

WEBB, Todd – *Transatlantic Methodists: British Wesleyanism and the Formation of an Evangelical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ontario and Quebec*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013. Pp. 236.

In 1835, and again in 1837, a young Methodist preacher, James Caughey, ventured North from his home in upstate New York to preach a series of revivalist sermons in Lower Canada. He returned in 1840-41, preaching to Methodists in Montreal and Quebec City over the next several months, before leaving for an extended preaching tour of the North and Midlands of England that lasted for nearly six years. Originally from Ulster, but raised amidst the fires of Second Great Awakening revivals in the "Burned-Over District" of New York State, Caughey's preaching represented an aggressive version of Methodist revivalism. Proclaiming the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith alone, alongside the more peculiarly Methodist idea of "entire sanctification," he was a master of revivalist technique. He was a striking preacher: direct, emotional, and, as Richard Carwardine, once put it, "a master of audience psychology." His preaching tours of both Lower Canada and England came at critical junctures in the history of both British North American and British Methodism.

Early 19th century Methodism in England was increasingly shaped by the leadership of Jabez Bunting, and his desire to exalt the power of the clergy, entrench centralized control, and moderate what he regarded as the worst features of emotionally charged revivalist preaching. For these reasons, many English Methodist leaders opposed Caughey. On the other hand, Caughey's preaching tours of Lower Canada, as Webb demonstrates in this book, came at a point when British North American Methodism was struggling to consolidate a sense of identity and place within the wider British Atlantic world. Many British North Americans welcomed Caughey's approach as they steered a middle course between the worst excesses of popular revivalism and a Bungtingite emphasis on controlled worship. They sought to balance emotionalism and church order in ways that avoided the major divisions within British Methodism. Caughey was an important transatlantic presence and his career figures prominently in the latter part of Webb's analysis, illustrating in microcosm many of the features and struggles of 19th century Methodism on both sides of the Atlantic. Understanding the diversity of responses to Caughey necessitates the type of approach rightly adopted by Webb in this fine book.

Alongside other recent work, this book places religious history firmly in a transatlantic context, extending the chronological boundaries of Atlantic history beyond 1783 or 1815 until well into the second half of the 19th century. This careful study of sources on both sides of the Atlantic helps us understand that the process of cultural transmission was not a simple one-way street from metropolitan centre to colonial periphery. Rather it was a two-directional relationship marked by complexity and fluidity. In common with other Atlantic school historians, Webb implicitly rejects the Whig-nationalist paradigm in Canadian history that emphasized the importance of the North American environment in producing indigenous forms of religious observance and identity. In its place he provides

a detailed analysis of the creation of a transatlantic British Wesleyan community in the middle decades of the 19th century. He shows how Methodist culture in Upper and Lower Canada was forged in the crucible of religious and political controversy—on both sides of the Atlantic—as Methodists debated issues surrounding church establishment, political loyalty, finances, church order, and worship. He is alive to the connectional disputes of the 1840s between liberal and conservative wings of the Methodist movement; between the supporters and detractors of Jabez Bunting’s vision for British Methodism and the impact these disputes had on Methodist culture in the Canadas. He shows how Canadian Methodists increasingly identified with a sense of Britishness, and how its denominational culture was shaped by an English Methodist sense of proper church order, with prominence given to regularly-ordained ministers, worship centred in settled church congregations, and by a tempered commitment to revivalism.

Despite a subtitle that seems to promise more, we only occasionally glimpse how British Wesleyanism contributed to the emergence of a more broadly conceived, trans-denominational evangelical culture in the Canadas. This is not meant as a major criticism, but such a consideration would have been instructive, pointing the way towards assessing the overall cultural influence of transatlantic Methodism. The case of Montreal businessman William Lunn, who emerges as a figure of some importance in this study, might suggest lines of further inquiry. Lunn’s involvement with a number of Montreal institutions and societies—including the British and Canadian School Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, the French Canadian Missionary Society, the Montreal General Hospital and the Natural History Society of Montreal—to say nothing of the part he played in municipal politics, indicate how one prominent Montreal Methodist was positioned within the broader transatlantic world of Protestant evangelicalism and how his cultural influence was felt within Lower Canadian society. We would also be in a better position to assess Webb’s rather bold claim that “Methodism in Canada was also able to achieve what Wesleyanism in Britain never accomplished: it became the dominant Protestant force in the country” (p. 16).

Putting these questions aside, Webb’s study of Methodism in Upper and Lower Canada from 1813 to 1874 provides a carefully-drawn portrait of the emergence of a British identity within 19th century Canadian Methodism, and thus makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the religious culture of the British Atlantic world.

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