feb. 1765. *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>Tyerman, Life and Times, 2:508.

<sup>49</sup>"Late Eighteenth-Century Dissent in Surrey," Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society 17/4 (November 1955), 128-135, as quoted by Rollmann "Laurence Coughlan", 57. The meeting house was registered on 4 Oct. 1764.

to be rebuffed by John Wesley. Had the illicit ordination been the only cause for concern, he would perhaps have been acceptable to the Methodists following his years in Newfoundland.<sup>50</sup> But John Wesley had discovered in this impetuous man a doctrinal heterodoxy which was incompatible with his own theology. This alleged heterodoxy will be explored more fully in Chapter III.

#### **2.4 Coughlan Comes to Newfoundland**

Meanwhile, in Newfoundland, the merchants and employers of Harbour Grace and Carbonear had built a church and were searching for a minister. Rev. Edward Langman, the Anglican missionary at St. John's, noted this in his annual report to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in the fall of 1764.

I was very desirous, on my return from Trinity, to have paid a visit to Harbour Grace, by reason, the Inhabitants of that place and Carboneer a Neighbouring place, and some other Inhabitants of Conception Bay, have lately raised a Subscription for erecting a new church at Harbour Grace; Having had a frame of wood and other materials brought them from Boston in New England to complete the Same, in the Same form and bigness as the Church at St. John's, and from what I can learn from Several who came to St. John's this last Summer, have fix'd up the frame & gone a great way toward finishing the Said Church: praying me at the same time, to come round to them, and perform Divine Service to them the Next Summer as often as I could, consistent with my more immediate Duty at St. John's: which indeed I promised to do, If the

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<sup>50</sup>The illicit ordination was no longer an impediment once he had been re-ordained by the Bishop of Chester in 1766 in preparation for his Newfoundland ministry.

Worthy Society would be pleased to give me their directions for so Doing. I should indeed have visited Harbour Grace this Summer in my return from Trinity, But was forced back to St. John's by contrary winds, as mentioned above: But God willing, shall visit the place next summer in my return from Trinity, and perform Divine Service in their new Church which the Inhabitants, Merchants and Employers of Harbour Grace, Carboneer Et cetera: are being Desirous of having a resident Missionary to perform Divine Service in, If the Worthy Society shall think proper to Send one among them. I am told there is now a Subscription on foot amongst the people there, for the Support of a Minister, beside what the Society Shd. allow yearly, in case the Society Shd. Send one to them, but cannot Say at present the Amount of it...<sup>51</sup>

This letter clearly assumes that the minister would be from the Established church and sponsored by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. It is impossible to determine whether this assumption is Langman's own or whether it originated with the "several who came to St. John's last summer", who were, most probably, merchant traders from Harbour Grace. It does, however, indicate confusion even in this early stage as to the type of minister desired by the community, for the initial approach was not made to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, but directly to Laurence Coughlan.

Coughlan's background as a Methodist itinerant and as an Independent preacher, his doctrinal heterodoxy, his lack of formal theological education, and his irregular ordination at the hands of the Greek Bishop, would not, in the eyes of some,

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<sup>51</sup>Edward Langman to SPG Secretary, 6 November 1764.  
B.6/161.

preclude him from being considered a Minister of the Established Church if only he could be properly re-ordained. A personal approach was made to William Legge, the second Earl of Dartmouth, then President of the Board of Trade.

We whose names are here underwritten being desirous of having a Minister of the Established Church settled at Harbour Grace in Newfound Land having heard the Character of the Bearer Mr. Lawrence Coughlan whom we think a proper Person if he would obtain Holy Orders Do earnestly recommend him to your Lordship and hope you will use your endeavour to get him Ordained & settled at Harbour Grace which we shall esteem a great favour as we think he may be a great Blessing to the Colony.

We are your Lordships most h'ble servts,

Geo: Davis, Newfd Land Merchant  
George Welch, Banker in Cornhill<sup>52</sup>

The expressed desire for "a Minister of the Established Church" may have been a subterfuge. George Welch, known in London as a prominent dissenter, was brother-in-law to Martin Kemp, one of the Poole merchants active in Carbonear. This is the same Martin Kemp who had been largely responsible for establishing the Congregationalist church in Poole,<sup>53</sup> and the same George Welch who was later to be instrumental in raising funds in England to construct the Congregational Meeting House in St. John's.<sup>54</sup> Welch was also a relative of the Rev.

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<sup>52</sup>Davis and Welch to the Earl of Dartmouth, 16 April 1766. Fulham Papers, Lambeth Palace, London. A transcript was obtained courtesy of Dr. Hans Rollmann.

<sup>53</sup>Beamish, Hillier and Johnstone, Mansions and Merchants, 65-66.

<sup>54</sup>J. S. S. Armour, "Religious Dissent in St. John's, 1775-1815." (M.A. thesis, Memorial U. of Nfld., 1988), 113.

Edward Ashburner, whose church Kemp had founded. In approaching the Earl of Dartmouth, Welch knew he was approaching one who also had strong ties to the Calvinistic Methodists. Known as a friend of dissenters, the Earl of Dartmouth had already obtained the ordination of several connected with Lady Huntingdon, including John Newton who, like Coughlan, had been previously ordained by Bishop Erasmus.<sup>55</sup>

The Earl lost no time in acceding to the request from Davis and Welch. Two days later he sent Coughlan with a note to the Bishop of London.

I intended to have waited upon your Lordp. yesterday if I could have found a moments leisure, to lay before your Lordp. the enclosed papers wch. I now send your Lordp. by Mr Coughlan the gentleman recommended in them, because he tells me that the ship in wch. he is to sail, if yr. Lordp. shall think fit to ordain him, now lies at Pool, & will sail as soon as he gets thither.<sup>56</sup>

The role played by the Earl of Dartmouth in his ordination was acknowledged by Coughlan who later wrote from Harbour Grace "...it was under your Lordship's Patronage I first came here. In short I may safely say you were the only instrument under God of getting me ordained and so of comeing to this

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<sup>55</sup>The connection between Welch, Ashburner and the dissenters of Conception Bay, and the connection between the Earl of Dartmouth and dissenters has been established by Rollmann, "Laurence Coughlan", 57f.

<sup>56</sup>The Earl of Dartmouth to the Bishop of London, 18 April 1766. Fulham Papers, Lambeth Palace, London. A transcript was obtained courtesy of Dr. Hans Rollmann.

Land".<sup>57</sup> The Earl's influence caused events to happen quickly. Laurence Coughlan was ordained Deacon of the Church of England by the Bishop of Lincoln, on April 25th., 1766.<sup>58</sup> The next day he was licensed to Newfoundland by the Bishop of London.<sup>59</sup> The following day he was consecrated Priest by the Bishop of Chester. He sailed for Newfoundland shortly thereafter accompanied by his wife, Anne, and daughter, Betsey.

Coughlan arrived in Harbour Grace with the fishing fleet in the spring of 1766. At the end of the fishing season he returned to England bearing a petition to the SPG from "the Inhabitants of Harbour Grace, Carbonear and parts adjacent in the Bay of Conception, Newfoundland"<sup>60</sup> to solicit their financial support for his ministry. Having succeeded,<sup>61</sup> he spent the winter and spring in England and arrived back in

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<sup>57</sup>Laurence Coughlan to the Earl of Dartmouth, Harbour Grace, 25 Oct. 1772. Dartmouth Originals, MG 23, A1/2:2497.

<sup>58</sup>Lw. Coughlan's papers for orders recd. 11 April 1766. Fulham Papers, Lambeth Palace, London. A transcript was obtained courtesy of Dr. Hans Rollmann.

<sup>59</sup>Licenses to the Plantations. Fulham Papers, 39:67 and 95. (CNS microfilm #3636, reel 19).

<sup>60</sup>Quoted in full above.

<sup>61</sup>The SPG minutes state "The Rev. Mr. Lawrence Coughlan attended the Board, & shewed a petition from the Inhabitants of Harbour Grace & Carboneer in Newfoundland desiring that Mr. Coughlan be appointed their Miss:ry & giving strong Assurances that they will allow him a Salary sufficient for his Support. Resolved that Mr. Coughlan be appointed Miss:ry at Harbour Grace & Carboneer with a Salary of L50 p. ann. to commence from Mich: last, & that the treasurer advance him half a year's Salary." SPG Journal 17:209-210. A/153.

Harbour Grace on the sixth of September, 1767.<sup>62</sup>

## 2.5 The Three Discouraging Years

The ministry in Newfoundland proved to be a challenging one. Coughlan was to write that

The Gospel was preached in Newfoundland near three Years before there was the least Appearance of any Awakening. This was very discouraging to me, insomuch that I often concluded that God had never called me to that Place. This kept me exceeding low; at last, I was determined, that I would not stay in such a poor desolate Land, and spend my Strength for nought...I concluded, that God had never sent me to that People; and therefore I had settled my Affairs, in order to return to England.<sup>63</sup>

There is no record of the letter Coughlan must have written to John Wesley during this period, expressing an interest in returning to the Methodist itinerancy in England. Wesley's reply was unequivocal. Coughlan, "by a various train of providences," was now in the place where God had intended him to be and should reconcile himself to staying there.<sup>64</sup>

Yet despite these expressions of discouragement Coughlan's reports to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel give the impression of a very successful ministry. That is, if one

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<sup>62</sup>Laurence Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 28 October 1767. B.6/170. "I take this opportunity to inform you of our safe arrival to this place. We had above 7 weeks voyage. We landed here the 6 of Sept."

<sup>63</sup>Coughlan, Account, 7f.

<sup>64</sup>Wesley to Coughlan, 27 Aug. 1768, in Telford, Journal, 5:283.

measures success by indices such as church attendance, church membership, and church extension.

Church attendance, which had been constant from the very beginning, showed continual growth. Within two months of his arrival back in Newfoundland Coughlan was able to report that "the natives attend the Church very constant."<sup>65</sup> At Christmas he celebrated the Lord's Supper for the first time and at the request of the people made this a monthly event. By the end of his first full year Coughlan was able to report that "there are eighty communicants, who for the most part constantly attend, and are chiefly Natives of the Land."<sup>66</sup> Twelve months later the number of communicants had doubled; he was able to report "I administer the Holy Sacrament once every month. There are a hundred and 60 Communicants and many more are preparing."<sup>67</sup>

Membership increased steadily during the first three years. Ten infants were baptized shortly after Coughlan's arrival, forty-six more within the first full year, and sixty-two the year after. But adult baptisms are perhaps a truer indication of the importance church allegiance came to have in the communities; a total of ninety adults were baptized

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<sup>65</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 28 Oct. 1767. B.6/170.

<sup>66</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 15 Oct. 1768. B.6/175.

<sup>67</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 13 Oct. 1769. B.6/179. The revival occurred during the winter before this letter was written, which accounts for the fact that the number of communicants doubled over the year before.

within this same period.<sup>68</sup>

The church was extended to other communities. A chapel was built in Carbonear, five miles to the north, and services were held there every second Sunday. As well, a charity school, established by Coughlan shortly after his arrival back in the community, was able to boast of forty-two pupils and was successful in securing financial assistance from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.<sup>69</sup>

There were of course some disappointments. The people who had originally pledged financial support were reluctant to honour their pledges.<sup>70</sup> Common fishermen, both English and Irish, continued to marry and baptize, and the magistrate, Charles Garland, was not disposed to put a stop to it.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>"Thirty had been baptized by October of 1768, and another sixty by October of 1769. The thirty persons baptized during 1768 were probably ones who had not had the opportunity to be baptized previously. Some of the sixty persons baptized during the following year must belong to the same category; others may have taken this step because of the revival.

<sup>69</sup>Laurence Coughlan to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 17 Oct. 1768. B.6/175.

<sup>70</sup>"Kind Sir I would be forever oblige to you if you could send me the Petition which the people hear sent to His Lordship the Bishop of London his Lordship will be kind anouf to keep a copy of it and send me the original for except I have it (as it is a Bond wher in the promise) they will not consent to make any comfortable liveing." Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 20 October 1767. B.6/170.

<sup>71</sup>"Common fishermen Englis and Irish in this Parish Mary and Baptize. I desired the Justice of Peace to put a stop to it (as I was apointed and ordained to do it) but took no notice of it. As our Governor will be at London a word from you would no doubt answer a good end. An order from the Governor to our Church wardons to Fine whould forever put a stop to it." Laurence Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 13 October

Initial hopes of converting from "popery" large numbers of the Irish, who in the beginning had flocked to the church to hear him preach in Gaelic, began to subside.<sup>72</sup> But the overall impression is of a very successful ministry. Why then, was Coughlan so discouraged?

Coughlan did not count church attendance, church membership or church extension as his measure of success. He regarded himself as a "true Evangelical Minister", one under whose ministry many souls are simultaneously converted in the sudden and striking manner typical of a revival. A steady increase in churchmanship was not sufficient to convince him his ministry was succeeding; he needed a more dramatic proof.

None can tell the Affliction which a Minister of Jesus Christ feels, when he has the Care of a Parish, and very little Fruit of his Labour; this is like hewing of Wood; or drawing of Water. Those who are called Ministers, but are not sent of God, Gallio like, care for none of these Things; if they have their Salary, and their Income answers their Expectation, all is well with them; they desire no further Proof of their being sent of God; but this will not content a true Evangelical Minister... A true Minister looks for a more glorious Fruit of

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1769. B.6/179.

<sup>72</sup>Coughlan wrote "The Irish are all Papists, many of which comes to Church to hear me preach in the Irish Tongue, it is to be hoped that in time some of them will be brought to see Thus the error of Popery." (Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 28 October 1767. B.6/170) and, two years later, "Many of the Papists come to Church and many more would come (as I speake in the Irish tongue) but numbers of them go to Ireland Annually where they go to confession: Their Priest finding they go to Church, when in Newfoundland, puts them under heavy Pennance this they told me when I asked some of them why they did not come to Church: Notwithstanding all the Priest can do many of them come to Church." (Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 15 October 1769. B.6/179)

his Labour, and Proof that God has called him to preach his everlasting Gospel.<sup>73</sup>

Coughlan's attempt to rejoin Wesley's connexion during this period reflects his discouragement with the response of the people. Convinced that he himself was "a true Minister", he could only conclude that the lack of "born again" experiences among his parishioners was because God had ordained that they should not respond. Therefore, he concluded, perhaps he had been wrong in thinking God had called him to Conception Bay.

#### 2.6 The Awakening

At the end of these three dry and discouraging years, the proof Coughlan had so earnestly prayed for occurred suddenly and dramatically. He reported

... at length God was pleased to bless my Endeavours in a very wonderful Manner: For now many were pricked to the heart, and cried out "What must I do to be saved?" Some prayed aloud in the Congregation, others praised aloud, and declared what God had done for their souls. Nor was this only at their private Meetings, now and then, but also in the great Congregations.<sup>74</sup>

From then until his departure from Newfoundland in 1773 Coughlan's ministry was marked by an emotional intensity which led many individuals to experience conversion. "Under almost every Sermon and Exhortation," he wrote, "some were cut to the

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<sup>73</sup>Coughlan, Account, 8.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 9.

Heart and others rejoiced in loud Songs of Praises;...that the mighty Power of God came down was very Manifest...God was daily adding to the church such as should be eternally saved..."<sup>75</sup>

The remarkable displays of anguish evidenced by the convicted, and the overwhelming joy expressed by the converted, led to rumours that the people of Harbour Grace and Carbonear had gone mad. Curious and entertainment-starved people arrived from miles around to enjoy the spectacle, and soon found themselves caught up in the emotions of the event.

Coughlan wrote

... a Report soon spread over the Bay, and great Part of the Land, that the People at Harbour-Grace and Carbonear were going mad; this was taken for granted but out of this seeming Evil, God brought forth Good: The Report of the Madness brought many from various Quarters to hear for themselves, and when they heard, many of them were like the Bereans, they searched the Scriptures, and found what they heard to be agreeable thereto.- Some came fifteen, some twenty Miles, to hear the Word: I have known some come, with their dear Infants in their Arms, over Mountains of Snow, at the Hazard of their Lives; so mightily did the Word of God prevail.

The response to Coughlan's preaching was by no means uniform in every community of the Bay. It seems to have been most ardent in Blackhead, where a compact and homogenous group

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<sup>75</sup>Coughlan, Account, 12.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 16.

of people were able to unite under strong lay leadership.<sup>77</sup>

A Proof of the great Zeal, which filled those dear Souls in one Part of the Bay, called Blackhead, upon the North Shore, was this:- They proposed to me, to point out a Place where I would choose to build a Church, which was agreed upon; accordingly all Hands went into the Wood, and cut down as much of it as they wanted, which they hauled out upon what they call Slides. When they had the Timber upon the Place, they sent for me, and I went, thinking there was not one Stick hewn; however they had made great Progress in the Work.... the said Church was framed, and covered in, in less than fourteen Days, which contained about four hundred People.<sup>78</sup>

The people of Blackhead had discovered in the church services conducted by Laurence Coughlan something which fulfilled their deepest needs. In their desolate and isolated situation on "a very wild shore" they were introduced to a God who took a personal interest in establishing a relationship with them. Thoroughly convinced that the emotional extremes exhibited at the services in Harbour Grace and Carbonear were manifestations of the power of God working in people's hearts, the inhabitants of Blackhead wanted this same power for themselves. They created within their own community a place where the power of God could be manifested in their midst, a church that was ten times larger than the population of the community called for. Unfortunately, Coughlan was unable to preach there with any frequency, and

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<sup>77</sup>A third of the dozen or so families then living at Blackhead bore the surname Moores. Great Britain Colonial Office "Return of possessions and inhabitants in Conception Bay 1702-1807" CO 199/ 18; FA/41, MHA.

<sup>78</sup>Coughlan, Account, 18f.

the anticipated large congregation did not materialize. They were unable without Coughlan's preaching to replicate the visceral emotionalism which was to them a sign of the presence of God's power. Dissatisfied with merely meeting together to read a service from the Book of Common Prayer followed by one of Wesley's sermons, as often as possible they deserted their new church to attend the services in the larger communities, where events were more dramatic and emotionalism was more readily sustained.<sup>79</sup> Gradually a new community began to form, one not based geographically, but on the sharing of a common religious experience. "They that feared the Lord spake often to one another."<sup>80</sup> Isolation and desolation were conquered. In satisfying their religious need, the people of Blackhead also satisfied their social and emotional needs, and this in turn reinforced their positive attitude towards religion.

The Blackhead experience illustrates how the religious

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<sup>79</sup>"Having preached in the New Church at Black-head sometimes, as I could come here but seldom, it being a very wild Shore, I appointed them to meet together, and read the Church Service; and afterwards to read a Sermon, which I furnished them with: Thus they continued to do; and when the Weather permitted them, they would come to Harbour-Grace and Carbonear, notwithstanding it was near eighteen Miles by Water. I have known them often come over the mighty Waters, at the Hazard of their Lives, with their little Babes in their Arms;- but what will not precious Souls, who have the Love of God shed abroad in their Hearts, go through for a dear Redeemer: God did great Things, in a short Time, in these Parts." Coughlan, Account, 19f.

<sup>80</sup>Coughlan, Account, 18.

revival, once begun, spread from one community to another. But it does not explain how the Awakening itself occurred. To do this we need to examine Coughlan's pastoral method, his preaching style, his understanding of the nature of religious conversion, and his use of death-bed experiences.

#### 2.7 Coughlan's Pastoral Method

The outstanding feature of Laurence Coughlan's ministry at Colchester, which had earned him the commendation of John Wesley, had been house to house visiting. It was a method which he also used extensively in Newfoundland.

In the Course of the Winter, I went from House to House, and read a portion of God's Word; and expounded the same: This I continued to do about four Times a Week, for near three Years, before I perceived the least Fruit of my Labour.<sup>81</sup>

For three Years I laboured Night and Day, from House to House; but I could not perceive any Appearance of Conviction, or Conversion, take place throughout the Parish.<sup>82</sup>

Although Coughlan himself could not see any positive results from this house to house visiting, the people were being prepared for an Awakening. During the visits he was imparting what he believed to be the principles of Methodist theology, and creating among the inhabitants the expectation that they should experience conviction and conversion. He was reinforcing the credibility of this theology by reference to Scripture, and impressing it upon the minds of the people

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<sup>81</sup>Coughlan, Account, 11.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 9.

through hymn-singing. He was introducing prayer into the homes of the people, by praying with them and for them, and leading them to pray for each other. Through this very personal approach he was uniting them to himself and to each other. The boat-keepers and their servants, who were accustomed to being socially isolated from the upper class, now had a clergyman repeatedly visiting them in their homes and taking a very personal interest in their well-being. The strong bond of friendship and climate of trust that developed between them and Coughlan formed one basis for the emotionality of the early Newfoundland conversions.

Ernest Harms' study of the process of religious conversion indicates that although conversion is always to some degree an ethical and rational decision, these often play minor roles in comparison to the emotional elements. Emotionalism may be stimulated by the ceremonial, but even more so by the "power of the personality" of the evangelist, which often plays a more important role than the message he brings.<sup>83</sup>

In the letters sent to Coughlan following his removal from Newfoundland his followers refer again and again to the strength of their personal attachment to him. I quote only two of them, both male:

I feel myself greatly attached to you, it was you that was the Messenger of Peace to my Soul; and I can assure you, if I was not so much advanced in

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<sup>83</sup> Ernest Harms, "Ethical and Psychological Implications of Religious Conversion," Review of Religious Research 3/3 (Winter 1962), 123f.

Years as I am, that I would gladly undertake a Voyage to England, for no other Purpose, but to see your Face once more in the Flesh; but as it is improbable that we shall meet again in the Body, I trust, we shall at last meet in the Realms of Bliss and Glory, to part no more.<sup>84</sup>

O my dear Father, how can I express the emotions of my Heart for you! I cannot express them: what earthly Friend have I, that lays so near my Heart as dear Mr. Coughlan...It was a Matter of great Grief and Sorrow, when we heard, that you was not coming to us again...<sup>85</sup>

The house to house visiting bonded the people to Coughlan. His visits set up a religious climate and imparted a teaching that laid the groundwork for the Awakening. But the impetus which set that remarkable event in motion came from Coughlan's preaching.

## **2.8 Coughlan's Preaching**

Laurence Coughlan preached what are commonly referred to as "hellfire and brimstone" sermons. Stress was laid on the sovereignty and unlimited power of God; this was contrasted with the helplessness of the human condition. Coughlan, like Wesley, believed that from the time of Adam's rebellion humankind has been utterly depraved and unable without direct divine intervention to escape the power of sin. The signs of this depravity could be seen in the drunkenness, brawling, and Sabbath-breaking evident in the community. Other sins were

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<sup>84</sup>J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774 in Coughlan, Account, 103.

<sup>85</sup>J.T. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 24 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 153.

also apparent, and Coughlan did not hesitate to point them out, naming names and denouncing from the pulpit the behaviour of particular individuals.<sup>86</sup> The inhabitants were taught that their sinfulness inevitably deserved the wrath of God. Lurid descriptions of the hell which would be their certain fate elicited a response of fear and trembling. Elizabeth Locke remembered this aspect of Coughlan's preaching many years later.

"You can not think," she would say, "what a state Newfoundland was in, when that man of God came among us. Imagine any sin you will, and you can not think of anything too bad. He would sometimes describe the sins of the land in language that polite people would be shocked at; yet they knew he was speaking only the truth. One expression he would use, when earnestly enforcing the commandment of God - 'Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins,' -was 'You fishermen, you Newfoundland fishermen,' he would say with great emphasis, 'I tell you, if you repent not, your sins will sink you into Hell.'"<sup>87</sup>

Elizabeth Locke was not alone in identifying Coughlan with the prophet Isaiah.<sup>88</sup> Mary Stretton, leader of the class in Harbour Grace, and Thomas Pottle, lay preacher from Clouns

<sup>86</sup>This trait led to the 1771 court case in which the merchant Hugh Roberts accused Coughlan of slander. This will be dealt with fully in chapter five.

<sup>87</sup>Wilson, Newfoundland and its Missionaries, 138.

<sup>88</sup>The quotation "Cry aloud, and spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet..." begins Isaiah 58, a chapter which also emphasises the need for humility, charity and keeping holy the Sabbath and promises that the obedient "shall take delight in the Lord", all key Methodist themes.

Cove, used the same quotation to refer to Coughlan's preaching.<sup>89</sup> This correspondence of thought in three widely disparate sources indicates that Coughlan was frequently identified with the prophet who pointed out to the people their transgressions.

Aroused by terror and anger, the fisherfolk were led to believe that their hearts were naturally sinful, hard, wretched, weak, untrustworthy and totally corrupt, and that they deserved nothing but the everlasting fires of hell. Even if there were no particular transgressions to recall, hell would be the well-deserved fate of any who had not been "born again". As one man put it: "I saw myself fit for Hell and Destruction, and knew that, if I was not washed in the Blood of Jesus, I could not be saved."<sup>90</sup>

But there was hope; an awareness of the true state of affairs leads to conviction, a state of acute anxiety and emotional stress which might last several days, or, as reported by some of the Newfoundland converts, several years. A seventy-year old widow wrote

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<sup>89</sup>"My soul would fly, if possible, to hear the Gospel Trumpet sounded by you; Oh! Sir, when I consider how often I have been blessed under your Preaching, it melts me into Tears now I am deprived of the Happiness." M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 October 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 76.

"May a double Portion of the dear Redeemer's Spirit be upon you, enabling you to blow the Gospel Trumpet very loud, in every Place where God calls you forth." T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 7 Jan. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 77.

<sup>90</sup>J.B. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 1 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 122.

From my Youth up, I was moral, and regular in my Conversation, of a sober, reserved Disposition; yet totally blind to my Corruption by Nature, till the merciful Lord sent you into this Place, to preach the everlasting Gospel...The first Time I heard you preach I was convinced of Sin; the Truth found a way to my Heart, and I saw and felt my lost Condition by Nature; and my whole Life appeared a Blot: I saw, that I had never done one good Action all my long Life; and my grief was great and sore that ever I offended a good, an infinitely good God: I laboured under this Distress of Soul near two Years; during which Time, I sought the Lord earnestly with Tears, Night and Day....<sup>91</sup>

For Coughlan, religion was pre-eminently an affair of the heart, and his exhortations were indeed designed to "cut to the heart". It was not enough to merely understand the doctrine of total depravity, one had to experience it.

...though the Fruit of your Labour did not appear in me, yet, I hope, it will yet spring up; Oh! that it may become a great Tree.- This I can say, that my one Desire is to serve God and do his Will: I know, that I must be born again; but, I think, that I do not feel my great Depravity by Nature, although I see it very clearly. My Life has been regular, therefore the Guilt of Sin does not lie so heavy upon me as it otherwise might.- I hope, you will remember me in your Prayers; pray, that Jesus would send the Comforter,<sup>92</sup> to convince me feelingly of Sin, of Unbelief, of inbred Corruption; that I may not only see, but feel my lost Condition, both by Nature and Practice: For though I have not many Sins of Commission to accuse myself with, yet I must certainly have many Sins of Omission lying heavy on my Soul, notwithstanding, I am not truly sensible of their Weight.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>M.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 99.

<sup>92</sup>The reference here to the Holy Spirit as Comforter is an anomaly; nowhere else in Coughlan's book is the expression used. It was normative to refer to Jesus Christ as the one bringing comfort.

<sup>93</sup>Coughlan, Account, 147f.

Coughlan taught that persons experiencing the acute anxiety of conviction were already in the first stage of the conversion experience. They were not to be comforted. There was only one way in which the distress could be relieved - by supernatural agency. God would, without fail, but in his own time, move within the heart of the sinner who would experience this movement as a sudden "flow of joy". Those who experienced this were justified and assured of a place in heaven.<sup>94</sup>

Reactions to Coughlan's preaching were mixed. Inhabitants with no previous experience of organized religion had the least problem accepting what he was preaching.<sup>95</sup> Others needed verification that his doctrine was correct.<sup>96</sup> Some objected to the doctrine he was preaching, such as the man who declared that "he was for the Church, the Church; and that he was sure the clergy in England did not preach up, that People

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<sup>94</sup>Mrs. A., the mid-wife, expresses the moment thus "I can, by no means, describe the amazing Alteration I suddenly felt. I was happy, my Night was turned into Day, my Hell was changed to a Heaven." C.A. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 113f. And, from a man, "the Change was so sudden, that I was, as it were, confounded; I knew not what to say, or think ... I was willing, that instant, to die; for I knew, that my Sins were pardoned, and that my God would receive me into his blessed Arms." J. S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 125.

<sup>95</sup>Some of these were no doubt influenced by the fact that Coughlan had been ordained within the Established church.

<sup>96</sup>"When I first heard you preach, I went and searched the Scriptures, to find if these Things were so; and I found, that your Preaching and the Word of God agreed;" James Noseworthy to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 87.

must go to Hell; except they were born again."<sup>97</sup> Others, whose sins he had not neglected to point out publicly, withdrew their financial support as a protest against his methods of preaching.<sup>98</sup>

Coughlan had some difficulty understanding why the almost instantaneous results he had experienced in Colchester and elsewhere were not happening in Newfoundland. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that in Colchester, a town famous for the Protestant martyrs it had produced,<sup>99</sup> there existed a long-standing Dissenting element to whom religious inferiority and the doctrine of justification by faith were not new. In other locations where Coughlan preached Methodism had already been introduced. Sermons which had been effective elsewhere did not get the expected results in Newfoundland until the doctrine Coughlan was teaching had been accepted by a large body of people. Coughlan lamented

My poor Heart often criea out, the Power will come  
in such a Time, and under such a Sermon; but the

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<sup>97</sup>Coughlan, Account, 22.

<sup>98</sup>"One Merchant was sent in the Name of many, or as a Representative of the Body, to me, with this message, That if I did not change my Way of Preaching, they would withdraw their Subscriptions...From this Time, many of the Gentry withdrew their Subscriptions, and as they could not stop me from preaching, they were determined to Starve me." Coughlan, Account, 14.

<sup>99</sup>The town features prominently in Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" which during the reign of Elizabeth I had been placed in every parish church in England. John Foxe, The Acts and Monuments of these latter and perilous dayes, 8 vols., introduction by George Townsend (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 8:303-310.

Voice of God is not in our Way or Time, but when he will, and by whom, and in what Manner he pleases.<sup>100</sup>

Finally, during the winter of 1768-69, the long-anticipated Power was manifested. It was stimulated by a sermon designed to induce an emotional response.

#### **2.9 The Pivotal Sermon**

Appended to Coughlan's account of the revival in Conception Bay is a summary of the sermon which initiated the revival.<sup>101</sup> It contrasts the death bed experiences of two members of the community. The first, having previously been convicted, suddenly on his death-bed sensed the grace of God testifying "I am thy salvation". The second, who opposed Coughlan's doctrine, had denied altogether the necessity of being born again. The first was a "blessed Testimony", and the second a terrible example of the end that awaited the unredeemed sinner who refused to accept the doctrine Coughlan was teaching. The events related in this sermon provided, for many, proof that Coughlan's doctrine was correct. But, more than that, it was an occasion of mourning for the community. Emotions were already intense, and Coughlan's vivid description of the dying father's tender farewell to his ancient parents, his loving wife and their six small children could leave no one unaffected.

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<sup>100</sup>Coughlan, Account, 11f.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 20-24.

The anguish of spirit that could be awakened by a consideration of death was enhanced, in those who believed themselves unredeemed, by the certain knowledge that they too would face an agonizing end. Persons hovering on the point of death were portrayed as already experiencing the fate that would be theirs after death. The unredeemed sinner, whose child begged him to pray for salvation before it was too late, cried in anguish

"Oh! my child, your poor Father cannot pray; he soon will be tormented in the Flames of everlasting Burnings; all is over, it is too late...Oh! I already feel the Torments of the Damned; none can tell what I feel: Oh! I see thousands of Devils in this Room; could you see them, you would not stay in this place: Oh! everlasting Burning! Oh! Eternity!"<sup>102</sup>

By contrast, the justified faced death without fear, without physical pain, evidencing a longing for the moment when there would be union with Christ, consigning his beloved wife and six dear little children to the care of Jesus who would serve as "a Father to the Fatherless and a Husband to the Widow."

Coughlan used proof texts to demonstrate that experience proves Scripture to be true. Those who die "in the Lord" are blessed.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, those who refuse the call and

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<sup>102</sup>Coughlan, Account, 23.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 22. The quotation, from Rev. 14:13, states, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

ignore reproofs die in fear, distress and anguish.<sup>104</sup> A final quotation was used by way of admonition.

"Seek the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his Way, and the Unrighteous Man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."<sup>105</sup>

Coughlan indicated in his "brief account" that the testimony of these experiences did much in "establishing the Word of his Grace among this people".<sup>106</sup> This is borne out by evidence given by his converts. Two of them in their conversion narratives make reference to the effect this particular sermon had on bringing them to the stage of conviction:

I heard you preach often, before I was convinced that your Preaching concerned me: I did not see my need of a Saviour: I thought my own Righteousness was sufficient for me: at last, it pleased God to

<sup>104</sup> Coughlan, Account, 23. Coughlan quotes, "Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my Hand, and no Man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my Counsel, and would have none of my Reprof: I also will laugh at your Calamity; I will mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as Desolation, and your Desolation cometh as a Whirlwind; when Distress and Anguish cometh upon you: For that they hated Knowledge, and did not choose the Fear of the Lord." From this quotation, which Coughlan indicates is found in Proverbs 1:24-29, he (or perhaps the editor of his book) has omitted the two lines of verse 28, "Then they will call upon me but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me." The thought expressed in these two verses, while it fits perfectly with the situation being described, is inconsistent with the Methodist theology which proclaims that God's mercy is for all and is eventually revealed to all that are sincere in seeking it.

<sup>105</sup> Coughlan, Account, 24. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 20.

open my Eyes, by means of your preaching from these Words, Let the Wicked forsake his wry, and the Unrighteous Man his thoughts; and return to the Lord, and he will have Mercy on him, &c. The Words were directly applicable to my State. I saw clearly, that if I was not Wicked, yet I was Unrighteous.<sup>107</sup>

...at last, it pleased God to awaken me, under a remarkable sermon of yours, in Carbonear, on these Words, Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts, &c. The Word came with Power to my Soul; I saw myself wicked and abominable, and wondered that my God was so kind, as to offer Pardon to such a Rebel as I had been. The Conviction followed me, and increased more and more, till my sins became a Grief and Burden too heavy for me to bear.<sup>108</sup>

This sermon, on the theme "Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts" was based on death-bed narratives which contrasted the eternal anguish of the unredeemed sinner with the blessed condition of one who had experienced the grace of God. It was pivotal in awakening people to the inevitable consequences of their natural sinfulness, and the emotions it elicited were instrumental in initiating a revival. Coughlan was to find that death-bed narratives also proved effective in other ways.

#### 2.10 Coughlan's Use of Death-bed Narratives

The interest in death-bed experiences was not an innovation of Coughlan's. As a people whose religiosity was

<sup>107</sup>J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 102.

<sup>108</sup>J.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 116.

based on an examination of feelings, the intense emotions surrounding an experience of death held a special fascination for the Puritans and their Methodist descendants. The effectiveness of vicarious participation in a death experience in awakening "anguish of spirit", an emotion which was closely related to the state of conviction, and which could indeed stimulate it, was recognized. Before Coughlan's book was published in 1776, John Wesley had already published a half dozen death experiences, including that of Matthew Lee, executed at Tyburn at the age of twenty.<sup>109</sup> The contrast between the death of the sinner and that of the redeemed is not new either. John Wesley's sermon "The Important Question"<sup>110</sup> used this technique effectively. Asking "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?", Wesley notes that he who saves his own soul can expect a peaceful death as he looks back on "the calm remembrance of a life well spent" and looks forward to "an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away". The situation of a sinner approaching the moment of death is quite different.

Some years since, one who had turned back as a dog to his vomit was struck in his mid career of sin. A friend visited him, praying, "Lord, have mercy upon those who are just stepping out of the body, and know not what shall meet them at the entrance to the other world, an angel or a fiend!" The sick

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<sup>109</sup>Wesley, Works. Vol XIV provides a listing of all the books and tracts published by John Wesley.

<sup>110</sup>Wesley, Works, 6:493-505.

man shrieked out with a piercing cry "A fiend! A fiend!" and died. Just such an end, unless he die like an ox, may any man expect who loses his own soul.<sup>111</sup>

Coughlan appears to have been particularly interested in death-bed experiences. In addition to the two quoted above, he chose five others to add to his book, of which four were written by himself. A group of three represent women who at the onset of their death are in the beginning stages of spiritual growth - the unthinking girl who used to say "it was too soon, when she grew old she would be religious, and become a Convert";<sup>112</sup> the youth who had been too much with "the Allurements of the World" but faced with death recognizes her sinfulness and cries for mercy;<sup>113</sup> and the young mother, a backslider, who thought her present intimations of eternal suffering could be used as an example to others.<sup>114</sup> All three young women, who died within four months of each other, experienced the grace of God before their death.

These death-bed experiences have been carefully crafted according to a set form. Each begins with an epitaph,

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<sup>111</sup>Wesley, Works, 6:496.

<sup>112</sup>Laurence Coughlan, "The Experience of C. G., Who departed this Life, on the 9th of May, 1773", in Coughlan, Account, 25-33.

<sup>113</sup>Laurence Coughlan, "The Experience of Miss N. G., Who departed this Life, on the 24th of June, 1773, in the 20th Year of her Age," in Coughlan, Account, 34-39.

<sup>114</sup>Laurence Coughlan, "The Experience of Mrs. W., Who departed this Life, on the 9th of September, 1773, in the Twenty-First Year of her Age; Who was a Wife and Mother of Two Children," in Coughlan, Account, 40-46.

indicating the name of the deceased, followed by the phrase "who departed this life" and indicating the date and age at time of death. In one case this is followed by a description of the occupation "who was a Wife and Mother of two Children"; (presumably the other two, who were single women, were not considered to have an occupation). Next follows an applicable Bible verse. Coughlan chose all three from the Old Testament. In two of these three death-bed narratives, the body of the narrative opens with the cliche, "as to her person". This is followed by a description of the deceased in which the most positive aspects of her character and her family are mentioned. No disparaging remarks are made; in the case of a young woman who has become pregnant out of wedlock, she is presented as "this poor deluded young Lady," and the full responsibility for the pregnancy is placed on the man. She is not the sinner, but the betrayed innocent, the victim of "this horrible Sin she was overcome with", so that the sympathy of the reader is elicited rather than the scorn.

The description of the deceased is followed by Coughlan's account of the death experience itself. It is presented in the form of journal entries showing the daily progress towards both death and salvation. He describes the situation as he finds it on each visit, or as it has been related to him by those participating in the death-watch. In all three of these death-bed experiences, the dying person is brought swiftly through all the stages of the conversion experience. Coughlan

visits daily. He plays the role of interrogator, questioning the dying as to the state of their soul. He prays for them, asking first what they desire he should pray for on their behalf. He offers the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, after first assuring himself that the dying person is sufficiently aware of her own sinfulness and unworthiness to receive it. Coughlan takes no credit himself for having brought the dying through the stages of conviction and conversion. The actual moment of conversion in all cases happens in his absence, and he finds evidence of it on his next visit. It has been the Work of God alone.

The evidence that conversion has taken place is found in the mood of the dying person. No longer afraid of death, she looks forward eagerly to it, and expresses willingness to leave behind the world with all its human attachments. She feels Jesus present to her, and has the sense that all her sins have been forgiven. She testifies about her experience to her family and friends, urging them, too, to seek the Lord before it is too late. She breaks into spontaneous prayer and praise. Physical suffering is eased. Coughlan says of Miss N. G. "...during the time I was last with her, she had uncommon strength, and was delivered from distracting Pain, till Prayer was ended."<sup>115</sup> and of "Mrs. W. "She then desired that we might join in Prayer, and after Prayer, she gave out an hymn

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<sup>115</sup>Coughlan, Account, 37.

throughout, and sung it as if she were quite whole."<sup>116</sup>

The death-bed narrative ends with a description of the death itself, expressed in euphemistic imagery such as "She clapped her glad Wings, and tower'd away, And mingled with the Blaze of Day,"<sup>117</sup> or "She then gave up her Breath, and fell asleep in the Arms of her dear Jesus."<sup>118</sup>

Taken cumulatively, the message is clear. Conversion does not occur unless the sinner experiences the burden of sinfulness and reacts with repentance, sorrow, and humility. This is the only active role the sinner plays. The rest is up to God, who moves in his own good time to lift the burden of sin and reconcile the sinner to himself. But God is merciful, and does not allow the convicted sinner to die unreconciled.

Taken individually, each of these death-bed narratives teaches the stages of the conversion process, the emotions one should expect to feel in each one, the role of the minister in leading one through the various stages, and the appropriate responses to be made to his inquiry. The advantage to Coughlan of using the dead as examples is obvious; he can not be contradicted by the convert whose progress through the various stages may have been less ideal than the presentation of it.

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 46.

The final death-bed narrative written by Coughlan<sup>119</sup> is shorter than the previous three, and does not follow the same form. It is not the story of a last-minute conversion. It is Coughlan's answer to the question of theodicy. It describes the death of Mrs. P., someone who is already converted, and who is suffering great pain. It is the story of how she interprets that pain theologically. She feels that the affliction comes from God, yet the more agony she feels, the louder is her praise of God. She rationalizes that God has afflicted her body for the sake of her soul; in his goodness he is answering her prayers by not allowing her, through any pain of death, to fall from him. In her weaker moments she does not understand why God allows her to suffer, and prays for a quicker death, but finally she resigns herself to his will saying "I must wait my Lord's leisure."<sup>120</sup> She dies praying that her example will convert the poor, hard hearts of her children.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Laurence Coughlan, "The Experience of Mrs. P., When lying on her Death-Bed", in Coughlan, Account, 47-49.

<sup>120</sup>Coughlan, "The Experience of Mrs. P.", 48.

<sup>121</sup>The parallel with the Book of Job is obvious. Did Coughlan deliberately rewrite this book, replacing the culturally remote Job with someone the congregation knew well and could readily empathize with, and changing the restoration motif to a more dramatic ending? Or has the Old Testament become so much a part of his thinking that he unconsciously reproduces its thoughts? A more likely explanation may be that he is using a narrative form that was common among Methodist preachers; although I have been unable to locate other written examples the form may have been popular in the oral tradition.

The final of the death-bed experiences is in the form of a letter to Coughlan from lay preacher Thomas Pottle. Coughlan has visited a dying man in Carbonear, and, presumably having to return to Harbour Grace himself, has asked Pottle to continue to visit him. Pottle does so, and experiences for himself the "strange Metamorphose! the Conscience, but a moment or two before wounded, loaded; the Sinner, just ready to despair, now instantly, with a loud Voice, proclaims the Salvation of his Redeemer, and cries out, with Ecstasies of Joy, I have found a pardoning God."<sup>122</sup>

The experience has led Pottle to attempt to understand why so many are converting on their death-beds. He feels that the whole process is the work of God. The purpose of the illness is to bring the sinner to the state of conviction. Pottle, like John Wesley,<sup>123</sup> believed that humankind is so degenerate and so completely evil that we are incapable alone of realizing our own sinful state. Afflicting pain is God's way of humbling us, of preparing us to recognize our own sinfulness. God does not afflict pain in anger, but in his tender compassion for us, as a way of bringing us to himself.

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<sup>122</sup>T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 28 July 1772, in Coughlan, Account, 52.

<sup>123</sup>Wesley wrote, in his sermon "The Circumcision of the Heart", "... we are convinced, that we are not sufficient of ourselves to help ourselves; that, without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing but add sin to sin; that it is He alone who worketh in us by His mighty power, either to will or to do that which is good; it being impossible for us to even think a good thought, without the supernatural assistance of His spirit..." Sugden, Standard Sermons, 1:268.

Faced with pain and impending death we begin to repent of our sins. The repentance is preparative, "softening the stony Heart, making it capable of receiving the Grace of God, even as soaking Showers prepare and mollify the Earth, to receive the Seed."<sup>124</sup> God then moves in his own time to bring the repentant sinner to conversion.

These death-bed experiences inadvertently give us a picture of community life in eighteenth-century Conception Bay. No one dies alone. Dying is a community event; friends and neighbours gather in the house and keep watch day and night. The minister is sent for, and visits daily. The friends and neighbours join him in prayer, sometimes standing round the death-bed to sing hymns. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered to the dying. As the moment of death approaches, the nearest relatives are called into the room to receive the last words. In this type of setting, every symptom and every word of the dying person are shared with those in the house, and repeated over and over again to others in the community. Some of the conversations of the dying that Coughlan has recorded were repeated to him by Mrs. A., one of his earliest converts, whose role it was to nurse the dying,<sup>125</sup> and who would have been sought out by those in

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<sup>124</sup>T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 28 July 1772, in Coughlan, Account, 51.

<sup>125</sup>Mentioned as being present at the last moments of both Miss N.G. (Coughlan, Account, 38) and Mrs. W. (*Ibid.*, 45), this is probably the same C.A. who before hearing Coughlan preach had hoped to be saved by the merit of her works. (C.A.)

the community who craved for news. The tales gained in dramatic appeal as they were retold. When Coughlan retold these stories from the pulpit, and published the dying words of the redeemed sinner, the majority of the people would have already heard versions of the story from others in the community. They only needed Coughlan's interpretation of the events to begin to see things through his eyes.

Although most of the death-bed experiences Coughlan relates in his account are embedded in a written set form, their didactic nature indicates he used them in his preaching. One can imagine the stentorian tones in which he enumerates the spiritual agonies of the damned, the rising hopefulness in his voice as he indicates the first signs of conviction in the repentant sinner, the blast of triumph in which he recounts the moment of saving grace, and then the hush of the congregation punctuated by the sound of muffled sobbing as he recounts the last words of the dying saint, the special messages from one whose soul has already begun to experience the blessedness of heaven. The members of the congregation recognize in the dying an enactment of their own deepest fears and an answering hope. Then, punctuating his statements by reference to holy Scripture, Coughlan draws a lesson from the experience, a lesson the listeners will never forget.

The emotional impact on the congregation of hearing these death-bed narratives was instrumental in eliciting the

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to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774. *Ibid.*, 112-114.)

intensely emotional responses that Coughlan noted in his "brief account". They were the principal means by which the emotionalism of the revival was solicited.

#### **2.11 Summary**

The correlation between religious revivals and periods of social, economic and political unrest has been noted by social scientists. Conditions in mid-eighteenth century Conception Bay were conducive to religious revival. As well, there were needs for community-building, a more equitable sharing of power, and a process of self-affirmation for individuals of the poorer classes. Methodism had developed a doctrine and a discipline which answered these needs, and which had been well accepted by the poorer classes in England. The circumstances of isolation, social dislocation and externally controlled periods of boom and depression predisposed that a revival, if one should occur, would be emotional and ecstatic. There was only one element lacking - a strong prophet figure who would act as catalyst to set the revival in motion. Laurence Coughlan was to become that prophet figure.

Laurence Coughlan had been a successful lay preacher within the Methodist connexion with a ministry distinguished by his effective preaching and his practice of house to house visiting. Other traits noted were his belief in the power of prayer to effect supernatural occurrences, and a tendency towards what John Wesley considered an inappropriate form of

zealousness in a congregation which he had served.

Following a breach with Wesley, possibly as the result of his illegal ordination at the hands of a Greek bishop, Coughlan became preacher of an Independent chapel.

In 1766 he answered a call from the communities in Conception Bay, which had already erected a church at Harbour Grace, to become their minister. As a result of political manoeuvring by a Newfoundland merchant and a banker with connections to the Newfoundland trade, arrangements were made to have him ordained in the Anglican Church before sailing. There appears to have been some confusion in the community as to his affiliation; at least some of the members had assumed they would be applying to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel for a missionary. Following his first summer in Newfoundland, Coughlan returned to England bearing a petition requesting financial support from the SPG, and was successful in obtaining it.

Coughlan's reports to the SPG indicate a ministry successful in terms of church attendance, church membership, and church growth. But Coughlan himself was dissatisfied; he wanted proof that he was a "true evangelical minister" sent by God. At the end of three years of discouragement, the proof he was so earnestly seeking suddenly occurred in the form of a religious revival renowned for its emotionalism. Religious fervour spread to other communities in Conception Bay, notably Blackhead, whose dozen families, desirous of entreating the

power of the Holy to be present among them, erected within two weeks a church large enough to hold four hundred people.

Coughlan himself did not understand how and why the revival occurred, concluding that God works "when he will, and by whom, and in what Manner he pleases". But the factors which influenced the occurrence of the Awakening can be traced to his relationship with the people, his style of preaching, his understanding of the nature of religious conversion, and his use of death-bed experiences. Through house to house visiting, including exposition of Scripture and hymn-singing, Coughlan taught the people his doctrinal principles and gave them a sense of expectation; through visiting and praying for them he bonded them to himself. This emotional attachment to the prophet figure provided the impulse towards conversion, the doctrinal teachings furnished the rationale, and his preaching supplied the means.

Coughlan taught that no one could escape hell without first being born again, and no one would be born again without first experiencing conviction, a state of acute emotional distress which follows a realization that one is unable to escape the power of sin without God's direct intervention. His sermons were designed to arouse the emotions, predominately fear, sorrow, and hope. Fear was produced by emphasis on the sinfulness of the people; sorrow and hope through his narratives of death-bed experiences. A sermon on the theme "Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the Unrighteous

Man his Thoughts...", which contrasted the peaceful death of a believer with the agonizing end of one who rejected Coughlan's doctrine, was especially effective in initiating the Awakening.

Coughlan also used death-bed narratives on other occasions. Three included in his book illustrate the experiences of young women in varying stages of spiritual growth who all, through God's grace, receive the gift of justification before death. Another presents a faithful convert dying in great pain who praises God for afflicting her body for the sake of her soul. A letter from lay preacher Thomas Pottle concludes that affliction is part of God's plan, a way of humbling us so that we may be brought to conviction and thus prepared for conversion. The didactic nature of these narratives indicate that Coughlan used them in his preaching. They would have been instrumental in eliciting the emotions that Coughlan termed conviction.

Coughlan also defined conversion in terms of an emotional response. On this point he differed from John Wesley. The nature and source of this variation will be explored in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

"You never learned...  
that holiness consisted in a flow of joy."

### 3.1 Introduction

Laurence Coughlan, who was officially in Newfoundland as a priest of the Anglican church, proclaimed, in a letter to John Wesley,

I am, and do confess myself, a Methodist. The name I love and hope I ever shall. The plan which you first taught me, I have followed, as to doctrine and discipline.

Wesley had previously admonished Coughlan for misinterpreting the central Methodist doctrine of perfection or holiness. He wrote:

You never learned, either from my conversation or preaching or writings, that "holiness consisted in a flow of joy." I constantly told you quite the contrary; I told you it was love...<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, a comparison will be made between Wesley's doctrinal convictions and the religious ideas expressed by Coughlan and his Newfoundland converts. I hope to determine by this investigation whether or not Coughlan's claim to be following the doctrine that Wesley had taught him is indeed true.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Coughlan to Wesley, 4 Nov. 1772, reprinted in The Armenian Magazine (Sept. 1785).

<sup>2</sup>John Wesley to Laurence Coughlan, 27 Aug. 1768, in Wesley, Works, 3:340-2.

As to the source of Coughlan's theology, I will sometimes be referring to the letters written to him by his converts, as well as his own account and death-bed narratives.

The letters from Coughlan's Conception Bay converts display a remarkable uniformity of form, thought patterns, theological understandings, and vocabulary. As is the nature of conversion narratives, they have been influenced by the need of the narrator to conform to the group expectations which define when a conversion has taken place. They reflect a cultural norm, a cohesiveness which can only have been derived from a close-knit community uniting around a strong leader.

The question of whether the collective mentality expressed by conversion narratives reflect the morphology of conversion of their pastor was studied by George Selement for Puritanism. He compared Thomas Shepard's teaching (on such doctrinal issues as election, union with Christ, sanctification, the "means to close with Christ", and the signs of grace) with the conversion narratives of his church members in Puritan New England. Selement concludes that the narratives of the laity, despite some omissions, distortions, modifications, over-simplifications, and imprecise terminology, reflect their pastor's theology of conversion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>George Selement, "The Meeting of Elite and Popular Minds at Cambridge, New England, 1638-1645", The William and Mary Quarterly Series 3. 41/1 (January 1984), 32-48.

Although Shepard's Cambridge congregation represents a different era and location, many of the circumstances parallel those of Coughlan's Newfoundland congregation. Both congregations were located in the New World, in areas recently settled, where the settlers were living in relative isolation from outside influences. In both cases the morphology of conversion, that is to say, the expected form that it would take, was being introduced by a preacher with a strong personality who was held in high regard by his converts. Both sets of conversion narratives were the product of a religious revival, when extraordinary pressure is on individuals to conform to the group expectation. In both cases the preaching was reinforced by the witness of the laity.

But there are also some significant differences between the two congregations. Shepard's people frequently mention having heard other preachers in neighbouring towns. The effect of this would be to make Coughlan's converts, especially those who were descended from early settler families, even more dependent upon his preaching for their source of religious knowledge than Shepard's. On the other hand, the people in Shepard's congregation had emigrated for religious reasons. They had a much higher level of religious involvement before leaving England, and they came from a more homogeneous religious background. Thus there was less chance of conflicting religious ideas being present.

The uniformity of expression and common understanding of the conversion process found in the conversion narratives of the Newfoundland laity indicate that they reflect the content and style of Coughlan's teaching, and make a suitable source for the study of his morphology of conversion. The converts express uniformity of thought in their Christology, and their attitudes towards the priesthood, the Lord's Supper, the world, apostates, and what they have termed "the Enemy". However, in their understanding of perfection, a key doctrine in eighteenth century Methodism, there is some variation.

John Wesley, writing about the doctrine of perfection, stated:

This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up.<sup>4</sup>

The variations in the concept of perfection found among the Newfoundland converts indicate that Coughlan was not "propagating this chiefly", and so it was less solidly fixed in the minds of his converts than his other teachings. This chapter will explore the respective soteriological understandings of John Wesley and Laurence Coughlan. Special emphasis will be placed on the doctrine of perfection.

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<sup>4</sup>John Telford (ed.), The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1968), 8:238.

### 3.2 The Soteriology of John Wesley

Behind the theology of John Wesley lies the idea of an omniscient God to whom all time is simultaneously present, and who, in creating a good world, sought to make it ever better. Moved by this concern for sanctification, God permitted the Fall to occur so that humankind, having free choice, might seek him freely, and sent his Son so that every individual might be offered that choice. Thus for Wesley the atonement did not signify restoration, but one stage in the eternal perfecting.<sup>5</sup>

Wesley taught that the principal attribute of God is graciousness, a graciousness which leads him to continually seek to call human beings to himself. This is God's goal - to have each and every human being in communion with him, in

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<sup>5</sup>John Deschner, Wesley's Christology. An Interpretation (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1960). Other works which discuss the theology of John Wesley include: Gregory S. Clapper, John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and their Role in Christian Life and Theology (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1989); R. Newton Flew, The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology. An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life (New York: Humanities Press, 1968); Harald Lindstrom, Wesley and Sanctification. A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press, 1980; Arthur Wilford Nagler, Pietism and Methodism. The Significance of German Pietism in the Origin and Early Development of Methodism (Nashville, Tenn.: Smith & Lamar, 1918); Henry D. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1989); W. E. Sangster, The Path to Perfection. An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943); Clifford W. Towson, Moravian and Methodist: Relationships and Influences in the Eighteenth Century (London: Epworth Press, 1957); and Richard C. Worden, "The Relevance of Eschatology for Ethics in the Thought of John Wesley" (M.A. thesis, McGill Univ., Montreal, 1965).

perfect oneness with the mind that is in Christ Jesus, conforming completely to his will in acknowledgment of his kingship. The word *τέλειότης*, meaning "goal", "ripening" or "maturity", Wesley translated as perfection, and it was around this concept that his theology was built.

Wesley called himself homo unius libri<sup>6</sup>, a man of one book, an epithet which indicates the high value which he placed on the Bible. His key text was Matthew 5:8 "Ye therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." This text led him to believe that the achievement of perfection is possible in this lifetime. He also reasoned that Jesus would not have taught his disciples to pray "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" if this were not achievable. And in heaven the Father's will is always done perfectly.

Wesley's search of the Old Testament led him to identify two ancient promises: a promise to circumcise the heart as a sign of the belonging that brings new life,<sup>7</sup> and a promise to bestow a new heart and spirit which would deliver the recipients from all uncleanness.<sup>8</sup> Wesley interpreted both

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<sup>6</sup>John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (London: Epworth Press, 1968), 15.

<sup>7</sup>"And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your off-spring, so that you will love your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Deut. 30:6

<sup>8</sup>"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh....and I will deliver you

these passages in a Christocentric fashion,<sup>9</sup> and sought to determine how God achieves these promises in the life of an individual.

Wesley subscribed to the Augustinian doctrine of the inherent sinfulness of natural humanity. Original sin, the total corruption of human nature, impedes all the human faculties, so that one is unable by oneself to even be aware of this sinful nature. It imputes guilt, subjects all humans to the wrath of God, and brings with it a death which is both temporal and spiritual.<sup>10</sup> But there is also another kind of death, eternal death, and this results not from original sin itself, but from personal sin, which derives from it. There are three types of personal sin. These are inward sin (pride, wrath, foolish desires for the things of this world), outward sin (which occurs when faith and love are not existent in the soul), and sins of omission (such as spiritual sluggishness). Since the whole human nature is corrupt there is no natural knowledge of God, and no power to exercise free will to turn to him. Salvation is entirely impossible without the grace of God.<sup>11</sup>

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from all your uncleanness." Ezekiel 36: 25-26, 29a.

<sup>9</sup>Wesley, Plain Account, 34ff.

<sup>10</sup>John Wesley, "Original Sin" (1759), in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 2:207-225.

<sup>11</sup>John Wesley, "The Way to the Kingdom" (1742), in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 1:148-161.

Wesley recognized two distinct forms of the free grace of God, preventient grace and co-operating grace. Preventient grace gives discernment or natural conscience, which works in the human heart to make each individual aware of his or her own inherent sinfulness. Thus the sinner becomes "convicted of sin".<sup>12</sup> If through the exercise of free will one chooses to respond to this awareness of the human condition in humility and faith, the co-operating grace of God works to lead the sinner through justification to eventual perfection.<sup>13</sup>

Christ's work of atonement, "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world"<sup>14</sup>, is the sole basis for justification, and faith is the necessary condition. Yet justification itself comes only through the grace of God, and in God's own time.

These things must necessarily go together in our justification: upon God's part, the great mercy and grace, upon Christ's part, the satisfaction of God's justice, and on our part, faith in the merits of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

Justification involves an objective change in the individual; it brings forgiveness and acceptance, a deliverance from guilt, and a change in one's status before

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<sup>12</sup>John Wesley, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption" (1739), in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 1:179-198.

<sup>13</sup>John Wesley "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (1765), in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 2:444-460.

<sup>14</sup>Wesley quotes here from The Book of Common Prayer.

<sup>15</sup>John Wesley, "A Further Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" (1745), in Wesley, Works, 8:54.

God.<sup>16</sup> This objective change in status from sinner to redeemed brings about a subjective change in the individual, who experiences "new birth" and a deliverance from the power of sin.<sup>17</sup> The moment when the individual is conscious of deliverance from the power of sin Wesley called sanctification. Justification and sanctification, which are distinct from each other, occur simultaneously.

Although the consciousness of being sanctified at the moment of justification is instantaneous, there is also a sense in which sanctification is gradual. There are degrees of sanctification experienced as the individual grows in grace through the means of grace, that is to say, through prayer, searching the Scriptures, and partaking frequently of the Lord's supper (with an accompanying introspection for sin).<sup>18</sup> The Methodist discipline, with its emphasis on attendance in weekly classes where converts encouraged each other in their Christian growth and shared experiences of the grace of God in their lives, was designed to assist the individual in the growth towards entire sanctification. Good works and a world-denying life-style were encouraged in those who had experienced justification and who could acknowledge that these

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<sup>16</sup>John Wesley, "Justification by Faith" (1746), in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 1:114-130.

<sup>17</sup>John Wesley, "The New Birth" (1743), in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 2:227-243.

<sup>18</sup>John Wesley "The Means of Grace," in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 1:238-260.

were the fruit of faith, not works performed in expectation of deserving the gift of justification.<sup>19</sup>

Sanctification, then, is relative, and there is a development in it which transcends the boundaries of life and death. Its' aim is teleological, the glorification of the individual in a blessed oneness with the Divine. This glorification was known variously as holiness, Perfection, entire sanctification, the Second Blessing, the great Salvation, perfect love, or the Kingdom of God. Some Methodists referred to it as sinless Perfection, although Wesley himself did not like the term.<sup>20</sup> It was usually thought of as occurring after death or immediately before, or in some rare individuals, some time before death. Wesley's letters and journal entries make reference to individuals he knew who had attained Perfection, although he never claimed it for himself. As the Methodist movement matured, more and more individuals claimed to have been perfected long before death. A crisis occurred in the early 1760's when large numbers of people claimed instantaneous perfection, discrediting the Methodist movement.<sup>21</sup> Following this, Wesley emphasised even more than before the gradual growth that can be expected as

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<sup>19</sup>John Wesley, "Salvation by Faith" (1738), in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 1:35-52.

<sup>20</sup>Wesley, Plain Account, 45.

<sup>21</sup>This crisis will be discussed more fully below.

one subjects oneself more and more to the controlling influence of perfect love in the heart.

However, he continued to insist that perfection is not something that comes from human effort. It is the second point in one's life when God intervenes directly with supernatural power to effect a change in the relationship between himself and the individual. The confirmation of this experiential event is the attainment of perfect love in the individual. Perfect love involves a complete surrender to God and an obedience which is both inward (an obedient heart, conformity to Christ, purity of intention) and outward (expressed in word and action). Love of God and love of one's neighbours are inseparable and result in a lifestyle which by its example brings glory to God and serves as a pattern for those less advanced on their spiritual journey. In this way, the perfection of the individual acts as a catalyst to further the inception of the Kingdom of God.

Like sanctification, perfection, too, is a relative thing.

Christian perfection, therefore, does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exception either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus, every one that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect. Yet we may, lastly, observe, that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth....So that how much soever any man has attained, or in how high a degree he is perfect, he hath still need to 'grow in grace', and

daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour.<sup>22</sup>

Wesley could speak of perfection in relative terms because, although he equates perfection with attainment of the kingdom of God, it is the earthly Kingdom of Grace to which he is referring. The perfection of the individual was to John Wesley part of the overall movement of God to establish this earthly Kingdom of Grace through which the eschatological Kingdom of Glory would be inaugurated, the final stage in the sanctification of the world.<sup>23</sup>

Thus Wesley's doctrine of perfection reflected the tension between the already and the yet-to-be aspects of the kingdom. He was careful not to set its standard so high that no one could achieve it, or so low that God's grace and glory would not be reflected in it. Wesley, when he travelled, visited the societies set up by his preachers and examined individuals to determine their spiritual state. He accounted persons' professions of perfection genuine only if he could discern its fruits.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> John Wesley, "Christian Perfection" (1741), in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 2:156ff.

<sup>23</sup> John Wesley, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount", Part VI (1750), in Sugden, Standard Sermons, 1:436-7.

<sup>24</sup> He gave a more practical description of such a person in his "Sermon Preached on the Occasion of the Death of the Rev. Mr. John Fletcher" (1785), in Wesley, Works, 7:431-433.

### 3.3 Coughlan's Teaching on Conversion

Laurence Coughlan's concept of conversion was, like John Wesley's, based on the doctrine of total depravity. Reason, will, imagination and affections, all faculties of the human soul, were believed to have become irretrievably corrupted when Adam disobeyed God's injunction and ate the forbidden fruit. Reason has become imperfect; will continually revolts against God in the search for self-gratification; imagination leads to a false perception that the things of this world are worth-while; and the affections, the individual's basic orientation to the world, are ruled by imperfect reason, self-gratifying will, and deceptive imagination. Thus all the human faculties are at odds with God's purpose in creation. It is impossible for human beings to overcome on their own this inherently sinful nature because the imperfect faculties deceive them as to the true situation they are in.<sup>25</sup> Coughlan called this spiritual blindness "hardness of heart".

Wesley believed that only by an infusion of divine prevenient grace could the faculties be realigned, so that the true nature of the situation might be perceived. Coughlan's converts expressed the idea that this perception comes through hearing the Word of God as preached by Coughlan. The Word,

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<sup>25</sup>Charles Lloyd Cohen, God's Caress: the Psychology of the Puritan Religious Experience (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 26-30. The sentiments are also expressed in the sermon "extracted from the Writings of a very eminent Divine" which form an addendum to Coughlan's Account. (pp. 169-192).

"the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart",<sup>26</sup> served to break, prick, or pierce the hard heart of sinners so that God's grace might enter in, enabling individuals to recognize the true nature of their own sinful existence. Next, as lay preacher Thomas Pottle phrased it:

... this causes that blessed Mourning and Sorrowing for Sin, which worketh a sincere Repentance; softening the stony Heart, making it capable of receiving the Grace of God, even as soaking Showers prepare and mollify the Earth to receive the Seed...<sup>27</sup>

Intellectual realization of one's own sinfulness is not enough. Coughlan's converts believed the sinner is not truly convicted of sin unless symptoms can be felt in the heart. The mourning and sorrowing of the stage of conviction were a necessary prerequisite to conversion. This relationship between the intellectual and experiential realizations of sinfulness was expressed by J.S.

You preached here near three Years before the Word made any Impression upon me; I found my Heart hard as the nether Millstone, and felt not my guilty, fallen State; at last, the merciful Redeemer was pleased to open my Eyes, in a sudden, and almost instantaneous Manner, when sitting in my own house; I was struck with Surprise to see my fallen Condition; and Anguish filled my Heart, when I saw the Load of Guilt which bowed down my Soul; I cannot express the Pain and Anguish I felt...<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Coughlan, Account, 9. Cf. Hebrews 4:12.

<sup>27</sup>T.T. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 28 July 1772, in Coughlan, Account, 51. Cf. Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26, also Psalm 65:10.

<sup>28</sup>J.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 124.

The heart, then, was perceived by Coughlan and his followers as the arena in which the battle for the soul is fought. The hard heart of the sinner does not give up readily; it cries out in protest. Heart-piercing cries, terror, the impression of an intolerable weight and burden - all are signs that the battle for the soul of the sinner is being fought. The weight of sin on the heart was depicted in such vivid terms that Thomas Pottle, writing about the sense of conviction experienced by a dying man, had this to say:

Tuesday morning, I was with him again, when I found him much distressed, and labouring under an almost intolerable Weight and Burden on his Heart, which seemed, he said, more grievous, and painful, than all his other bodily Disorders, fearing, as he said, at the same Time, that his Sins had been so heinous, and manifold, that God, although, says he, I know he is a merciful God, would not pardon them:  
This was his great trouble and pain.<sup>29</sup>

Tears also appeared to be an important part of the conversion process for Coughlan's converts. They were interpreted as both a symptom of conviction and evidence of justification, and were a desirable emotional sign to be seen during prayers, sermons, and hymn-singing. They were a response judged to be holy, an indication that God was at work in the heart of the sinner.

The tears of conviction gave evidence that the hard, stony, heart of the sinner was becoming softened and subdued

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<sup>29</sup>T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 28 July 1772, in Coughlan, Account, 53-4.

by the pricks of the Word. They were also an appeal to Jesus, the intercessor. Thomas Pottle commented,

It is these precious Heart-sprung Tears that are well pleasing to Jesus; so well pleasing, that our tender, compassionate High-Priest cannot, will not, overlook them; for surely there is a Bottle to put them in.<sup>30</sup>

The image of Jesus bottling the tears of conviction and offering them as sacrifice to the Father reflects the respective roles played by each in the justification of the sinner. It is Jesus who intercedes for the sinner, and who, at the moment of justification, enters the heart of the sinner. But this gift of justification comes through the grace of God alone. It was an instantaneous and unexpected event and could occur at any moment that the means of grace were present - while hearing a sermon, being prayed for, partaking of the Holy Sacrament, walking home from class meeting, or even lying on one's death bed. The sinner knew that justification had occurred by the emotional change he or she experienced. Distress was suddenly removed, and the heart overflowed with joy and a longing for intimacy with Jesus. This sudden flow of joy was evidence that the burden of sin had been lifted from the heart; the sinner now was justified. Tears of joy marked the event.

...the blessed God broke into my Heart, in a more powerful Manner than I can describe, removed my Grief, and filled my Heart with his Love, to such a

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<sup>30</sup>T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 28 July 1772, in Coughlan, Account, 55.

Degree, that I could hardly speak, while Tears of Joy ran down my Cheeks.<sup>31</sup>

Our poor S. was sat at liberty: we could not proceed, Tears of holy Joy gave Vent to the Overflowings of our Hearts: I have since spoke with most of our Friends separately, and they affirmed, that they never were so powerfully influenced.<sup>32</sup>

But the convert had better beware! The heart still has an underlying deceitfulness and is susceptible to attacks of the devil, who actively seeks to hinder the completion of the work of God.<sup>33</sup> Almost invariably the converts reported a depression of spirits that set in after justification and which led them to doubt the validity of their experience. This they named assaults of the devil. They acknowledged that these assaults were sometimes successful because of the deceitfulness of the heart not yet fully sanctified. They prayed for Jesus to intervene, and noted instances of empowerment experienced when he enabled them to stand against these assaults. Many of them looked forward with longing for

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<sup>31</sup>T.R. to Coughlan, Baltimore, 21 June 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 62.

<sup>32</sup>A.T. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 12 Jan. 1775, in Coughlan, Account, 142.

<sup>33</sup>Lay preacher Arthur Twomey wrote "It is my daily Prayer, that the Lord would heal my Backslidings, and love me freely; that he would cleanse me from all Evil, and wash my heart with his most precious Blood; that he would root out all Evil, that would hinder the free Course of his blessed Spirit to my Heart." A.T. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 3 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 155.

a second great experience when all doubt would disappear and they could "with Full Assurance of Faith, call Jesus Lord".<sup>34</sup>

Three of the thirteen conversion narratives record the receipt of this second blessing,<sup>35</sup> such as J. M., who experienced justification when "at Prayer with our Friends in a private Meeting, the Lord Jesus set my Soul at Liberty and gave me an Assurance of his Love". This was followed by a period of doubt and then a second great experience when all doubt was removed.

After this, I had some Doubts of my Acceptance; the Enemy would have persuaded me, that all was a Delusion; and my Lord hid his lovely Face from me; O what did I suffer in the absence of my Lord; no tongue can express the anguish of Soul I endured, while he concealed himself from me; However he did not leave me long comfortless; he came to my deliverance, dispersed these Clouds; and all my doubts vanished. Glory be to my God...<sup>36</sup>

For others the pattern was different. Rather than anticipating perfection, they found their solace in repetitions of the emotionality experienced during justification. Jane Noseworthy, for example, described her initial religious experience in emotional terms. The Lord broke in upon her soul, flashing like lightning, her heart suddenly overflowed with love and she felt a comfort and joy

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<sup>34</sup>M.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 97.

<sup>35</sup>The two others are: M.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 95-97; and J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 101-103.

<sup>36</sup>J.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 116-117.

that no words could express.<sup>37</sup> This initial experience was frequently repeated. She declared:

Since this Time I frequently feel a Return of the same Heavenly Fire, sometimes in private, sometimes in publick, when I draw near unto the Lord.<sup>38</sup>

The fervency and intimacy that Jane Noseworthy longed to re-experience were typical of the conversion experiences of many of Coughlan's Newfoundland followers.

There were, then, two different patterns of experience present among the converts following justification. One group anticipated a second great moment when all doubts would be removed in the experience of full assurance or the instantaneous attainment of perfection. Others looked for the joy of repetitions of the emotionality of their conversion experience.

### 3.4 A Fundamental Difference

Wesley's own conversion experience was decidedly ethical, and he was adamant that emotionalism was only an adjunct to conversion, and not at all necessary to it. This is clearly shown in his journal account of his Aldersgate experience, in which the only emotional element is a "heart strangely warmed".

In the evening I went very unwillingly to Alders-gate-Street, where one was reading Luther's

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<sup>37</sup>Jane Noseworthy to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 92.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified to all there, what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, "This can not be faith; for where is the joy?" Then I was taught, that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation: But that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them, according to the councils of his own will.<sup>39</sup>

Wesley believed that Coughlan differed significantly from him in this regard. In a letter in which he advised Coughlan to stay in Newfoundland where "a various train of Providences" had led him, Wesley went on to criticise him for his assumption that holiness consisted in a "flow of joy". He expressed adamantly to Coughlan the idea that holiness is primarily ethical, not emotional. Although he recognized that there should also be joy, he clearly subordinated it to "the love of God and our neighbour". He wrote

You never learned, either from my conversation or preaching or writings, that "holiness consisted in a flow of joy." I constantly told you quite the contrary; I told you it was love; the love of God and our neighbour; the images of God stamped on the heart; the life of God in the Soul of Man; the mind that was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ

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<sup>39</sup>Journal entries for 14 and 15 May, 1738, in Wesley, *Works*, 1:103.

also walked. If Mr. Maxfield or you took it to be anything else, it was your own fault, not mine. And whenever you waked out of that dream, you ought not to have laid the blame of it upon me....<sup>40</sup>

Wesley continued the letter by questioning whether Coughlan may have deceived himself into believing he had attained perfection when in fact he had only experienced a "flow of joy".

Possibly you may be mistaken in this; perhaps you thought you had received what you had not. But pray do not measure all men by yourself....<sup>41</sup>

Wesley pointed out that even if Coughlan had deceived himself, this does not mean that perfection itself is a delusion. He emphasised once again that his definition of perfection is spiritual (a deep communion with the Father and the Son, whereby they are enabled to give Him their whole heart) and ethical (to love everyone, and to walk as Christ also walked). Whereas emotion itself may be illusory, love of God and love of neighbour can not be. Therefore, Wesley insisted, love of God and love of neighbour is the only suitable way to define perfection.

Where is the delusion of this? Either you received this love or you did not; if you did, dare you call it a delusion? You will not call it so for all the world....O Lawrence, if Sister Coughlan and you ever did enjoy this, humble yourselves before God for casting it away; if you did not, God grant you may!<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup>John Wesley to Coughlan, 27 Aug. 1768, in Wesley, Works, 3:340-2. The complete letter is transcribed in Appendix B.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

John Wesley, thus, in reply to a letter from Coughlan, emphasised to him that perfection was spiritual and ethical, not emotional, in nature. In doing so, he associated Coughlan's concept of holiness with that of Thomas Maxfield and the London enthusiasts.

### **3.5 Perfection Among the Newfoundland Converts**

In the thirty-six letters written to Laurence Coughlan from his converts in Newfoundland, the word "perfection" does not appear. Its synonyms, "holiness", "full Assurance", and "sanctification" appear infrequently.

In six of the conversion narratives<sup>43</sup> the converts focus entirely on their experience of justification and sanctification. They describe the moment in emotive terms. The period of conviction is suddenly ended - the heavy burden is lifted, the fears dispersed, the pain and anguish removed. There is comfort. The converts have their hearts enlarged with love, joy, and peace and go on their way rejoicing. They are given the power to believe, and express a willingness to die knowing that they will be received into the arms of Jesus. No reference is made to perfection. The narratives conclude with descriptions of spiritual struggles and victories encountered since their conversion experience, and prayers for endurance.

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<sup>43</sup>All six, found in Coughlan's Account, are contained within letters addressed to him and datelined Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774. They were from Jane Noseworthy (pp. 91-93), M.M. (pp. 98-100), J.J. (pp. 104-106), C.K. (pp. 107-109), C.A. (pp. 112-114), and J.S. (pp. 124-126).

The three persons claiming to have received assurance of justification describe it as a very emotional moment, when all the doubt experienced following justification vanished in an instant. J.M. found comfort for his soul's anguish, delivery from doubt, and a removal of the clouds separating him from God.<sup>44</sup> M.P. had all her doubts dispersed and could "with Full Assurance of Faith, call Jesus Lord". She also claimed to be filled with love and the power of Free-Grace.<sup>45</sup> J.P. received a clearer evidence of pardon and acceptance than he had received in justification, and a nearness to Jesus whose righteousness (imputed and imparted) he considered sufficient for him.<sup>46</sup> All three claimed to have found this assurance within a very short period of their justification. For M.P. the intervening period was six weeks, for J. P. it was "shortly after" and J.M. described it as "not long".

Three other individuals indicate that they are seeking perfection. Mary Stretton, née Parsons, the self-educated daughter of an early settler family,<sup>47</sup> was unique among the

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<sup>44</sup>J.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 117.

<sup>45</sup>M.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 95-96.

<sup>46</sup>J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 102-103.

<sup>47</sup>Her obituary, which appeared in The Newfoundlander on 27 Jan. 1831, states "Though descended from one of the most ancient and respectable families of the town, she received only that limited education which the circumstances of the country then afforded, but endowed by nature with strong mental powers, she so improved every opportunity which time

converts in her use of Wesleyan theological terms to express her religious experiences. She shows familiarity with the sermons of John Wesley and uses his very expressions as she writes:

...would to God, every thing contrary to his divine Will in me was done away. I see the great necessity of Holiness; and, blessed be God, I feel as great a distress, at Times, for Sanctification, as ever I did for Justification; I feel, that nothing short of Holiness will do. Lord Jesus, make me holy; give me that Faith which overcometh the World, and that Love which is stronger than Death....I long to be delivered from the remains of inbred Sin, and to have the Whole Image of God stamped upon my Soul, and every Desire brought into Subjection to Christ. May the blessed Jesus enable me to wait, till all his Will be done in me.<sup>48</sup>

A comparison of this with the description of holiness given by Wesley in the letter quoted above, that holiness is "love; the love of God and our neighbour; the images of God stamped on the heart; the life of God in the Soul of Man; the mind that was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ also walked" shows that Mary Stretton's understanding of perfection is little different from John Wesley's. The only element missing in her description is love of neighbour; her orientation at the time of writing this letter is completely other-worldly.

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and circumstance threw in her way....she acquired an astonishing fund of general, but more particularly of religious, information, of which she has with justice been termed a "living library".

<sup>48</sup>M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 73-76.

N.S. from Bear's Cove, whose short and simple letter displays a lower level of literacy than Mary Stretton's, is also seeking a perfection equated with subjection to Christ.<sup>49</sup> J.B. expresses the same theme when he mentions simply that he now desires to be wholly given up to God, and directed by him in all his ways.<sup>50</sup>

Subjection to Christ is also the theme of the "...choice Sentiments, extracted from the Writings of a very eminent Divine..." with which Coughlan chose to conclude his book.<sup>51</sup> This sermon presents holiness as the work of Christ the King who reigns supreme, so that "... all the Faculties of the Soul, and Members of the Body of a true Christian, are at the Command of Christ, receiving their Direction and Commission from Christ, doing every Thing in Subjection and Obedience to Christ".<sup>52</sup>

James Noseworthy's experience is variant. He alone can not point to the precise moment of his justification. Following a period of conviction which lasted only one week he reported his "Soul set at Liberty".

<sup>49</sup>"At Times, I find a Desire after Holiness of Heart, and to have my every Thought to be brought into Subjection to Christ." N.S. to Coughlan, Bear's Cove, 28 October 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 136.

<sup>50</sup>J.B. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 1 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 122.

<sup>51</sup>"The Following are some choice Sentiments, extracted from the Writings of a very eminent Divine, grounded upon Gal. ii.20," in Coughlan, Account, 169-192.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 181.

I cannot say, that I felt any sudden or instantaneous Change; but I found the Burden gradually remove, and the Love of Jesus overspread my Soul; However I can now say, in Full Assurance of Faith, that Jesus loved me and gave himself for me: I find Him very precious to me; and I do know, that Gd, for Christ's sake, has forgiven all my Sins.<sup>53</sup>

The Pietist expression that James Noseworthy used, "full assurance", was understood in Wesleyan circles as a synonym for perfection. James Noseworthy also received experiential evidence that he was now perfected and ready to die; he and his wife Jane shared an auditory hallucination. For six weeks Jane had been hearing hymn and psalm tunes playing constantly, expressing the words "All your sins forgiven".<sup>54</sup> Within three weeks her husband began hearing it too.<sup>55</sup> Both believed it to be a summons to sing with the heavenly angels, and thought they were soon to die.<sup>56</sup>

There were, then, by 1774, at least three different strains of thought present among the Newfoundland converts concerning the nature of perfection. James Noseworthy was alone in reporting no instantaneous change; his status as

<sup>53</sup>James Noseworthy to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 88.

<sup>54</sup>Jane Noseworthy to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 92-93.

<sup>55</sup>James Noseworthy to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 88-89.

<sup>56</sup>James Noseworthy, planter of Briants Cove, was buried on 19 May 1778. There is no record of the death of his wife. She probably died before 1775, which is when the record begins. The Records for the Parish of Harbour Grace, MHA 87E.

redeemed was verified by the music he heard. His wife also believed the music to signify her sins were all forgiven and she was being summoned to sing with the angels. These two must be considered anomalies. The majority focused entirely on their moment of justification, an event recognized by the flow of joy experienced as the period of conviction came to an abrupt end. They thought it marked the moment when Jesus entered their hearts, giving them faith, and a means of achieving victory over sin. Some of the converts experienced shortly afterwards a second great emotional moment when all doubt was removed and a new level of intimacy with Jesus was bestowed. This may be deemed assurance of justification, a Pietist doctrine which was sometimes equated with the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection.

But it is evident that, despite Wesley's charge that Coughlan misunderstood his doctrine of holiness, the converts were also taught the Wesleyan doctrine that perfection means complete subjection to Christ. However, they interpreted this in terms of intimacy with Christ, and the ethical element which Wesley thought was so important was seldom expressed in their narratives.

The association of holiness with a "flow of joy" is typical of the experiences of those converted during Coughlan's revival of the winter of 1768-69, a period when little emphasis was placed on the doctrine of perfection since most had not yet been justified. Many of the converts did not

progress much beyond this, and looked only for repetitions of the emotionality of that great moment. Others reported the instantaneous attainment of full assurance during this period.

Mary Stretton, whom Coughlan left in charge of the women's group, had since her conversion been paying careful attention to John Wesley's sermons, and her idea of perfection, which she equated with subjection to Christ, was more closely aligned with that of normative Wesleyanism. Two others also equated perfection with subjection to Christ rather than a flow of joy. However, the focus was still on "love of God". "Love of neighbour" did not play the prominent role it enjoyed in Wesley's own thought.

### **3.6 Instantaneous Attainment of Perfection**

The Newfoundland converts who believed themselves to have received full assurance of justification during the revival all reported a very short period of time elapsing between justification and assurance. This is consistent with the doctrine of instantaneous attainment of perfection which was current among the Wesleyan Methodists in Great Britain during the early 1760's, the period when Laurence Coughlan and Thomas Maxfield were active within the London societies.

Believing in the early years of his ministry that perfection could be attained as readily in the hours immediately before death as in the hours after it, John Wesley revised this view as time went on and more and more of his

converts claimed to have been perfected years before their death. The doctrine of perfection achieved more prominence after the revivals of the early 1760's, and it was during this period that many began to claim having been perfected very shortly after their experience of being justified. John Whitehead, Wesley's official biographer,<sup>57</sup> noted:

...though Mr. Wesley had so long held the doctrine of Christian perfection, he had not always held that this state might be attained in one moment; much less that a person might hold it in his novitiate: nor do I know that there were any professors of it before this time, except when death was approaching. In the beginning of this year,<sup>58</sup> however, there being a great revival of religious concern among the societies in Yorkshire, several professed, that at once, during prayer, their hearts were cleansed from all sin: that they were cleansed from all unrighteousness, or perfected in love: all of which were with them synonymous phrases....We may observe that Mr. Wesley, believing these professors were sincere, gave full credit to their report; and upon this and the concurring testimony of others which soon followed, he seems to have built his doctrine of an instantaneous attainment of Christian perfection.<sup>59</sup>

From Yorkshire the doctrine of instantaneous attainment of Christian perfection spread rapidly. By the summer of 1762 the movement was at its height. In Dublin, a four-month revival led by lay preacher John Manners was responsible for

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<sup>57</sup>Wesley's will stated "I give all my manuscripts to Thomas Coke, Doctor Whitehead, and Henry Moore, to be burnt or published, as they see good." The London Conference of 1792 appointed Whitehead to be the official biographer.

<sup>58</sup>Whitehead is referring to 1760.

<sup>59</sup>John Whitehead, The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M. A., with some Account of his Ancestors and Relations; and the Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A. (Philadelphia: John E. Potter & Company. n. d.), 449.

large numbers of conversions and produced some forty people who claimed to have been perfected.<sup>60</sup> In Limerick ten women and thirteen men claimed perfection during a month-long revival.<sup>61</sup> In Bolton seven were justified and six sanctified at one meeting; of these two claimed their sanctification had occurred within three days of justification.<sup>62</sup> The Macclesfield revival led forty people to claim having been perfected. Wesley examined them all, pronounced their claims genuine, and noted "Some of them said they received that blessing ten days, some seven, some four, some three days, after they found peace with God; and two of them the next day. What marvel, since one day is with God as a thousand years?"<sup>63</sup> Wesley exulted that his day of Pentecost had now fully arrived, with perfection being as frequently professed now as justification had been for the past two decades.<sup>64</sup>

During the ensuing winter Wesley's exultation turned to despair. The London societies had also undergone a remarkable revival, with many newcomers experiencing justification followed within a very short period by the instantaneous

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<sup>60</sup>John Wesley's journal, 24 July 1762, in Wesley, Works, 3:101-106.

<sup>61</sup>John Wesley's journal, 28 July 1762, in Wesley, Works, 3:106-107.

<sup>62</sup>John Wesley's journal, 6 Aug. 1772, in Wesley, Works, 3:109.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>64</sup>John Wesley's journal, 28 Oct. 1762, in Wesley, Works, 3:116.

attainment of perfection.<sup>65</sup> By the fall of 1762 reports began to reach him that these new converts had attached to the doctrine of perfection things that he had never sanctioned. Warned by his brother Charles<sup>66</sup> that ranters and enthusiasts were present in the societies, he at first ignored the threat this posed to his time of triumph, believing that the large numbers claiming justification and perfection established that the movement was the work of God. By the time he attempted to control the excesses it was too late. George Bell, a leader of the most fanatical enthusiasts among the group, embarrassed the Methodist movement by predicting that the end of the world would come on the 28th of February. The enthusiasts asserted that they, having attained perfection, would not die, but would be caught up in the rapture. The furore this created in the press discredited the Methodist movement. Bell and his closest followers were arrested for blasphemy.<sup>67</sup> The resulting censure by Wesley of the ideas expressed by the leaders of this movement led to the withdrawal of several hundred of the London members from the societies.<sup>68</sup> But the

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<sup>65</sup>Wesley, summing up the past year in his journal on 31 December 1762 wrote "...in London only, I believe full two hundred have been brought into glorious liberty." Wesley, Works, 3:124.

<sup>66</sup>In a letter dated 1 Feb. 1763 and reprinted in the Methodist Magazine (1794), 566, as quoted by Tyerman, Life and Times, 2:462.

<sup>67</sup>Tyerman, Life and Times, 2:438.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 2:431-44.

censure was too little and too late; the Methodist movement lost considerable support as many Evangelicals, formerly supportive, distanced themselves from this disturbing new development.<sup>69</sup> It also led to a breach between Wesley and his leading lay preacher Thomas Maxfield, to whom he had entrusted the leadership of the London societies, and whom he now made his scapegoat.

Wesley revised his book A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,<sup>70</sup> still not denying that perfection could be attained shortly after justification, but asserting that this is exceptional and that normally sins such as pride, anger, self-will, and a heart prone to backsliding have to be gradually mortified. He pointed out that although many of the London converts had claimed an experience of faith, love, joy and peace, some, perhaps one in ten, were manifestly lacking in the fruit of the spirit. They could not be deemed to have received the perfection they claimed, he wrote, until the fruits, such as long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and temperance were evident in their lives.

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<sup>69</sup>Henry D. Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1989), 340-341.

<sup>70</sup>This book was revised and enlarged several times during Wesley's lifetime. The 1766 edition embodied a tract, "Cautions and Directions given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies", originally published in 1762, which deals directly with "those in London, who seem to have been lately 'renewed in love'". Wesley, Plain Account, 82ff.

He warned his followers especially against "spiritual pride", and "enthusiasm", which he called the daughter of pride.<sup>71</sup>

Although Wesley refused to repudiate his claim that most professors of the instantaneous attainment of perfection were genuine, the doctrine did not receive widespread acceptance. Whitehead's comment may be deemed typical of the mainstream of later Methodist opinion.

Against the doctrine itself...there does not seem to be any just objection; but this instantaneous manner of obtaining perfection in the christian temper, seems to have no foundation in Scripture: it even appears contrary to reason, and to the constitution and order which God has established through all animated nature, where we see no instance of any thing arriving at perfection in a moment. And though there can be no doubt but some of those who made profession of this happy state were both sincere and deeply pious, perhaps beyond most of their brethren, yet there seems just reason to affirm they were mistaken in the judgement they formed of their own attainments.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.7 Quietism, Antinomianism, Enthusiasm and Spiritual Pride

In a letter to Maxfield,<sup>73</sup> Wesley enunciated the points of difference in their doctrine. He charged that Maxfield, along with "brother Bell and Owen, and those who are most closely associated with them",<sup>74</sup> were teaching an absolute perfection which excluded fallibility, susceptibility to

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 82-3.

<sup>72</sup>Whitehead, Life of Wesley, 149-150.

<sup>73</sup>John Wesley to Thomas Maxfield, Canterbury, 2 Nov. 1762, in Wesley, Works, 3:119-121.

<sup>74</sup>Including, presumably, Laurence Coughlan.

temptation, and the possibility of back-sliding. Along with this higher notion of perfection went a denial that justification was the beginning of holiness, and a lack of emphasis on the idea of a gradual growth in grace. The London enthusiasts were, Wesley claimed, teaching a sinless perfection, attained instantaneously by faith alone, and attested to by "feelings and inward impressions" rather than the fruits of the spirit. Wesley believed the group surrounding Maxfield neglected the means of grace and the importance of self-examination, which led him to charge them with quietism and antinomianism.

Maxfield subsequently published a pamphlet<sup>75</sup> in which he denied these charges. The enthusiasm, he claimed, was not his doing, but Bell's, and he had tried to discourage it while Wesley himself had turned a blind eye.<sup>76</sup> But Maxfield does not appear to have the same understanding of the nature of enthusiasm as Wesley. Whereas Wesley uses the term to refer to too much dependence on feelings and inward impressions, Maxfield uses the term only to refer to Bell's millenarian predictions, which he places in the same category as the calculations concerning Halley's comet.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Thomas Maxfield, A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Maxfield's Conduct, In not continuing with the Rev. John Wesley: And of his Behavior since that Time, with an Introductory Letter to the Rev. George Whitefield (London, 1768).

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 14-16.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 20-21.

Maxfield's Vindication also contains a synopsis of his theology. Much of it is an echo of mainstream Methodist thought. He acknowledges the inherent sinfulness of humankind, the Augustinian concept of Jesus' death as a sacrifice propitiating the wrath of God, the remission of sins through justification by faith alone, justification as an act of God's free-grace, and sanctification as a change wrought in the justified sinner by the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is in the nature of sanctification that Maxfield is most variant. Following the Pauline doctrine that the soul oriented on Christ can not also be oriented on the things of this world, he believes that sanctification separates us from the world and makes us partakers of the Spirit of Christ. Essential to it is an experiential knowledge of "nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified."<sup>78</sup> He believes sanctification can not occur in the heart without the soul's going out after Jesus Christ.<sup>79</sup> His hearers were cautioned to look only to Jesus, and to abide only in him, because "Were the light and life of Christ Jesus, his Merits and Righteousness to be withdrawn, the soul would be as dead and lifeless as ever."<sup>80</sup>

This is closely akin to the enthusiastic notion of the god dwelling within. It takes sanctification out of the realm

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<sup>78</sup>Maxfield, Vindication, 42.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 33.

of human endeavour and separates it entirely from ethical behavior. Maxfield denies Wesley's charge that he does not recommend the means of grace, but his reference to it is added as an afterthought in his Vindication. The use of the means of grace does not receive the emphasis in Maxfield's theological statement that it enjoys in Wesley's thought. As to perfection, he holds it higher than Wesley, seeing it as something to be strived for but never attained in this life.<sup>81</sup>

By associating Coughlan's name with Maxfield's, Wesley implies that his theology is variant in the same manner. There are some similarities. Both are more Christocentric than Wesley, subsuming under Christ the functions most frequently ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Both rely more on inward impressions, feelings, and emotional responses than on ethical behavior in determining when sanctification may be said to have occurred. Both make little reference to perfection, Wesley's central theme. When enumerating the effects of sanctification Maxfield mentions themes similar to those emphasised in the narratives of Coughlan's Newfoundland converts. These are a sense of personal unworthiness remaining even after sanctification, a thirst for Jesus Christ and a delight in fellowship with him, deliverance from the

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<sup>81</sup>"And as to Sanctification, I suppose all true Believers agree that there is far more to be done in us than we have hitherto received..." Maxfield, Vindication, 41.

cares of this world, and sanctification as a foretaste of the heavenly kingdom.

There is one other anomaly reflected in the writings of both men, that of the inordinately high self-esteem which Wesley labelled "spiritual pride". Maxfield wrote

He has also promised to teach us the Way of Righteousness, and to reveal unto us the Mystery of his Kingdom and the Secrets of his Love. But these Things which are so highly prized in the Sight of God are only known and enjoyed by those who are truly and really in Christ and Christ in them.<sup>82</sup>

The gnosticism implied by this statement is not shared by Laurence Coughlan, but the inordinately high self-esteem is. Coughlan, who believed himself to be a true evangelical minister sent by God, distinguished himself from those who are called ministers, but whose ministry bears little fruit in terms of numbers converted.<sup>83</sup> John Stretton also distinguished between true evangelical ministers and those "filled with the lumber of the schools."<sup>84</sup> These statements exemplify an attitude Wesley attacked in his letter to Maxfield and his associates.

<sup>82</sup>Maxfield, Vindication, 35.

<sup>83</sup>Coughlan, Account, 8. Coughlan accuses them of being as uncaring as Gallio, in a reference to the proconsul of Achaia who refused to hear or judge the apostle Paul. Acts 18: 12-17.

<sup>84</sup>John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 30 Nov. 1777, in Eliza Bennis, Christian Correspondence: being a collection of letters written by the late Rev. John Wesley, and several Methodist preachers, in connection with him, to the late Mrs. Eliza Bennis, with her answers, chiefly explaining and enforcing the doctrine of sanctification; now first published from the originals (Philadelphia: B. Graves for T. Bennis, 1809), 235.

But I dislike something that has the appearance of pride, of overvaluing yourselves and undervaluing others, particularly the Preachers, thinking not only that they are blind, and that they are not sent of God, but even that they are dead; dead to God and walking in the way to hell; that 'they are going one way, you another,' that they have no life in them! Your speaking of yourselves as though you were the only men who knew and taught the Gospel; and as if, not only all the Clergy, but all the Methodists besides, were in utter darkness.<sup>85</sup>

This was one of the main issues of contention between Wesley and the London enthusiasts. They, cognizant of Wesley's "heart strangely warmed", concluded that he had not achieved the same perfection they enjoyed and was not capable of teaching them.<sup>86</sup> They called him "an hypocrite, blind and dead".<sup>87</sup> Maxfield had the audacity to write to Wesley the following:

I long to have your heart set at full liberty. I know you will then see things in a different light from what it is possible to see them before.<sup>88</sup>

This attitude towards Wesley on the part of Maxfield and his associates was largely responsible for the recriminations that flew between the two. Wesley would not tolerate threats to his authority and actions which discredited the Methodist movement. He might have overlooked Coughlan's doctrinal

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<sup>85</sup>John Wesley to Thomas Maxfield, Canterbury, 2 Nov. 1762, in Wesley, Works, 3:120.

<sup>86</sup>John Wesley's journal, 23 Jan. 1763, in Wesley, Works, 3:126.

<sup>87</sup>John Wesley's journal, 7 Feb. 1763, in Wesley, Works, 3:127.

<sup>88</sup>Thomas Maxfield to John Wesley, 23 Sept. 1762, in Wesley, Works, 3:127.

heterodoxy had Coughlan not allowed himself to be associated with the London enthusiasts who spurned Wesley's authority.

### 3.8 A Moravian Influence?

Coughlan and Maxfield diverged from the Wesleyan Methodist norm in the emphasis they placed on justification and in their understanding of sanctification. Their theology seems to have been influenced by Moravian ideas.

The Moravian church had its inception in 1722 when Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a devout Pietist, offered refuge on his estate in Upper Lusatia, Saxony to the Unitas Fratrum, radical reformers from Bohemia and Moravia who were suffering religious persecution in their homelands. The Unitas Fratrum, or United Brotherhood, claimed the religious heritage of Jan Hus, a Czech reformer who had been burned at the stake in 1415. At Herrnhut in Saxony they formed a religious community, where, under Zinzendorf's leadership, the traditions of the Brethren merged with the emphasis of the Pietist movement. By 1722 this small band of three hundred had begun sending missionaries to establish renewal movements within the Protestant churches of Europe and to convert the heathens in such far-flung localities as the West Indies and Greenland, and later in Labrador.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>For the history of the Moravian Church see J. Taylor Hamilton, A History of the Moravian Church (Bethlehem, Pa.: Texas Publishing, 1900); J. E. Hutton, A Short History of the Moravian Church (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1895); Edward Langdon, History of the Moravian Church (London: George

It was John Wesley's contact with the Moravians in Georgia that had first led him to believe that the route to holiness led through faith alone rather than the pathway of asceticism and good works which had marked his Oxford days. Following his Aldersgate experience, which occurred under the influence and in the presence of Moravians, the Methodist movement was deeply intertwined with Moravianism. Both attempted to be ecclesiolaes in ecclesia, evangelic reform movements which worked within the national Protestant churches. Wesley copied many of the Moravian methods: the band societies, the love feasts, the hymn singing, watch-night services, open-air preaching, extemporary prayer and preaching, the use of lay leaders.<sup>90</sup> Many individuals were active within both movements. Wesley's early interest in the group soon led to acrimony as he became increasingly disillusioned with their subservience to the Count,<sup>91</sup> their reluctance to accept his own version of perfection, and their differences of faith and conduct. Wesley, whose base of operations was the Fetter Lane Society in London, one of the

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Allen & Unwin, 1956) and two articles by David A. Schattschneider, "Moravians" and "Zinzendorf, Nikolaus" in The Encyclopedia of Religion (Mircea Eliade, ed.-in-chief).

<sup>90</sup>Clifford W. Towson, Methodist and Moravian (London: Epworth Press, 1957), 174-247.

<sup>91</sup>Towson concludes that the prime reason for the break-up of the partnership was the conflicting personalities of John Wesley and Count Zinzendorf, and that the differences in faith and practice were exacerbated by their conflict. Towson, Moravian and Methodist, 68.

religious societies within the Church of England, found himself ousted from its pulpit by Moravian vote in July of 1740. Four days later he attended a love feast there, where he read a paper denouncing what he considered their errors, and formally seceded from the Society, taking with him the twenty-five men and fifty women who were to form the first Methodist Society at the Foundery.<sup>92</sup> Despite the breach between Wesley and the Moravians, for the rank and file of Methodists communication with the Moravians continued, and there was much cross-fertilization of ideas. Moravian influence was especially felt in England during the period from 1749 to 1755 when Zinzendorf and his closest associates had their headquarters in the British capital.<sup>93</sup> It was inevitable that Moravian ideas would continue to have some influence on Methodism throughout the 1760's.

The Moravians had inherited from German Pietists the theologies of Arndt, Spener and Francke. In the early days of Methodism, preachers were expected to read these works.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Langton, History of the Moravian Church, 119-126.

<sup>93</sup>John R. Weinlick, Count Zinzendorf (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 207-218.

<sup>94</sup>T.B. Shepherd, Methodism and the Literature of the Eighteenth Century (London: Epworth Press, 1947 [1940]), 147. The minutes of the Methodist conferences indicate that in 1744 preachers were instructed specifically to read the works of Arndt and Francke. Arndt was dropped as one of the recommended authors by 1757. Francke's name was not omitted until 1770. Minutes of the Methodist Conference, 508.

John Arndt in his six volume work True Christianity had emphasised God's saving work in the individual, a spiritual renewal which brings new birth. The result of this new birth is identification with God in a unio mystica in which human and divine natures are conjoined in the believer as in Christ. The believer is then dead to self and the world, and leads a life marked by commitment to God, moral excellence, and a devotion to meditation and prayer.<sup>95</sup> Maxfield's distinction of "those who are truly and really in Christ and Christ in them" echoes this unio mystica. Coughlan's subjection to Christ, on the other hand, is closer to the Wesleyan Christian ideal.

Philipp Jakob Spener developed some concrete suggestions for the reform of the church, including an emphasis on the priesthood of all believers expressed through a triple ministry of sacrifice, prayer and mutual edification. More interested in practical piety than the unio mystica of Arndt, Spener advocated Bible study groups for laity under the direction of their Pastors, and an emphasis on spiritual development through leading a spiritual life devoted to love of God and love of humanity, in contrast to the theological controversies which were then racking the Protestant churches.<sup>96</sup> He held two doctrines to be of greatest

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<sup>95</sup>Ernest F. Stoeffer, The Rise of Evangelical Pietism, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 203f.

<sup>96</sup>Philipp Jacob Spener, Pia Desideria, trans. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

importance. First, we must acknowledge our unholiness and incapacity in and of ourselves to attain righteousness. Secondly, we must have faith in Christ whose death gained for us reconciliation and forgiveness and who gives power and impulses to our new life in him.<sup>97</sup> In all other doctrine Spener advocated religious freedom and tolerance. Spener's distinction between the saving knowledge (contained in these two doctrines) and theological knowledge developed into the doctrine of the two states, which distinguished between true Christianity and formal Christianity.<sup>98</sup> This sowed the seed which in Maxfield, Coughlan and the London enthusiasts grew into spiritual pride.

Spener was also the source of the idea that holiness consists of a flow of joy.<sup>99</sup> The basis of this joy, he asserted, is the assurance of divine grace. God grants this foretaste of eternal life to beginners in true Christianity to induce them to give themselves wholly to the Lord. "Insofar as we are joyous", he proclaimed, "insofar do we believe".<sup>100</sup> Holy joy, he thought, prepares the neophyte for the battle

<sup>97</sup>Dale W. Brown, Understanding Pietism (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), 41-2.

<sup>98</sup>Stoeffer, The Rise of Evangelical Pietism, 237-8.

<sup>99</sup>Philipp Jacob Spener, "Christian Joy," translated from Die Evangelische Lebens Pflichten In einem Jahrgang der Predigten, (Franckfurt am Main, 1715), 582-586, in Peter C. Erb (ed.) Pietists. Selected Writings (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 94-96.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 94.

with evil. Arrived at through prayer, it is hampered both by worldly joys and by allowing oneself to sorrow for earthly things. It remains undisturbed in the heart even during earthly suffering, and continues under such circumstances to produce a natural fruit. This idea was replicated by one of Coughlan's Newfoundland converts, who discovered that earthly sorrow produced patience, and thanked God for it.

Last Winter, it pleased the Lord to afflict me very sore; The Fever raged in my Family, and two of my Children died of it: I lost a Son, aged nineteen Years, and a Daughter, aged near seventeen Years; I hope, they both died happy. Blessed be God, he has given me Patience to endure Affliction;<sup>101</sup>

August Hermann Francke laid even greater stress than Spener on the experiential aspects of conversion. He emphasised the penitential struggle and insisted that one should be able to date one's conversion experience.<sup>102</sup> Brown notes that Francke's own "dramatic conversion experience and his introspective analysis of feelings of guilt, anxiety, sorrow, and joy resulted in a greater emotionalization and subjectivism in his theology of experience than in the theology of Spener."<sup>103</sup> The conversion narratives of Coughlan's Newfoundland converts reflect Francke's influence. They emphasise the penitential struggle and all but James Noseworthy were able to date their conversion experience. They

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<sup>101</sup>J.J. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 105.

<sup>102</sup>Brown, Understanding Pietism, 147.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 118.

invariably contrast the guilt, anxiety and sorrow for sin of their period of conviction with the joy of the justification experience.

The main focus of theological contention between the Moravians and the Wesleyan Methodists concerned the nature of perfection. Spener recognized perfection as a valid biblical and traditional doctrine and expected that the regenerate should anticipate a measure of it. However, he viewed both justification and sanctification as a continuous rather than conclusive action, and placed his emphasis on regeneration rather than perfection. Francke's Pia Desideria presents perfection as a paradox; it is desirable to aim for but the closer one gets to it the more one finds it to be an unattainable illusion. In his Von der Christen Vollkommenheit he acknowledges that when justified we are considered perfect through the imputed righteousness of Christ, but are always able to grow towards fuller sanctification.<sup>104</sup> Zinzendorf strongly supported the idea that all perfection is in Christ alone; the only perfection in humans is imparted from him.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>August Hermann Francke, "On Christian Perfection" (1690), translated from August Hermann Francke: Ein Lebensbild (Halle, 1880), 273-275, reprinted in Erb, Pietists, 114-116. See also Brown, Understanding Pietism, 95-101.

<sup>105</sup>A full account of the controversy between Wesley and Zinzendorf concerning the righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner may be found in George W. Forrell (ed.) Zinzendorf: Nine Lectures (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1973), xv-xix. See also Wesley's letter to Dr. Rutherford, 28 March 1768, in Wesley, Works, 14:347f and his "Thoughts on the Imputed Righteousness of Christ" (1762), in Wesley, Works, 10:312-315. This was the main issue of theological contention

Maxfield also held that perfection is something to be strived for but never attained in this lifetime. As for Coughlan, the only direct evidence as to whether his position was the same as Maxfield's comes from Wesley's letter to him.<sup>106</sup> It can also be admitted that the conversion narratives of his converts indicate that perfection did not receive the pre-eminence in his soteriology that it did in Wesley's after the early 1760's.

Maxfield's and Coughlan's divergence from the theology of John Wesley was in the direction of Pietism and reflects a possible Moravian influence on the London enthusiastic movement of the early 1760's. Coughlan's distinction between true Christianity and formal Christianity, his emphasis on the penitential struggle and the emotionality of the datable conversion experience, his equation of holiness with a flow of joy and his lack of emphasis on perfection, Wesley's paramount theme, all suggest a Pietist influence.

### **3.9 Summary**

Laurence Coughlan's teaching on conversion was, like John Wesley's, based on the doctrine of total depravity, expressed by Coughlan as "hardness of heart". He depicted conversion as

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between the two men. I omit it here because there is no evidence to indicate Coughlan was influenced by this dispute.

<sup>106</sup>"...if Mr. Maxfield and you took it [perfection] to be anything else..." John Wesley to Laurence Coughlan, 27 Aug. 1768, in Wesley, 3:340.

a process through which the hard heart of the sinner is pierced by the Word of God and made amenable to the entrance of Jesus Christ in a conviction that is both intellectual and emotional. Tears of conviction mark the softening of the heart which then becomes the arena in which the battle for the soul is fought. Tears of joy are the sign of victory and mark the moment of justification when Jesus enters the heart. This conversion is discerned by a "flow of joy" and Coughlan's converts expressed their conversion primarily in emotional terms. Following this experience the heart again becomes a battlefield; its underlying deceitfulness making it susceptible to the assaults of the devil. For some converts a second great emotional moment marked the end of all doubt as full assurance of justification was granted. Others found joy in repeated victories over sin and longed for a repetition of their primordial experience. Several indicated a longing for the holiness of complete subjection to Jesus Christ, an event they expected to occur through divine intervention.

For John Wesley and the majority of Methodists the conversion experience had an ethical, rather than an emotional, outcome. Wesley recognized that Coughlan's view of perfection differed from his own and associated this divergence with that of Thomas Maxfield, whom he considered an enthusiast. To Coughlan he wrote adamantly that holiness is spiritual and ethical, and is measured by love, not joy.

An assessment of the way Coughlan's Newfoundland converts viewed perfection shows that the term was not in general use. The narratives focus on the moment of conversion. Of those who have attained holiness two strains of thought can be distinguished. Those who received it during the revival of 1768-69 describe it as a great emotional moment when all doubt is removed and a level of intimacy with Jesus attained. Mary Stretton, whose phraseology in 1774 shows familiarity with Wesley's sermons, deems herself to be seeking sanctification or holiness. Her narrative and two others equate this with subjection to Christ.

The converts who were made holy during the 1768-69 revival reported an instantaneous attainment of Christian perfection that was typical of Methodist revivals in Ireland and England during the early 1760's. Wesley had accepted those claims to having been perfected as genuine and credited the whole movement to the work of God. However, the Methodists lost credibility when ranters and enthusiasts permeated the London societies. Wesley reacted by making a scapegoat of Thomas Maxfield, who was the lay preacher then in charge of the London societies.

An examination of Maxfield's theology reveals that he equates sanctification with partaking of the nature of Christ. This is not the flow of joy or the subjection to Christ of Laurence Coughlan. Nevertheless, both Maxfield and Coughlan diverge from Wesley in the extent of their Christocentricity,

their reliance on inward impressions, and their neglect of the doctrine of perfection. Both exhibited the excessively high self-confidence which Wesley denounced as "spiritual pride". And finally, both posed a threat to the authority of John Wesley through their association with the London enthusiasts.

In the areas where Maxfield and Coughlan diverged most from the Wesleyan norm, they appropriated ideas which were more common among the Moravians, a movement whose relationship with John Wesley had once been very close. Both placed more emphasis on justification than on sanctification. Coughlan's stress on emotions and Maxfield's appropriation of the unio mystica are both reminiscent of the Pietist theology shared by the Moravians. The roots of the excessively high self-confidence evidenced by both men may have been derived from the distinction made by Spener between theological knowledge and saving knowledge. Coughlan's understanding of holiness as consisting of a flow of joy shows the possible influence of the theology of Spener.

Coughlan's claim to be Methodist in his doctrine was genuine in so far as he preached what he believed to be consistent with the doctrine prevalent among London Methodists in the early 1760's. What Coughlan didn't realize was that the enthusiasm of this period represented an aberration in normative Wesleyan Methodism, that it was later repudiated by Wesley, and that Wesley after this period placed more emphasis on his doctrine of gradual perfection. What he also may not

have realized was that the Methodists he associated with in London had been influenced by Pietist ideas through their contact with the Moravians.

## Chapter Four

### The Newfoundland Conversion Experience

#### 4.1 Introduction

It is Friday night, November 4th, 1774. Friday night is the regular meeting night for the Methodist women of Harbour Grace.<sup>1</sup> Tonight, though, they will not hold a regular meeting. Instead, a special meeting has been called, a meeting of the select society, attended by the dozen or so men and women from Harbour Grace and surrounding communities who form the innermost circle of Coughlan's followers. Tonight they have a special purpose in mind. Laurence Coughlan, whom they have missed intensely since his return to England the year before, has written to ask them to furnish him with "accounts of the work of God upon your soul".<sup>2</sup> Thirty-year old Mary Stretton, leader of the women's group in Harbour Grace, has already

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<sup>1</sup>"I still continue to meet the Women, according to your desire....We meet, as usual, on Fridays at Mrs. Martins." M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 74-75.

<sup>2</sup>Many of the correspondents make reference to the request received from Coughlan. For example, "Agreeable to your Desire, I send you an Account of my Conversion, which is as follows:..." J.J. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 105; "You already know my former Experience, yet, in compliance to your Desire, I will again repeat it to you:..." J.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 124. They were aware that the accounts of their conversion experiences were to be made public: "I here send you my Experience, and, I hope, the Account will prove a Blessing to many." M.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 99.

written her account,<sup>3</sup> and may have broken the ice by reading it to the assembled group.<sup>4</sup> But no one is reticent. These narratives have already been told and retold. One by one ten people rise and relate their conversion experiences, while Mary's husband, John, acts as scribe.<sup>5</sup>

Carved out of the larger Anglican parish to which everyone in Conception Bay belongs, this is a gathering of the elite among the converted. They are those who have listened intently to the Word as preached by Laurence Coughlan, and have experienced the conversion he led them to expect. The members of the group have shared many other common experiences. They have wept together as Coughlan related the death experiences of their relatives and neighbours, shuddered together over the immensity of their own sinfulness, rejoiced together as each new soul was added to the number being saved. Meeting regularly in intimate groups, they have prayed

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<sup>3</sup>Her conversion narrative, dated 31 Oct. 1774, is more detailed and expresses the theology of John Wesley better than any of the others. It has the appearance of being carefully thought through. Her letter also contains news of the community, mentioning by name those who are considered backsliders, another indication that hers was a written rather than a verbal account.

<sup>4</sup>This is speculation on my part; I can find no other reason for her conversion narrative to have been written in advance of the other ten.

<sup>5</sup>Stretton indicates at the end of two of the conversion narratives that he has been the recorder. (Coughlan, *Account*, 90, 94). It can be presumed he recorded all of the ten accounts that are dated November 4th. It would be too coincidental to assume that ten persons wrote individual letters on the same date.

intensely for each other, studied the Scripture and come to a common understanding of it, and frequently shared their impressions of "the work of God upon their souls". They have a common purpose, to strengthen one another, and a common enemy, those who oppose Laurence Coughlan and his religion of the heart.

The conversion narratives which they related on this occasion display both a uniqueness and a unity. The stories are individual ones, as each shares the personal story of his or her own conversion. Yet at the same time there is a consistency among all the narratives; they all have the same understanding of how conversion should be experienced.

This chapter will examine some aspects of the conversion experiences of these early Newfoundland Methodists, and the role played by the narratives in forming the converts into a community with a distinct identity. The material drawn upon is contained in the letters which Coughlan requested from his converts and published in his book, An Account of the Work of God in Newfoundland, North America. The letters contain both conversion narratives and the genre which I have labelled "after-walk account".<sup>6</sup> Each of these is a distinct genre. Both were, as I shall show, forms of oral expression which

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<sup>6</sup>I have derived the nomenclature from the expression "when I review my After-Walk" used by E.T. in her letter. E.T. to Coughlan, n.p., n.d., in Coughlan, Account, 110. I have not found examples of the genre outside the early Newfoundland Methodist material.

were commonly used in the class meetings, and which have survived in writing only because of Coughlan's request.

#### **4.2 The Purpose of the Conversion Narrative**

The letters contained in Coughlan's book reflect the first decade of Methodism in Newfoundland. At the same time, they must be viewed as the culmination of influences which began when Luther emphasised for Protestantism the doctrine of justification by faith.

History has not recorded when and where the verbal sharing of conversion narratives was initiated. Originally, the gathered churches of Europe had required of new members only a confession of faith before the church elders, a proof of belief in protestant soteriology. By the late sixteenth century these confessions were customarily given before the whole congregation. In line with the Reformation impulse to eliminate ritual and the repetition of rote formulae, candidates for admission into the gathered churches were required to demonstrate an understanding of protestant doctrine through a question-answer session. As the personal aspect began to define itself more fully, the emphasis changed from a demonstration of objective belief to an expression of experienced faith. The candidates spoke extemporaneously of their faith while the elders searched for signs of

repentance.<sup>7</sup> This same primacy of experienced faith over objective belief was expressed by Thomas Rottle of Cloun's Cove near Carbonear, when he wrote "The Lord Jesus forbid, that we ever should be content with a formal Profession."<sup>8</sup>

The English Puritan theologian William Perkins, in his book The Foundation of Christian Religion into Six Principles, published in London in 1592, elaborated an understanding of the conversion experience that gave priority to a personal assurance of salvation. The expectation that the elected would receive this assurance became normative for most Puritan preachers.<sup>9</sup> Consequently most developed a complex morphology of conversion, an ordo salutis, which delineated the stages of spiritual growth and identified criteria by which it could be determined when each stage had been attained.

This personal narration of an experience of saving grace, which was at first voluntary, became, within ten years after the arrival of the Puritans in New England, a rigorous test of membership. Thomas Shepard, pastor of the church at Cambridge between 1638 and 1645, took the initiative in requiring that

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<sup>7</sup>Patricia Caldwell, The Puritan Conversion Narrative. The Beginnings of American Expression (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 45-80.

<sup>8</sup>T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 7 Jan. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 82.

<sup>9</sup>David D. Hall, "Toward a History of Popular Religion in Early New England," William and Mary Quarterly, Series 3, 41 (Jan. 1984), 52. Hall identifies Perkins' book as the impetus behind a decisive turn in English Puritanism that placed a new importance on the personal assurance of salvation.

candidates for membership in his church demonstrate that they had experienced saving grace.<sup>10</sup> This requirement soon became normative for Puritan New England. Without it, one could not partake of the sacraments of baptism or the Lord's Supper, or be enfranchised. With it, one was considered by one's neighbours to have established a private relationship with God, as well as a covenant relationship with fellow church members. Thus the gains were political and social, as well as spiritual.<sup>11</sup> Considerable pressure was exerted on potential members to relate a conversion experience that would be judged acceptable by the whole congregation. This obliged candidates to discover within themselves experiences which followed an expected pattern of spiritual transformation.

This emphasis on the public recital of conversion narratives begun among New England Puritans was later adopted by the gathered churches of England. Their absolute insistence that every believer should experience conversion was the demarcation between the gathered congregations and the Church of England.<sup>12</sup> In addition, many of them, especially Independents and Congregationalists, held "experience

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<sup>10</sup>Selement, "Meeting of Elite and Popular Minds," 37-45.

<sup>11</sup>Cecilia Tichi, "Spiritual Autobiography and the 'Lord's Remembrancers,'" William and Mary Quarterly, Series 3, 28 (Jan. 1971), 67.

<sup>12</sup>Jerald C. Brauer, "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism," The Journal of Religion (1978), 230.

meetings", in which those already admitted to communion edified one another with accounts of their experiences.<sup>13</sup>

Gathered churches which use conversion as a recruitment technique typically face the problem of establishing the status of the children of founding members as they reach maturity. The solution for New England Puritans was the adoption in 1662 of the half-way covenant, so that conversion was no longer necessary for the continuity of the church.<sup>14</sup> The gathered churches of England, faced with the same problem of waning eagerness among descendants of the founders, turned to revivals as a means of restoring the purity of their primordial age. Revivals also became the religious means to express intense dissatisfaction with the religious and social status quo.<sup>15</sup> By the 1730's revivalism was endemic among the gathered churches in both continents.<sup>16</sup> Conversion again

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<sup>13</sup>Caldwell, Puritan Conversion Narrative, 76.

<sup>14</sup>The half-way covenant required of believers a life free from scandal, public agreement to the church's doctrine, and personal acknowledgement of the covenant made for them in their infancy. It conferred church membership, although reception of the Lord's Supper was restricted to those who attained full covenant through the public relation of a personal reception of grace.

<sup>15</sup>Brauer, "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism," 239.

<sup>16</sup>Butler believes that the term 'The Great Awakening' by which this movement was known in America distorts the extent, nature, and cohesion of the revivalism of the period, and gives the impression that it was widespread rather than endemic. Jon Butler "The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction," Journal of American History. 69/2 (Sept. 1982), 305-25.

had a central role to play in the religious life of the gathered churches, and the conversion narrative became the touchstone for religious activity.

The Methodist movement was born within this period of emphasis on revivalism, and contributed to its proliferation. For John Wesley, who firmly believed Methodism should remain an evangelistic movement within the Anglican church, the conversion narrative did not serve as a test of membership. It served instead as a didactic and diagnostic device. Followers were requested to send Wesley accounts of remarkable conversions and death-bed experiences that might serve as examples to others.<sup>17</sup> During his visitations to the societies he required members to relate the present state of their soul; some responded with conversion narratives.<sup>18</sup> Wesley, not realizing that it was the expectations he set up that influenced the experiences, tested the veracity of his doctrine of perfection by comparison with them. Also, the experiences related by his converts reinforced this doctrine,

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<sup>17</sup>Among the duties of the Assistant Preachers during the 1750's was "To send from every Quarterly Meeting a circumstantial account to London, (1) of every remarkable conversion, (2) of every one who dies in the triumph of faith". Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, Vol. I. (London: John Mason, 1862), 596.

<sup>18</sup>Wesley's journal entry for 6 March 1760 records two from the Birmingham society. He observed "...the spirit and experience of these two run exactly parallel....Now this is what I always did, and do now mean, by perfection". Wesley, Works, 2:525-528.

which in its inception had been based on theoretical opinions deduced from Scripture.<sup>19</sup>

Given this wider context, how did the conversion narrative function in Laurence Coughlan's congregation in Conception Bay? During the early stages of the revival period the death bed experiences, related by Coughlan himself, were of primary importance. As the number of converts grew, the conversion narratives increased in importance. Those yet unmoved were influenced by the example of the recently converted who, raising their voices in prayer and praise, did not hesitate to declare in front of the whole congregation "what God had done for their souls".<sup>20</sup>

Following Coughlan's departure from the island, it was during the class meetings held in private homes that these personal experiences were shared. They had a profound impact on those who attended the meetings but who could not yet claim an experience of saving grace. Those persons, whose membership was peripheral until such an experience could be claimed, were influenced by listening to the narratives of others. W.L. clearly identifies hearing the experiences of the elect as being instrumental in his own conversion. After mentioning that it was "but a Week Yesterday, that I found my Heart giving way to the sweet calls of that dear Redeemer," he adds:

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<sup>19</sup>Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 336.

<sup>20</sup>Coughlan, Account, 9.

It was, when all had told the blessed Experience they had of the divine Love shed abroad in their Hearts, when I felt self-condemned, without a Wedding Garment, justly convicted of my Unworthiness; since which, I praise the Almighty Power, that cut my Bonds asunder, and loosened me from the Fetters of Sin and Death.<sup>21</sup>

The early Methodist community in Conception Bay was formed of individuals who had conversion experiences through which they received a personal assurance of faith, experiences which distinguished them from the more conventional Anglican members of the parish. Once formed, the community established as its norm the fact that such experiences should occur. The relating of conversion narratives exposed and widened the chasm between converted and unconverted. This caused peripheral members like W. L.<sup>22</sup> to live in anxiety until such time as they too experienced conversion. The anxiety itself helped bring the potential converts to the stage termed conviction. Social pressure was exerted on them to claim the experience that would make them truly part of the élite, and some responded to this expectation. The community then served to validate and authenticate the experience of the individuals, whose continuing membership among the élite was dependent upon their willingness and ability to take part in the weekly sharing of after-walk accounts.

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<sup>21</sup>W.L. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 2 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 85-86.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

W. L. should, however, be considered an exception. Following Coughlan's departure, most of these peripheral members, uncomfortable with their status and now bereft of the emotional stimulation of his preaching, gradually drifted away from the classes. Led to expect an emotionally stimulated conversion experience, they were unable to relate to the types of conversion which occur in the normal course of congregational life.

#### 4.3 The Psychology of the Newfoundland Conversion Experience

Studies of conversion experiences indicate that in the normal course of congregational life there are two types which seem most likely to occur. William James, whose book The Varieties of Religious Experience remains a classic in the field, distinguished these as "the volitional type" and "the self-surrender type".<sup>23</sup> He described the volitional conversion as conscious and voluntary, and noted that the convert displays a gradual regenerative change as new moral and spiritual habits are acquired. In the "self-surrender type" the maturing process occurs subconsciously, and the experience involves a sudden exploding into consciousness of ideas that have been incubating subliminally. The experience appears to the subject to be involuntary, and he or she tends to attribute it to divine agency. W. Lawson Jones, who prefers

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<sup>23</sup>William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, A Study in Human Nature (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), 202f.

to label these as "the gradual type" and "the sudden type", distinguishes between them on the basis of whether or not the subject is conscious that change is taking place. During a gradual conversion the convert is aware of the progressive character of the experience. The sudden conversion occurs when some unresolved personal problem or obstacle impedes incipient religious development, which, maturing unconsciously, suddenly manifests itself in consciousness as a completed pattern, as soon as the obstacle is overcome.<sup>24</sup> Elmer Clarke, whose work also builds upon that of William James, has labelled these two types "the gradual type" and "the definite crisis type". He has also identified a third, "the emotional stimulus type", which is an amalgam of the other two. Clarke holds that while the gradual type and the definite-crisis type of conversion experiences occur naturally, the emotional stimulus type is most likely to occur during revivals.<sup>25</sup>

Gradual conversions are more prevalent than those stimulated by a definite crisis. For example conversion narratives from Puritan New England indicate that before the Great Awakening the gradual type was normative. As young people matured they got ready to take on adult responsibilities, including church membership, and their religious awakening dawned on them as a slow and sporadic

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<sup>24</sup>W. Lawson Jones, A Psychological Study of Religious Conversion (London: Epworth Press, 1937), 18.

<sup>25</sup>Elmer T. Clarke, The Psychology of Religious Awakening (New York: Macmillan, 1929).

growth in grace, a developmental process unaccompanied by significant upheavals. Their narratives tell of the religious expectations of their parents, of early convictions that "wore away", of cycles of awakening and backsliding, of sermons heard which touched a chord of response in them, of conversations with friends that awakened their sensibilities, of examples set by saints and reprobates.<sup>26</sup> Finally, they claimed an experience of saving grace, the public narration of which entitled them to full church membership and adult status in the community.<sup>27</sup> Jane Noseworthy, an elderly lady living in Bryants Cove, whose early upbringing in New England would have normally led her through this process, had her religious development arrested in Newfoundland through lack of opportunity to pass through the formalities of this public confession. She spoke of her religious awakening in these words:

I had my education in New England, in a religious Family, and was early taught the fear of the Lord; in this Fear I was preserved; and by the restraining Grace of God, I was kept from the gross

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<sup>26</sup>Kenneth P. Minkema, "A Great Awakening Conversion: the Relation of Samuel Belcher," William and Mary Quarterly, Series 3, 44/1 (Jan. 1989), 121-126. Minkema's study indicates that Belcher, who had attended a Whitefieldian revival, "departed from the pattern of spiritual experience that seventeenth century practice made normative".

<sup>27</sup>Stephen R. Grossbart, "Seeking the Divine Favor: Conversion and Church Admission in Eastern Connecticut, 1711-1832," William and Mary Quarterly, Series 3, 46/4 (Oct. 1989), 696-740. Grossbart points out that unless the applicant for admission was a revival convert, most joined the church within the first year after marriage, an indication that church membership marked the attainment of full maturity.

Pollutions that are in the World. At last, it pleased the Lord to send you into these Parts, and I praise my God for his Mercy in sending you. When I first heard you, my Heart rejoiced: when the Sound, the blessed sound of the Gospel reached my Ear, it soon found a way to my Heart;<sup>28</sup>

It was, then, only upon Coughlan's arrival that this elderly woman had the opportunity to confess to an experience of saving grace that made her, in her own eyes as well as that of her neighbours, a full member of the religious community. She used relatively few words to describe this vital experience.

One Evening, while my Husband was reading the Scriptures in our Family, the Lord broke in upon my soul like Lightening; and I felt a Comfort and a Joy that no Words can express.<sup>29</sup>

Her husband James was the only one of Coughlan's converts whose extant narrative could not point to a specific moment in time when conversion occurred. In a narrative style similar to those of the New England Puritans who expected their religious awakening to be the result of a slow process of development, he confessed simply:

The Lord heard my Prayer and set my Soul at Liberty. I cannot say, that I felt any sudden or instantaneous Change, but I found the Burden gradually remove, and the Love of Jesus overspread my soul:<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Jane Noseworthy to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 91-92.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>30</sup> James Noseworthy to Laurence Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 88.

The second type of natural conversion experience often follows a definite life crisis - a life-threatening illness, a child-birth experience, a natural catastrophe, a war, death of a close relative - the kind of crisis which shocks people out of a state of complacency and forces them to focus their thoughts on existential questions. Life crisis events played a role in the conversion of some of Coughlan's Newfoundland followers. J.B. related:

It pleased the Lord to lay me on the bed of Affliction; Death stared me in the Face, and all my former Sins came to my remembrance; I then saw my need of a Saviour, and was constrained to cry mightily to God, that he would save me from eternal Damnation: I saw myself fit for Hell and Destruction, and knew that, if I was not washed in the Blood of Jesus, I could not be saved:<sup>31</sup>

J.B.'s life crisis was a natural one, one that could under normal conditions make him "cry mightily to God". However, his reaction to it was precipitated by having heard Coughlan preach, so that the necessity of being able to claim an experience of saving grace became for him of utmost concern.

Catherine (Kitty) Garland, the subject of one of Coughlan's death bed narratives, also had her conversion precipitated by a natural crisis. Faced with impending child-birth, an event which in the mid-eighteenth century was fraught with danger, she was watching through her window and spied a corpse being carried to the burial ground. She had a

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<sup>31</sup>J.B. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 1 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 122.

sudden impression that she would be the next to die.<sup>32</sup> Compounding this was her sense of shame at being unwed, which impressed upon her mind that she was "one of the greatest of sinners".<sup>33</sup>

Less dramatic but equally effective was the life crisis experienced by J.J., who reported:

One Night, when coming from a publick Meeting, I was affrighted, and the Lord made use of it as a Means to awaken me; then, and not before, I saw myself lost and undone; I found I had as much need of a Saviour, and of being converted, as any other Person whatsoever. I cried mightily to the Lord ...<sup>34</sup>

J.J.'s sense of terror was probably enhanced by the fact that the incident occurred while he was returning home from a meeting at which Coughlan had preached.

Whereas both the gradual type and the definite crisis type of conversion experiences occur during the course of normal congregational life, Clarke identified the third type of conversion experience, the emotional stimulus type, as most likely to occur during religious revivals. It has elements of both the gradual and the definite crisis types. It is essentially gradual in that no immediate change of attitude is effected, yet the subject regards some sudden specific event as the beginning of religious consciousness. During a revival,

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<sup>32</sup>Coughlan, "The Experience of C.G., who departed this life on the 9th of May, 1773," in Coughlan, Account, 26-27.

<sup>33</sup>Coughlan, "The Experience of C.G.," 28.

<sup>34</sup>J.J. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 104-105.

emotions are stimulated both by the preaching and by the responses of the other members of the congregation. The emotionally-charged atmosphere causes the crisis of conversion in persons whose thoughts, whether conscious or subliminal, have led them in that direction. The conversion itself is not complete until a change of attitude has occurred. It is this emotionally-stimulated conversion experience that was the norm for Coughlan's followers in Conception Bay.

For the majority of Coughlan's converts the beginning of religious consciousness is related directly to his preaching. The formula "When I first heard you preach" is the most common way in which they begin their accounts. All the narratives make reference to the effect of his preaching. Reaction times vary from an immediate sense of conviction raised by the preaching, to a more protracted period before this desired effect was produced.

The first time I heard you preach, I was convinced of Sin; the Truth found a way to my Heart, and I saw and felt my lost condition by Nature.<sup>35</sup>

Several converts mentioned that they had heard Coughlan's preaching for about three years before their religious sensibilities were awakened. C.K. and J.S. describe their experiences thus:

I heard you preach the everlasting Gospel near three Years, before I felt that I was a Sinner; I constantly attended the Means of Grace, but felt not the Power of Religion till the Lord himself was

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<sup>35</sup>M.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 98.

pleased, at last, to open my Eyes; then the Word  
came with Power to my Heart...<sup>36</sup>

You preached here near three Years, before the Word  
made any Impression upon me; I found my Heart hard  
as the nether Millstone, and felt not my guilty,  
fallen State; at last the merciful Redeemer was  
pleased to open my eyes, in a sudden and almost  
instantaneous Manner, when sitting in my own  
House...<sup>37</sup>

For three years C. K. and J. S. had listened to  
Coughlan's preaching, and although they were not aware of its  
effect on them, they unconsciously had acquired the two things  
needful for conversion: a sense of present sinfulness and a  
positive ideal they longed to encompass. Subliminal tension  
had been building up. Coughlan's sermon on contrasting death-  
bed experiences, delivered around this time, was the catalyst  
which permitted this tension to reach a crisis point. In a  
sudden and involuntary up-welling of the unconscious, they  
surrendered to the pressure and became aware that they had  
reached the stage termed "conviction". It has already been  
noted that Coughlan's sermon on contrasting death-bed  
experiences was instrumental in bringing at least two others  
to the state of conviction. The emotion proved to be  
contagious, as is common in a revival situation. M.P.  
reported:

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<sup>36</sup>C.K. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in  
Coughlan, Account, 107.

<sup>37</sup>J.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in  
Coughlan, Account, 124.

The Gospel came with Power from your Lips, and reached the Hearts of my Family; our Eyes were all opened, as you may remember, at the same Time...<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the preaching and the responses of the congregation, the sacramental elements also had the capacity to elicit emotional responses. Of the few whose religious awakening occurred prior to the revival period, two women noted the impressions caused by the impact of Coughlan's first offering of the Lord's Supper at Harbour Grace, on Christmas Day of 1767.

On Christmas Day I ventured to go to the Sacrament, with my Father and Mother, after you had repeatedly explained the Nature of it, and the Danger of unworthily Receiving, I was, in a Measure, convinced of Sin...<sup>39</sup>

On Christmas Day, when you first administered the Holy Sacrament at Harbour Grace, I felt the Weight and Burden of my Sins; I saw my great unworthiness to receive the Holy Communion, and was so oppressed with Awe and Terror, as I approached the Table, that I sunk down, and I know not to this Hour, how I received the sacred elements.<sup>40</sup>

The sense of the numinous expressed in these quotations was the direct result of Coughlan's oft-repeated teaching on the holiness of the Sacrament. The creature-feelings of awe and self-abasement coupled with the element of religious fascination were identified by Rudolf Otto as the mysterium

<sup>38</sup>M.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 95.

<sup>39</sup>M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 72.

<sup>40</sup>C.A. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 113.

tremendum et fascinans which is commonly experienced in the presence of the holy.<sup>41</sup> Lawson Jones noted that objects such as the sacramental elements become holy and assume a special appeal and authority when supernatural powers are attributed to them. These characteristics are largely socially determined; the religious appeal of an object normally derives from a tradition of social approval, and a consequent capacity to satisfy the more persistent needs of individuals.<sup>42</sup> This was reinforced in Conception Bay by the Anglican sacramental and liturgical context in which Coughlan operated. The holiness ascribed to the Lord's Supper was derived from Coughlan's teaching,<sup>43</sup> and reinforced by the reactions of these two women to their first reception of it. The Lord's Supper continued to evoke the reverence and awe of worshippers, such as C. K.

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<sup>41</sup>Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. by John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958 [1923]).

<sup>42</sup>Jones, Psychological Study of Religious Conversion, 24-27.

<sup>43</sup>There is no direct evidence concerning the content of Coughlan's teaching on this subject. Given his Roman Catholic upbringing it is not unreasonable to assume his teaching was consistent with John Wesley's Anglican position. Wesley believed that in the Lord's Supper one experiences the real, objective presence of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ is represented so that its effect becomes operative in the here and now through his spiritual presence and the mystical relationship he has with the communicants. Thus the administration of the Sacrament is not a mere remembrance but an anamnesis, a reenactment of the past in the present. J. R. Parris, John Wesley's Doctrine of the Sacraments (London: Epworth Press, 1968).

At last, it pleased the Lord to break in upon my Soul, in a very powerful manner, when I was receiving the Holy Sacrament at your Hands, then, then, I found experimentally that the His Flesh was Meat indeed, and that His Blood was Drink indeed; my Jesus did then fill my Soul with the Manna of his Love; I found the Burden removed that pressed me down, my Heart was enlarged; and I can truly say, that I did then rejoice in God my Saviour.<sup>44</sup>

This is another example of Coughlan's ability to elicit strong emotions from the members of his congregation, emotions which stimulated religious consciousness and set his followers on the path to conversion.

Thus for the majority of Coughlan's converts the stimulus was emotional. Rather than occurring naturally, conversion was dependent upon stimuli such as Coughlan's preaching, the communal response, or the feeling of being in the presence of the holy. But does this make a conversion less valid as a religious experience?

The valuation of an experience as religious lies not so much in the objectivity of the experience itself, but in the interpretation which the subject places on the experience. To the converted, God has personally intervened in their lives. In a never-to-be-forgotten instance of "amazing grace" each has been justified, forgiven, accepted. They responded with a sense of awe and humility. Believing that they had a new status in the eyes of God, they attained a new status in their own eyes. This new self-concept coloured their future actions.

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<sup>44</sup>C.K. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 108.

Believing themselves to be made holy, they acted as though they were, until they truly became holy.

Added to this is the effect of acceptance of the sinner's new status by the community of faith, which validated and affirmed that a transformation had taken place. It was through constant contact with the community of faith that the convert's new status was retained and he or she was enabled to grow in holiness. The class meetings, which assisted the neophytes in understanding and interpreting the emotions they experienced, were instrumental in this.

#### 4.4 The Conversion Narrative and its Relationship to Personality Development

Fawcett<sup>45</sup> holds that the common reference to religious experience as an upward then downward journey expresses the emergence and formulation of a need, followed by an existential question and answer, and a creative response of integration as the self establishes a harmonious relationship with the sacred beyond. Lang<sup>46</sup> emphasises that conversion is a movement in personality, a psychological mechanism for the expression of humankind's highest spiritual activities. The process begins with a phase of self-dissatisfaction

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<sup>45</sup>Thomas Fawcett, The Symbolic Language of Religion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971), 171-2.

<sup>46</sup>L. Wyatt Lang, A Study of Conversion. An Enquiry into the Development of Christian Personality (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931).

characterized by a sense of unease, and ends with a decision to surrender to a new ideal, and the restoration of emotional equilibrium. Lang believes that the process of character-formation does not end with this, but moves into an activity phase as the self seeks to harmonize behaviour with its new self-concept. Jones<sup>47</sup> notes that conversion inevitably leads to mental re-organization and emphasises that a religious experience can be described as a conversion only when it manifests itself in a redirection of the will, the forming of new patterns of behaviour and an extensive re-shaping of one's life. Coughlan said much the same thing in simpler terms when he wrote, "And as the Understanding is first informed, it then follows for the Life and Manners to be reformed."<sup>48</sup>

Thus religious conversion emerges from a period of disintegration in which a sense of brokenness, incompleteness, or dissatisfaction gives rise to an existential question, and the final step involves an integration of the answer into the personality and behavior of the individual. It must be said, then, that personality change is an integral part of the conversion experience. When the conversion is gradual, the change is not readily perceptible. When the decision to surrender to a new ideal is sudden, the change is accompanied by extreme emotional swings as the old self is partially

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<sup>47</sup>Jones, Psychological Study of Religious Conversion, 31-32.

<sup>48</sup>Coughlan, Account, 8-9.

destroyed to make way for the new. These emotional fluctuations constitute the stages of the conversion narrative.

Fundamental to this religious interpretation is a belief in the reality of a God who actively co-operates with humankind. Coughlan's converts believed that their emotional fluctuations were caused by divine agency. They recorded their mood swings as cherished moments when God intervened directly to change their hearts in an astonishing and awe-inspiring outpouring of grace.

Laurence Coughlan expected that his converts would pass in turn through the stages of awakening, conviction, and justification to holiness. Lang identified three phases which occur in any normal conversion process; these are recognition, decision and activity.<sup>49</sup> Coughlan's theological categories and Lang's psychological categories coincide. Both are describing a process of personality change and development, which in the case of Coughlan and his converts was religiously motivated, and interpreted in the light of eighteenth century theology.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Lang, A Study of Conversion, 56.

<sup>50</sup>An essential difference between Coughlan's eighteenth century world view and that of twentieth century theologians influenced by the scientific age is whether God actively participates in history or whether the universe unfolds according to patterns established in the original act of creation.

#### 4.4.1 Awakening

Awakening and conviction both belong to the recognition phase of the conversion process. Awakening was the term Coughlan used to refer to an intellectual understanding of one's status as sinner, and the first stirrings of conscience that accompany this realization. Conviction was the period of extreme emotional distress that followed.

There are two pre-conditions necessary for awakening. These are the recognition of an ideal, and a dissatisfaction with the present state of being. For individuals such as Jane Noseworthy in whom there was latent religious sentiment resulting from Christian ideals instilled in childhood, reaction to Coughlan's preaching was almost immediate. Others needed considerable time before the religious ideal could be recognized and a dissatisfaction with the present spiritual state instilled. J. J.'s narrative reflects this.

I heard you preach a long Time, and used all the Means of Grace before I was truly convinced of my lost, undone State by Nature: and so stupid was I, and ignorant, that I laughed, and wondered, when I heard my Sister talk of her being converted; and I did not believe that she was a Sinner great enough to need Conversion. At last, it pleased God to work upon my Soul...<sup>51</sup>

Coughlan taught that it was immaterial whether one's life had heretofore been filled with good works or wickedness, all are in need of salvation. This was a new concept for some such as C. A., the mid-wife, who wrote:

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<sup>51</sup>J.J. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 104.

My Life, before you came to this Land, was regular; and I hoped to be saved by the Merit of my Works; nor do I know, that I was truly awakened, until the Winter that you first went from this Place to England;<sup>52</sup> then it pleased the Lord to open my eyes, and I found, that I was an Unbeliever, and had need of a Saviour.<sup>53</sup>

Others had to learn what wickedness meant. Coughlan blamed the migratory Europeans for teaching the inhabitants "Drinking, and Dancing, and Gaming" and leading them to believe these activities were acceptable.<sup>54</sup> The standards of other-worldliness set by Methodism frowned on all amusements, however innocent otherwise, as vanities that drew one's attention away from God. J. M. was one of those who had to learn that his amusements were wicked. He witnessed:

All my youthful Days were spent in Vanity and very Wickedness; I exceeded all my Neighbours in Iniquity, and gloried in my Shame; at last, it pleased God to awaken me...I saw myself wicked and abominable, and wondered that my God was so kind, as to offer Pardon to such a Rebel as I had been.<sup>55</sup>

Consciousness of corruption, then, was a necessary prerequisite to conversion. Coughlan's followers believed this could only be accomplished through divine agency. It was God

<sup>52</sup>This was the winter of 1766. One of the earliest converts, she dates her conviction as occurring during the first administration of the Lord's Supper in Harbour Grace (Christmas, 1767), and her conversion as occurring eighteen days later.

<sup>53</sup>C.A. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 112-113.

<sup>54</sup>Coughlan, Account, 13.

<sup>55</sup>J.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 115-116.

who opened the eyes of sinners, enabling them to see that they were wicked. He was assisted by the power of the Word, by which the converts meant the gospel preached or read. Thus "the Word" was not understood in its Johannine sense as referring to Christ the *λόγος*, but was associated either with Coughlan's preaching or with the Bible.<sup>56</sup>

What was accomplished in the stage of awakening was a stirring up of conscience. For most, conviction followed almost immediately, and some narratives barely distinguish between these two stages. For example,

I constantly attended the Means of Grace: but felt not the Power of Religion, till the Lord himself was pleased at Last, to open my Eyes; then the Word came with power to my Heart,<sup>57</sup> and I saw and felt my lost undone condition by Nature, and by Practice; I laboured under these Convicticns about twelve months, groaning earnestly to be delivered.

Others, such as Mary Stretton, clearly distinguished between awakening, when "the Word began to take root", and

<sup>56</sup>This is expressed more clearly in statements such as the following: "You preached here near three Years, before the Word made any Impression upon me". J.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 124. and "When I first heard you preach, I went and searched the Scriptures, to find if these Things were so, and I found, that your Preaching and the Word of God agreed." James Noseworthy to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 87.

<sup>57</sup>The converts commonly referred to awakening as "The Lord opened my eyes" and to conviction by the phrase "The Lord came with Power to my heart".

<sup>58</sup>C.K. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 107-108.

conviction, when "the Lord sent his Word with Power, as a two-edged Sword":

As I constantly attended the Means, the Word began to take Root...I was, in a Measure, convinced of Sin; yet I did not see, and feel, my lost and undone State by Nature, till the Spring following; when the Lord sent his Word with Power, as a two-edged Sword, to my Soul: I saw myself wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked; having no Hope, and without God in the World: I saw, and felt, I deserved Eternal Damnation; and was constrained to cry out, Lord, save, or I perish.<sup>59</sup>

In the stage termed "awakening" one had to understand that one had a hard-hearted, sinful nature and was in need of God's grace. In the stage termed conviction one must actually experience one's own sinfulness.

#### 4.4.2 Conviction

Of utmost importance was the stage termed "conviction". Coughlan and his converts believed that once the stage of conviction was reached, justification was inevitable, although it would occur in God's own time. Thus the conversion narratives emphasise the emotional turmoil suffered during this stage, and descriptions of conviction predominate in the conversion narratives.

The psychological condition most favourable to conviction is self-discontent.<sup>60</sup> The stage invariably begins with a phase of self-dissatisfaction, as the gulf separating one's

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<sup>59</sup>M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 71-72.

<sup>60</sup>Lang, Study of Conversion, 210.

religious ideals and one's present condition becomes apparent. In Coughlan's followers the guilt induced by this self-dissatisfaction was enhanced by fear, as repeated sermons on the wrath of God were heard. Torn between maintaining their present sense of self and responding to their fear of the God at whose hands they deserved nothing but eternal damnation, they entered a phase of extreme psychological disequilibrium marked by guilt, tears, depression and emotional distress. During this period the old personality was undergoing disintegration, and the new had not yet emerged. Believing they could not be justified until this period of suffering had been experienced, Coughlan's followers wallowed in their misery for a period of time that could last for several days or several years.

I was struck with Surprise to see my fallen Condition; and Anguish filled my Heart, when I saw the Load of Guilt which bowed down my Soul; I cannot express the Pain and Anguish I felt for three Days successively, I could find no enjoyment in any Thing, and, I thought, my Pain and Distress of Soul was as great as if I had felt a Portion of Eternal Torments.<sup>61</sup>

I saw myself as a lost, sinful Worm, utterly unworthy of Mercy; and many a Tear I shed, and many an aching Heart I had before the God of my Salvation set me at Liberty; about twelve months I groaned under the Lashes of a guilty Conscience and the Terrors of the Law.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>J.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 124-125.

<sup>62</sup>M.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 95-96.

The Truth found a way to my Heart, and I saw and felt my lost Condition by Nature; and my whole Life appeared a Blot; I saw that I had never done one good Action all my long Life; and my Grief was great and sore, that ever I offended a good, an infinitely good God; I laboured under this Distress of Soul for near two Years; during which Time, I sought the Lord earnestly with Tears, Day and Night...<sup>63</sup>

In an attempt to wrest meaning from the experience of guilt, the sufferers saw it as God-directed, and this attributed a positive value to the suffering. It was anxiously anticipated, and most converts could point to the precise moment when their conviction began and ended. Since they believed God is not found in ordinary experience, the convicted sinners had to experience a deeper and more profound suffering than they had ever known before. This was heroic suffering, glorified because it was in imitatione Christi. Through it the passion of Christ was self-appropriated. Just as the passion is followed by the resurrection and the ascension, the convicted sinners expected that their suffering would be followed by justification and holiness. Believing that God had awakened and convicted them for a purpose, they had faith in the ultimate beneficence of their pain. No one remained forever undelivered, for God is merciful; salvation was not for the elect but for all.

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<sup>63</sup>M.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 98-99.

From their suffering arose the existential question; "What must I do to be saved?"<sup>64</sup> Rejecting works as a path to salvation, they could do nothing but rely on the grace of God. But meanwhile, there were means of grace that could be used<sup>65</sup> - prayer, Scripture reading, attendance at class meetings, listening to sermons, taking part in the Lord's Supper.<sup>66</sup> Friends prayed for them, as did Coughlan and his wife.<sup>67</sup> Delivery from the state of conviction almost inevitably took place while they were participating in one of these means of grace.<sup>68</sup> This moment of deliverance was termed

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<sup>64</sup>Coughlan, Account, 9.

<sup>65</sup>Belief in the efficacy of the means of grace was one of the main points of contention between John Wesley and the Moravians. Zinzendorf believed that using of the means of grace before justification amounted to a reliance upon works. Wesley believed they were the means by which the grace of God is transmitted. Hamilton J. Taylor, A History of the Church Known as the Moravian Church, (Bethlehem, Pa.: Times Publishing Co., 1900), 133; See also, Langton, History of the Moravian Church, 119f. Coughlan clearly followed Wesley rather than the Moravians in this respect.

<sup>66</sup>Wesley also considered fasting a means of grace; Coughlan's converts make no mention of it.

<sup>67</sup>"Both you and Mrs. Coughlan prayed with and for me...." M.S to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 72; "...at Last I went to your House, and opened the State of my Soul to you, and you prayed with and for me...." M.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 99.

<sup>68</sup>"At a publick Meeting, the Lord was pleased to give me an Assurance of his Love.;" J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 102. "I was at Prayer in my own House..."; J.J. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 105. "when I was receiving the Holy Sacrament at your Hands..."; C.K. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 108. "On a Sabbath-day, when returning from the Sacrament, filled with Anguish, and

justification. It was understood as the moment when the righteousness of Christ was imputed to sinners, whose ontological status consequently changed. They became "restored to the favour of God"<sup>69</sup>

#### **4.4.3 Justification**

Awakening and conviction belong to the recognition phase of conversion experience; justification to the moment of decision. Lang emphasises, "Assimilation into personality depends upon decision, and this is an act of the self alone."<sup>70</sup> Morris describes the process thus:

...worn down by time and the entreaties of the will, his self gives up the struggle and its painful, precarious hold on its integrity.<sup>71</sup>

Delivery from the state of conviction was a decision to surrender to God. But Coughlan's converts did not interpret it as such. From a world view in which they yearned to become

perplexing Doubts and Fears, suddenly I felt myself delivered..."; M.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 96. "One Evening, while my Husband was reading the Scriptures in our Family..."; Jane Noseworthy to Coughlan, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 92. "Thursday in Whitsun Week...when I was praying to the Lord, this text came with Power to my soul, Try me, and see, if I will not pour in a Blessing, so as there shall not be Room enough to hold it. I suddenly felt my Distress removed and I could rejoice in the God of my Salvation."; M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 72-73.

<sup>69</sup>T.R. to Coughlan, Baltimore, 21 June 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 63.

<sup>70</sup>Lang, Study of Conversion, 73.

<sup>71</sup>John N. Morris, Versions of the Self (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966), 141.

recipients of the grace of God, they saw their surrender to the new ideal as a movement of God, an act of his free grace. They described the moment of justification in terms such as the following:

The Lord heard my Prayer, and set my Soul at Liberty.<sup>72</sup>

The Lord broke in upon my Soul with these Words: "Fear not, only believe".<sup>73</sup>

It pleased the Lord to shine upon my Soul.<sup>74</sup>

This Text came with Power to my Heart, "I will put my spirit within you." I was enabled to lay hold on the Lord Jesus, and praise the God of my Salvation.<sup>75</sup>

The redeemed sinner was expected to be able to give evidence of the change in his or her life. For Coughlan's converts, whose whole understanding of the conversion process had an emotional emphasis, the evidences of grace were primarily affective. J. J. lists five evidences to support his claim to conversion. He has received a dispersion of all his fears, the power to believe, his Heart has been lifted up, he has been enabled to cleave closer and closer to his God, and

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<sup>72</sup>James Noseworthy to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 88.

<sup>73</sup>M.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 96.

<sup>74</sup>M.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 99.

<sup>75</sup>N.S. to Coughlan, Bear's Cove, 28 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 135.

he has received the patience to endure affliction.<sup>76</sup> C. A. also finds five. She has received relief from the heavy load that bowed her down, happiness which makes her feel that her night has been turned into day and her hell into heaven, strength to fight the good fight, Jesus is now precious to her soul, and in every affliction her spirits are lifted.<sup>77</sup> J. S. also enumerates five evidences: he was confounded by the sudden change in his soul, he found himself full of love, his pains and anguish were removed, he was willing to die and be received into the blessed arms of Jesus, and he felt that his sins were pardoned.<sup>78</sup>

Among Coughlan's converts the pardoning of sins did not receive as prominent a place among the evidences of conversion as the change of mood. Also, while there is evidence that moral change took place after conversion,<sup>79</sup> the narrators themselves did not testify to moral change as they witnessed to their conversion. This was a very real departure from the

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<sup>76</sup>J.J. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 105.

<sup>77</sup>C.A. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 113-114.

<sup>78</sup>J.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 125.

<sup>79</sup>Coughlan wrote concerning the inhabitants, "...before they received the Gospel, they spent much of their Time in Rioting and Drunkenness; but when the Word took place in their Hearts, many of them not only got out of Debt, but also had to spare." Coughlan, Account, 15.

teachings of John Wesley, for whom the conversion experience was primarily ethical.

#### 4.4.4 Holiness

As was illustrated in the previous chapter, the early Newfoundland Methodists had two understandings of what it meant to be holy. One was a holiness imputed at the moment of justification. The other was a holiness imparted as one more and more subjected oneself to the rule of Christ.<sup>80</sup>

Following the euphoria of a conversion experience there frequently comes a mood of intense despair. Morris points out that this is because when the self has been defeated, something of value has been lost. For some the war is never really over - the old self gathers in strength and returns to do battle over the new self. The convert experiences a profound alienation, a sense of absolute isolation from good. Coughlan's followers interpreted this as an attack of the devil who seeks to be avenged for what he has lost.

I rejoiced thus in the Lord, about a Week; and then the Enemy came in as a Flood, and persuaded me, that I was deceived, that all was a Delusion, and that I had not received Pardon, or Consolation, as yet. Six Weeks, the Enemy thus blinded my Eyes, oppressed my Spirits, and overwhelmed me in

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<sup>80</sup>J.P. makes reference to his holiness in these words: "I could truly say, that Jesus was precious to my Soul; that he was altogether lovely, and that his Righteousness (imputed and imparted) was sufficient for me." J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 102-103.

Distress: Oh! what Anguish of Spirit was I in,  
until the Lord Jesus again delivered me.<sup>81</sup>

After this, I had some Doubts of my Acceptance; the Enemy would have persuaded me, that all was a Delusion; and my Lord hid his lovely Face from me: Oh! what did I suffer in the Absence of my Lord; no Tongue can express the Anguish of Soul I endured, while he concealed himself from me: However, he did not leave me long comfortless; he came to my Deliverance, dispersed these Clouds, and all my Doubts vanished.<sup>82</sup>

This phase typically ends with complete surrender to the ideal, and peace and harmony is restored. Holiness has been achieved through suffering.

Most of the converts do not include this period of doubt in their conversion narratives. Their experience ends with a statement of praise to God for what he has done. In their understanding, the story of the doubts that arise after conversion are not part of the conversion experience. They belong instead to the narrative form I have labelled "after-walk account".

The telling of a conversion narrative marks a decision to project oneself as a convert, and, as such, anticipates a reality not yet existent.<sup>83</sup> Recognition and decision-making have taken place; the activity that consolidates the new self-

<sup>81</sup>M.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 96.

<sup>82</sup>J.M. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 116-117.

<sup>83</sup>André Billette, Récits et réalités d'une conversion (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1975), 10.

understanding into the patterns of every-day living is yet to come. New patterns of conduct must be adopted, character modified, intellectual life re-organized. This takes time. In the normal pattern of full conversion an emotional re-orientation is followed by volitional and conceptual re-orientations.<sup>84</sup> Growth is intermittent, as old habits compete with the new self-concept until new self-understandings are completely incorporated into the personality. For those followers of Coughlan who were stimulated by the emotions of the revival to proclaim themselves justified, complete conversion was dependant upon attendance in the class meetings through which the integration of the new personality was completed. The after-walk accounts give evidence of this process of personality change through which holiness is achieved.

#### 4.5 The After-walk Account

Ten of the accounts that Coughlan received in writing from his Newfoundland converts follow a form different from that of the conversion experience. Rather than narrating a conversion experience from the moment of awakening, through conviction to justification and holiness, with a listing of the evidences of their conversion, they express only the state of the writer's soul at the present moment. The writers refer to this as "the

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<sup>84</sup>Jones, Psychological Study of Religious Conversion, 54.

Dealings of God with my Soul,"<sup>85</sup> as "relating to you what Jesus has done, and is yet doing, for my Soul,"<sup>86</sup> or as "when I review my After-Walk".<sup>87</sup> They are "accounts" in the sense of a weighing up of debits and credits, the balancing of life so that every defect is balanced by hope.

Two of the ten letters are undated; the others all have different dates ranging from October 19 to November 4, 1774. In addition, the form without its opening and closing formulae is found in a letter written by John Stretton two years later.<sup>88</sup> Eleven individuals from various communities writing letters on different dates would not have used the same form in their letters unless it were a familiar genre. I have found no extant examples outside the letters from Coughlan's Newfoundland congregation. The genre they are using is an oral one, which they have committed to writing only at Coughlan's request. The writings, therefore, depict what must have been a regular way of expressing oneself during the weekly meetings attended by Coughlan's followers. It does not necessarily follow that this form was peculiar to Newfoundland. However,

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<sup>85</sup>J.F. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 19 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 145.

<sup>86</sup>M.F. to Coughlan, n.p., 20 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 157.

<sup>87</sup>E.T. to Coughlan, n.p., n.d., in Coughlan, Account, 110.

<sup>88</sup>John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 8 Nov. 1776, in Bennis, Christian Correspondence, 215.

this may be the only instance when the after-walk account, normally transmitted orally, was committed to writing.

The typical after-walk account is very short, taking only a minute or two to narrate. It begins with praise to God and ends with a prayer request. The body of the account contains a confession of the spiritual weaknesses of the convert, nevertheless the tone is overwhelmingly hopeful. Every weakness either has already been amended by the grace of God, or is an occasion for prayer. In this way, the after-walk account serves as a personal gauge of holiness. When all weaknesses have succumbed to grace, holiness will have been attained.

Clement Noel's after-walk account is typical.<sup>89</sup> He begins, as do all the others, with a statement of praise: "Glory be to our blessed and dear Redeemer, who is always more ready to hear, than poor sinners are to pray."

The body of Clement Noel's After-walk account contains a listing of three failings. In the first of these he is troubled with fears that he will be "overcome by the hands of Saul", a reference to 1 Samuel 27:1. In the pericope which contains the expression, David has crept into the cave where his enemy Saul is sleeping and has stolen his spear. Recognizing that David has had the opportunity to kill him and refrained from doing so, Saul blesses him. But David still

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<sup>89</sup>C.N. to Coughlan, Freshwater, 27 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 127-128.

believes that one day he will perish at the hands of Saul. What Clement Noel is expressing in the allusive shorthand typical of the religious language used by Coughlan's converts is the feeling that, although outwardly he has been blessed by God's gracious gift of conversion, inwardly he still fears that he may perish at God's hands in the Day of Judgement. Then he amends his fear, declaring, "when I look to the Lord I know his grace is sufficient for me, and I am able to rejoice."

Next follows a second failing, the deceitfulness of his own heart, which Clement Noel describes as his worst enemy. This is a recognition that even though his faculties have been influenced by the grace of God, they are yet imperfect. He is justified but not yet made holy. He discovers that in the realization itself there is a blessing.

Then he testifies to the third of his weaknesses: "the nearer I live to God, the more temptations I find". Clement Noel is slowly learning to integrate new habits into his personality. Many of his old habits are considered sinful by Methodist standards and he is making a conscious effort to eliminate them. Still he is tempted to fall into old ways. He echoes a thought expressed in Romans 7:14-25, "...when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand."<sup>90</sup> In this pericope, Paul speaks of the value of the Law in helping him realize that nothing good dwells within his own flesh, recognizes his

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<sup>90</sup>Romans 7:21.

inability to overcome this sinfulness, and looks to Jesus Christ to deliver him.<sup>91</sup> Clement Noel, too, looks to Jesus rather than his own will-power to find a way to withstand the temptations.

In the closing formula of his after-walk account Clement Noel petitions "pray for me, that I may not be cast away." This practice of ending an after-walk account with a prayer request indicates that during a class meeting the narration of each account was followed by a period of prayer for the narrator.

The remainder of Noel's letter contains personal words to Coughlan indicating how much he is missed, a request to Coughlan to pray for him, and one more expression of his present state "it is a rough and thorny road that we are walking in", an indication of how much they are missing Coughlan. "But", he states with conviction, "I know that the Lord will deliver us out of all our troubles here below." The form of the after-walk has become so much a part of his religious expression that he naturally falls into the pattern of expecting that every dilemma has a hopeful solution in the form of supernatural assistance.

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<sup>91</sup>Zwingli's statement of evangelical doctrine interprets the passage thus: "In Paul's view we perceive and experience our own weakness and impotence. If, however, no one can come to God unless he has no blemish, according to Psalm 15:1-3, and we cannot be without blemish, it then follows that we must despair of ourselves of being able to come to God. Here the grace of God that is shown to us in Christ will reveal itself." Zwingli, A Short Christian Instruction, 54.

Prayer was an essential part of the after-walk account. Not only does each narration end with a prayer request, some also add the narrator's own prayer for the group, or for Coughlan. P. P.'s account contains a prayer for herself, requests Coughlan to pray for her, adds her own prayer for Coughlan and his wife, and closes with her prayer for the group.

I hope, that my dear Lord, who hath begun this good Work in my Soul, will deepen it, and carry it on, and seal me to the Day of Redemption. Dear Sir, I hope you will pray for me, the weakest and unworthiest of all your Children...O dear Sir, though you are absent in Body, you, and our dear Sister, Mrs. Coughlan, are present with us at the Throne of Grace; And if we never see you more in the Flesh, may the Lord prepare us all to meet you at our Father's house, as you charged us at your Departure, which Charge often quickens, and stirs us up....May God, of his infinite Mercy, grant, that we may hold out unto the End, that when Christ, who is our Life shall appear, we may also appear with him in Glory. Amen.<sup>92</sup>

The initial telling of a conversion narrative, whether before the congregation or in a class meeting, would have marked the convert's decision to project himself or herself as the recipient of God's grace. It would perhaps have been repeated from time to time in the class meetings as a means of encouraging newcomers and teaching them what to expect. Conversion narratives may even have been shared whenever a new convert was made. But the regular business of the weekly class meetings was the sharing of after-walk accounts. This forced

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<sup>92</sup>P.P. to Coughlan, Cloun's Cove, 26 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 139-140.

the converts to be perpetually cognizant of their spiritual condition, to pay daily attention to their impressions of the work of God upon their souls, and to be vigilant in recognizing their own weaknesses. The form taught the converts to look ever to Jesus for strength to overcome their moral and spiritual weaknesses, and held out the expectation that through the grace of God imparted holiness as well as imputed holiness could be attained.

Used in a weekly meeting, this genre would be very effective in drawing the group together into a close fellowship. As one person expressed his or her failings, the others would empathize. They would also be conscious of similar failings in themselves. This would serve to unify the group in a fellowship of shared experience. Yet the form itself teaches that every failing is an occasion for hope. It serves to draw the converts, who through their ability to relate a narrative of conversion have attained the status of holiness, towards the expression of this holiness in their lives.

#### 4.6 The Role of the Class Meetings

Laurence Coughlan claimed, in a letter to John Wesley, "The plan you first taught me, I have followed, as to doctrine and discipline."<sup>93</sup> The Methodist discipline centred around the class meetings. Christophers called class meetings the "groundwork of the entire plan of discipline" and noted that of the multitudes gathered into the fold in revivals, only those who faithfully followed the discipline of the class-meetings grew in holiness.<sup>94</sup> John Wesley called the weekly class meetings "the greatest means of deepening and confirming every blessing"<sup>95</sup> Watson noted that they were the basic structural unit of the Methodist movement and concluded that they were the most effective means of spiritual nurture for the membership as a whole.<sup>96</sup>

If the revival which occurred during the winter of 1768-69 can be claimed to be the occasion of the birth of Newfoundland Methodism,<sup>97</sup> the class meetings were where it

<sup>93</sup>Coughlan to Wesley, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1772. Reprinted in The Armenian Magazine, (Sept. 1785).

<sup>94</sup>S. W. Christophers, Class-Meetings in Relation to the Design and Success of Methodism (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873), 221.

<sup>95</sup>Wesley, Plain Account, 94.

<sup>96</sup>David Lowes Watson, The Early Methodist Class Meeting. Its Origin and Significance (Nashville, Tenn.: Discipleship Resources, 1987), 87.

<sup>97</sup>I say "if" in acknowledgement of the fact that at this early stage the identification with Methodism was insecure. The group was seeking as successor to Coughlan either a Methodist or a Presbyterian preacher. Balfour to SPG

was nurtured and grew. Established early during Coughlan's ministry, they were the primary means of maintaining experiential and evangelical religion after his departure.

Methodist classes were, like those of the Moravians, normally composed of neighbourhood groupings of a dozen or so persons of the same sex. Coughlan also used the criterion of age.<sup>98</sup> These factors, as well as the content of the meetings, led to the development of intimate relationships among class members. The meetings accommodated people with a wide range of religious experience. All members of the inner circle were of course members. But there were also a number of peripheral participants.<sup>99</sup>

Some of these would have felt coerced into being there; Coughlan had signified that he would prefer to give the Lord's Supper to those who attended the meetings. Although he denied refusing the Sacrament to any who did not attend, many believed that he would.<sup>100</sup> Others may have been there at the

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Secretary, 9 Nov. 1775. B.6\203.

<sup>98</sup>"I kept the Place, where you put me with the young Men, till the middle of this last Summer, when they began to draw away; and then I went with the old Men, where I have been ever since." J.T. to Coughlan, n.p., n.d., in Coughlan, Account, 130. Dividing classes by age was sometimes also done in England. Watson, Early Methodist Class Meeting, 95.

<sup>99</sup>In England such persons would have been accepted on three month's trial.

<sup>100</sup>Hugh Roberts' contention that many had been disbarred from going to the Ordinances because they would not submit to being examined by an illiterate common fisherman was supported by a petition signed by twelve merchants of Harbour Grace. The original court records which deal with this incident are no

urging of friends and relatives. Arthur Thomey wrote:

He who is my bosom Friend doth not go to the little Meetings; but it is my Prayer to the Lord Jesus to turn his Heart, that he may go:...be pleased to send us a few Lines to stir us both up.<sup>101</sup>

Many of these peripheral members were lost to the groups within the first year of Coughlan's departure.<sup>102</sup> Lacking the emotional stimulus of Coughlan's preaching, they proved unable to experience the type of conversion they had been led to expect, and lost interest in attending.

Yet even for the peripheral member there was value in attending. Through their attendance the standards of behaviour of the group became a community standard. By the Fall of 1769

longer available. A copy is attached to Warwick Smith, "An Address on Revd. Laurence Coughlan, March 20, 1942, from records of the Harbour Grace Court House" (Unpublished. Available at the Nfld. Room, Arts and Culture Centre, St. John's). A handwritten transcript of the records is also contained in Frank McCrea's Notebook, PANL MG 314.

<sup>101</sup>A.T. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 3 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 156.

<sup>102</sup>Class leaders sent Coughlan accounts of their groups as follows: "...there are some that seem to draw back;...poor R.T., I fear, is quite gone, and W.C.; I have no hopes of Mr. G., very little of J.B; R.B. comes but very seldom, I am afraid of some others"; J.T. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 24 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 133. "Poor M.B. and I., Demas-like, have forsaken us, having loved this present evil World; they have never met since you left us. And what can I say of poor Mrs. P., her Walk is disorderly and she seldom attends the Meetings; I am very doubtful of her"; M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 74. "I could wish all who had frequented our Meetings, under your Ministry, had continued with us, and been blessed as we were; alas! some have been ashamed of us. Poor J.P., H.S. and his wife, and F.S. are entirely gone off from us"; A.T. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 29 Jan. 1775, in Coughlan, Account, 143.

Coughlan could claim that drunkenness and Sabbath-breaking were "very much done away" in the community, and great numbers were coming to church constantly.<sup>103</sup> The standard of lay piety was raised, and scripture reading, extemporaneous prayer, and hymn singing became a part of people's lives. Asceticism and other-worldliness were encouraged, the value of poverty extolled, and suffering given religious meaning. The group pressure towards conformity helped establish a new ethical code in Conception Bay. When peripheral members dropped out, the ideas they learned in the classes stayed with them and influenced their ethos and their behaviour.

For those who attended, the class meetings proved of inestimable value. They were the place where religious experience and feelings were articulated. The pressure to do this forced new members to become aware of these feelings, and to interpret them according to Coughlan's morphology of conversion. During this process the individual grew in self-perception, self-assurance, and self-expression. Since the willingness to confess one's faith declares its presence, the telling of a conversion narrative during a meeting established the neophyte's change of status from sinner to redeemed. The telling also had a cathartic effect for the narrator. This was shared by the converted listeners who relived their own experiences during the narration. Then by comparison with the

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<sup>103</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 12 October 1769. B.6/179.

group experience, the experience of the individual was verified. The anxiety and insecurity of the conviction phase was overcome by the acceptance of the convert's new status by the group. This re-affirmed a new sense of self, and led to the emergence of a different social persona. It also satisfied needs for acceptance and inclusion, basic needs for uprooted individuals living in the fluid and rapidly-changing society of mid-eighteenth century Conception Bay.

Subsequent to the telling of a conversion narrative, the newly-converted received the solicitous care of the group during the weekly recital of an after-walk experience. For a few moments every week, the spiritual health of the new convert was the centre of attention, and individuals were forced to maintain a constant alertness to their religious feelings during the intervening days in order to be able to give an account the next week. Through this means, the new way of life was integrated into the personality. Through the practice of following the giving of each account by prayer for the convert, the individual was taken into the fellowship of the group. Through mutual exhortation, the faith of each individual was strengthened. Through the disapproval of worldly diversions, contact with outsiders was kept to a minimum and the group became a bulwark against the world of unbelief. The members became so close to each other that they were welcomed into each other's most intimate moments, even the moment of death, when they would gather around the bed to

sing hymns and pray.<sup>104</sup>

There were also many social benefits to class membership. Isolation was overcome by the community-building that occurred. The monotony of life on the frontier was overcome by providing a constant source for conversation and speculation. The individual was given status within the community through peer recognition, a status especially welcome to the powerless and ill-educated planter-fishermen and their wives who composed the bulk of the converts. Through memorization of hymns and Scripture passages and having books and pamphlets read to them, the illiterate were not cut off from the world of knowledge. They were given a feeling of connectedness, so much so that individuals did not hesitate to request that the members of Coughlan's English congregation pray for them.<sup>105</sup>

For those who became class leaders, the social benefits were especially pronounced. Their role was "To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper: to advise, reprove, comfort. or exhort, as occasion may require...to inform the Minister of

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<sup>104</sup>Thomas Pottle, in describing a death bed scene, noted "Several of our Women Friends were with us..."; T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 28 July 1772, in Coughlan, Account, 50.

<sup>105</sup>"I desire the Prayers of your Church, that the Lord will enable me to ask, seek, knock, and strive, till I enter in at the strait Gate..."; R.A. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 22 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 152. "Dear Sir, remember my kind Love to all my Brethren unknown..."; D.O. to Coughlan, n.p., n.d., in Coughlan, Account, 168.

any...that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved:<sup>106</sup> The status this role conferred on the leader was one of the few means of upward social mobility available to the inhabitants. Only women were permitted to lead women's groups, this provided a rare opportunity for women to attain leadership positions within the patriarchal society. The class leaders were seen as being especially close to Coughlan himself. and shared in his glory for they continued to correspond with him after he left, and were the point of contact between the groups and their "apostle".

Finally, the class meetings were the means by which Coughlan's ministry was financed. In English Methodism, pence offerings of a penny a week per person and a shilling quarterly were collected during the meetings. If individuals were unable to pay, the class leader made up the difference.<sup>107</sup> When the merchants of Harbour Grace withdrew their financial backing from Coughlan, the class members donated what they could. Those who had no money to give, gave in kind. The giving continued even after he had left Newfoundland:

Sir, I have sent you a few small Fish, and three Bottles of Juniper Berries, for you and Mrs. Coughlan, and Miss Betsey. I am still poor in this World's Riches...I am ashamed that I have Nothing more to send, but please to accept of my little

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<sup>106</sup>Watson, Early Methodist Class Meeting, 98.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

Fish and Berries, which I am sure you will.<sup>108</sup>

The class meetings, then, met various needs - needs which could be psychological, social, or even financial. They formed the backbone of early Newfoundland Methodism, and kept the movement alive even though there was neither meeting-house nor minister in the years immediately following Coughlan's departure. They also demarcated the Methodist identity from the prevailing power structure in Conception Bay society, and deepened the division between the Methodists and the inhabitants whose allegiance to Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism remained intact.

#### **4.7 Summary**

On the fourth of November in 1774, the select society of the Harbour Grace Methodists met for the purpose of relating and recording their conversion narratives, at the request of Laurence Coughlan who had left the community the previous year. The purpose of this chapter was to examine some aspects of these conversion narratives and a related genre, the after-walk account.

The practice of sharing narratives of conversion began in the gathered churches of Europe as a means of testing potential members. New England Puritans made conversion a prerequisite to membership, a practice later adopted by the

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<sup>108</sup>D.O. to Coughlan, n.p., n.d., in Coughlan, Account, 166, 168.

gathered churches of England. In the revivals which, beginning in the 1730's, influenced religious life on both continents, conversion narratives played a central role.

John Wesley used the conversion narrative as a didactic and diagnostic tool, and as a practical test of the validity of his Scripture-based doctrines. For Laurence Coughlan the conversion narratives also served a didactic function. However, the example of the converted was secondary to his preaching in stimulating the revival. More importantly for the life of the Methodist community, the conversion narratives served to determine who belonged to the ecclesiolae in ecclesia, since the converts judged who would be part of the inner circle by the ability of individuals to claim a conversion experience that paralleled their own. It was this aspect which made the conversion narrative of primary significance to the normative self-definition of the community.

In the normal course of congregational life there are two types of conversion experiences likely to occur: one is gradual, conscious and volitional, the other involves a sudden self-surrender frequently stimulated by a life-crisis event. Both of these types occurred in Coughlan's Newfoundland congregations. But the norm was the "emotional stimulus type", identified by Clarke as the type most likely to occur during revivals, in which a specific religious event is regarded as the beginning of religious consciousness. For many this was

Coughlan's sermon on contrasting death-bed experiences; for others it was the community's first celebration of the Lord's Supper. Interpreting their emotions as religious experience, they proclaimed themselves awakened and convicted, the first stages of a conversion process which would not be complete until a new social persona emerged.

Coughlan expected his converts to pass through the stages of awakening, conviction, justification and holiness. His followers' understanding of what occurred during each stage parallels what modern psychologists describe as the stages of personality development. In the awakening phase occurred the two pre-conditions necessary for conversion: the recognition of an ideal, and a dissatisfaction with the present. Conviction marked the period of disintegration of the old personality, and was recognized by the profound emotional distress experienced. This stage ended in justification, the moment of decision-making, when the self surrendered to the new ideal. Justification was followed by sanctification, a period of intermittent growth when old habits competed with the new self-concept.

The Newfoundland conversion narrative illustrates this process of self-surrender to a new ideal; the after-walk account demonstrates the process of integrating this new ideal into the personality. Failings of sentiment are occasions for prayer, and supernatural grace is expected to impart holiness. This genre, which always commences with praise and ends with

prayer, would have been frequently used during class meetings.

The class meetings were central to Methodist discipline, and answered the varying needs of people at different levels of spiritual growth. The inclusion of peripheral members helped spread Methodist ethical values to the wider community. Neophytes learned to recognize and articulate their religious experiences. Their initial telling of the narrative marked a change in self-concept and the emergence of a new social persona. As well as helping neophytes integrate the new self-concept into a changed lifestyle, the group meetings answered needs for acceptance, community-building, socialization, status-building, knowledge, and connectedness. Class leadership provided opportunity for upward social mobility. And, finally, the classes provided a means to supplement Coughlan's income from the SPG.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Class Conflict and Religious Differentiation

#### 5.1 Introduction

Not all residents of Conception Bay were equally receptive to the message Laurence Coughlan preached. Among the merchant class the primary aim in bringing religion to Harbour Grace had been establishing law and order and allegiance to the crown in face of the threat posed by increasing numbers of poor Irish immigrants. Coughlan's affinity with the poor, his preaching in the Irish tongue, and his elevation of an illiterate fisherman to a position of leadership did not endear him to these merchants. Nor did his explosive temper and persistence in denouncing sin wherever he found it. The merchants scorned his lack of education and gentlemanly qualities. He was not what they had expected.

The enmity between merchants and boat-keepers, which was so much a part of the social situation in Conception Bay when Laurence Coughlan arrived there, was also instrumental in the development of the group of converts into a distinct religious community. Chapter one detailed the roots of this enmity. Chapter three noted how, in Coughlan's morphology of conversion, the newly justified convert was thought to be susceptible to the assaults of the devil who deliberately attempts to hinder the work of God. This chapter will depict how Coughlan applied this same theme to the conflicts that

developed between himself and the merchants. Thus the converted community, interpreting its own religious history according to this theme, came to believe that the devil, working through the merchants of Conception Bay, was challenging the establishment of "true evangelical religion" by attacking the prophet who had led them to conversion. This idea had a profound effect on religious differentiation, and led to the proliferation of denominational conflict in Conception Bay.

### **5.2 The Demography of the Converts**

Twenty-eight of the thirty-one correspondents whose letters are contained in An Account of the Work of God in Newfoundland, North America were permanent inhabitants of Conception Bay. Most lived in the two large commercial centres of Harbour Grace and Carbonear. Others came from tiny fishing villages such as Freshwater, Blackhead, Cloun's Cove, Bear's Cove, Mosquito, and Bryants Cove. These correspondents were the élite among the converts. They were comprised of two groups of people - those most fervently religious and those most intimate with Coughlan. The former had a conversion narrative to tell; the latter were the class leaders who carried on a regular correspondence with Coughlan and continued to seek his advice and send him accounts of the spiritual state of their charges long after he had left the shores of Newfoundland. Among these class leaders were

housewives Mary Stretton of Harbour Grace and Patience Parsons of Cloun's Cove, Irish trader Arthur Thomey of Harbour Grace, young Thomas Pottle who was clerk in the Carbonear store of Pike and Green, and Richard Valentine, agent for the firm of Kemps in Carbonear. Since a level of literacy was a necessity for class leadership, they were not only among those most advanced in holiness but also the most educated. The absence of representatives of the merchant class among them is notable.

While caution must be exercised in assuming the extant letters to be representative of the whole community of converts, it is evident that the merchant class was seriously under-represented. Arthur Thomey and John Stretton of Harbour Grace belonged to this class, but being Irish newcomers were excluded from the existing power structure of the mercantocracy. Thomas Pottle and Richard Valentine belonged to the lower echelon of the merchant class. Both were employed by Carbonear firms whose owners had connections to the dissenting churches of Poole. The major Harbour Grace merchants who had been instrumental in having the church erected there were not followers of Laurence Coughlan.

Coughlan's initial success among the Irish servants was short-lived. His following was principally from among the families of planter-fishermen who resided permanently in the colony. In some of the smaller villages, where there were close family connections, the whole population converted. The

remarkable response of the people of Blackhead has already been noted. In Freshwater and Cloun's Cove the response was also universal.<sup>1</sup> Support for Coughlan was stronger in Carbonear, where families influenced by the Ashburner revival in Poole were concentrated. Their identification was not as much with Methodism *per se*, as with dissenting or "heart religion". As successor to Coughlan they would have been pleased to accept any minister who preached in the same style, regardless of his denominational affiliation.<sup>2</sup> In Harbour Grace, the centre of law and commerce and then the most populous town in Newfoundland, ardent followers of Coughlan formed only a small percentage of the population, and there was active opposition to his "born again" theology. When the Methodist society was formed there by Arthur Thomey in 1775 it

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<sup>1</sup>"Our little meetings go on, and no one fails to come, in Freshwater and Clouns:" P.P. to Coughlan, Cloun's Cove, 26 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 139.

<sup>2</sup>"At Carbonear Church...they will have a Gospel Minister without any application to the Society," Laurence Coughlan to William Legge, Second Earl of Dartmouth, Harbour Grace, 25 Oct. 1772. Dartmouth Originals, MG 23, A1, 2:2497. The society referred to is the SPG, whose supported clergy were required to be licensed by the Bishop of London.

"Oh, may our Lord send us a Teacher after his own Heart, that our Souls may be more abundantly fed." J.T. to Coughlan, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 119.

"...to oppose their Religion, as they term their Enthusiasm, would kindle a Fire. They are scheming to have a Methodist preacher recommended to them by their former Missionary, or a Presbyterian..." James Balfour to the SPG Secretary, 4 Dec. 1775. B.6/207.

could boast of only thirty members, none of whom belonged to the leading families of the town.<sup>3</sup>

Coughlan's converts varied in age from young married couples, such as John and Mary Stretton, to the elderly, such as James and Jane Noseworthy, Mary Martin, and the individual who wrote the following:

I feel myself greatly attached to you, it was you that was the Messenger of Peace to my Soul; and I can assure you, if I was not so much advanced in Years as I am, that I would gladly undertake a Voyage to England, for no other Purpose, but to see your Face once more in the Flesh;<sup>4</sup>

Very few youth remained involved. Due to the exigencies of the fishing season a young men's class dissolved the summer after Coughlan's departure, and the sole youth still interested joined what he referred to as "the old Men".<sup>5</sup> Coughlan's letter to Wesley indicates separate classes for married men and married women; he made no mention of classes for unmarried youth.<sup>6</sup> Kitty Garland, whose death-bed narrative Coughlan relates, had often said that "when she grew

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<sup>3</sup>John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 14 Nov. 1775, in Bennis, Christian Correspondence, 210-211. A.T. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 12 Jan. 1775 in Coughlan, Account, 143.

<sup>4</sup>J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 103.

<sup>5</sup>J.T. to Coughlan, n.p., n.d., in Coughlan, Account, 130.

<sup>6</sup>Coughlan to John Wesley, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1772, in Armenian Magazine (1785), 491.

old, she would be religious, and become a Convert".<sup>7</sup> Similar attitudes seem to have prevailed among the other youth of Conception Bay.<sup>8</sup>

Women, who formed only about ten percent of the population, composed a large percentage of the converts. They also proved to be the most faithful. Before two decades had passed all the men's groups had dissolved, and only the women remained. William Black, visiting from Nova Scotia on a preaching tour in 1791, noted the following in his journal when he arrived at Carbonear:

It seems there was once, (about twenty years ago) a great stir amongst the people in different harbours of this bay, under Mr. Coughlan, many of whom were converted to God. Some of these have removed to different parts of the world; some have returned to folly again; and not a few of them are gone to heaven; so that now there is no regular society; only about fifteen women meet among themselves.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Coughlan, "The Experience of C.G., Who departed this Life on the 9th of May, 1773", in Coughlan, Account, 25.

<sup>8</sup>This lack of response from the youth contrasts sharply with their reaction during Black's evangelical tour of Conception Bay two decades later. William Black, "The Journal of Mr. William Black in his Visit to Newfoundland," Arminian Magazine (1792), 179. It also contrasts with the high incidence of youth involvement in the Great Awakening which occurred in the American Colonies. A comparative study of communities experiencing their first introduction of "heart religion" followed by repeated revivals is needed to determine whether this is typical of first-generation converts.

<sup>9</sup>Black, "Visit to Newfoundland," 122-123.

In Harbour Grace, where John Stretton had complained of lack of suitable companionship,<sup>10</sup> he noted:

There is no regular society here: only about twelve or fifteen women meet among themselves.<sup>11</sup>

It seems, then, that the converts were predominately poor persons of the planter-fisherman class. Merchants were notably absent. There were very few youth among the gathered community. Women made up a much larger percentage of converts than they did of the general population, and remained faithful to the cause long after the men's interest died.

There were variations in community response, with almost the whole population of some of the smaller villages involved, and proportionately very few from Harbour Grace, the main population centre. In Carbonear, where the impetus to have Coughlan ordained and licensed to the Conception Bay ministry originated, the allegiance was not to Methodism as much as it was to any dissenting "heart religion".

### 5.3 Influence on the Migrant Population

Each summer during the period Coughlan was in Conception Bay the fishing population was swelled by a thousand or so passengers who arrived to sign on as temporary servants to the

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<sup>10</sup>"I greatly feel the want of Christian converse; for the professors here, (except a few which are dispersed) are very ignorant, and unfit to keep up a conversation of any kind." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 30 June 1777, in Bennis, Christian Correspondence, 223.

<sup>11</sup>Black, "Visit to Newfoundland", 176-177.

planters. Half of these were Jerseymen, many of whom had been coming to the Newfoundland fishery summer after summer.<sup>12</sup> Although the class meetings came to a stand-still during the busy fishing season,<sup>13</sup> they found time to attend church, and some of them were influenced by hearing Coughlan preach.

In the Fall of 1774 the annual departure of the fishing fleet was delayed several days by unfavourable winds. Two men took advantage of this delay to add their letters to the packet being sent to Coughlan from the inhabitants.<sup>14</sup> W.L., who had been some years in Newfoundland,<sup>15</sup> did not feel his "Heart giving way to the sweet Calls of that dear Redeemer" until the week before he was due to sail home. J.T. wished that he had taken fuller advantage of hearing Coughlan preach when he had the opportunity. In his after-walk account he regrets that he has not made use of the talent his Lord

<sup>12</sup>Palliser, in his "General Scheme of the Fishery and Inhabitants of Newfoundland for the Year 1766", counted 1053 passengers of whom 486 arrived on ships sailing via Ireland and 567 on ships from Jersey. CO 194/27.

<sup>13</sup>John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Carbonear, 29 Oct. 1770, in Bennis, Christian Correspondence, 200.

<sup>14</sup>"I am going to sail for Home To-morrow, God Willing;" W.L. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 2 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 84-86.

"...I would not let slip any Opportunity of writing to you, if Time would permit; and as Mr. H. has been detained by contrary Winds, and I now have a little Leisure..." J.T. to Coughlan, n.p., 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 118-120.

<sup>15</sup>He indicated Coughlan had often made ardent intercession for him.

entrusted to his care and requests Coughlan to pray that he may set out afresh.<sup>16</sup>

If the J.T. who wrote that letter is John Tantin, who returned to Jersey that year from Newfoundland where he had lately been convicted and converted,<sup>17</sup> he did indeed learn to make use of his talent. Pierre Le Sueur, who is credited with bringing Methodism to Jersey,<sup>18</sup> had experienced the awakening of religious consciousness in 1767 during one of his periodical visits to Newfoundland, where he had heard both Coughlan and his zealous young convert, Thomas Pottle, preach. For seven years he nurtured these religious convictions while Pottle wrote him "animating and comforting letters urging him to stand fast in the Lord".<sup>19</sup> When John Tantin returned from Newfoundland in 1774, the two men met nightly until Le Sueur at last experienced the flow of joy of the conversion experience. Within another week his wife also claimed that experience, and shortly after, so did another dozen people, including two of their brothers who had also been convicted in

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<sup>16</sup>J.T. to Coughlan, n.p., 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 120.

<sup>17</sup>His return to Jersey from Newfoundland in 1774 is mentioned by Peter Le Sueur in "A Short Account of Peter le Sueur of Jersey, by his Eldest Son" Methodist Magazine (Nov. 1820), 401-408.

<sup>18</sup>Abel Stevens, The History of the Religious Movement of the Eighteenth Century, called Methodism 2 vols. (New York: Carlton and Lanahan, 1868), 2:329-332. T. Watson Smith, History of the Methodist Church, Vol. I.

<sup>19</sup>Le Sueur, "Short Account of Peter le Sueur", 404.

Newfoundland.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted, however, that the Jersey movement could not be considered Methodist until 1783 when John Wesley, at Le Sueur's request, sent Mr. Brackenbury to be their preacher, replacing the Calvinist John Brown of Poole and the blind Calvinist preacher Bestland. Until then, as Le Sueur's son testifies,

...we knew nothing about Methodists or Calvinists,  
&c. Only we knew that we believed in Christ, that  
we loved God, and all who loved him, and ardently  
desired that all the world should love him too, and  
from this motive we called sinners to repentance.<sup>21</sup>

These individuals whose lives were touched by Coughlan's ministry are an indication that his message was well received by at least some of the five hundred or so Jerseymen who became temporary residents of Conception Bay during the fishing season.

Among the Irish migrants there was less success. Their initial interest in hearing Coughlan preach in the Irish tongue dissipated when they returned home and were required to do heavy penance for their attendance at Protestant services. However, among the Irish who settled in Newfoundland, where as yet the Roman Catholic church was not established, there was more success. By 1772 Coughlan was able to claim "Many of the Irish come to Church and some are brought over to our Church

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 401-408.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 406.

and attend Church and Sacrament very constant".<sup>22</sup> Among these were Arthur Thomey<sup>23</sup> and John Stretton, young Irishmen who had come to Newfoundland to seek their fortunes in business. Both these men were to play a prominent role in maintaining a Methodist presence in Conception Bay following Coughlan's departure.<sup>24</sup>

Thus it can be said that although Coughlan's preaching to the Irish migrants had no lasting effect, among the Irish who remained in Newfoundland there were some converts. Among the migrant Jerseymen the seeds Coughlan sewed came to fruition in the period when both they and Coughlan were no longer in Newfoundland.

#### 5.4 Early Opposition to Coughlan's Message

The inhabitants of Newfoundland were not all receptive to the message which Laurence Coughlan had to preach. One man opposed Coughlan openly in church, declaring that "he was for the Church, the Church; and that he was sure the Clergy in England did not preach up, that people must go to Hell, except they were born again." Coughlan later turned this incident to

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<sup>22</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 26 Oct. 1772. SPG A-170 C/Nfld/1/61, ACC.

<sup>23</sup>Sometimes spelled Thoumey.

<sup>24</sup>A full account of this period, including the contributions of Thomey and Stretton, may be found in Hans Rollmann, "'The Pillars Fall, Yet the Building Stands.' Methodist Lay Preachers and Missionaries in Newfoundland After Coughlan: 1773-1791." Unpublished.

his good by portraying the man as dying in torment, and contrasting his demise with the peaceful death-bed scene of a convert, in the sermon which began the revival.<sup>25</sup>

The merchants sent a representative to warn Coughlan that if he did not change his way of preaching they would withdraw their subscriptions.<sup>26</sup> They called his way of preaching madness. This too, Coughlan played to his advantage. The following Sunday he took as his text Acts 26:25, "I am not mad". "From which Words," he wrote, "I first shewed, who they were that might properly be said to be mad, namely Drunkards, Swearers, &c were mad; and in the next place, I shewed that those who were turned from Darkness into Light, and feared God, and worked Righteousness, could not, with any Propriety, be considered as mad."<sup>27</sup> Coughlan's proof text was taken from Paul's defense before Herod Agrippa, during which Festus suggested that Paul's great learning had driven him to madness. Coughlan was identifying himself with the apostle, and the merchants with those who persecuted Christianity. Possibly he also pointed out the drunkards and blasphemers by name, a practice which he did not hesitate to follow on other occasions. As a result of this sermon the merchants withdrew their subscriptions. Coughlan requested the Governor to order them to honour the pledges they had made before his

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<sup>25</sup>Coughlan, Account, 22-23.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

appointment,<sup>28</sup> and obtained the original subscription paper from the Bishop of London as proof of their promise of financial support to his ministry.<sup>29</sup> This action caused a further deterioration in the relationship between Coughlan and the merchant class.

#### **5.5 A Theological Rationale**

By the time of the revival in 1768-69 the opposition of the merchant class to Coughlan was obvious to the entire community. This did not adversely affect his standing in the eyes of the poor. The financial dependence of the boat-keepers on the merchant class, their lack of legal and civil power, and the abuses of economic power from which they had suffered throughout the history of English settlement on the island had already caused them to look unfavourably upon the merchant class. The personal allegiance of the converts to the prophet who was leading them to Christ was very strong. They needed only a theological rationale to justify the feelings they were experiencing. This rationale Coughlan was able to supply.

The decision to convert is typically accompanied by a feeling of euphoria. Euphoria can never be sustained over the long term. It usually dissipates at the same time converts are faced with integrating new behaviours into their

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<sup>28</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 15 Oct. 1768. B.6/175.

<sup>29</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, 12 Oct. 1769. B.6/119.

personalities. A period of confusion and mental anguish often results. Coughlan had taught his converts to recognize this as the attacks of the devil, and to counter it by submitting themselves to Christ, who would do battle with the devil for their souls. Thus the converts were familiar with the idea that the devil would mount a fierce attack whenever the power of Christ asserted itself.

The revival represented for the converts the period when the power of Christ asserted itself most fully. They expected the devil to attack. When the merchants and gentlemen of the town opposed Coughlan's preaching, the very preaching by which they themselves had been converted, this was interpreted as the work of the devil. Coughlan declared that when the kingdom of the devil is shaken, he raises up children to battle for him.<sup>30</sup> He began to refer to the merchants and gentlemen as "the Children of Disobedience"<sup>31</sup> or "the Children of Darkness".<sup>32</sup>

In his historical account of the revival, Coughlan wrote:

Now the Devil began to roar; hitherto he had kept his Palace, and his Goods were in Peace: Jesus, who is the Stronger, came and spoiled his Goods, and took away his Armour wherein he trusted, so that he was a conquered Foe. Now, to be revenged, Satan sets to work from another Quarter, which was to work in the Hearts of the Children of Disobedience.

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<sup>30</sup>Coughlan, Account, 9.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 14.

The Gentlemen and Merchants began to threaten what they would do...<sup>33</sup>

This identification of the merchant class as agents of the devil destroyed their credibility with the converts, who began to refer to them as "the Enemy".<sup>34</sup> It enabled the converts to view themselves as better than the merchants and gentlemen. This challenged the existing power structures of the communities. Through the attainment of holiness, the poor were given a means by which they could also attain social status. Finally, the way had been opened for a "poor illiterate fisherman" to assume a leadership role in the community.

#### 5.6 The Opposition Intensifies

In 1771 and 1772 the enmity between Coughlan and the merchants came to a head when a petition against the minister was forwarded to the governor by Hugh Roberts, a Harbour Grace entrepreneur.<sup>35</sup> His petition was supported by another signed by dozen prominent merchants of the town, including the Fishing Admiral Nicholas Fiott, a member of the prestigious

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>34</sup>The following correspondents use the term "enemy" to refer to the merchants: M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 71; T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 7 Jan. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 79; J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 101; W.P., Jr. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 147.

<sup>35</sup> Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address".

Jersey merchant firm operating from London. Coughlan believed that even Charles Garland, his fellow Justice of the Peace, was involved in a plot to discredit him, and accused him of being the instigator behind a third complaint, signed by a drunken John McCarthy, who accused Coughlan of accepting a bribe to release a convicted thief from his sentenced whipping.

Captain Hugh Roberts, from Liverpool,<sup>36</sup> was a successful entrepreneur in an age when success required audacity, ruthlessness, and a fighting spirit. He was the owner of half a dozen ships ranging in size from the seventy-five ton "Serviceable" to the one hundred and eighty ton "Squid". In addition to his mercantile premises at Harbour Grace, Roberts operated a ship-yard at Holyrood, and at least one of his ships, the "Hope", was Newfoundland-built. When the American Revolution interfered with shipping, Roberts equipped his ships with guns and ordered his crews to capture what they could.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>I am indebted to the late Keith Matthews, from whose extensive name files the following information was gleaned. MHA Matthews Series 1. R58Q.

<sup>37</sup>The value of equipping the ships with guns was proven when Robert's "Friendship" was boarded at high seas by the crew of an American privateer under the command of General Gates. The thirty-five crewmen of the "Friendship" were seriously outnumbered by a combined crew and boarding party of seventy-five on the privateer. Nevertheless they fired two broadsides, killing the captain and forty-one of the crew. The engagement resulted in the privateer being taken as prize of war. Roberts lost one crewman in the engagement, and seven were wounded. London Chronicle, Tuesday, 23 June 1778.

Roberts was equally ruthless when it came to dealing with the Newfoundland fishermen. As was the custom of the day, the merchant provisioning a boat-keeper was obliged to ensure that the wages of the boat-keeper's servants had first claim on the profits of the fishing season. If the fishery was a failure the cost was normally debited against the account of the boat-keeper and recovered next season. In 1767 Roberts refused to pay the servants of two Irish boat-keepers.<sup>38</sup> Orders from the governor to pay or provision them were defied, and the servants, lacking passage money, were forced to remain in Newfoundland for the winter while their families were left destitute at home. Governor Palliser ordered the local Justices, one of whom was Laurence Coughlan, to examine Roberts and force him to pay.<sup>39</sup> They were unsuccessful. Finally the Vice-Admiral was dispatched to Harbour Grace to seize seventy pounds worth of Robert's fish and oil, and order him to appear before the governor.

If Roberts had little respect for legal authority, he was even less inclined to follow the conventions of polite society. He had fallen in love with Jane Ferrers,<sup>40</sup> the doctor's wife. When the doctor left Newfoundland, she remained behind, and the two lived openly together. Coughlan considered

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<sup>38</sup>Colonial Record Books, entry of 31 Oct. 1767. GN2/1A, 3:83, PANL.

<sup>39</sup>Colonial Record Books, entry of 22 Oct. 1768. GN2/1A 3:129, PANL.

<sup>40</sup>Sometimes written Ferris.

these two prominent citizens "intollerable examples of vice and immorality",<sup>41</sup> and frequently admonished them in attempts to convince them of their error. They ignored his reproofs. When he met the pair strolling together on the High Road in Harbour Grace on a Sunday afternoon in February of 1771, he was incensed that they would flaunt their adulterous relationship in full view of the community. Roberts claimed that Coughlan, completely unprovoked, greeted him with the words "You dirty low liv'd scoundrel! You rascal! You villan! You scum of the earth! Are you not ashamed to be walking with another man's wife?"<sup>42</sup> Coughlan admitted only that he "reproved him, which reproof was answered with the most scurilous language and unbecoming treatment".<sup>43</sup> In Roberts' version of this account he "civily asked him what he meant by such behavior and if such language was to be used by a Minister of the Gospel."<sup>44</sup> Though these conflicting viewpoints leave some doubt as to exactly what transpired on this occasion, there is little doubt about what happened at church later that evening. Coughlan ascended the pulpit,

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<sup>41</sup>The Answer of the Revd. Laurence Coughlan to the Petition of Hugh Roberts & Co. Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address", 3.

<sup>42</sup>The Petition of Hugh Roberts, in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address, 1.

<sup>43</sup>The Answer of the Revd. Laurence Coughlan to the Petition of Hugh Roberts & Co., in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address, 3.

<sup>44</sup>The Petition of Hugh Roberts, in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address, 1.

announced the text, and, mentioning that Roberts had threatened him, continued his sermon with these words:

"The monster and brute Roberts, the lump of iniquity. I would have all you, my brethren, shun him as you would Hellfire and have no communication or connection with him on any account whatever. He is worse than the sorcerer of the Bible."<sup>45</sup>

Roberts was equally determined to defy Coughlan's attempts to ban Sunday work. On a Sunday evening in June 1771 the two men nearly came to blows again over this issue.<sup>46</sup> Coughlan, returning from church in Carbonear, noticed one of Roberts' servants rolling a cask out of his store. It contained bread destined for the boat-building crew at Holyrood.<sup>47</sup> Coughlan intervened, seizing the cask and returning it to the storehouse. Roberts demanded to know why his servant was being obstructed in complying with his orders. A shoving match ensued. Coughlan allegedly threatened to have Roberts put in jail and sent out of the country, declaring

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<sup>45</sup>Roberts' version of this is supported by evidence from Jonathan Parsons, Henry Warford, Capt. Robert Gray, Simon Mills, Arthur Thoumey, and Gideon Fiott, all of whom were at church. There is some variation in what they remembered as the exact wording in court eight months later, but all agreed that is the gist.

<sup>46</sup>Accounts of this incident are contained in the following court records transcribed by Warwick Smith in "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address": The Petition of Hugh Roberts, pp. 1-2; The Answer of the Revd. Laurence Coughlan to the Petition of Hugh Roberts & Co., pp. 3-4; The Deposition of John Siberl, pp. 7-8; The Deposition of Thomas Pynn, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup>Roberts' defense was that this was a case of necessity. The bread was not being sold, but was intended for his own servants at Holyrood. The men, who had come eight leagues to fetch it, planned to return the same night.

that if it were not for his gown and commission as Justice of the Peace he "would trim him from head to foot".

It was shortly after this last incident that Roberts petitioned Governor Palliser for redress. He also requested that the Governor "represent to the Laudable Society for probagating the Gospel what an improper person they have sent us, who we cannot think is known to them".<sup>48</sup> Roberts' petition was supported by another from twelve merchants of Harbour Grace who declared:

..we all are Sufferers in many respects through the said Law.ce Coghlan & that he is a very unfitt Person for a Justice of the Peace as well as a Missionary, being ignorant of the Laws of his Country & a Person of no Education, & pray that he may be silenc'd or remov'd.<sup>49</sup>

One of the more prominent merchants to sign this document was Nicholas Fiott, who had been born in St. Helier, Jersey in 1704.<sup>50</sup> Fiott, a self-made man, was a sailor until his marriage, when he acquired a ship and became active in the Newfoundland trade. Establishing himself in Newfoundland by

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<sup>48</sup>Petition of Hugh Roberts, in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address", 2.

<sup>49</sup>Petition of the Principal Merchants of Harbour Grace, 26 Aug. 1771, in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address", 2.

<sup>50</sup>For information on Fiott's career as merchant see Omner, "The Cod Trade in the New World," 245-268. For his career as privateer see A. G. Jamieson "The Return to Privateering: Channel Island Privateers, 1739-1783," in A People of the Sea, edited by A. G. Jamieson (London: Methuen, 1986), 148-172. For his political involvement in Jersey see Lemprière, History of the Channel Islands, 127f. See also MHA Matthews Series 1; F79C for his involvement in Newfoundland.

1749, within a decade he owned nine trading vessels and mercantile premises in Harbour Grace and Port de Grave. By 1763 he had expanded into the Gaspé as well. An adventurous man imbued with a fighting spirit, Fiott also acquired shares in privateers; by 1780-81 his profits from privateering alone amounted 223,000 livres.<sup>51</sup> As Fishing Admiral of Harbour Grace, Fiott's opinion was sought and valued by the Governor.<sup>52</sup> After leaving Newfoundland, Fiott was also held in high regard in his native Jersey where he was in 1782 elected jurat, a life-long position which gives one the power to judge all civil and criminal cases, except those involving high treason. Before his death in 1786, Fiott also gained a reputation as a leading Magot.<sup>53</sup> Thus Fiott was an acknowledged community leader both in Harbour Grace, where he resided during the fishing season for several decades, and in Jersey, to which he retired.

Fiott had been one of the first and principal contributors to building the church in Harbour Grace. He annually gave a considerable sum of money towards Coughlan's

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<sup>51</sup>Equivalent to 17,000 British pounds.

<sup>52</sup>In 1765 he attended court in St. John's as witness to the Harbour Grace riot. In 1768, the governor asked him, as "a gentleman of repute at Harbour Grace", to assist Charles Garland, Justice of the Peace, in determining the mental condition of a murder suspect.

<sup>53</sup>The anti-establishment political party in Jersey.

salary.<sup>54</sup> His disaffection with the missionary, and that of the other merchants, was taken seriously by Governor John Byron, who forwarded the petitions to his Surrogate, William Parker, with orders to investigate and report.<sup>55</sup>

Parker's investigation cleared Coughlan of all criminal charges. It was acknowledged that he had verbally abused Roberts, but it could not be proven that Roberts' trade had suffered as a result. The charge of accepting a bribe was unfounded. Coughlan had, like other Newfoundland missionaries, been appointed Justice of the Peace, and as such had levied a fine of five pounds against John Power of Crocker's Cove, who had stolen some herring from the stage of his neighbour, John McCarthy. In default of payment thirty-nine lashes on the bare back were to be administered.<sup>56</sup> The thief at first refused to pay, but later gave Coughlan a promissory note for the five pounds. Thus it was a fine, not a bribe, that Coughlan had received. A charge that he had offered to tear up the promissory note if the thief would testify that his neighbour

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<sup>54</sup>Note added by Coughlan to the Petition of Nicholas Fiott to Governor Shuldham. (undated, est. Oct. 1772) A-170 C/Nfld/1/59, ACC.

<sup>55</sup>Colonial Record Books, entry for 2 Oct. 1771. GN2/1A 5:2, PANL.

<sup>56</sup>This number corresponds to the "forty lashes save one" suffered by the apostle Paul, mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:24, an indication that Coughlan let himself be guided by Scripture (literally interpreted) in the administration of justice.

was selling liquor was based on rumour and proved to be unfounded.

The remaining complaints against Coughlan illustrate a failure to measure up to the merchants' expectations of how a Church of England clergyman should conduct parish affairs. They accused Coughlan of having "appoint'd illiterate People to hold meetings at Private Houses". He had declared publicly, they claimed,

...that no Person whatever should be admitt'd to the Holy Sacrament but such as constantly Attend the Nocturnal Meetings of his deputed Curates & Submitted themselves to be examin'd by them one of whom is a very illiterate Fellow a Common fisherman that many People have been debarr'd from going to that Ordinance as they would not pass under such a scrutiny.<sup>57</sup>

Coughlan acknowledged that he had sometimes advised people he would rather give Communion to those that attended the meetings, but denied ever refusing anyone admittance to the Sacrament for failure to attend them.<sup>58</sup> Behind the merchants' complaint lies both a religious difference and a class consciousness. Examining persons before admitting them to communion was not practised in the Church of England, although it was a common practice in many of the gathered

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<sup>57</sup>Petition of Hugh Roberts, in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address," 2.

<sup>58</sup>The Answer of the Revd. Laurence Coughlan to the Petition of Hugh Roberts & Co, in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address," 4.

churches of the day.<sup>59</sup> The merchants, to whom the fishermen normally would be expected to "tip their caps", were highly offended at the suggestion that their suitability to receive communion should be judged by one of them.

Although Coughlan was cleared of all criminal charges, the petition indicated that he had lost the confidence of the leading citizens of Harbour Grace. Within weeks of the court hearing Governor Byron relieved Coughlan of his duties as magistrate and sent him the following letter:

Having received representation from several Adventurers in the Fishery at Harbour Grace complaining of many unwarrantable proceedings committed by you as Justice of the Peace for that District to the great Obstruction of Trade, I do therefore for the quiet of the said Place think it necessary that you should on the accept hereof deliver up your Commission as Justice of the Peace to Mr. Garland & it is hereby Revoked and made Void accordingly.<sup>60</sup>

Coughlan felt his fellow Justice, Charles Garland,<sup>61</sup> was largely to blame for this loss of his commission.<sup>62</sup> He may

<sup>59</sup>Nor was it common practice among the Methodists in England, who in those days were being advised by Wesley to take Communion in their parish churches.

<sup>60</sup>John Byron to L. Coughlan, Panther, St. John's, 25 Oct. 1771. Colonial Record Book. GN2/1A 5:5-6, PANL.

<sup>61</sup>H. F. Shortis, "Some of our Conception Bay Families, Pioneers of our Country's History," from The Papers of H. F. Shortis, 5:457, PANL; Brown, Hayne and Halpenny (eds.), Dictionary of Canadian Biography, s.v. "Garland, Charles" by W. Gordon Handcock, 5:337-338.

<sup>62</sup>"The Gentlemen and Magistrates began to threaten what they would do, accordingly they drew up a petition, signed by twelve Merchants, and Gentlemen, so called, wherein they set me forth black enough to the Governor..."; Coughlan, Account, 10. "It appeared likewise by Oath of Arthur Thoumey that said

indeed have been advising the merchants as to the best course of action to take. Descendent of an early settler family, Garland was the son of one of the first Justices of the Peace, and was himself a Justice of the Peace and later magistrate.<sup>63</sup> He had been bred to assume leadership in the community. During the French invasion of 1762 he had fortified Carbonear Island at his own expense and raised a company of fifty soldiers for the relief of St. John's, earning the commendation of the British Parliament. His was the first signature on the 1766 petition to the SPG soliciting financial support for Coughlan's ministry in Newfoundland, and the document was written in his hand. The idea of establishing religion as a countercheck to lawlessness and the threat of "popery" was probably his. He had not anticipated that the missionary would designate him one of "the Children of Disobedience".<sup>64</sup>

When writing later of this court hearing Coughlan claimed that "the Everlasting Friend of Sinners appeared for me, and all my Enemies were found Liars".<sup>65</sup> He followed this

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MacCarthy told him he was Drunk when he signed the said petition & that his abettors were Charles Garland Esqr. & others who induced him to do the same," Answer of Laurence Coughlan to the Petition of Jno. MacCarthy, in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address", 5.

<sup>63</sup>This was not his only source of income. He owned and leased properties in half a dozen Conception Bay communities, and was active in provisioning fishermen, and in trade.

<sup>64</sup>Coughlan, Account, 10.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

statement with the proof text, "They that trust in the Lord shall never be confounded."<sup>66</sup> If he was not confounded, he was at least angered. The grudge he bore against Nicholas Fiott and Charles Garland erupted into another major confrontation some months later.

#### **5.7 The Final Confrontation**

Had Laurence Coughlan been the minister of a gathered church he could have baptised only those who met his standards of holiness. However, his ordination in the Church of England and his appointment by the SPG made him incumbent of a parish church and expected to baptize all applicants.<sup>67</sup>

In the month of May, 1772 Coughlan refused to baptize the infant children of John Alcock, a Harbour Grace merchant, and John and Mary Martin, poor inhabitants of that town. On Sunday morning, the twenty-fourth of May, Alcock visited Coughlan to inform him he would be bringing his baby to the evening service for baptism. On being informed that Nicholas Fiott was to be given the honour of being godparent, Coughlan refused to baptise the child unless Fiott first came to him to "make proper concessions and ask his pardon". Alcock's protest that any private dispute between the two men should not be the

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<sup>66</sup>From The Book of Common Prayer; "Oh, Lord, in Thee have I trusted. Let me never be confounded."

<sup>67</sup>Canon 68 of the Church of England: All-comers must be granted baptism who desire it. Quoted by Bernard G. Holland, Baptism in Early Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 95.

means of depriving his child of baptism was to no avail. Coughlan adamantly refused to perform the baptism.<sup>68</sup>

Mary Martin told a similar story. On that same morning she, too, had applied to have her baby baptised. Nicholas Fiott had already consented to be godfather, and she "looked upon it as a great honour done her for such a gentleman to stand for so poor a child as hers". Coughlan, faced for the second time that day with the prospect of having one of his avowed enemies honoured as godparent, angrily demanded how she could have asked "such a vile man". He ordered her to tell Fiott the child would not be baptised unless he could provide a certificate stating that he was a communicant member of the Church of England.<sup>69</sup>

It was of course impossible for Fiott to obtain such a certificate readily. A request to his home church at St. Helier in Jersey could only be sent when the fishing season closed in late November, and a reply would not reach Newfoundland until the following spring.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, Fiott showed up at church that evening, and at the end of the

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<sup>68</sup>Deposition of John Alcock. A-170 C/Nfld/1/60, ACC. The complete text of the deposition may be found in Appendix D.

<sup>69</sup>Affidavit of Mary Martin. A-170 C/Nfld/1/60, ACC.

<sup>70</sup>In putting this impossible condition on Fiott's sponsorship, Coughlan was enforcing a seldom-observed provision of the canon law of the Church of England: "No person shall be admitted Godfather or Godmother to any child before the said person hath received the Holy Communion", Canon 29, as quoted by Holland, Baptism in Early Methodism, 95.

second lesson presented Mary Martin's child to be baptized. Coughlan told him to "go about his business and sign another petition".<sup>7</sup>

It seems evident from Coughlan's own account of this incident that the real issue was not Fiott's attendance at communion, but his signing the petition which had led to the investigation by the governor. In his letter to the SPG, Coughlan links the two incidents very closely.

The treatment which I meet with here from time to time is not very agreeable. But haveing said so much upon this head last year in my Letter to the Society, I shall not mention Particulars one I must mention one I must mention<sup>7</sup> which was this treatment one of the Traders in this Harbour who in a very malicious manner in Publick & privit labourd to take away my Character also insulted me when in my Duty before a large congregation so that I could not go on for some time: the reason was he asked first to Stand Godfather for a child that Sunday, when I was informed of this I sent him word I could not admit him till I spoke with him firs, which he refus'd and would not come, but in the open

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<sup>7</sup>Petition of Nicholas Fiott to Governor Shuldham. A-170 C/Nfld/1/59, ACC. In this petition Fiott asks that the Governor take the case into consideration "that the said Lawrence Coughlan may be obliged to prove wherein any action or conduct in your petitioner's life deserve the least censure, as such a malicious report may be of the greatest prejudice to your petitioner's trade which he now carries on in Harbour Grace and have done with as much reputation as any trader in the land ever since the year 1749".

<sup>7</sup>Coughlan's repetition of this phrase may indicate a confused state of mind. He was probably torn between a desire to keep the incident from the SPG, and the knowledge that it had already been reported to the governor. His reference to the incident was added to his annual report after it had already been signed, an indication that he had just found out about the affidavits which were being sent to the Governor.

Congregation came up to the place where I was upon my Duty and called a loud for the Child...<sup>73</sup>

Coughlan concludes his letter by asking the SPG whether it is possible to pursue a legal suit against Fiott for interrupting the church service. He refused both then and later to baptize the infant, who was "obliged to be carried to St. John's which was attended with much expense".<sup>74</sup>

It is not known whether Coughlan similarly refused to baptize Charles Garland's baby, or whether Garland, anticipating a refusal, did not apply to Coughlan for baptism. His child was baptised on the seventeenth of October, 1772 by the Naval Chaplain with the Governor's Surrogate, William Parker, as godfather, an action which Garland assured the governor "Mr. Coughlan dare not with propriety refuse".<sup>75</sup> With his letter of thanks to the Governor for sending the Naval Chaplain, Garland enclosed legal depositions concerning Coughlan's refusal to baptize the Alcock and Martin children. He indicated that there could be many more charges forthcoming had he and the Surrogate not been so busy with other matters during the latter's visit to Harbour Grace. The letter, affidavits, and a petition from Fiott were forwarded to the

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<sup>73</sup>Laurence Coughlan to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 20 Oct. 1772. A-170 C/Nfld/1/61, ACC.

<sup>74</sup>Petition of Nicholas Fiott to Wm. Parker, Esq., Surrogate to his Excellency Molineux Shuldham, Esq.. Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Island of Newfoundland, &c. A-170 C/Nfld/1/59, ACC.

<sup>75</sup>Charles Garland to Governor Shuldham, Harbour Grace, 18 Oct. 1772. A-170 C/Nfld/1/58, ACC.

SPG by Governor Shuldham, along with an earnest request that Mr. Coughlan should be removed.<sup>76</sup>

In his annual report to the SPG Coughlan had asked permission to return to England on leave, "since", he wrote, "I have some Business which Calls me".<sup>77</sup> His letter to the SPG does not mention the nature of that business, but, in a letter written on the previous day to the Earl of Dartmouth he indicated a desire to leave Newfoundland and inquired whether the SPG or the Bishop of London owed him a living in consideration of his seven years as a missionary.<sup>78</sup> He put the same question to John Wesley in a letter written some ten days later.<sup>79</sup> In this letter he mentioned that he had been in touch with Lady Huntingdon and her plan of having him preach from place to place was "somewhat agreeable" to him. He asked Wesley's permission to speak to the Methodist Societies in Ireland. Finally, he wondered if Wesley thought he should accept a parish appointment if one were offered, even though "to be shut up in a little Parish-Church, and to conform in

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<sup>76</sup>Minutes of the SPG General Meeting, 15 Jan. 1770. CNS microfilm #567, 19:343.

<sup>77</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 26 Oct. 1772. A-170 C/Nfld/1/61, ACC.

<sup>78</sup>Laurence Coughlan to the Earl of Dartmouth, Harbour Grace, 25 Oct. 1772. Dartmouth Originals, MG 23 A1/2:2497-2500.

<sup>79</sup>Coughlan to Wesley, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1772, in The Arminian Magazine (Sept., 1785).

every little thing for sixty or a hundred pounds a year, I would not; no nor even for a thousand."

Coughlan's decision to leave Newfoundland was expedited by his belief that "the Enemy" was trying to murder him.<sup>80</sup> He was warned by the doctor, who refused to divulge the name of the man who had approached him with the intention of obtaining a dose of poison to use against Coughlan, claiming that the potential assassin was now dead.<sup>81</sup>

The SPG, having received Shuldham's correspondence, granted Coughlan leave to return to England, and requested that upon arrival he "instantly wait upon the Secretary to answer some charges laid against him".<sup>82</sup> At the end of the fishing season of 1773 Coughlan returned to England. Details of his conversation with the Secretary were not recorded. However, on the fifteenth of October Coughlan attended the monthly meeting of the SPG and resigned.<sup>83</sup> The anticipated living was not forthcoming, but they agreed to pay him his salary until Christmas. Coughlan soon joined Lady Huntingdon's

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<sup>80</sup>Coughlan, Account, 9-10.

<sup>81</sup>Coughlan to the Earl of Dartmouth, Harbour Grace, 25 Oct. 1772. Dartmouth Originals, MG 23, A1/2:2497. Coughlan believed this threat was real. It may have been an effort to frighten him into silence by the doctor, who must have been embarrassed by the attention Coughlan gave to his wife's dalliance with Roberts.

<sup>82</sup>Minutes of the General Meeting of the SPG, 15 Jan. 1773. CNS microfilm #567, 19:343.

<sup>83</sup>Minutes of the SPG General Meeting, 17 Dec. 1773. CNS microfilm #567, 20:49-50.

Connexion.<sup>84</sup> When his converts were informed in the Spring of 1774 that he would not be returning to Newfoundland, they expressed sorrow that they would see him no more, and gratitude that he was now out of reach of his Enemies.<sup>85</sup>

If Coughlan was discredited before the gentlemen and clerics of the SPG, he did not suffer like treatment in the eyes of his Newfoundland converts. Their opinion was expressed by Thomas Pottle, who wrote,

Dear Sir, I hope, you will go through, and face all your Newfoundland enemies, in the Strength of Christ, who will fight all your Battles for you, and bring you off more than Conqueror: It is his Cause, therefore fear not. I suppose they will, Devil-like, be ashamed to appear openly against you, and would be glad, if you were silent; but out with those Serpents, out of the Grass, and expose them; not that we mind what wicked Men can do or say against us; but let God's Cause be glorified, and his dear Children in England be unprejudiced; I want all the World to know that you are a Prophet sent of God, a faithful Minister of Jesus Christ, which, glory be to Jesus, myself and a great many more have happily experienced.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup>Details of his career with Lady Huntingdon's Connexion may be found in Rollmann, "Laurence Coughlan", 68-69.

<sup>85</sup>"I was heartily glad to hear from you and was truly sorrowful, when I considered, that I shall see your face no more, however I am rejoiced, when I consider that you are happy, and out of the Power of your Enemies." J.P. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 101.

"I found my very Heart pained, when I found you was not to return; yet I could rejoice and praise God, that he had frustrated the malicious Design of your Enemies, and had covered them with Shame." M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 71.

<sup>86</sup>T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 7 Jan. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 79.

### 5.8 Results of the Controversy for the Converts

Coughlan's identification of the merchants as agents of the devil led the converts to believe God was on the side of the poor. This resulted in the glorification of poverty seen in statements such as following made by Coughlan:

If they have but little they have Content: Godliness with Contentment is great Gain; so that, if the Children of God are poor, they have Bread to eat which the World knoweth nothing of. Indeed they are all Beggars at the Throne of Grace; and in this they glory, that they have an hearty Welcome to come, and that, without Money, and without Price. They ask and have, they seek and find:<sup>87</sup>

By making godliness rather than riches or learning the standard for judging the worth of a person, Coughlan empowered the poor and illiterate, enabling them to perform leadership roles. He also taught them that God had entrusted them with talents, which he expected them to use. Given this encouragement, and provided with the opportunity, persons who could never have aspired to leadership in the greater community became leaders among the converts. One of these was W. H.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>88</sup>I have not been able to positively identify W.H. He may have been a member of the Homer family, mentioned by Lench as one of the pioneer Methodist families in Freshwater. (Charles Lench, "The History of the Progress of Methodism on the Western Bay Circuit," 9.) The Howell family of Carbonear were also an early Methodist family with at least three sons, William (1747-1832), James (1749-1837), and Robert (1755-1823). (The Register of Burials in the Parish of Carbonear). Possibly the W.H. referred to was their father. The common practice of naming a first-born son after the father points to this possibility. Whether he is the same elderly man who led family services prior to Coughlan's arrival is a possibility

W. H. was a poor illiterate fisherman who had to ask others to read to him the correspondence sent from Coughlan.<sup>89</sup> Yet he "was not ashamed of his heavenly Master, and boldly stood up and spoke in his name."<sup>90</sup> Coughlan had made him one of his "deputed curates"<sup>91</sup> and during the first year following Coughlan's departure, he was encouraged by Arthur Thomey and John Stretton to lead the corporate worship of the converts. Services were held at the Parsons home in Harbour Grace,<sup>92</sup> where he preached every Sunday evening and exhorted every Wednesday night.<sup>93</sup> Arthur Thomey said of him:

Last Sunday, W. preached from Prov. VIII, 33-35,<sup>94</sup>

that can not be positively established.

<sup>89</sup>"I had the pleasure of reading your letter to poor W.H... he is a very serious and true Christian, and labours indefatigably in the Gift he has obtained." W.L. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 2 Nov. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 86.

<sup>90</sup>John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 14 Nov. 1775, in Bennis, Christian Correspondence, 210.

<sup>91</sup>Petition of Hugh Roberts, in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address", 2.

<sup>92</sup>The church in Harbour Grace had been taken over by magistrates Garland and Gray, who conducted services on alternate Sundays. T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 7 Jan 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 79-80.

<sup>93</sup>M.S. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 31 Oct. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 74. In normal practice among the Dissenting churches of the eighteenth century, "preaching" was used to refer to Scripture-based sermons, while "exhorting" was based on life experience.

<sup>94</sup>"Hear instruction and be wise and do not neglect it. Happy is the man who listens to me, watching daily by my gates, waiting beside my doors. For he who finds me finds

which he performed in such a Manner, that I should have been glad that some of our modern, fine witty Gentlemen had been present. How doth God, in his Wisdom, make use of the Weak and Foolish to confound the Wise and Mighty.<sup>95</sup>

To the "wise and mighty" merchants W. H. was nothing but a common fisherman who had no business assuming such a role. To the converts he was a man empowered by God, and his poverty and illiteracy only served to illustrate more forcefully God's mighty power.

#### 5.9 Results for the Wider Community

The dispute between Coughlan and the merchants of Harbour Grace was not a private affair, but one which involved the whole community. A counter-petition to that of the merchants was signed by forty or fifty of Coughlan's converts during Parker's investigation of 1771.<sup>96</sup> The following year Coughlan offered to send the SPG a testimonial signed by over one hundred of "the most sensible gentlemen and planters of this Bay".<sup>97</sup> The campaigns by his supporters to have the petition and testimonial signed put considerable pressure on people to take a stand. This resulted in a sharper division between

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life, and obtains favour from the Lord."

<sup>95</sup>A.T. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 12 Jan. 1775, in Coughlan, Account, 143.

<sup>96</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 3 Dec. 1771. B.6/194.

<sup>97</sup>Coughlan to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 26 Oct. 1772. A-170 C/Nfld/1/61, ACC.

Coughlan's followers and the rest of the community. No one could remain neutral.

The bitter controversy which divided the community had its effect on community institutions. One of the first to suffer was the school Coughlan had founded. The merchants no longer kept the building in repair. A large number of children were withdrawn from this school and enroled under "a popish teacher". Although the schoolmaster, John Griggs, took "all imaginable pains" to increase the attendance he met with nothing but repulse. He blamed the controversy for the unfruitfulness of his endeavors.<sup>98</sup>

The magistracy was also affected. On the very day that Coughlan departed a drowning occurred at Harbour Grace. The topic of the funeral sermon, preached by one of the magistrates, was the respect, obedience and homage that people ought to pay to magistrates.<sup>99</sup> This indicates a fear that lawlessness would result from Coughlan's designation of them as "Sons of Disobedience". A similar fear was also expressed by James Balfour, the Anglican minister whom the SPG transferred from Trinity in 1775 to take Coughlan's place. Balfour's assessment of the converts was as follows:

They are fond of holding private Conventicles two or three times a week in sentiments unfriendly to our civil Government and gives the Magistrates

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<sup>98</sup>Minutes of the General Meeting of the SPG, 16 Dec. 1772. CNS microfilm #567, 19:332.

<sup>99</sup>T.P. to Coughlan, Carbonear, 7 Jan. 1774, in Coughlan, Account, 79-80.

sometimes a good deal of trouble. Were they Numerous, and Enterprising men to Head them, they would exactly resemble the Americans on the Continent. But happy for us, our People of Property here, are strictly Loyal. It is only our lower classes that affect these things...to oppose Religion as they term their Enthusiasm would kindle a Fire.<sup>100</sup>

This fear that religious dissent would lead to civil disobedience or even outright rebellion may have been a factor in the refusal of Governor Edwards to perm<sup>i</sup>. religious freedom to Coughlan's followers. Instructions granting religious freedom to protestant dissenters, a standard formula in orders to British colonial governors, had been included in regulations for Newfoundland ever since the first governor, Henry Osborne, had been appointed in 1729.<sup>101</sup> Yet Edwards in 1779 ordered Charles Garland and Robert Gray, the Justices of the Peace, to prevent Methodist preachers or any person not commissioned by Balfour from using the chapels at Carbonear and Blackhead, and from marrying and burying.<sup>102</sup>

A struggle for control of the church buildings by the two factions ensued as soon as Coughlan left. In Harbour Grace, Garland and Gray took possession of the church and read

<sup>100</sup>James Balfour to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 4 Dec. 1775. B.6/207.

<sup>101</sup>Hans Rollmann, "Religious Enfranchisement and Roman Catholics in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland," in Religion and Identity: the Experience of Irish and Scottish Catholics in Atlantic Canada, edited by Terrence Murphy and Cyril T. Bryne (St. John's: Jesperson Press, 1987), 34-52. Rollmann maintains that Edwards, in action and by decree, favoured the Established Church. This point is well documented in the text.

<sup>102</sup>Order of Governor Edwards, 31 Aug. 1779. B.6/213.

prayers until Balfour's arrival. Meanwhile one of the converts<sup>103</sup> occupied the house Coughlan had vacated, and held possession. Although Balfour protested that the house had been built by public subscription and dedicated to the SPG, he was given nothing but "excuses and fair promises" for several years.<sup>104</sup> It was not until the Fall of 1778 that he was able to gain possession of the house through the intervention of Admiral Montague, acting on orders from Governor Edwards.<sup>105</sup>

Gaining possession of the chapel at Carbonear was a more difficult matter for Balfour. In an action reminiscent of those taken previously in Poole at both the Congregational Church and St. James' Anglican Church, the people locked out the minister. They insisted it was not a chapel of the Church of England but their own meeting house, and they would do with it what they pleased. They indicated a preference for a Methodist or Presbyterian minister.<sup>106</sup> Balfour's non-confrontational approach at length gained him entrance, but

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<sup>103</sup>Probably Stretton. Arthur Thomey wrote that on Christmas Day of 1774 "we held a love-feast at S. (formerly your house)..."; A.T. to Coughlan, Harbour Grace, 12 Jan. 1775, in Coughlan, Account, 142. Stretton mentions himself and Thomey as being resolved to oppose the formality which was introduced in the place of "the pure gospel"; John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 14 Nov. 1775, in Bennis, Christian Correspondence, 210.

<sup>104</sup>James Balfour to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 3 Dec. 1776. B.6/208.

<sup>105</sup>James Balfour to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 2 Dec. 1779. B.6/215.

<sup>106</sup>James Balfour to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 9 Nov. 1775. B.6/203.

problems of church polity continued to recur. In 1779 Conception Bay Methodists claimed the chapels at Blackhead and Carbonear for themselves and sought permission for their lay preachers to baptise, marry and bury. Governor Richard Edwards, whose own religious preference was decidedly Anglican, forbade them the use of the chapels and denied their request to perform liturgical actions in competition with the Anglican minister. This decision was reversed by Edwards' successor, Governor John Campbell, son of a Presbyterian minister, who considered the dispute to be a question of private property rights.<sup>107</sup>

The controversy at Harbour Grace was not soon forgotten in Newfoundland. In 1795 a petition to the SPG from thirty-six people of Bonavista to have George Smith, an itinerant preacher "of that religious sect usually called Methodist", appointed missionary was met with a counter petition from sixty-nine of the orthodox, who preferred not to have him, even though they had been forty years without a missionary. The effect created by Coughlan's presence at Harbour Grace two decades before was cited as the reason Smith was unacceptable to them. So bitter was this dispute in Bonavista that an attempt was made deprive the town's surgeon of his livelihood

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<sup>107</sup> Rollmann, "Religious Enfranchisement and Roman Catholics", 40, 44.

because he had signed the petition to have Smith appointed.<sup>108</sup>

Smith's visit to Harbour Grace in that same year is cited as the reason for the unfriendly reception accorded Balfour's Anglican successor. Encouraged by Smith, who called the rites and ceremonies of the Anglican church "the remains of popish superstition",<sup>109</sup> the people of Harbour Grace declared they had the exclusive right to dispose of the church however and to whomever they pleased.<sup>110</sup> The following years were marked by strife as Anglican and Methodist missionaries competed for souls and chapels.

The struggle for possession of the buildings and the right to name missionaries reflects a contest between congregational and episcopal polity which was not unique to Conception Bay. Such fractious behaviour commonly occurred in North America because of the isolation of the congregations from their governing bodies, as well as a result of competing theological convictions.<sup>111</sup> As a legacy of the Coughlan era

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<sup>108</sup>Mr. Bland, Magistrate of Bonavista, to the SPG, 16 Nov. 1795 as cited in the Journal of the Proceedings of the Society, 27:98-100. CNS Microfilm #567.

<sup>109</sup>Journal of the Proceedings of the SPG, 25:6. CNS Microfilm #567.

<sup>110</sup>Minutes of the General Meeting of the SPG, 22 Jan. 1796. Journal of the Proceedings of the Society, 27:1-3. CNS Microfilm #567.

<sup>111</sup>Terrence Murphy, "Priests, People and Polity: Trusteeship in the First Catholic Congregation at Halifax, 1785-1801," in Religion and Identity: the Experience of Irish and Scottish Catholics in Atlantic Canada, edited by Terrence

in Conception Bay, the personality conflicts and theological convictions resulted in a polarization which could only end in the complete separation of the converts from the Church of England. Thus while John Wesley in England was still insisting that Methodism remain a movement within the Church of England, in Newfoundland religious differentiation had already taken place.

#### **5.10 Summary**

Coughlan's converts were predominately poor boat-keepers from the planter families that inhabited Conception Bay. They ranged in age from young married couples to the very elderly, with few youth involved. The proportion of females among the converts was much higher than the proportion of females in the community as a whole, and those who were involved remained staunch adherents of "heart religion" long after the men lost interest. Most significant for the direction the development of religion in Conception Bay would take was the serious under-representation of members of the merchant class. The Irish servant class seems to have been largely unaffected by Methodism, despite Coughlan's preaching in the Irish tongue.

There were significant community differences in the response to Coughlan's "gospel trumpet". In Harbour Grace only a small percentage of the population became converts, and

there was an active movement against Coughlan. In Carbonear, where families from the Dissenting congregations of Poole were concentrated, there was no visible opposition and some solid support from members of the lower echelon of the merchant class. In fishing villages such as Blackhead, Cloun's Cove, and Freshwater the response was universal. Individual families in other communities were represented. Coughlan's influence on migrants from Jersey led eventually to the introduction of Methodism to the Channel Islands. His influence on the Irish migrants seems to have had relatively little effect.

Coughlan's detractors soon realized that although he was technically an Anglican missionary, his theology differed from mainstream Anglican thought. Initial opposition, centred around theological and homiletical issues, took the form of a withdrawal of financial support by the leading merchants.

Coughlan's ability to turn opposition to his advantage by a religious interpretation of events based on Scriptural parallels is evident in his responses both to the criticism of his theology and the charge that he had gone mad. To explain the opposition of the merchants to his preaching, he also used Scriptural parallels, equating them with the Sons of Darkness through whom the devil works. This interpretation was reinforced by the existing enmity the boat-keepers felt towards the merchant class, and further bolstered by the impression, gained during the conversion process, that the devil mounts an attack whenever God shows signs of winning

souls. It became normative for the converts to refer to the merchants and magistrates as "The Enemy".

Coughlan's stormy relationship with merchant Hugh Roberts, who was living in a common law relationship with a legally married woman, culminated in Robert's petitioning the governor for redress. His affidavit, which included complaints about the way Coughlan was conducting parish affairs as well as personal grievances, was supported by a petition from twelve leading citizens including Fishing Admiral Nicholas Fiott. Coughlan believed his fellow Justice of the Peace, Charles Garland, was behind the petition. A subsequent investigation by the Governor's Surrogate cleared Coughlan of criminal charges, but the merchants' lack of confidence in him led to his loss of commission as Justice of the Peace.

A subsequent group of complaints to the governor involved Coughlan's refusal to baptise infants because he would not accept Nicholas Fiott as godparent. Although Coughlan found a canonical excuse to repudiate Fiott, his linking of the two incidents indicates that Fiott's support of the Roberts petition was behind the rejection. The governor forwarded the complaints to the SPG, and Coughlan was politely requested to "wait upon the Secretary" in London. Subsequently, he attended the board meeting of the SPG on the fifteenth of October, 1773 and resigned.

Correspondence from Coughlan to personages such as John Wesley, the Earl of Dartmouth, and Lady Huntingdon indicates

that he had been negotiating for a position in England, with a preference for an itinerant ministry. His ensuing career was within the Lady Huntingdon Connexion.

Coughlan's converts in Conception Bay expressed both grief at losing him and gratitude that he was now out of reach of his "Enemies". They had been empowered by his message, had learned to appreciate their poverty as something which brought them closer to God, and had learned that poverty and illiteracy were no barrier to leadership. They were strongly committed to "heart religion" and unwilling to support any other expression of Christianity.

The effect of the controversy on the community as a whole was not beneficial. Pupils were withdrawn from the school Coughlan had founded, magistrates were treated with disdain, and there was fear that if the converts had suitable leadership they would rebel against civil authority as well as religious authority. The struggle of the converts to attain proprietary rights and congregational polity influenced the direction of religion in Conception Bay for the next several decades. The loyalty of Coughlan's followers was extended to persons who preached in the same style as Coughlan, regardless of whether or not they were Methodist.

The long range effect of the fractional fighting in Conception Bay was felt in other Newfoundland communities. For example, in Bonavista in 1795 the majority of the populace preferred no missionary to one who might prove to be a

challenge to the established order. In the Conception Bay communities themselves, the issue of church polity also continued to recur throughout the next decades. The controversy surrounding Coughlan's relationship with the merchants had caused a polarization which led the converts to define themselves as completely separate from the Established Church.

#### CONCLUSION

Laurence Coughlan, who arrived in Conception Bay, Newfoundland in the summer of 1766, had spent the years 1755 to 1764 as an itinerant lay preacher within John Wesley's Methodist Connexion in Ireland and England. William Legge, the Second Earl of Dartmouth, who was then Chairman of the Board of Trade, used his influence to have Coughlan ordained within the Anglican Church and licensed by the Bishop of London to fill the position of missionary to the church which had already been constructed at Harbour Grace, then the main population centre of Newfoundland. Thus Coughlan was in the anomalous position of being at the same time Methodist preacher and incumbent of an Anglican parish. By the time he left Newfoundland seven years later a conclave of Methodist converts within the parish viewed themselves as separate and distinct from the Anglican church. Thus a full two decades before the official division between Methodist and Anglican occurred in Great Britain, a de facto separation had occurred in Conception Bay.

Laurence Coughlan arrived in Conception Bay in an era when Newfoundland was just beginning to establish the institutions of civilized society. Previous British mercantile policy had kept Newfoundland underdeveloped, and settlement had been either repressed or ignored according to the

prevailing degree of pressure exerted by the merchants of West-country England. The inhabitants' attitude towards these merchants, upon whom they were economically and politically dependent, was one of distrust and sometime enmity. When merchants began residing in Newfoundland this class division remained. It played an important role in the religious division which was to follow.

Among the factors contributing to social stress in the Conception Bay of the 1760's were a transient and unstable population, an economically capricious fishing industry, the threat of foreign conquest, an inadequate political system, and the fact that women comprised only ten percent of the population. The influx of large numbers of Irish Roman Catholic immigrants, who had reason to dislike the British crown, further threatened the stability of the struggling society. Drunkenness, lawlessness, and rioting compelled leading Harbour Grace merchants to build a jail and a church in order to restore social order and prevent "Popery's getting a footing".

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Carbonear, interest in church services was stimulated by an elderly fisherman from Poole who led family prayers with hymn-singing. Newfoundland migration patterns, which were determined largely by trading routes, merchant selection, and kinship ties, decreed that the demography of the Conception Bay communities was influenced by whichever English town was in the ascendant when the community

was settled. Carbonear had been settled largely by people from Poole, where, alone among the towns of origin, "heart religion" had long been the dominant expression of religiosity. Religious life in Poole and Carbonear was influenced by a revival at Ashburner's Independent church in Poole, with which several Carbonear families had connection. It was people of Poole with associations to Carbonear who had requested the Earl of Dartmouth to use his influence to get Coughlan ordained and licensed to Conception Bay. It was in Carbonear that the nucleus of the group that was to become the early Newfoundland Methodists was located.

The villages of Conception Bay were composed of homogeneous groupings of related boat-keepers and their servants. This predisposed that, in villages such as Blackhead, Freshwater and Cloun's Cove, when a religious response occurred it would be universal.

The town of Harbour Grace, on the other hand, was the centre of commercial and legal power. It boasted of forty mercantile establishments and consequently contained a wealthier and more culturally diverse population. The merchant class, some of whom pronounced themselves Deists, had been more influenced by the Enlightenment than the boat-keeping and servant classes, and tended to view religion as a social and ethical entity. They equated loyalty to the Anglican church with loyalty to the crown of England, and the establishment of religion as a means of controlling lawlessness and debauchery.

Social historians have identified four conditions which predispose a religious response to be revivalist. These are external circumstances which produce stress and fragmentation, internal needs which are not being satisfied through present religious conventions, a doctrine which meets these needs and is rooted in the past, and a strong prophet-figure who can articulate a program of action. Extreme social, political and economic stress had been present in Conception Bay for a long time, and the pressure to assimilate within a short period large numbers of Irish added immeasurably to it. Internal needs for community-building and the transfer of power to the boat-keeping and servant classes had also been consistently present. Methodism, which offered a God who personally intervenes in the lives of individuals, in contrast to the remote Creator promoted by those influenced by the Enlightenment, met the needs of the poor for self-affirmation and empowerment. Methodism was grounded in the Puritan and Pietist movements, and like them, abandoned philosophical discussions of the nature of God for the knowledge of God as he works within the human heart, an approach which better suited the needs of the ill-educated poor. The fourth condition, the presence of a strong prophet-figure, was met in the person of Laurence Coughlan who served as a catalyst for religious revival.

Laurence Coughlan's experience as an itinerant preacher in Ireland had taught him revivalist methods, and during his

months of study and work at the Orphan House in Newcastle he acquired Wesleyan doctrine and discipline. He became noted for the ardour of his preaching, his faithfulness in visiting from house to house, his strong belief in the efficacy of prayer, and his hearty zeal in promoting an evangelical "religion of the heart". Although he claimed to be Methodist in doctrine and discipline, he had been estranged from Wesley since his illicit ordination by the Greek Bishop Erasmus and had spent the year before his arrival in Newfoundland as preacher of an Independent church registered in his own name.

Coughlan's first three years of ministry in Conception Bay were successful in terms of church attendance, church membership, and church growth. However, Coughlan was dissatisfied. He needed experiential proof that he was a "true evangelical minister" sent by God. This proof came in the winter of 1768-69 when a notable sermon he preached at Carbonear initiated a religious "awakening". This sermon emphasised in vivid imagery the contrasting death-bed experiences of a reprobate who had scorned Coughlan's "born again" message, and a woman saved by grace, both of whom were known to the congregation. The anger, fear and despair aroused by this sermon were instrumental in eliciting the response known as "religious conviction". The ensuing religious revival was noted for its extremes of emotion, as the despair of conviction gave way to tears of joy.

A letter from John Wesley in which he rebuked Coughlan for presenting "perfection", the central Methodist doctrine, as a "flow of joy" rather than a spiritual and ethical experience brings into question whether the doctrine Coughlan preached was normative Wesleyanism. I have reconstructed the doctrine of the early Newfoundland Methodists mainly through reference to the conversion narratives of Coughlan's followers. Analysis shows that their self-expression reflects Wesleyan doctrines concerning the inherent corruption of human nature, the impossibility of salvation without the grace of God, the expectation that the presence of this grace will be experientially discerned, the efficacy of the means of grace in preparing the way for God to enter the heart, the idea that both justification and sanctification are movements of God's grace and outside of human control, and the concept that God justifies and sanctifies all who respond in faith. Their morphologies of conversion follow the Wesleyan pattern of awakening, conviction, justification and sanctification. However, there are some differences.

It appears that "perfection", the doctrine which Wesley held to be the main reason God called the Methodist movement into being, was neglected by Coughlan. The word does not occur in the conversion narratives of his followers, many of whom focus only on the emotions experienced during justification and full assurance of justification. Of those who do claim to have received holiness during the revival period, it is

analogous to the claims of the instantaneous attainment of Christian perfection prevalent during Methodist revivals in Ireland and England during the early 1760's, claims which Wesley had at first endorsed and then distanced himself from when the excesses of the London ranters and enthusiasts discredited Methodism. Wesley equated Coughlan's understanding of holiness as a "flow of joy" with the theology of Thomas Maxfield, whom he had made his scapegoat for the London debacle.

An examination of Maxfield's theology reveals that it shared some features with Coughlan's which were variable from normative Wesleyan Methodism, such as reliance on inward impressions, and a lack of emphasis on the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection. The two men also shared common experiences. Both were Methodist lay preachers who had been ordained by the Greek bishop, Erasmus. They had a common association with the London enthusiasts, and were judged by John Wesley to be as guilty of "spiritual pride" as the other members of this conventicle. Together they formed a threat to Wesley's authority. Both had left the Methodist movement to become preachers in Independent chapels.

However, in spite of Wesley's linking of their names in that context, these two co-workers did not share a common concept of holiness. Maxfield's understanding of holiness approached Arndt's unio mystica, in which human and divine natures become conjoined in the believer as in Christ. On the

other hand, Coughlan's idea of holiness as a "flow of joy" is similar to ideas then current in Pietist and Moravian circles influenced by Spener's Evangelistische Lebens Pfichten. In addition, Coughlan's distinction between true Christianity and formal Christianity, his emphasis on the penitential struggle, his datable conversion experience, and his lack of emphasis on perfection denote familiarity with ideas embraced by Spener and Francke, the leading Pietist theologians. It appears then, that both Coughlan and Maxfield were influenced by Pietist thought, which may have been mediated through the London Moravians whom Wesley had repudiated. Thus Coughlan's theology, while it approximated Wesley's in most respects, differed from it in the very doctrine which Wesley held most important, the doctrine of perfection.

Nevertheless, some of Coughlan's Newfoundland followers, such as class leader Mary Stretton, considered themselves Methodist and read Wesley's sermons. Mary Stretton and two others looked forward to attaining holiness through subjection to Christ, a typical Wesleyan theme.

In his sermons and instructions Coughlan made use of three genres of oral communication. The death-bed narrative, used as public oration, had a didactic purpose as well as a role in eliciting the strong emotions which lead to conviction. The recounting of a conversion narrative, which took place either before the whole congregation or within the class meetings, marked one as a convert and gave membership

into the inner circle. It also denoted a change in self-concept and the emergence of a new social persona. The ill-educated poor were empowered through the narration of a conversion experience to take on leadership roles. Peripheral members felt stress until they too were able to claim a conversion experience. The after-walk account, a genre which I have not found extant outside the writings of the early Newfoundland Methodists, was the customary mode of participation in the class meetings. It functioned as a personal gauge of holiness, and served to make members consciously aware of the workings of God in their hearts. It typically concluded with a prayer request, an indication that its communication in a class meeting was normally followed by prayer for the narrator.

Taken together, the conversion narrative and the after-walk account illustrate stages of personality development which are normally not consciously experienced. The awakening phase marks the recognition of an ideal and a dissatisfaction with the present. The severe emotional distress of the conviction period denotes the disintegration of the old personality. The flow of joy experienced at justification signifies the moment of decision-making and the euphoria experienced through surrendering to the new ideal. This is normally followed by a period of disequilibrium reported in the after-walk accounts as the old self battles to return. The

converts explained this as attacks of the Devil, and looked to Jesus to strengthen them.

The idea that the Devil attacks vehemently whenever signs of God's success in winning souls are evident was transferred from personal experience to community event. The merchants of Harbour Grace, who were opposed to the content and style of Coughlan's preaching, were designated by him as the "Children of Darkness". The converts came to believe that the Devil worked through these merchants to frustrate Coughlan's ministry. This idea was reinforced when Coughlan's personal opposition to Hugh Roberts, whose lifestyle openly defied his teachings, led Roberts to send a complaint to the Governor. Twelve leading merchants signed a supporting petition requesting that Coughlan be removed. Because he had lost the confidence of Harbour Grace's leading citizens, Coughlan was dismissed from his position as Justice of the Peace. He refused some months later to baptize infants because their parents had chosen as godfather one of the signatories of this petition. This led to a second series of complaints to the Governor, which were forwarded to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Coughlan's official employer. Coughlan's supporters circulated petitions requesting that he stay in the community. This was to no avail. Their prophet-figure was recalled to England and forced to resign.

Coughlan, who had been expecting this action, soon found employ within the Calvinistic Methodist Connexion of Lady

Huntingdon. He left behind him a community torn by conflict. The boat-keepers' latent mistrust of the merchant class, which had its roots in the economic and political history of the island, received ecclesiastical approval through Coughlan's designation of the merchants as the "sons of Darkness". Following his removal, Coughlan's followers commonly referred to the merchants and magistrates as "The Enemy". The line of demarkation between Anglican and Methodist, which had formerly been drawn in terms of religious interiority, was now expressed in terms of support for a marginalized religious leader.

A struggle for proprietary rights and congregational polity followed Coughlan's departure. Here again the influence of the Poole dissenters may be discerned, as the tactic of locking the clergy out of the church, which had been used successfully in Poole, was attempted with less success in Carbonear against James Balfour, Coughlan's Anglican successor. These struggles continued to recur throughout the next two decades. The long-range effect was a denominational rivalry in which villages as a whole declared themselves either Methodist or Anglican.

It should be noted that during the years of Coughlan's incumbency the converts did not refer to themselves as Methodist, and they were willing to accept as his successor any minister who preached "heart religion" in a similar style. Thus, in using the term "early Newfoundland Methodism", I have

anticipated history by naming as Methodist a religious tradition that had enthusiastic dimensions and only later became more closely aligned with corporate Wesleyanism. The roots laid down during the Coughlan years created for Newfoundland Methodism a divergent soteriology and an ethos that remains unique.

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APPENDIX APetition of Inhabitants to SPG

30 Oct.r 1766

To the Hon.ble Gentlemen of the Society for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts.

The petition of the Inhabitants of Harbour Grace, Carbonear & parts adjacent in the Bay of Conception, Newfoundland Humbly sheweth

That your Petitioners having the laws of God & Christ to Heart and in order to prevent Popery's getting Footing in these parts where so great a Number of Roman Catholicks are employ'd did at a great Expense erect a Church & desiring to have a Protestant Minister settled among them made choice of the Revd. Mr. Coughlan for that purpose and unanimously agreed to allow him a salary sufficient for his support; But your Petitioners having bad success in the Fishery which is very precarious find that they are not able to allow him what they so intended.

And your Petitioners being sensible of the laudable benefactions in Cases of this Sort; to the Protestant ministers settling in foreign Plantations, humbly beg leave to recommend the said Revd. Gentleman to your Consideration, hoping, as his Behaviour (as far as we have seen) has always been consistent with the sacred Office he sustains, that he may obtain from your wonted Clemency, some Stipend such as you in your good Judgement shall think fit so that your Petitioners may be able to establish him among them & have the Gospel of Christ (which they have not had before) preached to them, to their great benefit and satisfaction.

And your humble Petitioners as in duty bound shall ever pray

Harb. Grace, Newfd.Land  
October 30, 1776

This petition, which was signed by thirty-one men of Conception Bay, is now among the papers of the SPG. (B.6/166). It may be viewed on microfilm #471 at the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University.

APPENDIX BWesley to Coughlan

[c. 27 Aug. 1768]

Dear Lawrence,

By a various train of provinces you have been led to the very place where God intended you should be. And you have reason to praise him that He has not suffered your labour there to be in vain. In a short time how little will it signify whether we have lived in the Summer Islands or beneath

The rage of Arctos and eternal frost!

How soon will this dream of life be at an end! And when we are once landed in eternity, it will be all one whether we spent our time on earth in a palace or had not where to lay our head.

You never learned, either from my conversation or preaching or writings, that 'holiness consisted in a flow of joy.' I constantly told you quite the contrary; I told you it was love; the love of God and our neighbour; the image of God stamped on the heart; the life of God in the soul of man; the mind that was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ also walked. If Mr. Maxfield or you took it to be anything else, it was your own fault, not mine. And whenever you waked out of that dream, you ought not to have laid the blame of it on me. It is true that joy is one part of 'the fruit of the Spirit,' of the kingdom of God within us. But this is first 'righteousness,' then 'peace,' and 'joy in the Holy Ghost.' It is true, farther, that if you love God with 'all your heart' you may 'rejoice evermore.' Nay, it is true still further that many serious, humble, sober-minded believers, who do feel the love of God sometimes, and do then rejoice in God the Saviour, cannot be content with this, but pray continually that He would enable them to love and 'rejoice in the Lord always.' And no fact under heaven is more undeniable than that God does answer this prayer; that he does, for the sake of His son, and through the power of His Spirit, enable one and another so to do. It is also a plain fact that this power does commonly overshadow them in an instant, and that from that time they enjoy that inward and outward holiness to which they were utter strangers before. Possibly you might be mistaken in

this; perhaps you thought you had received what you had not. But pray do not measure all men by yourself; do not imagine you are the universal standard. If you deceived yourself (which yet I do not affirm), you should not infer that all others do. Many think they are justified, and are not; but we cannot infer that none are justified. So, neither, if many think they are 'perfected in love,' and are not, will it follow that none are so. Blessed be God, though we set an hundred enthusiasts aside, we are still 'encompassed in a cloud of witnesses,' who have testified and do testify, in life and in death, that perfection which I have taught these forty years! This perfection cannot be a delusion, unless the Bible be a delusion too; I mean, 'loving God with all our heart and our neighbours as ourselves.' I pin down all its opposers to this definition of it. No evasion! No shifting the question! Where is the delusion of this? Either you received this love or you did not; if you did, dare you call it a delusion? You will not call it so for all the world. If you received anything else, it does not at all affect the question. Be it as much a delusion as you please, it is nothing to them who have received quite another thing - namely, that deep communion with the Father and the Son, whereby they are enabled to give Him their whole heart, to love very man as their own soul, and to walk as Christ also walked.

O Lawrence, if Sister Coughlan and you ever did enjoy this, humble yourselves before God for casting it away: if you did not, God grant you may!

John Wesley introduced this letter into his journal, which he was then preparing for publication. It appeared under the dateline August 27, 1768, and was prefaced with the words, "About this time I wrote to a friend as follows." Wesley, Works, 3:340-342.

APPENDIX CClement Noel's After-walk

Fresh-Water, October 27, 1774.

My Dear and Honoured Father,

I, Your poor weak Child, now acquaint you with my Life, which, blessed be God, is pretty well at this present Time; for this Day, I have been very happy, as I was in the Woods. Glory be to our blessed and dear Redeemer, who is always more ready to hear, than poor Sinners are ready to pray. My dear Reverend Sir, I am, at Times, troubled with Fears and Doubts, that I shall be overcome by the Hands of Saul; but when I look unto the Lord, I know, that his Grace is sufficient for me, and I am enabled to rejoice. My dear Father, the greatest Enemy I have is my deceitful Heart; but, O my dear Sir, what a Blessing it is that we know it! One Thing I know, that the nearer I live to God, the more Temptations I find; but, for ever blessed be his holy Name, he finds a Way for me to withstand them; but, O dear Sir, pray for me, that I may not be cast away: I remember the Charge which you gave me, to meet you at the Right-hand of the Majesty on high, which Words many Times prove a great Blessing to my poor Soul, to believe, that we shall meet in the Spirit, as there is no Likelihood of our meeting in the Flesh. Oh! my dear Sir, I often perceive the Want of your Company; but, I hope, you will grant me my Desire, which is, that you will pray for me, that I may hold out to the End; for it is a rough and thorny Road that we are walking in; but, I know, that the Lord will deliver us out of all our Troubles here below.

I am,  
Your poor unworthy Child,

C-- N--.

This letter, written to Laurence Coughlan a year following his departure from Newfoundland, includes Clement Noel's "after-walk account". Coughlan published it in his Account of the Work of God in Newfoundland, North America. This book, which has never been re-printed since its original publication in 1776, is available in the Rare Book Section of the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University and at the Archives of the Conference Office of the United Church of Canada, Elizabeth Avenue, St. John's. Coughlan, Account, 127-128.

APPENDIX DDepositions

District of Conception  
Bay, Harbour Grace  
Newfoundland

Be it known that this 26th  
Day of May 1772 Personally  
appeared before me Charles  
Garland, Esq.r

His Majesty's Justice of the Peace for Said District Mary  
Martin, Inhabitant and Native of this Said Bay, who being  
first Duly Sworn on the Holy Evangelists

Did Voluntarily and Solemnly depose that on Sunday the 24th of this Instant May, this Deponent went to the house of the Reverend Lawrence Coughlan ( Missionary to the Society for peopagating the Gospel into Foreign Parts) and told him that she intended that afternoon to have her child Publickly Baptised at Church. Said Lawrence Coughlan replied yes, and asked this Deponent who where to be the Godfathers. Shee answered Mr. Nicholas Fiott & Richard Gould, at which Reply, Said Lawrence Coughlan, in a very angry Manner, told her this Deponent he would not Baptize the Child provided the Said Nicholas Fiott was to be the Godfather. Said Deponent then asked him for what Reason Said Nicholas Fiott should not be admitted, as shee looked upon it as a great honour done her for such a Gentleman to stand for so poor a child as hers. Said Deponent further declares, that Said Lawrence Coughlan then answered that he wondered how Shee would ask such a Vile Man or how shee could think he would admitt him and desired her to go and tell Nicholas Fiott that he would not admitt him to Stand Sponsor for Said Child, without, he said, Nicholas Fiott would bring him a Certificate that he had been to the Sacraments, on which said Deponent left the House and immediately went to Said Nicholas Fiott and Repeated to him what the Said Missionary desired her to tell him.

Notwithstanding Said Deponent farther Deposes that she had a great Desire to have her Child Baptised as it had been Some time before very ill, and shee had sent for Said Lawrence Coughlan, to give it Private Baptism, but he wwould not attend, for what reason her, this Deponent, cannot tell.

The Deponent also Deposes that Shee with the Said Nicholas Fiott & the other Sponsors attended at the Church with said Child at the Evening Service, & on the conclusion of the Second Lesson, by the consent and Desire of the Said Godfathers presented Said Child to be Baptised, but was Refus'd by Said Missionary, who very Angrily told Said Nicholas Fiott to go about is Business and Sign a Petition - That the Child was not Baptised nor have there been application Since Made by Said Lawrence Coughlan to Baptise the Child. Either Privately or publickaly to the great grief of this Deponent.

Sign'd Mary Martin

District of Conception      Be it known that this 26th  
Bay, Newfoundland      Day of May 1772

Personally appeared before me Charles Garland Esq.r his  
Majesty's Justice of the Peace at Harbour Grace in said  
District John Alcock Merchant, who being first duly sworn on  
the Holy Evangelist's

Deposed that the Said John Alcock intended having his Child  
Publickly Baptised in the afternoon the 24th of this Instant  
May, and applied to the Rev. Mr. Lawrence Coughlan (Missionary  
to the Society for Propagating the Gospel) to inform him of  
this Intention, & that Mr. Nicholas Fiott was to be one of the  
Godfathers, he the Said Lawrence Coughlan told this Deponent  
that he would not Christen the Child on those Conditions. That  
Capt. Nicholas Fiott's actions and Conduct in Life was Such  
that he could not without making a Sacrifice of his own  
Conscience, admitt him as the Father to any Child, & told this  
Deponent that Mr. Nicholas Fiott's Behaviour had been Such,  
that till they had Conversed together, & that Mr. Fiott would  
make proper Concessions and would ask his Pardon, he would not  
admit him as a Father; This deponent further Declares that he  
told said Missionary that if there was any Private Dispute  
between Mr. Nicholas Fiott & him it should not be a means to  
prevent the Baptism of the Deponent's Child, but he Absolutely  
Refused to Baptise it.

Signed John Alcock

Sworn before me  
C. D. Garland, Justice

These depositions, which bear the words "True Copy" over  
Charles Garland's signature, were sent by him to Governor  
Shuldhham, who forwarded them to the SPG. They are held in the  
SPG series A-170 C/Nfld/1/59. Microfilm copies are available  
at the Archives of the Anglican Church of Canada, Jarvis  
Street, Toronto, or the Centre for Newfoundland Studies at  
Memorial University.







