EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NEWFOUNDLAND METHODISM AS A REVITALIZATION MOVEMENT

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Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland Methodism as a Revitalization Movement.

by

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Abstract

Because of the prevailing political and economic conditions, the internal problems inherited from Laurence Coughlan's ministry (1766-1773), and the inability of Methodist leaders to tend to the Conception Bay societies properly, the development of early Newfoundland Methodism proved to be rife with complications. Coughlan's departure from Newfoundland in 1773 left his followers under the care of his lay preachers, whose attempts to keep the societies intact were effective in the short term, but a steady decline in the membership was evidenced over time. The first official mission to Newfoundland (1785-1791), conducted by John McGeary, had its problems as well. McGeary's mission met with resistance from the Anglican church, and was further disadvantaged by personal and professional problems incurred by McGeary himself. As a result the progress of Methodism in Conception Bay in the late eighteenth-century was a formidable challenge for those who attempted to maintain and oversee it. Anthony F. C. Wallace's Revitalization theory offers a useful methodology that enables one to study this period and how early Newfoundland Methodism was prone to decline and almost certain collapse. Wallace's model outlines a series of phases (*processual structure*) which determine how religious movements are initiated, developed and stabilized. According to

Wallace, religious reform must complete the primary stages of mazeway reformulation, communication, organization and adaptation before success can be realized. The following study applies Wallace's theory to the events and circumstances of early Newfoundland Methodism, and in doing so identifies several recurrent problems within the movement which help to explain the volatile nature of its early development.

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Abbreviations

CNS Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

DAB Dictionary of American Biography.

DCB Dictionary of Canadian Biography.

PANL Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador, Colonial Building, Military Rd., St. John's, Newfoundland.

SPG Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

Chapter 1

The Eighteenth-Century Background

1.1 Introduction

The progress of Methodism in Conception Bay during the eighteenth century is determined by a series of events which suggest a history of inconsistent and unstable development. Early Newfoundland Methodism exhibits a series of "fits and starts" of which the most notable occurrences include the introduction of Methodism by Laurence Coughlan, William Black's "revival" in 1791, and, later, William Thoresby's successful mission. Aside from these periods of success there were times when Methodist support underwent serious decline and the movement was in danger of being completely eradicated. For the purpose at hand the stages outlined in Anthony F. C. Wallace's "Revitalization Theory"[1] have been applied to the study of early Newfoundland Methodism in order to better understand how the movement developed. As a methodology, Wallace's model of religious reform helps to identify and explain the various stages of advancement and decline met with in the process of establishing Methodism on the island.

Before the events and circumstances of Methodist development in

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[1]The particulars of Wallace's theory are explained in detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Newfoundland can be placed into perspective it is necessary to consider briefly the political, economic and cultural factors which influenced the movement. How these factors affected the development of early Methodism in Conception Bay is of vital importance, since they determined which beliefs and practices were acceptable and which were not.

1.2 "More than a fishery, less than a colony"[2]

The eighteenth century in Newfoundland was a period of social, economic and political transition: the migratory fishery was changing to a sedentary one, internal trade was developing, courts and churches were founded in the more populous areas, and the reigning mercantile class was slowly losing control of the economy - an advantage to which they had been accustomed.[3] British mercantile policy inhibited the growth of the resident population for most of the eighteenth century, and purposely hindered the development of effective governmental and social infrastructures. The obvious consequences of settlement, in their view, would be that residents would take the fishery into their own hands, thereby usurping British control.[4]

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[2]*Part of the Main: An Illustrated History of Newfoundland and Labrador* Peter Neary and Patrick O'Flaherty eds. (St. John's: Breakwater 1983), 33.

[3]Keith Matthews, " A History of the West of England-Newfoundland History" (Oxford University: PhD. Thesis 1968), 426.

[4]Governance of the island was frequently placed into the hands of British loyalists who, in the aim of preserving Newfoundland as a fishing colony,

Newfoundland was a valuable resource, it was abundant with fish and was literally unprotected and ripe for plunder. Because England envisioned Newfoundland as merely a supplier of fish and a training ground for British seamen,[5] little effort was made to ensure living conditions were even marginally tolerable.[6] In addition, the West Country Adventurers[7] were determined to safeguard the economic advantages they were used to. The influence of these merchants, who were supported by the crown, made it difficult for independent entrepreneurs to hone in on the territory to which they laid claim. Complaints by the West Countrymen suggested that settlers involved in local trade debauched the seamen by selling them liquor on the Sabbath,[8] sheltered them from press

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enforced rules and regulations to maintain British interests.

[5]Keith Matthews, *Lectures on the History of Newfoundland, 1500-1830* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1988), 27.

[6]There is a sharp contrast between the British treatment of Newfoundland and that of the neighbouring colonies: "While capital, skill and labour were directed to the other colonies, the adventurers to Newfoundland extracted millions from its resources without expending anything on its internal improvement...in Nova Scotia, money was lavished by the British Government in promoting colonization." Rev. M. Harvey *A Short History of Newfoundland: England's Oldest Colony* (London: William Collins, Son, & Co., 1890), 101.

[7]The West Country Adventurers represented influential English merchants. The West Countrymen arrived on the shores of Newfoundland each spring to participate in the cod fishery. Matthews, *Lectures*, 161.

[8]It is ironic that the alleged "sold" liquor was in fact a purchase insisted on by the merchants themselves: in order for the permanent residents to purchase "ten hog heads of salt" they were forced to purchase a butt of port wine and a quarter cask of brandy. Wilfred Kerr, "Newfoundland in the Period Before the American Revolution," *Pennsylvania Magazine* 65 (1941): 62. Also see Barrett, "Revivalism," 12.

gangs in wartime, and took possession of the best fishing for themselves.

The holding of private property was legitimized under the King William's Act of 1699, which held a hidden agenda for discouraging settlement.[9] England's reluctance to establish formal government and related infrastructures, social institutions and the like, attended the difficulty in establishing permanent settlement.[10] Early Newfoundland residents were in constant conflict with the migratory workers who flocked to the island each spring. The Fishing Admirals who competed for first fishing birth and the right to rule were essentially antagonists. They often uprooted the inhabitants, taking their fishing grounds and securing the best curing sites.

In addition to imposed hardships there were natural factors which made life on the island difficult: the seasonal employment within the fishery, the inhospitable climate, the short growing season, and the inability to avail one's self of other resources made habitation nearly intolerable. Despite the hardships, natural and otherwise, population continued to increase and by the mid-seventeen hundreds had reached a substantial number.[11] The hardy individuals

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[9]The implementation of such law is open to question since any effective means of enforcing law did not exist on the island, including those which stipulated the right to private land holding.

[10]Kerr, "Revolution," 74-77.

[11]In 1764 the winter population of Conception Bay numbered 3,483, in 1772 it reached 5,069. Shannon Ryan, "Newfoundland Census Returns, 1693-1833" (St. John's: Government of Newfoundland), 47. Ryan's sources are quoted from C.O., 194/16:109, and C.O. 194/30:139, respectively.

who faced these conditions were soon joined by the Irish[12] who took seafaring jobs with English companies. The early inhabitants were primarily men[13] who had left their families and the comforts of home-life to establish themselves financially. Because there were no immediate family responsibilities and since England was unwilling to establish judicial systems,[14] government and religious leadership, these men lacked the social restrictions which keep a society peaceably intact. And, since settlement on the island was strongly discouraged there was no requirement to establish a formal legal system, or for that matter, any other type of institution. Such lack of restraint encouraged living in the settlements to be *truly* free, in that, a land with no rules or regulations held the

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[12]Many of these Irish immigrants were Roman Catholics, which was not a problem as far as work was concerned. However, once well established they became segregated as a group, were suppressed, and became an eventual problem for the authorities. Hans Rollmann, "Religious Enfranchisement and Roman Catholics in Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland," in Religious Identity: *The Experience of Irish and Scottish Catholics in Atlantic Canada* Terrence Murphy and Cyril J. Byrne eds. (St. John's: Jesperson Press, 1987) 34-52. Hereafter "Enfranchisement."

[13]Handcock estimates that women comprised only ten to twelve percent of the total population. Gordon Handcock, *So longe as there comes noe women: origins of English Settlement in Newfoundland* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1989), 92.

[14]At this time the only semblance of law and order existing on the island was under the control of the Fishing Admirals. These men were bestowed with such honour simply for being the first to reach a specific area at the beginning of the fishing season. The Fishing Admirals were given full "judicial" control of these areas for the remainder of the summer residency. Understandably, this system of justice was haphazard, and because of its rather informal structure was open to many forms of abuse. Christopher English, "The Development of the Newfoundland Legal System to 1815." *Acadiensis* 20/1 (Autumn 1990), 97.

potential for crime and general debauchery.

Although tension existed between the merchants and the primary workers a mutual dependency existed as well. The merchants sold their wares to the locals and provided them an opportunity to sell cured fish which the merchants needed. However, this procedure placed the merchants in an advantageous position, since they could lessen the value of fish and increase the value of supplies. As a result the local people were often left impoverished and at the mercy of the empowered merchants and the British Crown[15]-a pattern which persists throughout early Newfoundland history.

In the early eighteenth century social problems steadily increased along with the increase in the settled population. With the influx of population the economy diversified into labours such as whaling, ship-building, trapping, and with the development of these resources trade to the island increased.[16] In 1729 the foundations of justice and organization, albeit rudimentary, were introduced by the appointment of a governor.[17] Subsequently Justices of the Peace were appointed, and legal authority was finally becoming more formalized and

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[15]C. Grant Head, *Eighteenth Century Newfoundland: A Geographer's Perspective* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1976), 141-143.

[16]Handcock, *noe women*, 75.

[17]In 1729 Captain Henry Osbourne was assigned to the post of Governor of Newfoundland. Frederic F. Thompson "Henry Osborn (Osbourne)", in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. 6 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) 597-598. Hereafter DCB.

equitable.

At this time an influx of Irish immigrants became a real concern for the English.[18] The Irish, according to Wilfred Kerr, "had no love for the British Empire...or for the leading inhabitants who took advantage of their weaknesses and kept them in debt."[19] Economic and political hardships at home made it easier for the Irish to settle in Newfoundland permanently. By the middle of the eighteenth century the population of Conception Bay had increased to approximately six thousand, of which the Irish composed a quarter of the permanent residents.[20] Once settlement became "unofficially" established and residency had swollen to the point that depopulation was impractical,[21] institutions of law, commerce, and administration became even more necessary than ever.

With the continued and escalating rise in population incidents of violence

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[18]Edward Langman writes in his report to the S.P.G., "There were a greater number of poor Irish men brought here this year 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...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 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." Edward Langman to the S.P.G. Secretary, 8 Nov. 1766, (B.6/167).

[19]Kerr, "Revolution," 310.

[20]Handcock, *nœ women*, 88.

[21]Ibid., 74.

also increased. As a result the notion of religion as a means of social control became a viable solution to the existing social problems. The prevailing opinion concerning the state and church equated state religion with loyalty to the crown.[22] Therefore, the persecution of Catholics could be justified on the grounds of disloyalty rather than religious discrimination. The general lawlessness and the feared association with the French by the Irish[23] became reasonable grounds for establishing British ruled religion.[24] Ironically, this would also prove to be an addition to the already growing problems on the island, since the enmity based on economic and political differences extended to religious differences as well. By the 1760's it was determined that the "twin threats of lawlessness and 'popery'" necessitated the establishment of a formal ministry in Harbour Grace.[25]

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[22]Hans Rollmann, "From Laurence Coughlan to William Black: The Origins of Newfoundland Methodism, 1766-1791" Unpublished Manuscript, 15. Hereafter "Origins."

[23]Kerr notes that during the 1760's the Irish greeted the French "with open arms." The Irish enlisted with the French, "the servants robbed their masters and inflicted much more hardship on the merchants than did the French." Kerr, "Revolution," 311. Rev. Edward Langman writes that in the year 1762, "the whole number of Irish roman Catholicks in this place and also in the neighbouring harbours were aiding and assisting to the French, to get and bring intelligence to them." Edward Langman to the SPG Secretary, 8 Nov. 1766, (B.6/167). See also Hans Rollmann, "Enfranchisement," 34-52.

[24]In addition to the Irish threat, Britain had to contend with the French mercantile trade which threatened to encroach on its lucrative fishing industry. Bernard D. Fardy, *Under Two Flags: The French-English Struggle for Newfoundland, 1696-1796* (St. John's: Creative Publishers, 1987), 110.

[25]Barrett, "Revivalism," 30-32.

1.3 The Late Eighteenth Century

The last quarter of the eighteenth century proved problematic for the inhabitants of Newfoundland. The American War of Secession (1775-1783), in particular, made life in Newfoundland an ordeal. The American colonies imposed trade sanctions which contributed to the overall difficulties experienced on the island. By 1775 disputes between the American colonies and Britain had become critical and both sides availed themselves of any means available to influence each other politically and economically. In 1775, as a result of political and economic tensions, America banned all trade with the British colonies: Newfoundland was caught in the cross-fire between the two nations upon which it depended for subsistence.[26] The ensuing lack of essential supplies and Britain's inability to deal with the problem resulted in many Newfoundlanders starving to death, with many others "dreadfully weakened by undernourishment and the diseases it brings."[27] The period from 1775-1777 was one in which Newfoundlanders were seriously disadvantaged by the events of the American War of Secession.[28] The conditions on the island, as described by Rev. James

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[26]Keith Matthews points out that Newfoundland had become increasingly dependent on American supplies in order to conduct commerce on the island. He states that by 1775 "the fishery was almost completely dependent upon supplies of American bread, flour and livestock which were much cheaper than that obtainable from anywhere else." Matthews, *Lectures*, 116.

[27]Matthews, *Lectures*, 118.

[28]Matthews suggests that inroads were also made, in that, trade lines became rerouted much to Newfoundland's future advantage. Ibid., 118.

Balfour, suggests that the people of Newfoundland were experiencing severe difficulties. He reports, "a raging Famine, Nakedness, & Sickness in these parts. None can express the heartfelt woe of Women & Children mourning for want of Food." [29] In addition, civil matters were not properly attended to: no customs were collected, there were no provisions for the poor and destitute, and there was no effective means of maintaining institutions of law and order.[30]

When Newfoundland began to recover and had once again resumed a semblance of economic stability, effects from Britain's continued hostilities with France and Spain were felt. While Newfoundland was not as severely affected as in the previous war, there were repercussions: the French wished to establish their own naval base and secure rights to fishing grounds, which in turn gave rise to escalating tensions between Britain and France. Between 1793 and 1800 a large number of the Newfoundland merchant fleet were captured by the French and Spanish and thousands of men were taken into captivity.[31] Since the demands of war faring required substantial manpower, and because merchant were otherwise occupied, it was virtually impossible to conduct the fishery as successfully as in previous years. This, combined with a drop in the market for

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[29]James Balfour to SPG, Harbour Grace, 2 Dec. 1779 (B/6, fol. 215).

[30]Kerr, "Revolution," 307.

[31]Matthews, *Lectures*, 143.

fish, once again negatively affected life in Newfoundland.[32]

1.4 Social Progress in the Midst of Adversity

Although the early inhabitants in Newfoundland experienced many hardships and difficulties, there was also a gradual improving of conditions. The belated appointment of a governor in 1729 brought a certain measure of internal peace, and the development of local commerce and trade during the war with the American colonies helped stabilize the island's economic base.[33] Throughout the war years, Britain's inability to properly tend to the fishery had an irreversible effect on the Newfoundland economy. During the war period the inhabitants of the island had taken on the task of harvesting and curing their own fish. This move to partial independence[34] changed forever the way in which the fishery was conducted, and encouraged settlement despite British attempts to curtail permanent residency. The period immediately following the war of

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[32]Because of prevailing conditions on the European continent all related markets were adversely affected, this of course, included the fish trade which Newfoundland ultimately depended on. Ibid., 144.

[33]In order to re-establish itself as integral part of the British market, Newfoundland merchants were compelled to arrange alternate trade routes.

[34]Although this transition changed the means by which fish was acquired it did not change the marketing of fish and exchange of commodities. The permanent residents were still dependent on the British merchant fleet which controlled most aspects of trade to and from the island. A. H. McLintock, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Newfoundland, 1783-1832: A Study in Retarded Colonization* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd. 1941.), 82-83.

secession proved to be a period of transition, not only for Newfoundland residents, but for Britain as well.

After the American War of Secession Newfoundland experienced accelerated political and economic growth. There was an unprecedented increase in fish production, and with this new economic growth there occurred an increase in population.[35] Within a decade the winter[36]population of Conception Bay alone rose from 3,453 in 1781, to 7,958 as reported in 1790.[37]

In addition, Britain was left to recover from the loss of her American colonies. Thereafter, Newfoundland became increasingly important because of her abundant natural resources and because of her newly determined role in British-North American trade.[38] The protection of the fishery became a "fundamental tenet of England's economic creed,"[39] resulting in the British parliament's recognition that policies relating to the governance of Newfoundland needed modifying.

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[35]C.O. 194/21,23,49,64,70,80,81. "Abstract Census and Returns for the Several Electoral Districts of Newfoundland", 1793-1830. Maritime History Archives, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

[36]Because migrant workers returned to Britain in the fall the figures reported for the winter population are taken to indicate permanent residency.

[37]C.O. 194/34:53-54; C. O. 194/21:264.

[38]Due to the termination of trade between Britain and the American colonies Newfoundland became an important centre for trade to and from the West Indies. Matthews, *Lectures*, 116.

[39]McLintock, *Constitutional*, 27.

In 1784 Governor John Campbell issued the following order to the magistrates of Newfoundland:[40]

> Pursuant to the King's instructions to me, you are to allow all persons inhabiting this island to have full liberty of conscience, and the free exercise of all such modes of religious worship as are not prohibited by law, provided they be contented with a quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the same, not giving offence or scandal to Government.[41]

The governor's instructions prior to 1779 included an "except Papists" clause which prohibited Catholics and Protestant dissenters from openly practising their religions.[42] This instruction is significant in relation to permanent settlement on the island, in that Catholics could now obtain absolution without having to leave the island to do so,[43]they could be married locally, children could be baptised, and Catholic schools could be put into operation. This in turn had a stabilizing effect by contributing to population growth as well as establishing a necessary part of social infrastructure.

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[40]In fact, this amendment appeared in the governor's instructions for 1779, but then governor, Richard Edwards neither enforced nor publicly recognized the new instruction. Rollmann, "Enfranchisement," 36.

[41]As quoted in Hans Rollmann, "Enfranchisement," 34.

[42]Hans Rollmann suggests that this clause was modified in accordance with Catholic emancipation in England. The Relief Act in 1778, which "aimed at modifying the penal code, was initiated by the British government for tactical and political reasons." The instructions to the governors of *all* British colonies regarding religious liberties was a result of changes to the penal code. Ibid., 37.

[43]Irish immigrants were forced to leave the island each year in order to receive the sacraments. However, in some cases this necessity was circumvented by the "illegal" presence of priests in several areas. J. D. Rodgers, *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies* Vol. V (Oxford: Calendon Press, 1911), 151.

The British design to protect trade on the island necessitated a properly constituted civil court. In 1791, once Britain realized that settlement on the island was inevitable,[44] the British parliament passed an act governing the functions of courts.[45] Although these courts were an improvement on the older system they were merely a concession since the seat of law did not change to local control. McLintock points out that the island's legal system:

> ...still came to life with the arrival of the fishing fleet in the spring and after a short uneventful existence it expired with the departure of the fleet at the close of the season, leaving the inhabitants, like the dead leaves of autumn, helpless before the blasts of legal adversity.[46]

Although revisions to policies and legal directives relating to Newfoundland were inadequate they were substantial improvements over the previous ones. In the final analysis it appears that the impetus for establishing a revised court system, initiating laws of judicature, and implementing general social reform was, for the most part, inspired by British protectionism, rather than a genuine response to the needs of island residents.

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[44]R. MacKay suggests that Britain's attempt to depopulate the island "were as futile as King Chnut's command to bid the waves recede," *Newfoundland, Economic, Diplomatic and Strategic Studies* R. MacKay ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 262.

[45]The act relating to legal systems on the island was first introduced in 1791, and reinstated every year thereafter until 1809 when it became permanent. English, "Development," 89.

[46]McLintock, *Constitutional*, 77.

1.5 Summary

In Newfoundland the years of external political and economic struggle which impaired internal economic and social progress had a decisive impact on the development and maintenance of most infrastructures. Because Britain was reluctant to establish (or recognize) Newfoundland as a colony, and because British interests were diverted to political concerns during the war years, the island inhabitants were left in want of well organized and effective institutions. This lack of infrastructure extended to the establishment and development of most religious organizations, including Methodism.

The events of the American War of Secession left Newfoundland in a precarious position, both economically and politically. While general hardship characterized much of this period, substantial gains were also made in that the residents of Newfoundland were provided the opportunity to secure more lasting control over the island's economic base. When the fishery changed from a migratory to a sedentary one, and the population resumed growth, Britain was forced to change administrative policies. It was at this time when permanent settlement was an undeniable fact, and British protectionism took hold, that Britain instituted formal government, regulated systems of justice, and allowed for the uninhibited development of educational and religious institutions.

Chapter 2

Methodism as a Revitalization Process

2.1 Introduction

If the democracy of the New World was "freedom for all," then the realities of living in eighteenth-century Newfoundland had somehow fallen short of the mark. The imperial system of government had for many years resisted settlement by refusing to establish infrastructures and administrative policies to help organize the fledgling colony. The absence of such support encouraged the residents of Harbour Grace to erect a church and obtain the services of a minister on their own initiative.[47] The arrival of Laurence Coughlan in 1766 offered a certain hope to some of these residents. Those who retained Coughlan as minister for the church in Harbour Grace did not apply specifically for a Methodist preacher, but with Coughlan they found a self-confessed

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[47]"It was my decision, on my return from Trinity, to have paid a visit to Harbour Grace. By reason, the Inhabitants of that place and Carbonear a neighbouring place, and some other Inhabitants of Conception Bay, have lately raised a Subscription for Erecting a new Church at Harbour Grace...the Inhabitants, Merchants and Employers of Harbour Grace, Carbonear Et cet: are [?] very [?] 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 Sh/d. allow yearly, in case the Society Sh/d. Send one to them." Edward Langman to S.P.G., 6 Nov. 1764 (B6/161, folio 2-3).

Methodist who incorporated his own convictions as an integral part of his ministry.

Coughlan detracted from the doctrine of the "Established Church" by imparting a message of salvation for all - a message which was well received among the less fortunate classes, but frowned on by those in positions of power. The popularity of Methodism within the poorer classes was a trend witnessed in England and the American colonies as well, partly because it promoted the principles and freedoms equated with a move away from the "Established Church" and its support of traditional social values and practices.

2.2 The Hope for Change

Social reform is embedded within Methodism - it is intrinsic in its basic doctrines, principles, and practices. The primary tenets of Methodism lent themselves to social revision, in that they inspired the hope for change, but, more significantly, they acted upon this hope. The importance of the social aspect of Methodism was explicit in the doctrine of salvation which contained an obligation to reform society and its institutions for the benefit of everyone. In practical terms Methodism was not only dedicated to the salvation of humankind but was also devoted to the duty of public service. It involved feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and teaching the

uneducated.[48]

In the American colonies the Methodist Circuit Riders of America gave "expression to democratic social ideals." In the words of W. C. Barclay:

> In attitude and teaching they challenged the European tradition of aristocracy based upon birth, social prestige, and property. They refused deference to the class distinctions which had prevailed in colonial society and the stratification which divided society into higher-class and lower-class people.[49]

To Methodists all were sinners in need of salvation, which had a levelling effect on the existing social order: no man, woman, or child was exempt from the need for salvation, and no one was beneath their notice or above it. The egalitarianism bound up in such a view held profound social implications. What was said of the American Circuit Riders can be said of Laurence Coughlan: he represented a different species of minister, and proclaimed a system of belief which suited the displaced and seemingly forsaken residents of Newfoundland.

At the very base of the reforming tendencies of Methodism was the attention to the individual. In the preachers' thinking there was:

> confidence that if the man's soul was saved fundamental social change would inevitably follow. The most direct and surest way of changing society and all its evil institutions, they believed, was to change the

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[48]In England, Methodism was taken to industrial areas where impoverished workers were preached a gospel of hope in the midst of their despair. Elie Halévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 69-72.

[49]W. C. Barclay, *Early American Methodism, 1769-1844* Vols. 2 (New York: Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1950) 2:2.

individual."[50]

Their conviction rested on the notion that only through genuine conversion could people become righteous and just, and in sincerely seeking to do the will of God, would reform the nation. In holding such a view Methodist preachers exhibited a sound social instinct which fostered profound implications for social reform.

The conviction that no one was exempt from social responsibility, that all persons were worth saving, and that all could be saved gave depth to the message they preached. Inherent in their teachings was a strong sense of moral and social responsibility which served as a positive move towards social equality, and moved away from the traditions and restrictions associated with the hierarchical structures of traditional British rule.[51]

While Methodists did not directly attack the dominant institutions of the economic order, they did so indirectly by offering the possibility of salvation to everyone, rich and poor alike. Methodists constantly emphasized the perfectibility of the individual through divine grace and the need for Christian perfection as a part of this possibility.[52] They were primarily concerned with the

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[50]Barclay, *American*, 2:8.

[51]Henry D. Rack notes that, it was not "uncharacteristic of religious renewal movements in their early phases to overcome, to some degree, the normal divisions of the social hierarchy. This was partly true of early Methodism: hence the alarm of critics at lay preachers and the fears of a return to seventeenth-century chaos. Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 441.

awakening and the cultivation of an inner spiritual experience that was genuine, but by extending this message to all it contravened traditional social order. In Newfoundland, the work begun by Coughlan can be said to fit such a pattern. Coughlan, in his zealous attempt to convert sinners, managed to attract a loyal following and simultaneously alienate the elite class in Conception Bay.

2.3 The Introduction of Methodism to Conception Bay

The inception of Methodism in Conception Bay can be said to belong to a larger framework of change based on a need to reconstruct life in a harsh environment. For most of the eighteenth century the social atmosphere in Newfoundland lacked the freedoms associated with principles of social equality. It was a society that favoured the powerful and subverted the poor and down-trodden.[53] As opposed to change, the island residents were subjected to a social and political structure consistent with that of the Old World. These new settlers, instead of improving their situation, were confronted with the same system of governance, except there were no formal institutions in place to protect them.[54] The message of Methodism offered a change in attitude, a change in structure, and the hope that such changes were for the benefit of everyone. In effect, the

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[52]E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1963), 368-369. Also see Rack, *Reasonable*, 427.

[53]Head, *Eighteenth*, 142-143.

[54]Matthews, *Lectures*, 135-136.

social and political climate existing in Newfoundland during most of the eighteenth century was generally disorganized, and the social, economic and legal structures in place did not adequately meet the needs and demands of the resident population.[55]

The anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace maintains that social reform usually develops in response to social disorganization, and general discontent among the populace. He ascertains that "revitalization movements" often manifest themselves within a religious context, as a means of adaptation aimed at reorienting systems of belief:

> Reformative religious movements often occur in disorganized societies, these new religions, far from being conservative, are often radically destructive of existing institutions, aiming to resolve conflict not be manipulation of the self but by manipulation of the real world.[56]

These revised systems of belief, in turn, serve to resolve conflict by modifying perceived social inadequacies. The realities of life in Newfoundlanders during the eighteenth century, replete with its many deficiencies, appears to fit the prescription for a society in need of organization and reform. How the message of Methodism answers to Wallace's principles of revitalization, and the stages of processual structure which determine the success or failure of a movement, can be traced in the progress of Methodism under Coughlan's direction and in the

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[55]Head, *Eighteenth*, 54, 140.

[56]Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966), 30.

be traced in the progress of Methodism under Coughlan's direction and in the missions that followed his departure from Newfoundland.

2.4 An Anthropological Perspective

Many sociologists, anthropologists and social historians recognize the study of religious movements as vital to the understanding of social transformation and growth. In "Revitalization Movements," Anthony F. C. Wallace explains how changes in social dynamics affect social transition. Wallace observes that social transition often manifests itself within the context of religious reform. The basis of Wallace's theory assumes that religion is "the inculcator of social values" and that differing social values within a culture often incur change:

> ...from the known diversity of values among various cultures, it can be readily deduced that religion should vary from one society to another and from one group to another within society, depending on the values necessary for that society's and that group's integration and survival.[57]

Wallace's analysis of *cultural-system innovation* determines how changes occur within specific social units. In his study Wallace identifies the elements of *processual structure* (or stages of social transformation) which occur successively within the process of social transition.[58] The constitutive elements within this

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[57]Wallace, *Anthropological*, 26.

[58]Wallace recognizes *processual structure* as a series of stages through which the dynamic of social change must pass before revitalization is realized. Anthony Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropology* no. 58 (1956): 264.

processual structure are set as provisos necessary to social reform. Wallace's thesis supports the concept of common tendencies within the process of social renewal, in that all innovative movements exhibit common traits or "certain uniformly-found processual dimensions."[59] The five stages of this process range form the preliminary stage of *Steady State*[60] to the final stage of *New Steady State*.[61] The intermediary stages are transitional: they proceed through phases which include the inception of reform, (necessitated by individual stress and cultural distortion), through a period of revitalization necessary for social innovation, and are completed in a stabilized state arrived at through reformulation of the previous social structure:

> the persons involved in the process of revitalization...must feel that this cultural system is unsatisfactory; and they must innovate...a new cultural system, specifying new relationships...[62]

It can be argued that many of the necessary preconditions, explained by Wallace, existed in Conception Bay throughout most of the eighteenth century.[63]

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[59]Wallace, "Revitalization," 264.

[60]The state in which "culturally recognized techniques for satisfying needs operate with such efficiency that chronic stress within the system varies within tolerable levels." Ibid., 268.

[61]Wallace maintains that the *New Steady State* is realized, "once cultural transformation has been accomplished and the new cultural system has proved itself viable, and once the movement organization has solved its problems of routinization, a new steady state may be said to exist." Ibid., 275.

[62]Ibid., 265.

[63]Wallace contends that social adaptations occur when the individuals in a society are subjected to stress. A society is subjected to additional stress once

Dawn Barrett observes that, the social, political and economic conditions evidenced promoted an atmosphere "ripe for religious revival."[64] This suggestion is based on a social analysis which uncovers class conflict, personal alienation and general discontent among many Newfoundland settlers.[65] Wallace maintains that:

> ...religion is frequently a way of asserting an ethnic, or class, or racial identity in a situation of intergroup conflict, and resistance to change may be based more on grounds of identity than on reluctance to adopt instrumental values more appropriate to the new circumstances of the society.[66]

With this in mind the circumstances surrounding early Newfoundland Methodism can be more readily explained. The resistance met with by Coughlan was not simply a result of divergent religious orientations but can be seen as a result of social and political differences as well.

The prescription for reform, as determined by Wallace, qualifies life in Conception Bay during the Coughlan period as one of cultural distortion, and one which was very much in need of revitalization. By the end of his residency Coughlan had planted the seeds of renewal by offering the people an alternative

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culture becomes distorted to the point that the "elements are not harmoniously related but are mutually inconsistent and interfering." The resulting alienation on the part of individuals and groups requires social "reformulation." Ibid., 269-270.

[64]Barrett, "Revivalism," 67.

[65]Ibid., 58-61.

[66]Wallace, *Anthropological*, 26.

means of expression, and a sense of community within evangelical religion. However, in terms of success, the stages of reform, as determined within Wallace's stages of processual development, were not fulfilled during Coughlan's ministry. In essence, the loss of Coughlan interrupted the process of revitalization. The basic instruction and leadership offered through his ministry, while influential, did not complete the requirements for definite reform. Wallace's theoretical framework offers a formulaic approach that helps in constructing a view of how early Methodism was adopted, why it faltered, and why it was eventually restored.

2.5 Supporting Research

Wallace's model of revitalization is supported by the work of Jochiam Wach and William McLoughlin. Both Wach and McLoughlin acknowledge the importance of religious orientations in establishing renewed social understanding. Wach recognizes the relationship between social organization and religion as an expression of social identity. He suggests that if social realities are perceived by the people as being deficient, then social change is inevitable. In Wach's opinion there are two essential factors which promote change: "the growing differentiation in the sociological, political cultural structure of society, and the enriching of the religious experiences of individuals and groups."[67]

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[67]Jochiam Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 109.

Wach contends that the initiative of leaders in response to traumatic events in the lives of people, like plagues, wars and "other *portenta*" significantly influence the "religious attitudes of the group and the corresponding expression..."[68] Therefore, a break from conventional forms of religious expression and practice are often accompanied by, and are part of, social transformation.

Wach observes that in constructing a new social identity through religious orientation, segregation from other sectors of the social unit often occurs. Such reformulation, or regrouping, "is characterized by the concept of relationship as spiritual fatherhood and spiritual brotherhood." The formation of this new community it will differ from "the natural groups not only in type of organization, in rites, and in beliefs but primarily in a new spirit of unity."[69] This observation is of particular interest here, since the social segregation and the sense of community evidenced in early Newfoundland Methodism is characteristic of Wach's reorganization model.

In *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, William McLoughlin offers a comprehensive survey of how social transition and religious movements in America evolved from a fundamental response to perceived social needs. McLoughlin incorporates the key elements of Wallace's revitalization theory into his study of revival movements. He maintains that:

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[68]Wach, *Sociology*, 109-110.

[69]Ibid., 110.

> Great awakenings (and the revivals that are part of them) are the results, not of depressions, wars, or epidemics, but of critical disjunctions in our self-understanding. They are not brief outbursts of mass emotionalism by one group or another but profound cultural transformations affecting all. Awakenings begin in periods of cultural distortion and grave personal stress, when we lose faith in the legitimacy of our norms, the viability of our institutions, and the authority of our leaders in church and state. They eventuate in basic restructuring of our institutions, and the authority of our institutions and redefinitions of our social goals. [70]

In McLoughlin's view the general precepts of cultural innovation, as determined by Wallace, are applicable to the way in which most religious revivals develop.

2.6 The Revitalization Process

Section IV of Wallace's *processual structure* identifies six steps which constitute the revitalization process: 1. *Mazeway reformulation;* 2. *Communication;* 3. *Organization;* 4. *Adaptation;* 5. *Cultural Transformation;* 6. *Routinization*. *Mazeway reformulation* is the stage in which insight into a process of change is realized. The insight into reformulation is often discovered through inspiration or revelation by a prophet or leader. Usually these insights appear as dreams or visions, but in certain cases (as in the case of John Wesley) there occurs a "brief and dramatic moment of insight, revelation, or inspiration, which functions in most respects like a vision in being the occasion of a new synthesis of values and

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[70]William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 2.

meanings."[71] In most instances, as a result of these prophetic revelations "the 'dead' way of life is recognized as dead: interest shifts to a god, the community, and a new way."[72]

The next stage, *Communication*, involves the prophet passing on the meaning and significance of the revelation. Wallace identifies two principal motifs which accompany this stage:

> The convert will come under the care and protection of certain supernatural beings: and that both he and his society will benefit materially from an identification with some definable new cultural system.[73]

The communication of the new message becomes essential to the success or failure of the revitalization process. It is the means by which converts and disciples are attracted to the movement. Wallace maintains the "preachings take many forms and may be directed at various sorts of audiences such as the elite versus the down-trodden." As the movement gains momentum and as the prophet "gathers disciples, these assume much of the responsibility for communicating the `good word,' and communication remains as one of the primary activities of the movement during later phases of organization."[74]

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[71]Wallace, "Revitalization," 270-271.

[72]Ibid., 270.

[73]Ibid., 273.

[74]The concept of communication, as understood by Wallace, can be expanded to include various aspects of the communication process. In the analysis of early Newfoundland Methodism presented in this thesis the notion of communication is considered in terms of the style and method of communication employed by

The third stage, *Organization*, determines how the movement manifests itself and is developed. The leader is expected to "phrase his call for adherents as a demand to perform a duty to a power higher than human."[75] In most instances "A small clique of disciples clusters about the prophet and an embryonic campaign organization develops with three orders of personnel: the prophet; the disciples; and the followers."[76] Within this system the followers, as well as the prophet and the disciples undergo a "revitalizing personality transformation," that is, the revelation experienced by the leader is often experienced in a similar way by the disciples and followers.[77] Wallace observes that the organization of the movement, once established, becomes political rather than religious.

The fourth stage, *Adaptation*, is one in which various strategies are used in order to overcome resistance. Wallace suggests that given the revolutionary nature of most revitalization movements and the challenge they present to existing structures, it is likely they will meet with resistance. Such resistance is frequently overcome through "doctrinal modification; political and diplomatic

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various Methodist preachers. Here, the different communicative approaches used by Methodist leaders are viewed in terms of how various methods either positively or negatively influenced the reception of Methodist principles and practices. Ibid., 273.

[75]Here, Wallace draws on Max Weber's work concerning charismatic leadership. Ibid., 274.

[76]Ibid., 273.

[77]Ibid., 274.

manoeuvre; and force."[78] Wallace points out that in most cases the doctrine is continually revised by the prophet, who does so in response to "various criticisms and affirmations."[79]

The fifth stage of *Cultural Transformation* pertains to the period in which the new religion becomes part of accepted cultural practice. At this point some movements fail while others "represent well conceived and successful projects of further social, political, or economic reform."[80]

The sixth and final stage, *Routinization* is the process whereby the movement is accommodated within the culture and is established as a recognized institutional feature. After a movement has been accepted within a culture rarely does it:

> maintain a totalitarian control over all aspects of the transformed culture; more usually, once the desired transformation has occurred, the organization contracts and maintains responsibility only for the preservation of doctrine and the performance of ritual (i.e., it becomes a church).[81]

It can be argued that Coughlan's ministry answered to the first two steps, faltered at the next two, and failed to complete the remainder. However, Coughlan cannot be held entirely responsible for this failure, since external

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[78] Wallace notes that all of these strategies are not mutually exclusive and all do not need to be employed in the adaptation process. Ibid., 274.

[79] Ibid., 274.

[80] Ibid., 275.

[81] Ibid., 275.

factors interrupted his ability to fulfil his ministerial role. He did create an audience for his message and in doing so created an alternative world view[82] which allowed for the recognition of a higher order than that imposed by the controlling classes.[83] This world view appealed to the poor and disadvantaged, whereas the majority of the controlling class (mercantocracy) upheld traditional beliefs and doctrines.[84] As a communicator of ideas Coughlan initially failed, but eventually his message was heard and conversions followed. Coughlan's most obvious failure was his inability to introduce the Conception Bay Methodists into the formal organization of the Methodist Conference. Because of his association with the Anglican missionary, he could not garner support from the Methodist Conference, and therefore was not supported by the Methodist network. As a result of this disparity the Methodist movement initiated by him was doomed to failure. Coughlan did however manage to organize at the local level. He organized classes within his district, and established churches in Blackhead and Carbonear.[85] The classes held together during Coughlan's

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[82]The notion of world view can be assimilated with Wallace's concept of "mazeway."

[83]Wallace defines "mazeway" as an understanding of how "nature, society, personality, and body image" is perceived by the members in a society. Mazeways are manipulated in order to reduce stress. Wallace, "Revitalization," 266.

[84]This point refers to the rift created between Methodist converts and the merchants of Conception Bay. This is explained in more detail on pages ??? of this thesis.

[85]Rollmann, "Origins," 9.

residency, but after his departure the lack of organization and the absence of a qualified minister interfered with maintaining the Methodist interest he had encouraged.

2.7 Summary

The conditions of life and livelihood existing in Conception Bay during the eighteenth century were generally deplorable and rampant with social inequity. The change for the better that many newcomers and settlers anticipated did not occur. Instead, these hopeful people were faced with the same types of problems as those faced with in their native lands, with the unfortunate exception that there were no formal means of maintaining a check on the ruling elite. In fact, conditions were worse than were hoped for, and those of impoverished and destitute means were exploited by those who had the power to do so. Methodism offered a doctrine and discipline which answered to the needs of the people: the rich and powerful could control their purses but they could not control their immortal souls. The system of belief offered through Methodism was one area where money and power, prestige and influence did not determine self-worth.

The revitalization model offered by Anthony Wallace provides a systematic framework into which the events and circumstances of early Newfoundland Methodism can be placed, that is, it can be accommodated within the definition of a revitalization movement. In light of Wallace's model,

social reform was not only needed in Conception Bay, but was inevitable, according to the terms and conditions of his "processual structure" analysis. How Coughlan's ministry meets with the requirements that determine successful and complete reform are considered in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Coughlan's Newfoundland Ministry

3.1 Introduction

In 1764 the people of Carbonear and Harbour Grace erected a church and requested the services of a minister. In 1766, in response to a formal request for a minister Laurence Coughlan took up the Newfoundland posting.[86] In his early years as a preacher Coughlan had not been ordained as an official minister of the "Established Church," nor was he given formal education and instruction associated with the office, but had served as a Methodist itinerant throughout England and Ireland.

Initially, Coughlan and John Wesley were close associates and shared in the common purpose of spreading Methodism throughout Britain. However, over time this relationship seems to have been interrupted by Coughlan's affiliation with Thomas Maxfield. Maxfield and Wesley appear to have had a difference of opinion regarding the experiential aspects of the religious life: where Maxfield dwelled on the subjective elements of religious experience, Wesley emphatically did not.[87] The differences between Wesley and his

[86]The people of Harbour Grace and Carbonear authorized George Davis, a local merchant, to "procure and agree with a Protestant Minister of the Gospel, to come and reside" among them for 100 pounds a year. GN2/1A: vol. 4, 237-8, (PANL).

followers and Maxfield and his own followers, including Coughlan, resulted in factionalism within the Methodist Connexion in Britain. Coughlan had further separated himself from Wesley upon receiving ordination from the Greek bishop Erasmus. In 1764 Coughlan and several others had been ordained when Wesley was absent from England, supposedly because "they were refused or were expected to be refused ordination by Anglican bishops."[88] Wesley, unimpressed by this event, expressed his disapproval in writing stating: "When I was gone out of town, Bishop Erasmus was prevailed upon to ordain Laurence Coughlan, a person who had no learning at all."[89] By the time Coughlan was approached to take on the Newfoundland mission he had separated from the Wesleyans and was preaching as an independent in Surrey, south of London.[90]

Coughlan's "official" ordination was hastily conducted before he departed

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[87]Part of the tension between Coughlan and Wesley is related to Coughlan's "misinterpretation" of Wesleyan doctrine. Wesley writes: "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...If Mr. Maxfield or you took it to be anything else, it was your own fault, not mine." Wesley suggests that Coughlan, under the influence of Mr. Maxfield, had distanced himself from Wesley's true teachings. Letter to Laurence Coughlan from John Wesley dated August 27, 1768. *Journal*, 283:101; as stated in *The Letters of Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* John Telford ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1960). Hereafter *Journal*.

[88]Hans Rollmann, "Laurence Coughlan and the Origins of Methodism in Newfoundland," *The Contribution of Methodism to Atlantic Canada* Charles H. H. Scobie and John W. Grant eds. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 56. Hereafter "Coughlan."

[89]As quoted in Hans Rollmann, "Coughlan," 56.

[90]A comprehensive account of Coughlan's professional life, prior to his arrival in Newfoundland, is provided by Hans Rollmann. Ibid., 54-57.

the shores of England.[91] Coughlan then became a full-fledged minister of the "Established Church,"[92] but lacked the education and instruction which usually accompany such a position. Although Coughlan's timely ordination ensured his official acceptance as a minister, several other concerns were not as easily remedied. Coughlan was a man of earnest conviction and strong devotion - qualities which had caused friction between himself and John Wesley before he left England and shortly after his arrival brought him into controversy with the people of Conception Bay. Coughlan's background as a Methodist itinerant and as an Independent preacher, his doctrinal heterodoxy, and his lack of formal education would not be acceptable to some.[93]

3.2 Coughlan's Early Period: "The rage of Arctos and eternal frost!"

In the first few years of Coughlan's residency we find that he was not at all pleased with his new posting. He had difficulty establishing his ministry: the people were resistant, the local government was non-supportive, and the land

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[91]The request by the inhabitants of Conception Bay specifically asked for a Protestant minister. Coughlan was but a Methodist lay preacher. Coughlan's second ordination was arranged by George Davis and George Welch through the Bishop of London. In 1766, shortly before he left England for Newfoundland, Coughlan was ordained by the Bishop of Chester. See Hans Rollmann for a more detailed explanation of the circumstances behind Coughlan's second ordination. Ibid., 58.

[92]Rollmann, "Origins," 7.

[93]Barrett, "Revivalism," 80.

was as inhospitable as the social climate that greeted him. There was also some difficulty with securing the financial support he had been promised: less than a year after his arrival Coughlan was compelled to return to England in order to secure financial support from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.[94] In addition, there was some confusion as to what type of ministry was to be established.[95] In a personal sense Coughlan did not help matters: he managed to aggravate an already difficult situation by offering a ministry which was best suited to the less influential members of the populace, and in doing so alienated himself and his followers from those in positions of authority.[96]

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[94]Coughlan returned to England in December of 1766 requesting support from the S.P.G.. The S. P. G. honoured this request, appointed him missions representative to Harbour Grace and Carbonear and advanced him a half years salary of 25lb. Rollmann, "Coughlan," 61.

[95]Barrett provides a lengthy and detailed breakdown of different denominational and cultural backgrounds of the Conception Bay residents. According to Barrett the different religious orientations displayed by the Irish Catholics, the people from Poole, who were noted "dissenters," and the Bristol immigrants, who were primarily, but not entirely, Anglican traditionalists, made for a population with mixed religious needs: Coughlan could not fulfil the needs of all. Barrett, "Revivalism," 48-58.

[96]Coughlan did not apply his ministry to any one sector of the society excluding others. However, the manner in which he conducted his ministry was more acceptable to certain groups and less so to others. Those who adopted Coughlan's spiritual message were segregated on several levels, of which economic and religious differences are the most apparent. This situation was exacerbated after Coughlan publicly admonished several persons of authority within the community. Deposition of John Alcock. A-170 C/Nfld/1/60, ACC.; also see the Petition of Hugh Roberts, in Warwick Smith, "Revd. Laurence Coughlan, An Address," this is an unpublished paper presented to the Newfoundland Historical Society in 1942, 2. Also refer to Hans Rollmann, "Origins," 163.

The politically and socially dominant group in Conception Bay were, for the most part, affluent and educated. Many were familiar with traditional church practices and therefore were not receptive to Coughlan's unconventional style of preaching. In that, Coughlan emphasized experiential religion, and encouraged belief that all were equal before God - a concept that was contrary to the hiearchical structures within Anglicianism. The ruling class consisted chiefly of wealthy merchants, principally wholesale importers and exporters, and retail merchants. They controlled the economic situation and most aspects of society, which by natural extension, included religious practices.[97] The elevation of lay persons to positions of authority, as in the installation of Arthur Thomey, Thomas Pottle and John Stretton as lay preachers, was inconsistent with the conventional approaches followed within traditional church practice. In effect, such action was perceived as a threat to the established power structure existing on the island.[98] For instance, Hugh Roberts, a local merchant, became incensed when he discovered that Coughlan had "appoint'd illiterate People to hold meetings at Private Houses."[99] Understandably, the powerful mercantile class,

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[97]As part of the British mercantile elite, the majority of Conception Bay merchants supported associated British policies. The most obvious display of religious control is demonstrated in the policies concerning Roman Catholics. Refer to pages 5 and 13 of this thesis.

[98]Hans Rollmann suggests that Coughlan was really the only person who actively challenged the existing social structure. Rollmann, "Origins", 13.

[99]The appointment of George Vey, an illiterate fisherman, as lay preacher was only one of the points of contention between Coughlan and Roberts. Later

and those who ultimately relied on them, were reluctant to engage in any activity that challenged existing authority in any way.

The first three years of Coughlan's ministry were a disappointment to him. Although the number of communicants were on the increase he was still lacking the success he had hoped for. The inherent problems and difficulties of life on the island suggest that the potential for a religious revival did exist.[100] However, the reality of a move towards Methodism was nowhere in evidence during the initial years of Coughlan's ministry. In actual time it took a period of three years of preaching and pastoral work before Coughlan was rewarded with the people's support. This suggests that although people were in need of social change, the realization of such change was not within immediate reach.

In 1768 Coughlan wrote to John Wesley complaining of the state of his ministry, suggesting that his work in Newfoundland was in vain.[101] Wesley's return letter shows little concern for Coughlan's situation advising him to stay

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Roberts becomes one of Coughlan's most active adversaries. Deposition of Hugh Roberts, Harbour Grace, 26 August 1771. Smith, "Address", 2.

[100]Dawn Barrett argues that social structure in Newfoundland during the eighteenth century was primarily disorganized, fragmented and essentially diasporic, and as a result the society in general was "ripe for religious revival," in that organization of any kind provided necessary structure. Barrett, "Revivalism," 67.

[101]Unfortunately there are no extant copies of Coughlan's letter to Wesley available, however we do have Wesley's response. Letter to Laurence Coughlan from John Wesley dated August 27, 1768. *Journal*, 283: 101-103; See also Laurence Coughlan, *Account*, 8.

"where God intended," and to conduct his work as best he could.[102] Coughlan remained in Newfoundland and in the following year his ministry attained the success that he had hoped for.

3.3 The Success of Coughlan's Mission: "*the Arm of the Lord revealed.*"

Although Coughlan frequently complained of the futility of his mission through sheer persistence he eventually succeeded. The widespread conversion which Coughlan prayed for was answered suddenly and with great result.[103] The community at large responded to this occurrence with general disapproval. The intensity of these conversions and the outward expression of conviction led to rumours that the people of Carbonear and Harbour Grace had gone mad.[104] This "madness," although openly and actively criticised by the unconverted, filled an emotional and social void among those who embraced Coughlan's teachings.[105] By those who were not converted his ministry was viewed less

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[102]Wesley's response suggests that the source of tension between the two had not been resolved. It appears that Wesley had washed his hands of Coughlan for good. This becomes more evident when Coughlan returned to England: Wesley did not admit him into the connexion, but he served as a preacher under Lady Huntington and her associates. Letter to Laurence Coughlan from John Wesley dated August 27, 1768. *Journal*, 283:101.

[103]Ibid., 9.

[104]"...a Report soon spread over the Bay, and great Part of the Land, that the People at Harbour-Grace and Carbonear were going mad." Coughlan, *Account*, 16. The intensity of these conversions and the resulting emotional attachment to Coughlan is evident in the letters contained in Coughlan's *Account*.

favourably. While Coughlan's "hellfire and brimstone" sermons did much to rouse the imaginations and the "fearfulness" of the people, it raised eyebrows among the more traditional religious followers.

The impetus behind Coughlan's eventual success is attributed to his "pivotal sermon."[106] In this sermon he useed two contrastive death-bed conversions: in one instance the dying man "suddenly' felt the "grace of God." In the second instance the dying person steadfastly opposed Coughlan's doctrine and the necessity to be born again. Coughlan, in his preaching, used both these examples to contrast the ends to be expected for the redeemed and the unredeemed. The fact that death was a common occurrence in this isolated land did much to help along the conversions.[107] Coughlan indicated that the use of these accounts did much in "establishing the Word of his Grace among this people."[108] The sermon on the theme "Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the Unrighteous Man his Thoughts,"[109] was considered determinative in awakening people to the consequences of a life of "natural sinfulness".

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[105]Rollmann, "Origins," 46.

[106]Barrett, "Revivalism," 100.

[107]Semple suggests that death contributed significantly to the rate of conversions. Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal & Kungston: McGill-Queen's University, 1996), 60.

[108]From Laurence Coughlan's *Account* as quoted in Hans Rollmann, "Origins," 44.

[109]Ibid., 43.

3.4 The Contribution of Methodism to Social and Personal Renewal

Despite the criticisms levelled at Coughlan's converts, the religious focus offered through his ministry did have beneficial results. In a practical sense it made a positive contribution to the way in which people conducted their lives. According to Coughlan himself, his ministry was the force behind improving the lives of those who followed Methodist principles and practices:

> ...where Sabbath-breaking, Playing and many other Vices had before abounded, the Employment was now Prayer, and the singing of Hymns.[110]

Once people realized that certain spiritual needs were being met through the religious experience offered by Coughlan's ministry, it was viewed more positively throughout the Conception Bay communities. As a result, it became an acceptable alternative to the lifestyle it replaced.[111] Hans Rollmann suggests that of the influences contributing to the acceptance of Methodism in Conception Bay, the promise of social and personal renewal were the most significant and far-reaching:

> All in all, the revival was "religious" in Nature. It provided the converted with subjective certainty of liberation from sin and guilt, once-through the preaching and pastoral efforts of Coughlan-such liberation had become established as an authentic and desirable solution to the human plight of the residents. It also conveyed concrete moral, emotional, and aesthetic rewards resulting from a life of holiness.[112]

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[110]Coughlan, *Account*, 17.

[111]Rollmann, "Origins," 44-46.

[112]Ibid., 12.

Rollmann maintains that for the converted the "human horizon of meaning" changed offering a means of coping in an otherwise difficult society. And, as a result of the hope and encouragement offered through Coughlan's ministry people's lives were "illuminated by ultimate meanings, and grounded in ontological certainty."[113] As a result of Coughlan's devotion and attention to all sectors of society, regardless of social status, his converts established a personal and emotional attachment to him, which among the most devoted persisted long after he had left the island.[114]

In a positive sense Newfoundland Methodism provided the people of Conception Bay with an alternative world view which held a promise for change. Because the residents of Newfoundland were still governed by British imperial policies, Coughlan's message represented a break from the tradition of servitude and deprivation which often accompany class systems. The people's attraction to Coughlan can be viewed as an extension of the differences which separated the ruling elite from those of the working class. In Wallace's model such a break from tradition is considered to be a definitive move towards revitalization. The fact that Newfoundland Methodism operated as an alternative to traditional church practice qualifies it as a revitalization movement

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[113]Ibid., 12.

[114]Coughlan includes correspondence from converts who swear allegiance and devotion to him as their spiritual leader. Coughlan, *Account*, 50-168.

independent of its rate of success or failure.[115] Wallace claims that a move away from traditional practices and values often occurs when existing cultural, social and economic systems fail to satisfy the needs of the people. In eighteenth-century Newfoundland it seems that few needs of the year round residents were being met either in a spiritual or a physical sense. The deprivation described by Coughlan illustrates resident life in Newfoundland as one of few comforts.[116] Life on the island was difficult, the harsh environment, the isolation from major centres, and Britain's lack of provision for suitable administrative agencies, contributed to general disorder and lawlessness.[117] As well as physical there were spiritual depravities like those expressed by John Hoskins the lay preacher in Old Perlican,[118] who writes:

> I read the Church Prayers and some of your [Wesley's] Sermons, and sung your Hymns, by myself alone, for many weeks. For my congregation did not know how to behave in divine service; no not even to kneel in prayer, or to sing at all: but would stand at a distance and look at me, as if I had been a monster: and yet they called themselves members of the Church of

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[115]Wallace points out that a revitalization movement exists as soon as a break with traditional beliefs and practices are in evidence. However, the success of a revitalization movement depends on whether or not it completes the various stages outlined in his model.

[116]Coughlan, *Account*, 13.

[117]Kerr, "Revolution," 74-77.

[118]John Hoskins, a lay preacher and school teacher, was Coughlan's counterpart in Old Perlican, Trinity Bay. In 1775 Hoskins took up preaching and educational instruction upon realizing the destitute state of the people.

England."[119]

It seems that Hoskins' assessement of the situation in Old Perlican provides a telling statement about lack of spiritual support and instruction in the out-lying areas of Newfoundland.

3.5 Methodism as a Revitalization Process

In Wallace's revitalization theory the periods which pertain most specifically to the study of Methodism in Conception Bay are III and IV, the *Period of Cultural Distortion*[120] and the *Period of Revitalization*,[121] respectively. Cultural distortion are apt words to describe the realities of life in Conception Bay during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Systems of government, legal reform and institutional developments were still very much in their initial stages. The quality of life in Conception Bay was wanting in many ways - spiritually as well as physically: institutions of law and order were inadequate,

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[119]By the middle of the eighteenth century permanent settlement in Newfoundland had taken hold. Some were natives who did not have the benefit of any religious instruction as noted by Hoskins. "An Account of Mr. John Hoskins: in a Letter to the Rev. John Wesley", *Arminian Magazine* 8(1785): 26.

[120]The Period of Cultural Distortion is the phase in which: "the culture is internally distorted; the elements are not harmoniously related but are mutually inconsistent and interfering." Wallace, "Revitalization," 269.

[121]The Period of Revitalization, as determined by Wallace, consists of six stages necessary for innovation to occur. These are described in detail in section 2.4 of this thesis.

religious services were rarely found even within the more populous areas,[122] and educational facilities were practically non-existent.[123] While the impetus for social transformation was in place, the means by which this change was to occur had yet to be implemented.

Wallace stipulates that a revitalization movement need not be developed to an advanced stage in order to be recognized as such. He suggests that the move toward reform is, in and of itself, synonymous with a move towards the revitalization process.[124] Of the six stages described in Wallace's theory, Methodism, under the leadership of Coughlan, can be said to have met with the prescriptions outlined in the first two stages, encountered difficulties at the third, and failed at the fourth and critical stage of *adaptation*, which, according to Wallace, is the phase whereby the success or failure of a movement is determined.[125]

Of the six moments which determine a revitalization movement the first

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[122]In 1764 there were only two ministers residing in Newfoundland: Rev. James Balfour in Trinity and Rev. Edward Langman in St. John's. Rollmann, "Coughlan," 60.

[123]Coughlan, in his assessment of the inhabitants writes, "Their Language is artless and simple without the least human embellishment...As to the Gospel, they had not the least Notion of it: Drinking, and Dancing, and Gaming, they were acquainted with... these they thought it no Harm." Coughlan, *Account*, 13.

[124]Wallace states that the completion of all six stages applies to revitalization movements which are completely successful. He asserts that "logically, as long as the original conception is a doctrine of revitalization by culture change, there should be no requisite number of stages." Wallace, "Revitalization," 278.

[125]Ibid., 278.

stage, *mazeway reformulation*, is the one in which leadership is of the utmost importance. At this stage the guidance provided by a prophet figure or group leader is instrumental in initiating and maintaining a revitalization movement. In effect, this is the period in which innovative systems of belief are developed, which are subsequently passed on to potential converts. Even though Coughlan was now a representative of the Anglican church, he did not adhere to its traditional principles and beliefs, but was faithful to Methodist[126] principles in both practice and preaching. The message of a "New Birth",[127] his emphasis on religion of the heart, his door-to-door evangelism, and his attention to all persons, regardless of social rank, indicates a style of ministry inconsistent with traditional church practices.[128] In effect, his distinctive approach marked an

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[126]By his own admission Coughlan insisted on his devotion to Methodism, "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." Letter from Laurence Coughlan to John Wesley, Harbour Grace, Nov. 4, 1772, *Arminian Magazine* September 8(1785), 491. Even though Coughlan considered himself a Methodist, his interpretation of Methodists principles and beliefs detract somewhat from those of Wesley. His association with Thomas Maxfield and his emphasis on the subjective elements of religious conversion were serious points of contention between himself and Wesley. Refer to pages 36-37 of this thesis.

[127]The concept of "New Birth" was a primary tenet of Methodist belief. "New Birth" or rebirth constituted dying to a life of sin and being reborn into one of sanctification. As Rupert Davies interprets it, "So he rises from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. His evil passions turn to virtues; the earthly, sensual, devilish mind is turned into the mind that was in Jesus Christ." Rupert Davies, "The People Called Methodists: 1. `Our Doctrines'," in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Vols. 4 (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 1:165.

[128]Rollmann, "Coughlan," 62.

obvious break from tradition.

As group leaders, "prophets" assume responsibility for the spiritual well-being of their followers. The emotional response which often accompanies the experience of conversion is a result of a direct connection with the prophet and is in line with the prophet's ability to convince the potential convert of the message being expressed:

> [The] emotional appeal of the new doctrine to both the prophet and his followers is in a considerable part based on its immediate satisfaction of a need to find a supremely powerful and potentially benevolent leader.[129]

Coughlan, as a spiritual leader, conveyed experiential religion so effectively that he was amazed at the strength of the responses. In both private meetings and in public gatherings the people:

> *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. The Word was now *like Fire, or like a Hammer, that breaketh the Rock to Pieces.* Now the Word was indeed *quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged Sword; dividing between Soul and Spirit, Joint and Marrow.*[130]

Once the role of leader is filled and the message of renewal is formulated then the process of communication begins whereby the principles and beliefs of a movement are extended to the community at large. As stated earlier, Coughlan

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[129]Wallace, "Revitalization," 274.

[130]Coughlan, *Account*, 9.

initially failed as a communicator, but eventually succeeded. Despite the many hardships relating to life on the island, receptivity to Methodism was slow in coming, essentially because people had to be "awakened"[131] to their state of sinfulness and only then could the Methodist message be adopted.[132] In effect, Coughlan was responsible for bringing religious instruction to some 5,000 residents in an area where no ministry had previously been established.[133] To some degree the problems of reception may also be attributed to the nature of Coughlan's ministry. Coughlan was representative of a new form of Protestantism.[134] Unlike the established Protestant and Catholic churches Methodism had not yet established its own institutional form and identity, but had grown from a recognized need to reinterpret traditional values within the Anglican church.[135] Methodism, as a form of worship, was still in a

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[131] *Awakening* was the term Coughlan used to refer to one's awareness of sinfulness. Barrett, "Revivalism," 190-191.

[132] The religious state of the people seems to have lacked even the rudimentary forms of religion, therefore the people had to be prepared spiritually before conversions could occur. Such problems are reflected in Hoskins' account of the people's lack of familiarity with religion. "Mr. John Hoskins," *Arminian Magazine* 8(1785): 26.

[133] There were S.P.G. ministers in other parts of the island, as in St. John's and Trinity, but Coughlan was the first resident minister in the Conception Bay area. Naboth Winsor, *Hearts Strangely Warmed: A History of Newfoundland Methodism, 1765-1925* (Gander: BSC Printers, 1982), 24.

[134] Although John Wesley attempted to maintain close contact with the Anglican Church his brand of ministry conflicted with accepted church practices. In England Wesley met with resistance just as Coughlan had in Conception Bay. Halévy, *Birth*, 51.

developmental stage, at least on the North American continent.[136] Of the resident islanders who had traditional religious affiliations few were familiar with Methodist teachings.[137] However, after the Coughlan's initial three years of preaching and pastoral work the problem of communication was greatly alleviated and the next most immediate task at hand was the organization of the converts. In this area Coughlan encountered several problems the severest of which were associated with the separation of his Conception Bay following from the Methodist Conference in England.

As an organizer Coughlan managed to instill a sense of community among his followers: he conducted "little meetings," or classes whereby such private assembly was instrumental in establishing a religious identity among his followers. Coughlan viewed these assemblies as necessary to his missionary work. He writes: "My preaching in this land would do but little good, were it not

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[135]Ibid., 50-52.

[136]The introduction of Methodism to Newfoundland and to the American colonies occurred almost simultaneously. Barclay, *American, 1:18.*

[137]This is a general rule only and not an absolute. The Congregationalists on the island conducted ministries similar to Methodism. John Stretton was also familiar with Methodism and had a personal connection with John Wesley through his Irish parents. John Wesley, in a letter to Stretton, makes mention of his acquaintance with them, "I remember your father and mother well. They truly feared God when I conversed with them." John Wesley to John Stretton, London, Feb. 25, 1785. As quoted in William Wilson, *Newfoundland and its Missionaries in Two Parts to Which is Added a Chronological Table of All the Important Events that Have Occured* [sic] *on the Island* (Cambridge: Dakin and Metcalf, 1866), 159.

for our little meetings."[138] Coughlan instituted classes Harbour in Grace and Carbonear, and after the revival of 1769-70, group meetings were set up in Blackhead[139] and several other communities in order to maintain a sense of community and brotherhood. These meetings appear to have become even more important once Coughlan had left, since they represented one of the few remaining common bonds among the converts.[140]

All indications suggest that these "little meetings" did not extend beyond localized groups and that no Societies were being established. Part of the problem relates to Coughlan's estrangement from Wesley. However, Hans Rollmann points out that the principal reason is associated with his official position as a S.P.G. missionary. Rollmann suggests that "the establishment of a regular `society'" during Coughlan's tenure as Anglican priest and as a representative of the S.P.G. would have led to his immediate removal from the ministry."[141] This also explains why Coughlan did not gain the support of the larger Methodist community in establishing a missionary field on the island. In effect, Coughlan's inability or reluctance in introducing Newfoundland

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[138]Laurence Coughlan to John Wesley, Harbour Grace, 4 Nov. 1772, *Arminian Magazine* 8(1785), 490-492.

[139]Coughlan, *Account*, 19.

[140]After Coughlan's return to England the Methodists of Conception Bay were left without spiritual guidance except for that which was offered by the lay preachers. The meetings would have played an important role in keeping the Methodists in close association with each other.

[141]Rollmann, "Origins," 13.

Methodism to the Methodist Conference[142] created problems with the leadership after his return to England. While Coughlan was successful in attracting converts and organizing his followers on the local level, lack of support from the Methodist Conference created problems for those remaining on the island.

After Coughlan's departure the Conception Bay Methodists were literally abandoned: they had no formal or "official" leadership, they were marginalized within their own community, and they were geographically isolated and therefore cut off from active association with other Methodist societies. With this combination of factors in mind it is surprising that Methodism survived at all in Conception Bay.

While organization became an eventual problem, the most immediate obstacle facing Coughlan and his converts was encountered at the adaptation stage. Wallace defines *adaptation* as the period in which resistance to the beliefs and practices of a particular movement become evident, and the one in which the success or failure of a movement is often determined.[143] At this stage the basic tenets and beliefs of a reform movement are modified by the professor of that faith in order to combat opposition. It is the process by which principles and beliefs are accommodated to a level acceptable to both the professor of the new religion and those who resist it. In relation to early Conception Bay Methodism

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[142]In fact, it was not until 1791, after William Black's visit that Newfoundland as a missionary field is formally included in the minutes of the annual meeting.

[143]Wallace, "Revitalization", 278.

adaptation was one area in which success eluded Coughlan. Coughlan's puritanical and dogmatic insistence of proper conduct contributed to the most severe problems encountered within his ministry. Because of his resolute and confrontational approach, and his insistence on obedience by all,[144] Coughlan agitated the mercantile class to the point that his ministerial position was placed in jeopardy.

It seems that Coughlan provoked an already alienated group by lodging personal attacks on members of the mercantile class.[145] He escalated already existing tensions by referring to the merchants and gentlemen as "the Children of Darkness," "the Enemy," and "the Children of Disobedience." In 1771 the enmity between Coughlan and the merchants rose to a critical level. The Harbour Grace merchant Hugh Roberts, in his determination to silence Coughlan, drew up a petition accusing him of wrong-doing and inappropriate conduct against several members of the merchant class.[146] This petition was

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[144]Although Coughlan's open criticism of the Conception Bay merchants appears confrontational, Coughlan possibly accepted this position as one of responsibility. In the Methodist rules of conduct a preacher was not only responsible for his converts but to society in general: "`tell everyone what you think wrong with him, and that plainly, as soon as may be.'" Goldwin French, *Parsons and Politics: The Role of the Wesleyan Methodists in Upper Canada and the Maritimes from 1780 to 1855* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962), 9.

[145]Coughlan confronted both Roberts and Fiott on separate occasions concerning their behaviour. This public criticism did not sit well with these influential men who subsequently took measures against Coughlan. Petition of the Principal Merchants of Harbour Grace, 26 Aug. 1771. Smith, "Address," 2.

signed by at least a dozen prominent merchants of the town, all attesting to the unsuitability of Coughlan as a resident minister:

> ..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.[147]

In Coughlan's version of the problems between himself and the merchants he writes:

> 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. The gentlemen and merchants began to threaten what they would do; accordingly they drew up a Petition...wherein they set me forth black enough to the Governor...[148]

As a result of the merchants' petition Coughlan was removed from his position as Justice of the Peace, an occurrence which only served to complicate matters further. In response to this action on the part of the merchants Coughlan retaliated by refusing the petitioners the benefit of ministerial services.[149] The net

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[146]"The Petition of Hugh Roberts, in Warwick Smith, Revd. Laurence Coughlan," "Address," 1.

[147]Petition of the Principal Merchants of Harbour Grace, 26 Aug. 1771. Smith, "Address," 2.

[148]Coughlan, *Account*, 9-10.

[149]Apparently Coughlan refused to baptise an infant whose Godfather was none other than Nicholas Fiott. This refusal once again resulted in action on the part of the merchants. Deposition of John Alcock. A-170 C/Nfld/1/60, ACC.

result of this series of actions and counter-actions resulted in making conditions so uncomfortable for Coughlan that the continuance of his Newfoundland mission was practically impossible.[150]

As Wallace notes resistence is usually unavoidable in the struggle to assert a new movement.[151] The degree to which a movement adapts itself within a society often determines its rate of success.[152] By 1773 the controversy between Coughlan and the merchants had taken their toll and Coughlan could no longer conduct his ministry in peace. In October of the same year Coughlan appeared before the S.P.G. in England and resigned his position. In light of Coughlan's failure to adapt and accomodate his teachings to an acceptable level within Conception Bay society, his minisrty can be determined more so a failure than a success. The problems with the Newfoundland ministry become even more apparent in the decades immediately following his departure, and it would be at least another twenty-five years before Methodism became firmly established on the island.

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[150]Coughlan had several altercations with members of the merchant class who made it increasingly difficult for him to remain at his posting. In his annual report to the SPG Coughlan requests to be removed from his assignment. Coughlan to the SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 26 Oct. 1772. A-170 C/Nfld/1/661, ACC.

[151]Ibid., 274.

[152]Ibid., 278.

3.6 Summary

It appears that the manner in which Coughlan conducted his ministry attracted the less influential members of the congregation and simultaneously alienated the rich and powerful. In particular his attention to the poor, his outright criticism of the merchants, and the elevation of the laity (regardless of social status) to positions of authority were the main factors contributing to the merchants' disapproval. The tensions existing between the merchants and the working class, based on economic factors, became the basis for a more notable split based on religious conviction. While the mercantile class had the benefit of education, influential friends, and essentially controlled the way in which communities functioned, the remainder of the general population did not enjoy the benefits of such privileges. Those who were "outside" the community elite then would have found a kindred spirit in Coughlan who made no distinctions based on the "materialistic" aspects of existence: to Coughlan a person's worth was estimated in terms of spirituality.

In light of Wallace's theory, Methodism under Coughlan's leadership, cannot be considered successful as a revitalization movement. Although Coughlan's mission had answered to the primary conditions of mazeway reformulation, leadership, communication and organization, it did not meet the essential requirement of adaptation. The escalating problems between the Methodist converts and others in the community was one of the most significant factors influencing the development of early Methodism in Conception Bay, in

that the net result of the confrontations resulted in the loss of their spiritual leader. Although these problems seriously hampered the movement Coughlan did leave a devoted following behind, and in doing so established a potential for strong Methodist support on the island. However, the lack of response on the part of the Methodist Conference did not provide the leadership and support necessary for this growth to take place. In the next two decades the lack of formal leadership and organization was to have a detrimental effect on Newfoundland Methodism.

Chapter 4

Coughlan's Legacy

4.1 Introduction

The two decades immediately following Coughlan's departure proved difficult for the Methodists of Conception Bay. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century there were drastic fluctuations in the number of Methodist followers: from "the near disappearance of the Conception Bay societies" as documented by William Black to an estimated high of 510 as reported in 1798.[153] The distinctive shifts in membership suggests that the varying responses to Methodism were not simply a result of lack of interest, but can be attributed to several factors. In the period between 1773 and 1791 it appears that the absence of formal structure and organization, in addition to social, political, and economic instability interfered with the progress of the Methodist movement.

The last quarter of the eighteenth century in Newfoundland was a period of social, economic and political upheaval. In 1775 the residual effects of the American War of Secession greatly influenced the lives and livelihood of Newfoundland residents. The decline in the fishery, the cessation of trade with the American colonies, and the British preoccupation with the war adversely

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[153]*Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the First, Held in London, by the Late Rev. John Wesley, in the Year 1744* (London: John Mason, 1978), 425.

affected trade and commerce to and from the island. As a result of these events the quality of life in Newfoundland was reduced to one of its most depressed states.[154] Many people were faced with starvation and associated hardships. In their struggle to escape such atrocities many residents left the island in the hope of improving their lives.[155] Such obstacles were among the many challenges facing the remaining Methodists, for whom the demographic changes were especially devastating.

When Coughlan returned to England in 1773, the Methodist following was left in the care of his lay preachers John Stretton, Thomas Pottle and Arthur Thomey.[156] Stretton, Pottle and Thomey attempted to continue the work begun by Coughlan but found it increasingly difficult to do so since the organization and leadership offered by Coughlan seems to have vanished with him. The lay preachers continued in their role as overseers of the converts until the arrival of John McGeary in 1785. McGeary who was sent to rescue what remained of the Newfoundland mission did not accomplish what he was sent to do.[157]

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[154]This period is discussed in more detail in sections 1.3 and 1.4 of this thesis.

[155]According to James Balfour Newfoundland residents were severely affected by the events of British-American hostilities. He writes "they are so unhinged by distress, that thousands of them have Emigrated to the Continent of America & some to England..." Balfour to the SPG, Harbour Grace, 2 Dec. 1779 (B/6, fol. 215).

[156]Stretton and Thomey were responsible for the Methodists of Harbour Grace, and Pottle oversaw the Carbonear membership. Rollmann, "Origins," 15.

[157]A more detailed description of the mission under the lay preachers and McGeary follows in sections 4.4 and 4.5, respectively.

Coughlan's ministry, despite its various problems, had instilled the expectation of social and personal reform in his converts. The experience of rebirth, the notion that all were equal before God, and the sense of fellowship fostered by Coughlan, all contributed to a sense of hope and spiritual well-being among the converted. Coughlan had also established himself as an effective leader, he was successful in communicating his religious message, and he had organized his converts into a recognized community. However, the promising beginnings initiated by Coughlan were in danger of collapsing, since the lack of formal leadership affected the progress of Methodism at all levels. Without his much needed leadership, organization within the societies and classes deteriorated, and problems between Coughlan's followers and the rest of the community continued unchecked. Wallace's model indicates that the failure to maintain advancement toward revitalization at any stage often leads to decline and the possible collapse of a movement.[158] Of the four constitutive elements of processual structure which make up a successful revitalization movement (mazeway reformulation, communication, organization, and adaptation) none were effectively instituted between 1773 and 1790. In reference to Wallace's theory then, the movement instituted by Coughlan was prone to failure since the steps taken toward reform were seriously challenged after his departure.

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[158]Wallace, "Revitalization," 278-79.

4.2 The Problems with Leadership

Wallace suggests that leadership,[159] as a function within revitalization, is fundamental to the progress of all religious movements.[160] The problems with leadership within Conception Bay Methodism are blatantly obvious upon close examination of the details of Coughlan's mission up to and including McGeary's ministry. In historian Arthur Kewley's view the inherent problems existing in early Newfoundland Methodism can be directly attributed to Coughlan himself.

The primary reason for the near collapse of Methodism, according to Kewley, lay in Coughlan's inability to properly represent the principles and doctrines laid down by its founders.[161] Kewley maintains that Coughlan's ministry was a disastrous period in the history of Newfoundland Methodism. In his terms the initiation of Methodism was "misconceived, misinterpreted, misunderstood, mismanaged, and misacclaimed."[162] His analysis is based on the

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[159]Wallace does not explicitly define "leadership" as a vital function of revitalization, but explains it in terms of "prophecy." However, he does see leadership as being necessary to mazeway reformulation, in that it contributes significantly to the initiation and maintenance of any reform movement. Although the function of "prophecy" works a little differently in establishing Methodism in Newfoundland the primary function of "prophet" and that of Methodist leader can be viewed as fulfilling similar roles in the context used here.

[160]Ibid., 272.

[161]While Kewley may be accurate in his criticism of Coughlan's ministry, his analysis does not fully account for how the Methodist presence lapsed into serious decline and almost certain decimation after Coughlan's departure.

notion that Coughlan did not represent true Wesleyanism, essentially because "he had practically no connection with the Wesleyans of England...He showed little understanding of, or adherence to, the doctrines of Wesley or to the discipline required by the Methodist Conference."[163] This suggests that the type of Methodism introduced by Coughlan was not in line with typical Methodist practices.[164] Kewley interprets Coughlan's form of Methodism as a "pale reproduction of the teachings, practice, and discipline of John Wesley."[165] He maintains that Coughlan's "failure to understand the church as an organized structure, relying more on emotional response than on a sound doctrine of grace and growth, made disintegration almost inevitable."[166]

In the developmental phase of early Methodism in Conception Bay the processual stages of communication and leadership cannot be separated. The Methodist societies influenced by Coughlan were not incontrovertible in their convictions. Wallace stipulates that as group leaders, "prophets" assume

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[162]Arthur E. Kewley, "First Fifty Years of Methodism in Newfoundland: Was it Authentic Wesleyanism?" *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* (19/1-2 March-June 1977), 7.

[163]Kewley, "First Fifty," 11-12.

[164]Sandra Beardsall makes a similar observation. She explains Coughlan's Methodism as "Newfoundland Methodism," maintaining that it was a distinctive practice. Sandra Beardsall, "Methodist Religious Practices in Outport Newfoundland" Unpublished ThD Dissertation (Toronto: Emmanuel College, 1996), 2.

[165]Kewley, "First Fifty," 17.

[166]Ibid., 17.

responsibility for the spiritual well-being of their followers.[167] The emotional response which often accompanies the experience of conversion is a result of a direct connection with the prophet and is in line with the prophet's ability to convince the potential convert of the message being expressed. The "emotional appeal of the new doctrine to both the prophet and his followers is in a considerable part based on its immediate satisfaction of a need to find a supremely powerful and potentially benevolent leader."[168] While states of emotional intensity cannot be constantly maintained, conviction of sin and closeness to God are fundamental aspects of the Christian experience. Therefore, it was imperative that those committed to the ideal of Christian perfection[169] be spiritually nourished and supported. Periodic attention through inconsistent missionary work did not contribute to maintaining and expanding Methodist interest nor were the converts sustained by such indifferent treatment.[170] A more

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[167]Wallace, "Revitalization," 273.

[168]Ibid., 274.

[169]The Methodist notion of Christian perfection is related to sanctification through a "second blessing," or rebirth. McLoughlin calls it the "new light" that operates counter to the "old light,." The transition is often a gradual and continual process which demands constant attention to the state of one's soul. McLoughlin, *Revivals*, 21, 25, 95.

[170]Once Coughlan left Newfoundland, his converts were essentially ignored by the Methodist Conference, no minister was sent and no attempts were made to encourage the ministry. In the years that followed the missionaries who were appointed stayed for brief periods of time, and years often separated the departure of one minister and the arrival of the next. For instance McGeary, the first official minister to be sent to Newfoundland arrived in 1785, Coughlan had left in 1773. McGeary left in 1791 but was not replaced until 1794 when George

permanent and active ministry was required to hold the congregation together and to attract new membership. The way in which Methodism developed in Conception Bay supports this basic assumption. People did not turn to Methodism when faced with adversity: records indicate that despite hunger, starvation,[171] and poverty a rise in Methodism was not immediately witnessed.[172]

4.3 The Problems with Organization

As part of revitalization, organization is seen as necessary to the progress of a movement as well as contributing to its preservation. The natural progression of organization within a movement usually develops with "three orders of personnel: the prophet; the disciples; and the followers."[173] There is no doubt that by the end of Coughlan's tenure that such organization was in place. The problems encountered by the lay preachers can be located in their inability

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Smith was sent from England. Thoresby, the first resident minister since McGeary, arrived in 1796.

[171]James Balfour notes that starvation and general hardship affected out migration patterns, in that many residents left the island. James Balfour to the SPG, Harbour Grace, 2 Dec. 1779 (B/6, fol. 215).

[172]During the war years in particular the Methodist membership decreased. This is reflected in the letters of John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, who suggests that new membership was practically nil. He writes that there was, "not one soul been awakened by my speaking, that I know of, now near a year." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 8 Nov. 1776. And later, "only one [member] has been added." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, 30 Jun. 1777; *Christian Correspondence*, 216, 225.

[173]Wallace, "Revitalization," 273.

to maintain established organization without the benefit of an official leader[174]. In terms of processual structure the absence of competent leadership predetermines decline and the possible collapse of a movement.

In addition to the problems arising from Coughlan's "mismanaged" attempt to establish Methodism there was also a lack of the basic organizational structure, like those which had proven successful in missions throughout the North American continent.[175] Coughlan, while being responsible for introducing Methodism to the island, had no real "authority" to do so. He did not arrive in Newfoundland as a Methodist missionary, but was commissioned by the local residents to minister to the people of Harbour Grace and Carbonear.[176] In fact, the Methodist organization had not made any commitment to establishing a ministry in Newfoundland. Because Coughlan promoted Methodism as a

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[174]Although the leadership roles filled by various Methodist preachers cannot be closely associated with the role of "prophet" outlined in Wallace's theory, the position of leader can be considered vital to the success or failure of a movement. This especially true in early Newfoundland Methodism where the presence of strong and dutiful leadership was often rewarded by a devoted following.

[175]Although Methodism originated in the American colonies around the same time as in Newfoundland, it spread quickly and was more efficiently organized. Between 1769-1784, "...the Methodists had increased from a few widely separated Classes to some fifteen thousand members 'in Society' preachers' 'in connection' from none to eighty-three, besides some hundreds of Local Preachers and Exhorters." Barclay, *American*, 1: 71.

[176]In fact, after preaching in connection with Mr. Wesley from 1755-1765, Coughlan broke ties with Wesley's organization. Although Coughlan was ordained and sent to Newfoundland as a clergyman of the "Established church," he was still devoted to Methodism, as expressed in his preaching and pastoral work.

personal conviction, rather than a professional responsibility,[177] the extended "forms and agencies" of Methodist practice, which contributed significantly to its advancement throughout Britain and the American continent,[178] were not put in place.

W. C. Barclay points out that as part of the Methodist movement in the American colonies internal organization was a necessary component of establishing and maintaining the Methodist message. The implementation of these institutional "forms and agencies" assisted in "creating, deepening, and expressing Christian fellowship."[179] This Christian fellowship was an important aspect of the Methodist Society, as it was formed to help each other seek personal salvation, and to aid in unifying the brotherhood.

The three main institutional expressions within Methodism were the Society; the Class; and the Band.[180] Classes held the primary functions of

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[177]This is also true for the American colonies. The Methodist Classes initiated by Robert Williams in New York (1766) and by Robert Strawbridge in Maryland (1766) began in much the same manner as did Coughlan's. Neither of the three had "official" authority to conduct missions but did so out of personal conviction. Barclay, *American*, 1:22,29.

[178]This is not to say that the missionaries in the American colonies were not without problems. Barclay points out that the unpredicted growth in Methodism on the North American continent lead to a shortage of competent ministers. As a result the Methodist movement in the American colonies relied heavily on lay preachers to expand the mission. Ibid., I:17.

[179]Ibid., 2:337.

[180]Frank Baker, "The People Called Methodists" in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp eds. vols. 4 (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 1:189, 216-217, 222-223. Hereafter "People".

fostering Christian fellowship, and offering the experience of Christian witness through personal testimony.[181] The function of the Band operated as a forum for confession. As Barclay describes it the purpose of the Band meetings was to "obey that command of God, *Confess your faults to one another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.*"[182] The Band meetings then were centred on self-examination regarding the state of one's soul. Societies held a more general function, in that, they included a larger group of people, and its aim was to organize Methodists followers within an effectual support group, and to promote the sharing of common experience.[183] The Class was formed first, followed by the Society, and later by the Bands. Of the three composite aspects of Methodist polity only two, the Class and the Society, were employed within the Conception Bay membership. During his stay Coughlan did manage to organize, to the best of his ability, a nucleus of people in various communities who participated in Class activities. After Coughlan's departure, John Stretton and Arthur Thomey initiated a society in Harbour Grace in the hope that it would sustain the membership. However, in his correspondence with Eliza Bennis, Stretton refers to the lack of spiritual vitality in the community and suggests that the organization was in a troubled state:

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[181]Barclay, *American*, 2:337.

[182]Ibid., 2:338.

[183]Ibid., 2:337.

> The little society I live in is at present in a very disordered state; the thorns and thistles are ready to destroy the good seed, the people are mostly very poor, the place in general growing more and more wicked, and a carnal minister makes them worse.[184]

It is through the report of district superintendent William Black that Stretton's complaints are verified. Black found a number of people in several communities who attempted to keep Methodism active, but there were very few who did so.[185]

While difficulties with local organization presented problems for the Methodists, neglect by the Methodist Conference was also a factor influencing the decline in membership during the last quarter of the century. In fact, there was no Methodist representative in Conception Bay until John McGeary was sent in 1785. Coughlan's dual role as a SPG representative and as a Methodist preacher, in addition to the estrangement between himself and Wesley, did not help matters. Conceivably the difficulties between the two were not conducive to acceptance into the British organization.[186] The Conception Bay Methodists then were left without the benefits of organization. They did not have support from the larger Methodist community, and because there was no official leader

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[184]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 2 Dec. 1778; *Christian Correspondence*, 238.

[185]Black states that there were only fifteen women who met regularly in society. Black, "Journal," 123.

[186]Although there was some degree of factionalism among the British Methodists, it was Wesley who ultimately maintained control of the Methodist Conference. The problems then between Coughlan and Wesley were not to Coughlan's advantage.

organization at the local level was bound to be difficult.

The problems with leadership and organization were further complicated by resistance from other members of the community. The difficulties of "adaptation" met with during Coughlan's residency continued after his departure, in that the split existing between Coughlan's followers and the official church persisted. This division had serious implications for the lay preachers who struggled against much opposition in their attempt to keep Methodism alive.

It appears the lack of leadership and direction and the additional stress of isolation on various levels[187] worked against the principles of fellowship laid down by Wesley. In relation to Wallace's "processual structure" analysis, Methodism, under the direction of the lay preachers was bound to be difficult, since the essential elements which keep a movement functioning and active were not in place. In addition to the absence of effective leadership and adequate organization, the movement was also hampered by persistent problems in adapting the views and beliefs of the converts to those of the larger community. As a result, the period between 1773 and 1790 was one in which Methodism nearly disappeared from the Conception Bay communities.

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[187]By isolation it is meant that the Newfoundland Methodists were not only geographically isolated but were isolated on principles of belief within the community. In addition, they were distanced from the Wesleyan Methodist in England both physically and pedagogically. The form of Methodism introduced to Newfoundland was more in line with Maxfield's teachings than Wesley's. this point is explained in more detail in section 3.1 of this thesis.

4.4 Methodism Under the Lay Preachers: 1773-1785

Between 1773 and 1785, Stretton, Pottle and Thomey were ultimately left without "official" leadership and had to rely on their own initiative in order to maintain a Methodist presence in Conception Bay. Although all three of these men were committed to the Methodist cause they were often distracted from this commitment due to professional responsibilities.[188] In addition, they had no formal instruction as ministers or as missionaries and were therefore limited in their ability to minister effectively.[189] The lack of competent leadership was also complicated by ineffective communication and continued problems with adaptation, which in terms of revitalization,[190] suggests that Conception Bay Methodism was open to regression. According to Wallace's model the preliminary phases of processual structure (leadership, communication, organization) must precede adaptation, and by extension must be in place before

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[188]Besides taking on the role of lay leaders these men were often preoccupied with their personal affairs. This would be particularly true in periods of economic hardship when the distractions of maintaining and operating businesses became necessary for survival. Stretton writes, "I am now jealous of my heart, business engages much of my thoughts." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 18 Dec. 1779; *Christian Correspondence*, 241.

[189]In New York a similar problem was unfolding. In a letter to John Wesley, Thomas Taylor requests the services of a competent preacher, stating that the current lay preachers are in "want of many qualifications necessary for such an undertaking." Thomas Taylor to John Wesley, New York April 11, 1768, as quoted in Barclay, *American*, 1:16.

[190]Wallace, "Revitalization," 278.

a movement can be considered successful.

Of the three lay preachers Stretton was the most ardent supporter of the Methodist cause. His contribution to the understanding of early Newfoundland Methodism is significant since it is through his letters that the history of Methodism in Conception Bay has been preserved. Keeping the Methodists fellowship together was no easy task according to Stretton's records. Stretton and Thomey, who "resolved to oppose the torrent of inequity"[191] cast against them by those who opposed their work, did not desist from their task, but continued to travel extensively throughout the bay, sometimes as far as sixty miles.[192] They made house to house visitations, organized Societies, and initiated love feasts.[193] However, their attempts to stimulate and maintain Methodist interest were not enough to ensure the continued preservation of the movement. Stretton reports that efforts on his and Thomey's part were insufficient in keeping the remaining Methodists actively involved, since pressures from the mercantile class still

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[191]Stretton writes: "I continue to labour without intermission, though I meet with violent opposition both from within and without, this last summer I have endured the most grievous trials I ever met with, through my dealings with evil men. The customs, manners and trade of this land is in my apprehension contrary to pure and undefiled religion." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 2 Dec. 1778; *Christian Correspondence*, 239.

[192]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 2 Dec. 1778; *Christian Correspondence*, 237.

[193]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 14 Nov. 1775; *Christian Correspondence*, 210, 212.

managed to interfere with the advancement of the movement.[194]

The problems with adaptation encountered by Coughlan during his residency continued to impair the efforts of the lay leadership. Both Thomey and Stretton were involved in local business and were successful until local circumstances interfered. It appears the Thomey and Stretton, like Coughlan, met with resistance from those who opposed the movement. Stretton writes:

> The summer before last, all my property had like to be swallowed up the suitability of wicked and designing men; who set themselves against me, because I openly reproved sin: they did me much hurt.[195]

Despite the many problems facing them, Stretton and Thomey did manage to sustain a society of about thirty in Harbour Grace. However, local circumstances were clearly not in favour of the Methodist cause, and the attempts by the lay preachers to keep the membership active were seriously undermined in the years that followed. An early complication was the arrival of the Anglican priest Rev. James Balfour in October of 1774. Balfour was the "dour former S.P.G.

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[194]By 1790 Stretton was totally discouraged by the state of the following in Conception Bay: "few and full of evil have these days been here in this dreary Region...I thought before this time to be able to leave this land, but find myself year after year in the same place; I toil and toil for nothing; then I think I am placed here, if not for the defence of the gospel, at least to be a witness against, and reprover of the works of iniquity: for O my friend, this place is like Sodom in every thing, but fulness of bread, and I am here alone, not one family heartily religious that I can associate with, or hold profitable converse with all the dreary Winter." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 18 Dec. 1790; *Christian Correspondence*, 252-253.

[195]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 18 Dec. 1779; *Christian Correspondence*, 240.

missionary in Trinity"[196] and from all accounts appears to have been at odds with the wishes of the Methodist following.[197] Balfour perceived the Methodist converts as being potentially disruptive.[198] They were, as he describes them:

> fond of holding private Conventicles two or three times a week in sentiments unfriendly to our civil Government and gives the Magistrates 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 or 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.[199]

Stretton informs us that the merchants, under the guidance of Balfour, wasted no time in reasserting their control. They took it upon themselves:

> to read prayers in the Church, and laboured with all their might, to introduce the dullest formality in the room of the pure gospel, which he [Coughlan] had preached.[200]

Apparently, Balfour attempted to take control of all the churches in the area

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[196]Rollmann, "Origins," 17.

[197]It seems that Balfour, like many Anglicans, took great exception to the "impostures" of Methodism. These "impostures" according to W. S. Gunter, include the appointing of lay preachers, the establishing of meeting houses, and the belief in doctrines contrary to those of the Established Church. W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine": John Wesley's Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books [Abingdon Press], 1989), 14.

[198]According to Hans Rollmann, Balfour was "staunchly orthodox" in his loyalty to the Established Church: he equated dissent from the Anglican church with disloyalty to Britain. Rollmann, "Origins," 15.

[199]James Balfour to SPG Secretary, Harbour Grace, 4 Dec. 1775. B.6/207.

[200]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 14 November, 1775. *Christian Correspondence*, 210.

including the chapel in Carbonear built by the Methodists themselves.[201] The dispute over control of the church in Carbonear was eventually resolved in favour of the Methodists,[202] but this was only the beginning of the many difficulties that the lay preachers would have to deal with. It seems that the rift between the Methodists and those who opposed them was widened further and deliberately under Balfour's influence.

For the most part the basic problems centre around the absence of strong leadership, a point which Stretton realized and continually attempted to remedy. He frequently complained of the plight of the Methodists and appealed to both Eliza Bennis and John Wesley to supply a competent preacher to the area.[203] While the support Stretton hoped for did not come, he attempted to fill the void left by Coughlan.[204]

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[201]The church in Carbonear eventually became the centre of a dispute between Balfour and the John McGeary. This particular point is dealt with in more detail on page 82 of this thesis.

[202]This dispute was drawn to the attention of Governor Campbell who regarded churches as private property and allowed the Methodists to regain control. Campbell states, "Mr. Balfour should not have attempted to perform Divine Service in a building belonging to private persons without having first obtained permission from the proprieters [sic] for so doing." C.O. 194. Governor Campbell's ruling relating to the dispute between Rev. Balfour and the Conception Bay Methodists, 8 Oct. 1785, 203. For additional background on Governor Campbell, see Rollmann, "Enfranchisement," 43-47.

[203]Stretton writes to Bennis on several occasions requesting help from the British organization: 8 Nov. 1776, 29 Jun. 1785; *Christian Correspondence*, 216, 244.

[204]The requests by Stretton did not receive any immediate attention. A minister was not sent to Conception Bay until 1785.

Attending the problems with leadership and adaptation was the absence of communication. According to Wallace's analysis of religious movements the communication of principles and beliefs is one of the "primary activities,"[205] and continues as such as the movement progresses. The strength of communication within processual structure, not only establishes the basis for basic doctrines and beliefs, but effectively reinforces these beliefs as well as advancing the progress of the movement. It may be said that Stretton was a sincere devotee and strong supporter of Methodism but he was decidedly weak as a communicator. Instead of embracing the role of spiritual leader he did so reluctantly and only when necessity dictated it:

> ...last Christmas I began to exhort amongst our little society, very unwillingly; for it was reduced to this alternative, either for me to undertake the superintendence, or to see the Society decay...but still I am not persuaded, that I am called of God to preach his word...the reason I have to think so is this; there has not one soul been awakened by my speaking, that I know of, now near a year...now I greatly fear being one of those that run, when they are not sent.[206]

The feelings of incompetency and self-doubt experienced by Stretton may have been rooted in the doubts he harboured concerning the state of his soul:

> I read, I wept, and prayed by turns, and though I had faith to lay hold on the promise; I felt that I loved Jesus, I saw that he was willing to reconcile me, and yet some strange doubt interposed, and I did not believe that I

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[205]Wallace, "Revitalization," 273.

[206]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 8 Nov. 1776; *Christian Correspondence*, 215-16.

was yet savingly converted.[207]

Along with the tensions resulting from personal doubt, Stretton had to contend with additional pressures. Between 1778 and 1779 he experienced several personal setbacks which further complicated his ministering to the people.[208] During this time Stretton encountered problems with his financial situation as well as having to deal with his own illness. These problems seem to persist for quite some time, since correspondence between Stretton and Bennis halted in 1778 and was not taken up again until 1785, at which time Stretton appealed to Mrs. Bennis for help in securing a preacher for the area. At this point the Conception Bay Methodists appear to have been in a very poor condition: the society had broken up, Arthur Thomey had died, and Stretton was left very much alone.

By the summer of 1785 Stretton was totally discouraged by the disastrous state of the once energetic Methodist following. Stretton writes:

> ...the work of God seems to be at a stand here, and superstition and profaness greatly increasing...if he [Mr. Coke] comes, he will find this a

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[207]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbor Grace, 4 Nov. 1774. Similar sentiments are subsequently repeated in his letters to Eliza Bennis: 14 Nov. 1775; 8 Nov. 1776; 30 Nov. 1777; *Christian Correspondence*, 208, 210, 216, 234.

[208]Stretton reports to Bennis that "The summer before last, all my property had like to be swallowed up the subtilty [sic] of wicked and designing men; who set themselves against me, because I openly reproved sin: they did me much hurt, but God as turned it to my good...Last January I was very near death with quinsey [sic], the effects of a severe journey taken that winter along this desart [sic] shore." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 18 Dec. 1779; *Christian Correspondence*, 240.

> desolate wilderness, and that it requires the spirit of martyrdom to carry on the work here.[209]

In the fall of the same year Stretton was encouraged by the arrival of John McGeary. However, this encouragement was to be short lived. His hopes that McGeary would "prove a blessing to this place," were soon dashed, for a blessing McGeary was not. Less than a month later Stretton's writes, "Every thing here appears disagreeable to Mr Magery [sic], that I fear he will not abide long, -indeed whoever seeks ease or comfort is not likely to meet much of it in this Island."[210]

It can be said that Methodism under the guidance of the lay leadership fell into serious decline and almost complete devastation. As suggested earlier, such an outcome was predictable when Wallace's theory of revitalization is taken into consideration. The terms and conditions of Wallace's processual structure which contribute to the overall success of a movement were not put in place. The primary conditions of leadership, communication, organization and adaptation, although present in varying degrees of effectiveness, were not advanced enough to stabilize the movement. In terms of revitalization, as explained by Wallace, Methodism between 1773 and 1790 had three distinctive strikes against it: the Methodists did not have an effective leader; they were not efficiently organized

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[209]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 29 Jun. 1785; *Christian Correspondence*, 243.

[210]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 15 Nov. 1785; *Christian Correspondence*, 246.

nor were they supported by the larger Methodist community; and they were segregated within their own community. It was only through sheer persistence and dedication on the part of the lay preachers and the few remaining devotees that Methodism managed to endure.

4.5 John McGeary's Ministry

The arrival of John McGeary in 1785 marked the appointment of the first official Methodist minister to Newfoundland. Very little is known about McGeary prior to his arrival in Newfoundland. However, Rollmann has managed to compile a short biography that identifies him as a new itinerant in 1782.[211] At the American Methodist Conference of the same year he was assigned to the Somerset Circuit in Maryland. In 1783 he preached in West Jersey and in 1784 had travelled to England and worked in the Glouchester circuit.[212] In 1785 he was sent to Newfoundland to attend to the Conception Bay membership. In assigning McGeary to the position, Methodist organizers had hoped to alleviate the problems existing within the Conception Bay societies.[213] However, his ministry seems to have had the opposite effect than was hoped for. The complications and problems with which the lay preachers had to contend were

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[211]Rollmann, "Origins," 24.

[212]Ibid., 24.

[213]Kewley, "First Fifty," 16.

now added to by McGeary's objectionable conduct during his residency.

The difficulties encountered during McGeary's mission, in relation to the process of revitalization, were similar to those met with beforehand. Like those who previously tended to the mission, McGeary was faced with administrative and organizational problems as well as resistance from official Anglicanism. The number of members recorded by William Black in 1791[214]suggest that McGeary's communicative talents were inadequate as well. His presence on the island was an attempt to provide the existing membership with the spiritual guidance and leadership that had been absent since 1773. However, in terms of processual structure and the overall development of Methodist organization, McGeary's mission did not accomplish the task it was set.

There are no known first-hand accounts concerning McGeary's residency in Conception Bay. Extant documentation relating to McGeary's stay is scarce and that which does exist must be gleaned from the correspondence of his contemporaries.[215] However, most of the documents referring to McGeary are less than favourable.[216] Unfortunately, for Methodist converts, McGeary invited

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[214]Black's personal journal indicates that there were very few active members in the Conception Bay societies. The numbers, as recorded by Black, are listed in note number 246 on page 94 of this thesis.

[215]Rollmann notes that Freeborn Garrettson, McGeary's former colleague in Maryland, informed Asbury that he had "heard very little form Newfoundland." As cited in Rollmann, "Origins," 25.

[216]John Wesley appears to be the only person who speaks of McGeary in favourable terms.

criticism both in his personal conduct and in a professional sense. In his personal life he was reported to have married a local girl without her parents consent,[217] which added to the tensions within the community. And, on a professional level, there are reports of several altercations with Rev. James Balfour concerning the control of the church in Carbonear, as well as disagreements with fellow Methodists Hoskins and Stretton.[218] His ministry was further complicated by the failure of the Methodist Conference to follow through on their promise of extra missionaries and financial support.[219] In addition, the Roman Catholic church and the Church of England operated in competition with Methodism, although this fact did not serve as a stumbling block to William Black's "revival" in 1791.[220]

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[217]In a letter to Eliza Bennis Stretton writes, "I have nothing agreeable to write from this wilderness, Religion seems on the decline; for my part I am absolutely left alone...the people have lost the form and power of Godliness...Mr. McGeary seems buried alive in Carbonear., he married a planters daughter, without her fathers consent, gave much offence, and his usefulness seems to be at an end." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 18 Nov. 1788; *Christian Correspondence*, 248-49.

[218]Balfour and McGeary rivalled for control over the church in Carbonear, the results of which eventually proved McGeary to be the victor. Rollmann, "Origins," 25.

[219]In the Methodist Conference of 1786, aid in the form of financial support and additional missionaries were promised to improve McGeary's situation. However, McGeary was left on his own when the promised support did not arrive. *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the First, Held in London, by the Late Rev. John Wesley, in the Year 1744* (London: John Mason, 1862), 187; see also H. H. Walsh, *The Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1956), 127.

[220]Kewley, "First Fifty," 16.

It appears that although a belated replacement had been found for Coughlan to conduct the Conception Bay societies, McGeary's suitability for this position must be seriously doubted. Stretton, in a letter to Eliza Bennis, of November 1788, provides us with a telling response to McGeary and his work:

> But Oh he laboured in vain, left this place for England last month; nor do I know one professor or profane that wished his stay:...he brought upon himself multiplied vexations, and a flood of reproach upon the cause; I was constrained for the cause sake, and for my own credit sake, to keep at a distance from him for near a year past.[221]

Instead of bolstering Methodist support and relieving the exhausted Stretton, McGeary seems to have done little other than aggravate the local situation. However, McGeary's stay did have a limited positive effect on the advancement of Newfoundland Methodism. It is through McGeary's appointment that Newfoundland became officially recognized as a missionary field,[222] and it is in response to the trouble with McGeary that William Black was sent to Newfoundland in 1791. In order to relieve the problems between McGeary and the lay preachers,[223] Wesley asked Black to, "do all you possibly can to keep our

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[221]John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, Postscript of 7 Dec. 1788 to letter of 18 Nov. 1788; *Christian Correspondence*, 250.

[222]The *Minutes* of the Methodist conferences register John McGeary as a missionary to Newfoundland from 1785-1788 and 1790-91, as stated in Rollmann, "Origins," *171*.

[223]It seems an altercation between Balfour and McGeary resulted in McGeary losing his temper. John Wesley to John Stretton, 19 Mar. 1788; Telford (ed.) *Letters*, 8:48-9. In addition, there are problems existing between Hoskins, McGeary and Stretton, according to a terse letter from John Wesley to Stretton: "what concerns me is that I cannot find any union between you northern

brethren in peace with each other and your pains will not be lost on poor John McGeary."[224] It seems that Wesley was unaware of the situation in which McGeary had entangled himself.

In effect, McGeary's attempt to bolster the Newfoundland mission was a failure. His ministry, as it relates to processual structure, did not encourage Methodist support in Conception Bay. In terms of leadership, communication, adaptation and organization, McGeary's ministry failed in three of the four stages. His mission bears the mark of regression as opposed to progression. And, the only positive result affected from his ministry was more by accident than design, in that his poor management and personal difficultues called attention to the plight of the Newfoundland Methodists. Although McGeary may have failed on a personal level, the attention attracted to the Newfoundland mission allowed for advancement to its next, and most positive stage as a revitalization movement. In contrast to McGeary's mission, the visit of William Black illustrates how communication and organization provided renewed energy to lagging membership in Newfoundland.

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preachers. John Hoskins, John McGeary, and John Stretton I should imagine would have all acted in concert; on the contrary, each seems to be afraid of the other. How is this? What is the true ground of this shyness? What objections have you to John Hoskins or John McGeary? What objections have they to you? 'Tis a pity that you had all spoken freely to." John Wesley to John Stretton, 27 Feb. 1789; Telford, ed., *Letters*, 8:119-20.

[224]John Wesley to William Black, 19 Mar. 1788; Telford, ed., *Letters*, 8:48.

4.6 Summary

Because of the prevailing political and economic conditions, the internal problems inherited from Coughlan's ministry, and the inability of Methodist leaders to tend to the Conception Bay societies properly, the decades immediately following Coughlan's ministry proved to be rife with complications. As a result the progress of Methodism in Conception Bay in the late eighteenth century was a formidable challenge. There are several apparent problems that emerged within the period immediately following Coughlan's departure: the first pertains to the lack of leadership within the Conception Bay societies which, in turn, adversely affected the communication of Methodist ideals and practices. Because communication was ineffective the movement was more prone to decline than to expansion. The second problem involves lack of support from the Methodist Conference at the organizational level, and the third relates to adaptation, in that the friction existing between Coughlan's converts and the rest of the community continued even after he had left.

In Wallace's theory of revitalization the processual stages of leadership, communication, organization, and adaptation are necessary to the progress of a religious movement. The success of a revitalization movement is determined by the extent to which these stages have been developed. The combination of problems and difficulties met with in Conception Bay betweeen 1773 and 1790 predetermine an inevitable decline and the possible failure of the movement. The only positive results from the 1770's and 80's appear to have been the

registration of Newfoundland as a missionary station, and the fact that the problems within Conception Bay Methodism had finally come to the notice of the Methodist Conference. In 1791 William Black was sent by Methodist overseers to determine what could be done to help the struggling societies in Newfoundland.

Chapter 5

William Black's "Revival" of 1791

5.1 Introduction

By the 1790's the problems within the Newfoundland ministry had reached a critical stage: the membership was in serious decline and very near extinction. In addition, John McGeary's attempts to alleviate problems within the failing mission appear to have been futile. Although McGeary was ineffective as a minister, his presence on the island drew attention to the plight of the Conception Bay Methodists. John Wesley, in response to several complaints about McGeary's conduct, sent William Black to Newfoundland to help settle matters.[225]

The arrival of Black in 1791 initiated a different stage in the evolution of Methodist movement in Conception Bay. The latter part of the eighteenth century was a period of transition for Newfoundland Methodism. It developed from a fledgling movement initiated by Coughlan, maintained by the laity, and nearly decimated under McGeary's direction, to one which was incorporated into the larger Methodist organization. Up to this point the organization in Newfoundland had not progressed but had shown evidence of slow but steady

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[225]Rollmann, "Origins," 26.

decline, despite efforts to stop the degeneration.

During the 1790's, the most significant event in Conception Bay Methodism is purported to be Black's visit. Black's preaching was responded to with an overwhelming and unexpected enthusiasm that moved Newfoundland Methodism out of its period of decline into one of immediate growth. However, the unprecedented response to Black's work can also be interpreted as an indication of the lack of spiritual leadership which characterized early Newfoundland Methodism, more so than a testimony of his abilities as a minister. It seems that the residents of Conception Bay were eager to hear Black's message, and even more willing to adopt it.

5.2 William Black

In terms of commitment to the Methodist cause William Black is hailed as one of the most outstanding leaders of early Methodism in British North America. Rev. Richard Wright's esteem is obvious in his hagiographical recognition that Black brought to the ministry:

> a constitution of more than ordinary strength; a strong, sound and discriminating judgement; the very desirable possession of Christian prudence; an ardent thirst for the attainment of knowledge; talents for the ministry of the most useful kind; a heart intensely inflamed for the salvation of souls; and a fixed purpose to labour for God.[226]

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[226]As stated in *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers: Chiefly Written by Themselves* Thomas Jackson ed. (London: John Mason, 1838), 3:163. For a more complete biography of Rev. Black and his work refer to Matthew Richey, *A Memoir of the late Rev. William Black, Wesleyan Minister* (Halifax: William

Black's success as a missionary is all the more impressive in view of his humble beginnings. He was awakened to the "New Birth" in 1779,[227] and after his conversion, his devotion to Methodism and his intense desire to convert others earned him a position among the most revered pioneers of the early Methodist preachers in Canada. Despite the fact that Black was not trained within the Wesleyan community and had little formal education, his steadfast devotion to the Methodist movement served him well. Initially, he had little exposure to formal Wesleyan doctrine and practice, but then he adopted the instruction imparted to him by local Methodists.[228] Ten years after his conversion, in a rather ambitious undertaking, Black claimed the entirety of Nova Scotia as his circuit.[229] At the American Conference in May of 1789 Black, supported by Dr. Thomas Coke[230] and Francis Asbury,[231] was ordained to the "diaconate" and was

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Cunnabell, 1839).

[227]G. S. French, "William Black," DCB, 6:62. Also see Richey, *Memoir*, 18.

[228]At the outset of his preaching career Black, "had no direct contact with Wesley or any of his colleagues. His knowledge of theology and particularly Wesley' s teaching was limited, and his understanding of the polity and discipline of the Methodist connection was derived from the older lay Methodists in his community." French, "William Black," DCB, 6:62.

[229]Black's itineracy was taken up in a time when, "Communications by land were rudimentary: travel by ship on the treacherous seas and the tide-swept Bay of Fundy was the principal link between the settlements." His itineracy included ministering to some 20,000 people who were scattered around the island in isolated communities. Ibid., 6:63.

recognized as the General Superintendent of Eastern British North America.[232] As superintendent Black was to preside over the missions in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland.[233] The situation in Nova Scotia was greatly improved at this time by the addition of six missionaries, allowing Black the freedom to fulfil his role as superintendent.[234] Although Black reports to have attended to the various missions in his charge, he did not include Newfoundland as part of his regular diocese. It seems that Black's singular visit to the island was prompted by John Wesley's appeal to Black to do all he possibly could to establish accord between the lay preachers and McGeary.[235]

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[230]Dr. Thomas Coke was a close associate of John Wesley. He was preeminent among the pioneers of early Methodism in North America, and was responsible for the management of foreign missions. His most valuable contribution was in spreading Methodism throughout the North American continent. Frank Monoghan, "Thomas Coke," *The Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930) 4:280.

[231]Asbury left England in 1771 as a volunteer to the American missions. He became one of the most positive influences in the development of early American Methodism. Asbury, along with Dr. Coke, held the responsibility for Methodism in North America. In 1782, during the Baltimore Conference, he was named head of the Methodist organization for the Americas. Allen Johnson, "Francis Asbury," *The Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928)1:380-381. See also Richey, *Memoirs*, 243-244.

[232]French, "William Black," DCB, 6:65.

[233]Ibid., 6:64.

[234]Richey, *Memoirs*, 208.

[235]Betts suggests that problems in the Newfoundland ministry may have been discussed at the 1791 Conference in Philadelphia. Betts, *Bishop*, 43. Also see Richey, *Memoir*, 208; Rollmann, "Origins," 26.

The situation in Newfoundland was at a critical stage, the ministry, in general, was in desperate need of improvement, and intervention was needed to settle the differences between McGeary, Hoskins and Stretton.[236]

5.3 William Black's Visit of 1791: "A quickening time"

Although Black's visit can be considered a success in many respects it can also be interpreted as a failure in terms of revitalization. In respect to Wallace's model, Black, like Coughlan, was successful as a communicator, but failed to support those he converted. He attracted new members, but failed to continue with the support and direction that was needed to guide the movement beyond the preliminary stages.

Upon his arrival in Newfoundland Black was made fully aware of the desperate condition of the mission. In his report he makes note of only a few Methodists remaining in Harbour Grace, Carbonear, Blackhead, Port de Grave,

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[236]Instead of coming to Newfoundland, Black was "to have visited Pasamaquady, the river St. John's, &c. &c. But the Lord over-ruled, and by visiting two of the three preachers with sickness, occasions my return to Halifax at the time the before mentioned vessel was to sail for this Island." To the contrary, an earlier entry by Black states that the trip was purely intentional: "Having had an intention for some time of paying a visit to Newfoundland, on August 2, 1791, I agreed for a passage on board the Snow Turner." "The Journal of Mr. William Black, in his visit to Newfoundland" *Arminian Magazine for the Year 1792: Consisting Chiefly of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* (London: G. Paramore, 1792), 15:180, 120. Hereafter, referred to as "Journal."

Bay Roberts and Old Perlican. The extent of the problem is most noticeable in McGeary's station at Carbonear where there was "no regular society: only about fifteen women meet among themselves."[237] A similar situation existed in Port de Grave where George Vey[238] conducted a society of twenty-six. In Harbour Grace only a few women met regularly in Class;[239] and, in Old Perlican, Hoskins' former mission[240] in Trinity Bay, a society of about thirty was reportedly maintained.[241] Under Black's direction all this was about to change, if only for a short time.

On August 11th Black arrived in Carbonear from St. John's. His diary entry for this date records the destitute state of the ministry:

> I reached Carbonear, where I was joyfully received by brother M'Geary, a Methodist Preacher. He said he had been weeping before the Lord over his lonely situation, and the deadness of the people, and that my coming was like life from the dead to him. There was a great work here, a number of years ago, under the ministry of Mr. Coughlan; but some of the fruits of it are gone to heaven, some are gone back unto the world, and now only about fifteen women meet in class.[242]

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[237]Black, "Journal," 15:123.

[238]Ibid., 15:180.

[239]"There is no regular society here, only about twelve or thirteen women meet together in Class." Ibid., 15:176-177.

[240]It is not certain exactly when Hoskins abandoned his mission, but it appears that he was no longer ministering when Black arrived. Rollmann, "Origins," 24.

[241]Black, "Journal," 234.

[242]Thomas Jackson, *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers: Chiefly Written by Themselves* (London: John Mason 1838), 166.

Black's reputation as a highly effective preacher was about to prove itself during his Newfoundland visit. It appears that from his first sermon on August 13th to his last on September 9th Black's ability to convince and convert met with a success that surprised even him. Of his first sermon he remarks:

> The last evening I preached, I believe God convinced many of their soul revolt. Some I trust, resolved to return to Jesus the Shepherd and Bishop of Souls. Several who never knew his ways, were much affected. I feel encouraged now, and trust I have not come here in vain.[243]

And, of his last:

> I walked to *Carbonear*, and preached in the church. O what a season! In the time of my sermon, many were affected, and the voice of mourning in a silent way ran through the church. In the last prayer it became more general. Those under conviction roared aloud, and prayed most frevently. Presently one began to publish the news of deliverance, and praised God with a loud voice, extolling the riches of boundless grace. After this another, and another, were enabled to cast their burdens on the Lord...It was a time of general Joy among the Christians; and of particular distress among the penitents. The latter hardly knew how to leave the church without the sense of forgiveness.[244]

His interim sermons were inspiring as well. His obvious amazement with the response of the people and the considerable rate at which conversions were taking place is evident in his journal entries:

> I know not that I ever witnessed such a meeting as we had this evening. Brother Stretton emphatically remarked,-"The scene was truly awful. What a contrast! Some in the very depths of distress; others in transports of joy! It appeared to me a faint piece of heaven and hell!"...Nothing was to be seen but heaving breasts and weeping eyes!-nothing to be heard but prayer and praise, expressions of repentance or of

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[243]Black, "Journal," 15:123.

[244]Ibid., 15:237.

faith, of joy or of sorrow.[245]

From the information provided in his journal there is little doubt that Black provided a much needed boost to the lagging ministry in Newfoundland. Although there are no exact figures relating to conversions, estimates suggest that Black attracted as many members or more in a month as Coughlan had in seven years.[246] During his short thirty-three day visit Black offered

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[245]Also note entries in reference to the rate of conversions and the intensity of the people's responses: Wednesday, 17th: "I stopped preaching and began to pray. My voice was soon drowned. I left the pulpit and went up and down the church...Weeping was on every side. About thirty were under deep distress...After they left the church, one might hear the language of distress for a considerable distance...What a change among the people in so short a time."; "Sunday 21. I preached to about three hundred people at *Port de Grave* ...and in the afternoon to about two hundred and fifty at *Bay Roberts*...They appeared much affected, I formed them into a regular class, added five more to their number."; "Sabbath-day 28, Black-head- 'A quickening time' Some backsliders were healed and comforted. Some believers much refreshed, and those under awakenings more deeply affected with their state...Some animosities are removed; some souls awakened: some new members added to the Society...There are about forty resolved to meet together in Class."; "Tuesday, 30th.-...There are now at Carbonear, including this place, fifty who will meet in class. Twelve of whom have been enabled to believe the saving of their souls in this revival." Ibid., 15:177, 180, 233, 234.

[246]It cannot be clearly determined exactly how many converts Coughlan attracted to Methodism. In his *Account* the number of letters in support of Coughlan suggests there were a little more than thirty who were devoted members, but these may represent the more educated members or the elite among the converts not the entire group. However, Hans Rollmann concludes that the membership was not large and a letter from John Stretton to Eliza Bennis records the number of supporters attending the Society in Harbour Grace shortly after Coughlan's departure as 30 - a similar number to the letters included in Coughlan's *Account*. John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 14 November 1775: *Christian Correspondence*, 200. Also see Hans Rollmann, "Origins," 13. From Black's records an approximate number of 200 hundred members can be calculated. Black, "Journal," 15:122-123, 176-181, 233-237. Also see Smith,

encouragement to the membership, converted some, and invigorated new interest in Methodism. As well as holding revival meetings, he formed additional classes,[247] and arranged for the registering of the Carbonear property with the British Conference,[248] thereby establishing it as an official branch of the Methodist church.[249]

The distinct success of Black's work in Newfoundland is often referred to as a "revival." However, there are serious reservations about the effectiveness of Black's visit, and whether his work in Conception Bay can be accurately termed a revival.[250] Arthur Kewley asserts that, "whatever saved Methodism from

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Methodist Church, 1:284. At the annual meeting of the Conference in 1792, two hundred and seventy was entered as the number of members reported for Newfoundland. Wilson, *Missionaries*, 178.

[247]"Sunday 21- ...at *Bay Roberts*...I formed them into a regular class."; "Sabbath-day 28,...at *Blackhead*...There are now about forty resolved to meet together in Class."; "Tuesday 30, and Wednesday 31, I preached both days: joined about fifty in Classes." Black, "Journal," 15:233, 234.

[248]"The former Deed of the church being not according to the methodist plan, I have procured another, and now the church and dwelling-house are made over to the Conference. Ibid., 15:235.

[249]Rev. Richard Knight suggests that during his visit, Black, "settled the Mission properly, and secured it to the Connection, increased and inspired the society, and obtained for them the help they needed." As quoted in Jackson, *Lives*, 3:165-167.

[250]According to Kenelm Burridge's entry in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Black's visit be considered "revivalistic," but cannot be considered a revival. A revival, like a revitalization process, must pass through various stages in order to be considered effective. In the definition of revivalism Black's visit meets the requirements of the "prologue" phase of a movement, but must pass through various stages of the "epilogue" before it qualified to be called a revival. Kenelm Burridge, "Revival and Reform," *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* Mircea Eliade ed.

extinction, it was not the visit of Reverend William Black."[251] He submits that if Black's work in Conception Bay:

> saved the cause, then the desperate conditions, admitted by McGeary, suffered by Hoskins, suspected by Wesley, and urgent enough to move Coke to action, could not have been so critical afterall.[252]

While it may be considered a revival in terms of a response by the people, it must also be questioned as such, since Black's work in Newfoundland can be more appropriately described as a series of revival meetings rather than a full fledged revival movement. This is particularly true since after his return to Nova Scotia, Black made no effort to sustain the Newfoundland mission, and once again the island was left without the fundamental resources necessary for the progress he initiated to continue.

5.4 Black's Revival as Revitalization

The so-called revival that originated in Conception Bay under Black's direction, appears to have been prompted more by accident than by design. The intention which drew Black to the island was to help the existing ministry in sorting out its problems. However, once Black began conducting sermons the

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vol. 12. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), 368-370. Also see McLoughlin, *Revivals*, 5-6.

[251]Kewley, "First Fifty," 20.

[252]Ibid., 20.

effects on the people were striking by any standard, including Black's.[253] There is no doubt that Black's work effected a positive change in Methodism in Conception Bay, but Rev. Knight's suggestion that he provided the membership with the help they needed is an exaggeration.[254]

In reference to satisfying the criteria which determine Wallace's definition of a successful revitalization movement, Black's foray into Conception Bay, in and of itself, was of no great consequence in the larger scheme of things. If anything, the response to his preaching was a blatant illustration of how desperate the state of the mission was. Black's "revival" brings into focus the most pressing problems affecting the Conception Bay Methodists. The difficulties which hampered the movement from the mid 1770's onward were also in evidence after Black's return to Nova Scotia. The membership was still without an authority figure, it continued to be separated from the larger

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[253]"I know not that I ever saw such a meeting as was here this evening. Great indeed was the noise and the shaking among the dry bones." Black, "Journal," 15:235.

[254]Rev. Richard Knight suggests that Black's work in Newfoundland: "was a large accession to the Methodist Society, and the dawn of that brighter day which has shone upon our Mission in that island...The arrival of Mr. Black retrieved the Mission, (for M`Geary had determined to leave the island,) and laid the foundation of its future prosperity. His visit to Newfoundland may be considered as forming the most useful and interesting portion of his Missionary life...No less than two hundred souls were converted to God during his brief sojourn in Conception Bay. Nor are the fruits of that visit to be estimated by its immediate results...He settled the Mission properly, and secured it to the Connection, increased and inspired the society, and obtained for them the help they needed." Jackson, *Lives*, 3:165-167.

Methodist community, and it was neglected by the Methodist Conferences abroad, and in North America.

In contrast to the state of the Conception Bay mission, the Nova Scotia mission was better supervised and supported. Although there had been relatively little activity in the Nova Scotia Methodist community until 1779[255] - thirteen years after Coughlan began his Newfoundland mission - it could boast the services of six missionaries and the support provided by Black's regular attentions.[256] In addition, Black had maintained regular correspondence with John Wesley, and initiated contact with his American counter-parts by attending the annual conferences in Philadelphia.[257] It seems that Newfoundland's nearest neighbour had fared much better in a shorter period of time. In Newfoundland the mission was barely sustained through the support offered by its lay leadership, and the questionable abilities of John McGeary.

In terms of revitalization Black's visit did little to stabilize the Methodist presence on the island, since his attention to the mission was of too short a

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[255]Betts, *Bishop*, 6.

[256]The extant account of William Black's work exhibits extensive travels throughout Nova Scotia. See Jackson *Lives*, 3:118-167.

[257]Black's involvement with the American Methodist Conference of 1789 granted him privileges in conducting his ministry. At this time he was ordained, appointed superintendent of the British North American colonies, and was provided with six preachers to help with the Nova Scotia mission. French, "William Black," DCB, 6:65.

duration and too limited in its scope[258] to have produced any real change. As a communicator he did encourage the enforcement of Methodist doctrines and ideals, and established a foundation upon which subsequent missionaries could build. However, he did nothing to ensure that these teachings were strengthened and maintained, and thus, according to Wallace's revitalization theory, Black's visit encouraged interest, but failed in terms of establishing more permanent ledership and organization. Although Black recognized the need for a more substantial ministry in Conception Bay he did not act on this need once he returned to Nova Scotia. Richard Knight, in his praise of Black, fails to note that the 1791 visit was the one and only time Black set foot on Newfoundland soil. After this brief sojourn, no attempt to assist the people of the island and no follow-up visitation is reported. As superintendent he did not supply missionaries or even lay preachers to help support the struggling ministry.[259]

To further complicate matters, McGeary left in December of 1791, two months after Black's departure. For another two years the Conception Bay

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[258]It is obvious that Black understands the need to minister to the abandoned residents of Old Perlican. However, in his urgency to leave Newfoundland (where he was obviously needed) he shunned this responsibility: "did not procede to *Perlekin* about thirty meet together in Society there; and there would be many more if, if they could have the Gospel preached among them more frequently. Brother McGeary can seldom go there." Black, "Journal," 15:234.

[259]After his return to Nova Scotia Black made no attempt to supply the mission with clergy. All subsequent missionaries were sent directly from England.

Methodists were left without the benefit of an official representative.[260] Again it was the faithful John Stretton, not Black,[261] who was instrumental in procuring a preacher for the mission in 1794.[262] However, it was not until the arrival of William Thoresby in 1796 that the Conception Bay Methodists were to have the benefit of a resident minister.

5.5 Summary

By 1791 the state of the Newfoundland ministry had collapsed into a state of general decay. The Methodist Conference, being aware of the difficulties, sent William Black to Newfoundland in order to help stabilize the situation. The response to Black's work resulted in widespread renewal of Methodist interest throughout the Conception Bay area. While Black is viewed by some as the saviour of Methodism on the island, Kewley and Rollmann are not convinced

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[260]According to extant documents and the annual reports of the Methodist Conference there were no appointments to the Newfoundland missions for the years 1792 and 1793.

[261]Hans Rollmann observes that subsequent missionaries "were sent directly from England without any prior consultation with Nova Scotia or the U.S.. But even then, Newfoundland and the Eastern British American theatre of operation took a backseat in Coke's planning." Rollmann, "Origins," 28.

[262]Stretton once again appealed to the British Conference stating the condition of the ministry and pleading for support. In response the Conference sent George Smith in 1794, but his stay was temporary and no resident preacher was sent until 1796 when William Thoresby was appointed to the Newfoundland field.

that his visit was as momentous as it has been claimed to be.

The "revival," as instituted by Black, draws attention to the destitute state of the mission, and reinforces Wallace's notion that leadership and organization is imperative to the success and perseverance of a religious movement. The result of Black's visit suggests that the existing leadership and organization was not strong enough to draw people to Methodism or to meet their spiritual needs. The overwhelming response of the people supports the idea that they were receptive to Methodism, and, if leadership had been provided, interest might have been renewed and maintained.

Admittedly, Black did stimulate positive action by attracting new members to the movement, forming classes, and formally registering Methodist properties, but he failed to follow through with the changes he had implemented. Where Black was receptive to the needs of the people and supportive of the Conception Bay mission on one level, he was remiss in his duties in others. Although he offered encouragement to the membership, converted some, and enlivened the people, he did little after his visit to promote the mission or act responsibly in his role as superintendent.

According to Wallace's theory Black's work fulfils several requirements of revitalization, in that he did provide short-term leadership and communicated the Methodist message effectively. But, like the missionaries who went before him, he failed to move Newfoundland Methodism to a stabilized level where leadership, communication and organization were secured. In Wallace's model

these three phases of development must be in place before a movement can progress to the more advanced levels.

Chapter 6

William Thoresby's Mission, 1796-1798

6.1 Introduction

After William Black left Newfoundland in 1791 very little attention was paid to the Conception Bay mission until the arrival of William Thoresby in 1796. On August 30th, Thoresby sailed from England for Newfoundland accompanied by George Smith, a fellow preacher. Smith had visited Newfoundland the previous year, at which time he spent ministering to the people of Conception Bay, Bonavista and Greenspond in Trinity Bay. In 1795 Smith travelled to England with the hope of being ordained as a Church of England priest, but was refused this request.[263] He returned to Newfoundland the following year accompanied by Thoresby who had been appointed to Newfoundland by the 1796 Methodist Conference.[264] Upon their arrival on Oct. 7th, 1796 Smith headed north to Bonavista while Thoresby remained in Conception Bay.[265]

Thoresby supplies a thorough history of his stay in Conception Bay in a

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[263]*The Encyclopaedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* vol. 5 (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1994), 218.

[264]William Thoresby, *A Narrative of God's Love to William Thoresby* (Leeds: Binns and Brown), 31.

[265]William B. Smith, "Memoir of the Rev. George Smith" *The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* Jan. (1833): 9.

detailed diary spanning the entirety of his mission to the island.[266] Thoresby's tenure proved to be one of the most successful periods in the history of early Newfoundland Methodism. The contents of his journal offer an insightful view into Conception Bay Methodism under his direction and help to explain why his work met with the success it did.

In accordance with Wallace's model of revitalization there are several possible reasons why Thoresby was more successful than those who had gone before him. Firstly, the visit of William Black and the effects of his work were still fresh in the minds of the recently converted. This was largely due to the fact that some of the societies and classes formed by him continued to function after his departure.[267] Unlike Coughlan who had to establish his ministry from the ground up, the basic forms of organization and structure were intact before Thoresby arrived. Secondly, the formal registration of Newfoundland as a mission station, established during McGeary's stay, contributed to a more involved and improved relationship between Methodist overseers abroad and the local ministry, which, in practical terms, contributed to overall organization at a more advanced level.[268] Thirdly, communication was greatly improved.

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[266]Thoresby's journal entries include notes relating to the entirety of his stay from August 30th, 1796 to July 7th, 1798.Thoresby, *Narrative*, 32, 111.

[267]Thoresby's journal indicates that societies were already in existence in Port de Grave, Brigus, Bay Roberts, Old Perlican, Adam's Cove, Devil's Cove, and Broad Cove. Ibid., 49, 51, 52, 55, 58, 60, 67.

Thoresby's rate of itineracy and his competency as a preacher seems to have had a positive influence on the success of his mission. He was an energetic man and the problems encountered in his ministry were overcome by his persistence and willingness to spread Methodism as far as possible. It seems that during this period receptivity to Methodism was greatly improved since Thoresby met with very little resistance to his preaching. Apparently, Thoresby did not have to overcome the more severe problems of adaptation faced by previous missionaries.

Wallace also points out that receptivity to religious movements is very much affected by periods of social stress.[269] During Thoresby's residency social and economic changes had a negative effect on certain groups. The transition from a migratory to a sentinel fishery had reached a critical stage, and those who depended on it for subsidence were disadvantaged by the instability incurred by economic upheaval.[270] In addition, the island residents were inflicted by an epidemic that took many lives in the space of a few months.

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[268]Even though the Conception Bay Methodists did not have the benefit of a full time resident preacher more attention was now being paid to their situation. After Newfoundland was formally recognized as a mission station in 1784 (during McGeary's stay), the Methodist Conference attempted to send ministers whenever possible. Black was sent in 1791; Smith in 1794; and Thoresby in 1796. Prior to Black's visit McGeary was the only other Methodist representative officially appointed by the Conference.

[269]Wallace, "Revitalization," 269.

[270]Matthews, *Lectures*, 142.

6.2 Life in Late Eighteenth-Century Newfoundland

Life on the island during the late eighteenth century differed somewhat from the early part of the century, in that the economic, social and political realities had undergone significant changes. No longer was the fishery entirely in the hands of the British mercantocracy, but was in the process of moving from a migratory operation to one which was becoming increasingly sedentary.[271] By the time Thoresby arrived the economic base, along with the fishery, was becoming increasingly localized, and more permanent and practical infrastructures had been put in place.[272] With these changes the settled population on the island experienced a period of growth.[273]

The changes in Newfoundland's social and economic base were directly related to events unfolding in Europe: the continued hostilities between Britain and France, the events of the French Revolution (1793), and the Napoleonic Wars, had an impact on how these changes were to take place. At this time Britain drained many of her resources in order to combat political problems abroad.[274] Newfoundland industry was affected by the fact that much of the

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[271]Ibid., 142.

[272]McLintock, *Constitutional*, 104-105. Also refer to sections 1.2 and 1.3 of this thesis where such changes are discussed in more detail.

[273]By 1766 population levels began to decline, but by 1787 they steadily increased each year. The population of Conception Bay for 1766 was 5, 584; in 1785, 4, 884; and by 1796, 5, 906. In the interim years the population had fluctuated below these numbers. C.O. 194/21, 23, 49, 64, 70, 80, 81.

merchant fleet had been captured by the French and Spanish, and many of the remaining ships were directed to the war effort in Europe.[275] Britain, being distracted by foreign concerns, was no longer preoccupied with conducting a full scale fishery in Newfoundland, thereby societal developments on the local level continued to proceed practically unimpeded.[276] The inability of British merchants to maintain their former controls encouraged the permanent settlers to conduct business for themselves.[277] As a result the shape of the Newfoundland fishery underwent more significant changes in the latter part of the eighteenth century than it had in preceding decades.[278]

Although many aspects of life on the island had changed, others had not, in that the rigours of day to day existence did not improve. Despite the change in economic structure and the rise in population this period was one in which the Newfoundland residents were depressed economically.[279] The adverse living

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[274]Head, *Eighteenth*, 204-205; Matthews, *Lectures*, 143-144.

[275]Head, *Eighteenth*, 205.

[276]McLintock, *Constitutional*, 102.

[277]Head, *Eighteenth*, 205-206.

[278]The slow but steady decline in the migratory fishery began in the 1790's and culminated in 1823 when "a paltry 5 per cent" of fishing vessels were sent to Newfoundland. McLintock notes that it was during this period that the British merchants were forced to relinquish their former role within the fishery. McLintock, *Constitutional*, 104.

[279]Although the fishery had changed hands the effects of war and low market prices for fish contributed to an overall depressed economy. Matthews makes it quite clear that the increase in population was due to a forced residency rather

conditions documented by those who had preceded Thoresby remained an unfortunate reality of residency on the island during his stay.[280] In addition, his ministry was further hampered by harsh weather conditions, inadequate transportation, and the persistent problem of disease and illness in the bays. However, Thoresby did manage to overcome such obstacles in the pursuit of his ministerial goals.

6.3 Itineracy.

In Wallace's analysis communication is one of the more effective means of advancing a movement through its various stages, and continues in importance as the movement progresses.[281] As a communicator Thoresby excelled both in his ability to attract membership, and in the type of ministry that he conducted. Of particular note here is Thoresby's rate of itineracy which was an important feature of his pastoral approach. However, before dealing with the particulars of Thoresby's mission it is necessary to discuss itineracy and its role in contributing to the development of religious movements in general.

William G. McLoughlin points out that itineracy was a fundamental social

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than one that was chosen. Matthews, *Lectures*, 144-145; Head, *Eighteenth*, 204-205.

[280]Coughlan and Hoskins also complained about the physical hardships they encountered. Coughlan, *Account*, 17; Hoskins, "An Account of John Hoskins in a Letter to Rev. John Wesley," Old Perlican, 15 October 1781, *Arminian Magazine* 8, 1785.

[281]Wallace, "Revitalization," 273.

phenomenon essentially because conversion and personal experience rested on the emotional encouragement provided by itinerant preachers.[282] In the American experience, the First Great Awakening (1730-60) was a result of preachers travelling to remote areas and bringing the benefit of spiritual renewal to the isolated populace.[283] Itinerant preaching, according to McLoughlin, was the "fundamental social phenomenon" that contributed to widespread conversions.[284] It occupied an important position in the process of spreading the Methodist message in Newfoundland as well, in that it enabled one preacher, or a small group of preachers, to minister to a much larger group.

Neil Semple argues that during the first thirty years of Methodism the lack of itinerant preachers contributed to its slow growth in Newfoundland and in the Maritimes as well.[285] In Newfoundland this was particularly true where few people were actively employed as lay preachers, and official ministers were not always in residence.[286] This problem was compounded by the fact that

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[282]McLoughlin, *Revivals*, 59,60.

[283]Ibid., 86.

[284]Ibid., 86.

[285]Semple, *Dominion*, 35.

[286]There were only seven lay persons referred to in to the period under study: John Hoskins preached in Old Perlican; John Stretton, Thomas Pottle and Arthur Thomey preached in the Conception Bay area; George Vey in Conception Bay South; Edward Baldwin preached in Port de Grave during Thoresby's mission; and Stretton, in a letter to Bennis, mentions an illiterate fisherman who "we constantly attend to hear." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 14 Nov. 1775; *Christian Correspondence*, 210; Thoresby, *Narrative*, 91.

ministers, if, or when appointed, stayed in Newfoundland for short periods of time.[287] This is especially the case with Black's visit whereby the positive contribution he made was undermined by the short duration of his stay. Semple also observes that the ministries in Newfoundland and the Maritime provinces were usually stationary, after the Anglican design, rather than active itinerancies. For instance, the type of ministry practised in Britain and in the American colonies involved extensive travel within assigned circuits, employed, no doubt, to compensate for the shortage of preachers. Thoresby strongly resembled the latter more so than the former. The tendency of most Newfoundland ministers to remain stationary may be attributed to the difficulty of travel in and around coastal areas. In this respect Newfoundland proved to be a challenging missionary field in many ways. The experience of commuting from settlement to settlement, as expressed in the writings of Thoresby, proved to be a tenuous enterprise.

6.4 William Thoresby: The Itinerant Preacher of Conception Bay

Thoresby's first winter in Newfoundland proved to be a particularly difficult one. In addition to the threat of disease and death, his ministry was also

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constantly attend to hear." John Stretton to Eliza Bennis, Harbour Grace, 14 Nov. 1775; *Christian Correspondence*, 210; Thoresby, *Narrative*, 91.

[287]Coughlan stayed for seven years; McGeary for approximately six; Black for about a month; Smith stayed for a year, and Thoresby for two years.

encumbered by poor transportation and severe weather conditions. Either he had to trudge through ice and snow, travel through forests and across marshlands, or be transported by boat in order to move from community to community to preach to his followers.[288] The following entry in Thoresby's journal suggests how difficult travel actually was:

> I went to a place a little distance to preach; I had to go down a high mountain, and then on a path-way which led close by the side of the hill; I was obliged to walk on creepers, two pieces of iron made to fit the feet, having prods to pierce the ice to prevent the foot from slipping the sea roared in a tremendous manner under us, which made it very frightful.[289]

However, such obstacles did not deter Thoresby from conducting his ministry as one which included an active, and by all accounts, a successful itineracy. His records indicate that daily sermons and meetings were diligently carried out, with few exceptions. Thoresby's circuit[290] extending from Brigus in the south to Lower Island Cove in the north, covered a distance of approximately fifty-five

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[288]In his journal Thoresby makes note of several occasions when adverse weather interfered with the progress of his work. Thoresby, *Narrative*, 52, 52-53, 66, 85, 72.

[289]Ibid., 50. A similar incident is recorded in his Feb. 13, 1797, entry: "I left Perlican...we had in our way to pass two high mountains; the footpath over one of them is not above half a yard from the edge of a great descent, not less than one hundred and fifty yards to the bottom; the descent is perpendicular the path being covered with ice." Ibid., 62.

[290]It can be said that Thoresby was the first missionary to organize his station into a circuit. Coughlan did attempt to travel throughout the Conception Bay area as much as possible but his itineracy does not appear to be as carefully planned as Thoresby's.

miles. He divided the area into three main districts: the Southern district included Bay Roberts, Port de Grave, Bareneed, and Brigus; the North Shore covered Lower Island Cove, Job's Cove, Ochre Pit Cove, Western Bay, Adam's Cove, Blackhead and Broadcove; and the Central district took in Carbonear, Harbour Grace, Clown's Cove and Freshwater. Thoresby travelled these areas staying for short periods of time in each before moving on to the next. He had organized his itineracy so that no place was left for an extended period of time without his services. He travelled from the southern district to central, from central to the north and back, conducting as many sermons and meetings as possible along the way.[291]

Thoresby's routine was frequently disrupted due to illness or poor weather. Disease in particular seemed to mark much of Thoresby's residency. Shortly after his arrival in Newfoundland Thoresby was "confined to

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[291]"Jan. 6 [1797]. Several friends came this day to Carbenear for me to go to Port de gave [Port de Grave]"; "I got ready immediately and went with them"; "Jan. 11. I went in a skiff half a league to Beorned [Bareneed] and stayed one night...and in the morning I preached to them...and set off in a boat two-thirds of a league to Cupit [Cupids], and walked two miles to Brighouse [Brigus]"; "Sunday, Jan.22, 1797. I left Port de Grave with four friends early in the mourning. They rowed me across the harbour to Bay Roberts...Jan 26...I parted with my friends in this harbour in peace, and seven more rowed me ten miles in a skiff to Harbour Grace"; "Feb. 2, 1797. I went to Carbonear and preached at one o'clock...four men came in a boat four leagues to fetch me to Blackhead"; "Feb.5...I walked from Blackhead to Adam's cove to attend the funeral of Elizabeth Hudson"; "Feb.8...I walked from Adam's cove, over ice as slippery as glass to Witson's Bay...I preached in a large house full of hearers, some of them came three miles in great danger over the ice"; "Feb. 9. I set off from Witson's Bay to Gull Island and from there to Devil's Cove." Thoresby, *Narrative*, 49, 51-53, 57-58.

Harbourgrace" for a period of four months[292] because of his "lame foot", the "measles prevailing in the Bay", and a widespread fever which had caused many deaths in and around Conception Bay. It appears that within a very short period of time Thoresby came to understand the many adversities that one had to face while ministering in Newfoundland. Soon after arriving on the island he remarks: "The Lord has been shaking a great rod over the inhabitants of Newfoundland."[293] Between his arrival on the 7th of October up to his diary entry for January 6th, 1797, Thoresby buried more that forty persons[294] and was required to visit the sick on a daily basis. However unfortunate, the prevalence of disease and death may have contributed positively to the success of his ministry. The role of death and illness in encouraging spiritual awakening is a point recognized by Neil Semple:

> The expectation of imminent death, either for oneself or for family or friends, was often critical in forcing individuals to contemplate their spiritual health...death could strike so unexpectantly that spiritual rebirth provided the only secure haven.[295]

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[292]Thoresby's journal indicates that he remained in Harbour Grace from October 21, 1796 to January 6, 1797. Thoresby was inconvenienced by illness on several other occasions as well. Ibid., 46, 52, 95.

[293]Ibid., 47.

[294]The high incidence of death persisted throughout the Fall of 1796 and the Winter of 1797, and threatened to recur in the summer of 1798 just before his departure. Ibid., 45ff, 100.

[295]Semple notes that death was a "constant companion" to early settlers "no matter how old they were," and was often instrumental in affecting conversions and sanctification. Semple, *Dominion*, 60.

The psychological burden of living with the uncertainty of life[296] undoubtedly contributed to concerns about the state of one's soul. Anthony Wallace also suggests that human crisis situations, such as those experienced during epidemics, contribute significantly to cultural stress and are often resolved through religion means.[297]

Despite the difficult conditions under which Thoresby conducted his mission, his term as resident preacher contributed significantly to the progress of Methodism in Newfoundland. Thoresby, like William Black, was highly effective as preacher. He was considered by D. W. Johnson to be a man of "talent and popular speech"[298] and was referred to by William Wilson as one who possessed excellent pulpit talents and who drew crowds wherever and whenever he preached.[299]

The relationship between the growth of a movement and communication suggested by Wallace is evident in the success rate of Thoresby's mission, and is expressed in the favourable response to his early pastoral work. In less than

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[296]During the epidemic Thoresby regularly conducted funeral services burying young and old alike. The stark realities of living on the island and the delicate balance between life and death can be best expressed by Thoresby's notes for Oct. 18, 1796 when he "baptised one child, and buried another." Thoresby, *Narrative*, 45.

[297]Wallace, *Revitalization*, 269.

[298]D. W. Johnson, *The History of Methodism in Eastern British America* (Sackville, N.B.: The Tribute Printing Co. Ltd., 1925), 244.

[299]Wilson, *Missionaries*, 175.

three months Thoresby found that his work was showing positive results. He writes of his sermon at Port de Grave on January 6, 1797:

> I have preached four sermons here, and not in vain; some are convinced of the evil of sin, others are blest with a feeling sense of God's love. I met the society and joined some new members; the people are very loving and kind.

This early interest was soon to be substantiated by increased conversions and additional memberships. During Thoresby's first extended visit to Port de Grave, Brigus and Bay Roberts he added forty members to the existing society.[300] His sermons conducted in other areas of the bay met with similar results:

> In the evening I preached to a large congregation, who came sweating from their hard labours, and in general the congregations are so large, that we are (at this season) almost suffocated or melted together.[301]

The response to Thoresby's work did not abate but steadily increased even during the harsh winter months. Thoresby seems impressed by this fact and notes:

> The more I preach in this neighbourhood the more people come to hear, though many have come over through great difficulties, especially those who live in the woods in the winter season.[302]

Thoresby's observation "The more I preach...the more people come to see me," can be extended to the entirety of his mission. However, his influence was not

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[300]Thoresby, *Narrative*, 53.

[301]Ibid., 54.

[302]Ibid., 78.

restricted to sermons alone. In addition to church attendance, he often refers to the large numbers of people attending general meetings, of increased memberships in societies, the addition of new classes, and of great "melting" times in love-feasts.[303] Of his sermon in Carbonear in February of 1798, and the love-feast that followed, he writes:

> At half past two I read prayers and preached to a very crowded church, and the Lord filled it with his glory; I do not remember to have seen a more affecting time since I came to this part...As soon as the service was ended, I kept a love-feast with the society; more than a hundred were present.[304]

One interesting point concerning Thoresby's mission is that at no time does attendance decline or remain steady even during working days,[305] but continually increased, especially during his final months on the island. In

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[303]Thoresby's references to "melting" times are associated with love-feasts - a religious practice that emulated the New Testament agapes and which had been taken over from the Moravians. Love-feasts involved the communal sharing of *unconsecrated* food. Generally, the meal was simple consisting of a beverage (water or tea perhaps)and bread or biscuits. Love-feasts can be considered as similar to the taking of the Eucharist in some respects, but were not intimately associated with Sacraments. They were more along the lines of a celebratory meal accompanied by speeches, hymns, prayers (grace) and occasionally conversions and testimonies. In Thoresby's descriptions of the love-feasts conducted in Conception Bay he suggests that they were occasions when the people were very much affected and emotionally moved by his speeches. Thoresby, *Narrative*, 30, 49, 52, 66, 88, 105; Frank Baker, *Methodism and the Love-Feast* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), 11, 15, 27, 63.

[304]Thoresby, *Narrative*, 108.

[305]Thoresby is taken aback by the number of working people in attendance at his sermons and meetings, "I was astonished to see so many on the evening of a working day." Ibid., 102.

relating the response to his sermon in Blackhead, Thoresby seems genuinely touched by the people's willingness to attend worship. He writes:

> I have preached twice today to the largest congregations I have seen in Blackhead church since I came here, they flock from all parts; some came five miles: the church was much crowded with serious hearers, and they felt the word and bowed before the Lord God of Elijah. After preaching I met the societies belonging to the adjacent coves, one hundred and twenty were present.[306]

The people of Adam's Cove were encouraged in a similar manner and appeared to be anxious to attend Thoresby's preaching:

> I looked out of my window, just before I went down to preach, and was much affected to see more than sixty persons coming down a high mountain, some walking, and some running to the house or prayer. O how God is working upon the hearts of his people; some are earnestly seeking him, and others have found him to the joy of their souls. The time is come in this land, when old men and maidens, young men and children praise the name of the Lord.[307] (cf. The prophecy of Joel 1:2,3)

It does appear that "the time had come" when the people of Conception Bay had freely and openly accepted Methodism. The results of Thoresby's work in Newfoundland can be said to have advanced Conception Bay Methodism through the stages of revitalization recognized by Wallace as "adaptation."[308] It fills the prescription in the sense that Methodism had progressed through the initial stages of leadership, organization, communication and, under Thoresby's ministry, had become a well accepted form of religious expression in Conception

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[306]Ibid., 110.

[307]Ibid., 109-110

[308]Wallace, "Revitalization," 275.

Bay. Judging simply from the numbers of people attracted to his ministry and their diligence in attending his sermons, there is little doubt that Thoresby had a revitalizing effect on the people. Not only did they regularly attend his services during working days and Sundays, but they frequently travelled many miles either on foot or by boat to do so.[309]

The stage of adaptation appears to have been during the period of Thoresby's mission. In his journal entries there are few references to resistance[310] such as that experienced by his former colleagues. He does, however, make note of one incident when a "morter [sic]" was thrown through a window during one of his sermons. However, such an occurrence was an exception more so than the rule, and such "small persecutions" as Thoresby terms them "will never dishearten the royal regiment of heaven."[311] In comparison the action taken against the Congregationalists in St. John's appear to be more aggressive and reactionary than those against the Methodist, except during the time when Rev. Balfour opposed Methodism in Conception Bay.[312]

One of the more significant changes that contributed to the reception of

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[309]Thoresby, *Narrative*, 109.

[310]Thoresby also mention several incidents of violence and general resistance, but these are related to incidents in St. John's and concern John Jones' Congregationalists. Ibid., 98.

[311]Ibid., 91.

[312]Thoresby suggests that the Roman Catholics had plans to mob him on St. Patrick's day, but this threat was never put into action. Ibid., 81.

Methodism may be attributed to the lessening of hostilities between the mercantocracy and the lower class residents. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Newfoundland experienced a period of economic transition in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The changes incurred in the move from a migratory fishery to one that was locally based also affected social structure on the island. Although many of the residents remained poor, they at least had partial control over local industries. In short, the powerful merchant class no longer held the power and influence they once had over the island residents. The persecution faced earlier by Coughlan, McGeary and the lay preachers was no longer a reality. Or, at least it was so insignificant that Thoresby does not even bother to mention it. With the alleviation of such tensions people were now free to express their religious views, or adopt new ones.[313]

Granted the changes in social and economic structures may have contributed to the advancement of Methodism, but it was Thoresby, the person, who seems to have made a great impression on the hearts and minds of the Newfoundland people. The success of his ministry is testimony to his popularity among the people. Prior to his mission the membership stood at two hundred and seventy[314] as reported by John McGeary. However, by the end of Thoresby's

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[313]The openness with which the people of Conception Bay accepted Thoresby's preaching may also be due, at least in part, to governor Campbell's proclamation of religious liberties and its enforcement. Refer to page 13 of this thesis.

[314]Wilson, *Missionaries*, 178.

short tenure the registered membership had increased to five hundred and ten[315] - a substantial increase over the previous numbers, and even more impressive since Thoresby had been in Newfoundland for two years while McGeary had resided there for nearly seven.

During Thoresby's residency the number of Methodist followers maintained a consistent rate of growth. As leader, Thoresby was able to develop and sustain a substantial Methodist following which comprised a little over ten percent of the Conception Bay population.[316] And, from the contents of his journal there is reason to believe that this would have continued, at least to a certain degree. It can be said then that Methodism, under Thoresby's direction, had progressed through the more advanced stages of adaptation, since resistance to the movement was minimal and steady growth was maintained.

Although Thoresby's work made a significant contribution to the growth of Methodism on the island there were further advances to be made before it was firmly established. In effect, Newfoundland Methodism retained its status as a fledgling movement until the beginning of the nineteenth-century when the island was designated as an independent District.[317]

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[315]Ibid., 179.

[316]Thoresby's following numbered at five hundred and ten can be estimated as approximately ten percent of the 5,906 residents. Population figures are quoted from C.O. 194/81.

[317]Kewley, "First Fifty," 21.

6.5 The Post-Thoresby Period: 1798-1815

The end of Thoresby's mission marks both a chronological and a developmental break in the progress of early Newfoundland Methodism. The advancements made during his ministry were to be the most substantial developments until 1815. After his return to England, Thoresby remained faithful to the membership and tried in vain to secure ministers for his Newfoundland following:

> I did all in my power to get one or two preachers to go to Newfoundland: two offered to go, but some obstacles arising in the way prevented them, so the precious souls in Newfoundland have been without a travelling preacher all winter; but I hope one or two will go in the spring.[318]

Despite Thoresby's efforts it would be at least another year before a replacement minister was sent to the island. In 1799 Rev. James Bulpitt was appointed to Newfoundland. He remained there until 1804 when he relocated to Nova Scotia.[319] Bulpitt was immediately replaced by Rev. John Remmington, who, according to Dr. Coke, was "a man of great piety, and great zeal, but of small abilities."[320] Coke's estimation of Newfoundland is obvious when he writes, "I know the native fishermen of Newfoundland are a very rude ignorant set of men, and that a man of small abilities would do for them."[321] Despite

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[318]Thoresby, *Narrative*, 116.

[319]Kewley, "First Fifty," 20.

[320]As quoted in Rollmann, "Origins," 28-29.

[321]Ibid., 29.

Remmington's perceived limitations, he did manage to recruit two additional ministers, Rev. William Ellis and Rev. Samuel McDowell. Remmington returned to England in 1810 but left his two associates to care for the Newfoundland following. Ellis and McDowell were soon joined by Rev. Samson Busby, and all three attempted to hold the following together.[322] Although there were now three official ministers on the island the number of practising Methodists did not increase but had decreased since the period of Thoresby's ministry. The ministries conducted after Thoresby's mission and prior to those of 1815 appear to have had some degree of difficulty in attaining the level of success that Thoresby's had.

As shown, Thoresby had directed Newfoundland Methodism to the successful stage of revitalization (i.e., adaptation), but there appears to be a lapse in support for the next seventeen years. It was not until 1815 when Methodism in Newfoundland was established as an independent district that it regained a momentum similar to that inspired by Thoresby. Prior to this date Newfoundland was associated with the District of Nova Scotia, but as Kewley suggests, this connection was "in name only." In theory the missions were connected but in practice "the scattered societies had been largely on their own

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[322]The report of Ellis, McDowell and Ward, noted that the membership had increased by one hundred, and now stood at three hundred and twenty. Windsor, "Hearts Strangely Warmed," 37.

except for the irregular services of a few overworked preachers."[323] With the newly formed district, Newfoundland had, for the first time, sufficient preachers to attend to the existing membership, and to spread Methodism throughout the island.

6.6 Summary

In terms of Wallace's revitalization model, Thoresby's mission can be determined a success on several levels. The elements of structure and organization in place before his arrival no doubt contributed to the advancement of the movement. However, Thoresby's personal approach and style of ministry can also be considered determining factors in attracting the unprecedented number of converts and followers who adopted Methodism under his leadership.

Although the Conception Bay Methodists had been without a leader for nearly six years before Thoresby's arrival, interest in Methodism had been sustained through the societies formed during William Black's visit, and the assistance of lay preachers. The local organization was also formally supported and recognized by the Methodist Conference in England. It can be ascertained that several of the stages prescribed in Wallace's revitalization model had already been completed to a certain degree. The communication stage had been

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[323]Kewley, "First Fifty," 21.

effectively carried out, in that the Methodist message had reached the people and they were willing to accept its tenets. This is evident in the number of classes and societies maintained on the island. It can also be assumed that the stage of adaptation had been initiated as well, since Thoresby, unlike his predecessors, did not encounter strong resistance to his teachings.

The one thing needed in Conception Bay was the services of a competent minister, and the fact of Thoresby's arrival fulfilled that need. But, it was the type of leadership provided by Thoresby that was to make a difference to the people of Conception Bay. Understandably the conditions of poverty and the persistence of disease and illness may have contributed to his ready acceptance, but it was also the manner in which he conducted his ministry that his success was realized. He was an effective communicator, an attribute that was helped along by his willingness to travel extensively and as frequently as possible throughout the bay. He was also a competent leader and an efficient organizer. As he travelled within his circuit he continued to add to the societies, form classes, and conduct meetings in addition to his preaching. By carefully organizing his itineracy and separating his circuit into manageable regions, he also ensured that the people were not without his services for an extended period of time.

It can be said that Thoresby's mission both stabilized and advanced Methodism on the island. It was advanced in the sense that he attracted an unprecedented number of followers to the movement. And, it was stabilized, in

that the societies were strengthened by the encouragement and leadership he offered as well as the structures he put in place to maintain its presence.

Thoresby's influence is all the more apparent when the years immediately following his ministry are taken into account. Even in 1811, with three ministers in residence, Newfoundland Methodism did not experience the popularity it had under his guidance. Although Thoresby had set Newfoundland Methodism on a firm footing it would take seventeen more years before Methodism was to be fully established on the island.

Conclusion

Newfoundland Methodism during the eighteenth century did not develop in a steady, straightforward fashion, but is characterized by periods of growth interrupted by periods of general decline. The many factors contributing to this pattern of development are of a complex nature and are more easily understood when placed within a structural framework. Anthony Wallace's analysis of *cultural-system innovation* provides a context within which the strengths and weaknesses of early Newfoundland Methodism can be more clearly determined.

Wallace's revitalization model identifies the elements of "processual structure" (or stages of social transformation) which occur successively within the process of social reform movements, especially those of a religious orientation. His thesis suggests that all innovative movements share common traits or certain uniformly-found processual dimensions. The stages of this process occur in five specific moments: *Steady State; The Period of Individual Stress; The Period of Cultural Distortion; The Period of Revitalization;* and *New Steady State.* Of these five stages, *The Period of Cultural Distortion* and *The Period of Revitalization* are the most relevant to the study of early Newfoundland Methodism.

According to Wallace, *The Period of Cultural Distortion* is the phase in

which the social structures and organizations in operation do not meet the needs of the majority of its members. Such was the case in early, eighteenth-century Newfoundland, where the social, political and economic realities exhibited an obvious imbalance. That is, the existing social structure and organization privileged the mercantile class and exploited those who were less fortunate. This imbalance extended to religious practices as well, whereby the Anglican presence on the island was supported (and essentially controlled) by most members of the mercantile class, and was given precedence over all other religious affiliations until the latter part of the eighteenth century. According to Wallace's model, social and cultural tensions that arise from social imbalance often create stress that can only be resolved through social reform. As a model of reform, early Newfoundland Methodism can be perceived as a movement that provided hope to the underprivileged by giving expression and significance to spiritual meaning. That is, Methodism offered a sense of well-being based on a system of belief that operated outside the controls exacted by the powerful mercantile class.

Wallace maintains that once the need for reform is perceived then the process of revitalization becomes the medium through which this reform is initiated and strengthened. Within this process there are four stages that must be in place before a movement can be determined as being successful. That is, when mazeway reformulation, communication, organization and adaptation are realized. However, if any of these elements are missing, or are seriously

challenged, then the movement remains incomplete and open to decline and possible failure.

By employing Wallace's revitalization model several recurrent problems within Newfoundland Methodism can be identified and explained. For the most part, the periods of decline can be attributed to poor organization and the lack of official leadership. However, this does not preclude the fact that a certain type of leadership and specific kinds of organization worked better than others. For instance, McGeary's mission distinguishes itself as a period in which Methodism was negatively affected by leadership. In comparison the results of William Black's visit proved encouraging, but the positive results attained were undermined by the lack of continued support for the Newfoundland mission. Since there are no clearly determined reasons so far why Newfoundland Methodism prospered during specific periods and declined during others, its development is best explained by Wallace's revitalization model.

The movement initiated by Coughlan can be considered progressive in a specific sense, but was unsuccessful when viewed in its entirety. In terms of revitalization, it was progressive in that Coughlan managed to attract a membership, organize classes and offer leadership during his stay on the island. However, once he left the mission his accomplishments were seriously challenged and almost completely eradicated. Coughlan's ministry was unsuccessful in the sense that his official role as S.P.G. missionary made it impossible to establish formal relations with the Methodist Conference in

England. As a result there were no provisions put in place to secure the preservation of the movement after his departure. In addition, Coughlan's mission did not meet the essential requirement of adaptation, which, according to Wallace, is the stage in which the success of a movement is determined. The problems with adaptation were the result of tensions between the ruling merchants and the less influential members of Conception Bay society. The influence of Coughlan's teachings extended the tensions associated with social and economic differences to religious differences as well. Coughlan attracted the less influential members of Conception Bay society by preaching a doctrine of equality, by promoting lay persons to positions of authority and by openly condemning the actions of several prominent businessmen. The problems between Coughlan's converts and the mercantocracy escalated to the point that the merchants' resistance made his mission impossible to continue.

In the period between 1773 and 1785 the void left by Coughlan was profoundly felt within his Newfoundland following. There were several apparent problems which emerged at this time: the first pertains to the lack of formal leadership, which, in turn, adversely affected the communication of Methodist ideals and practices. Because leadership was left in the hands of a few devoted lay preachers who were essentially ill-equipped for such a responsibility, the movement was prone to decline. The second problem involves lack of support from the Methodist Conference at the organizational level, and the third relates to adaptation, in that the friction existing between Coughlan's

converts and the rest of the community continued even after he had left. However, the efforts of the lay preachers (Thomas Pottle, Arthur Thomey and John Stretton) and the persistence of a few devoted converts served to keep the vestiges of Methodism alive until the arrival of John McGeary in 1785.

John McGeary was the first "official" Methodist minister appointed to Newfoundland. With McGeary's mission a new set of problems emerged. Not only were the Methodists faced with the residual problems from Coughlan's ministry, but they also had to deal with McGeary's personal short-comings as well as with resistance from the Anglican ministry. McGeary was not a strong leader, and from all accounts does not appear to have been a particularly effective communicator. It is not entirely clear how McGeary conducted his mission, but we are aware that tensions existed between him and his fellow Methodists. In addition, the Conception Bay Methodists also had to contend with the presence of Rev. James Balfour, the Anglican preacher, who challenged them at every turn, and strengthened the mercantile opposition to the tradition.

In terms of revitalization McGeary emerges as an ineffective leader and communicator. The difficulties encountered with his fellow Methodists did not contribute to the organization, but threatened to fracture it. And, he did not encourage adaptation, but seemed to draw resistance to his ministry, both internally and externally. The most positive feature of McGeary's mission was the fact that the Methodist Conference in England became acutely aware of the problems within the Newfoundland membership, and began to view

Newfoundland as a legitimate missionary territory. In response to these difficulties William Black was sent to help stabilize the failing mission.

In 1791 the arrival of William Black provided a much needed boost to the troubled Newfoundland mission. By this time the state of the Newfoundland ministry had nearly collapsed. The effect of Black's work resulted in a widespread renewal of Methodist interest throughout Conception Bay. Black's "revival" stimulated positive results, new members were attracted to the movement, additional classes were formed, and Methodist properties were formally registered with the Methodist Conference, but he failed to follow through with the changes he had implemented.

According to Wallace's theory Black's work fulfils several requirements pertaining to revitalization. He provided short-term leadership, communicated the Methodist message effectively, and organized classes and societies. However, in his role as district superintendent he neglected to provide the continued support required in Newfoundland. Like the missionaries who went before him, Black did not advance Newfoundland Methodism to a stabilized level where leadership, communication and organization were accomplished.

In 1796, five years after Black's visit, William Thoresby was appointed to the Newfoundland mission. Overall, Thoresby's ministry can be viewed as a success in many ways. The structure and organization that were in place before his arrival certainly contributed to the advancement of the movement under his direction. In addition, Thoresby's personal approach and communicative skills

can be considered decisive factors in attracting an unprecedented number of converts and followers to Methodism.

As far as revitalization is concerned, the Thoresby period can be considered the most progressive in the history of eighteenth-century Newfoundland Methodism. His competency as a leader, communicator and organizer is evident in the number of people attracted to his ministry. Under Thoresby's direction, Methodism in Conception Bay progressed past the first three stages and into the more advanced stage of adaptation. While Thoresby's ministerial abilities may not be entirely responsible for adaptation *per se*, it did not detract from it either. His high conversion rate and his ability to attract members into the movement resulted in greater acceptance and less resistance to Methodism, part of which can be attributed to his capabilities as an effective leader. Although Methodism under Thoresby's direction did not develop to the more advanced stages of reform outlined by Wallace, it was stabilized to the extent that further advancement was made possible.

In conclusion, it appears that the progress of early Newfoundland Methodism can be more clearly defined and understood when placed within a formulaic model. Wallace's revitalization theory allows for a detailed study of religious movements in terms of how they are initiated, organized, communicated and developed. By placing the events and circumstances of early Newfoundland Methodism within such a framework it can be shown how certain combinations of factors positively or negatively influence the progress of

the movement. This thesis gives credence to Wallace's theory in the sense that the early Newfoundland Methodism experienced decline and possible collapse when the primary stages of leadership, organization, communication and adaptation were not in effect, and experienced accelerated rates of growth when these stages were in evidence. This is not to suggest that Wallace's theory provides all possible answers, but it does provide a context where vital questions can be asked and where pertinent answers can be found.

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