

A People's Religion: P. W. Philpott and the Hamilton Christian Workers' Church

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When P. W. Philpott left the Salvation Army and founded the Christian Workers' Church in 1892, he was followed by many former Salvation Army adherents who, like Philpott, were dissatisfied with the Army's hierarchical structure and its centralized management of funds. While the Christian Workers had no political or social agenda and did not foster a class consciousness, much of Philpott's critique of the Army paralleled the language and concerns of class struggle. The Christian Workers dissociated themselves from what they portrayed as a concern for social propriety and economic advancement that had distanced the "denominational" churches from the working people. The lack of a political agenda could be interpreted as a failure of the Christian Workers to respond to the social realities of the early twentieth century, especially in rapidly industrializing Hamilton, where Philpott was pastor for over 20 years. However, the discourse and practices of the Christian Workers provided what Michel Foucault has called "technologies of the self" that could be employed individually by men and women to make sense of their lives and thereby transform themselves and their condition.

Quand P. W. Philpott quitta l'Armée du Salut pour aller fonder l'Église des travailleurs chrétiens en 1892, le suivirent de nombreux anciens adhérents de l'Armée du Salut qui, comme lui, étaient insatisfaits de la structure hiérarchique de l'Armée et de sa gestion centralisée des fonds. Tandis que les Travailleurs chrétiens n'avaient pas de programme politique ou social et ne prênaient pas de conscience de classe, une bonne partie de la critique que faisait Philpott de l'Armée trouvait écho dans le

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langage et les préoccupations de la lutte des classes. Les Travailleurs chrétiens se dissocièrent de ce qu'ils dépeignaient comme le souci de la propriété sociale et de l'avancement économique qui avait éloigné les églises « confessionnelles » des travailleurs. L'absence de programme politique pourrait être interprétée comme un échec de la part des Travailleurs chrétiens à réagir aux réalités sociales du début du XX^e siècle, surtout dans la ville en industrialisation rapide de Hamilton, où Philpott fut pasteur pendant 20 ans. Cependant, le discours et les pratiques des Travailleurs chrétiens fournissaient ce que Michel Foucault qualifiait de « technologies du soi », que les hommes et les femmes pouvaient utiliser individuellement pour tenter de comprendre leur vie et, par le fait même, se transformer eux-mêmes et changer leur condition.

IN THE SUMMER of 1896, P. W. Philpott, a former Salvation Army officer, moved to Hamilton to assume responsibility for a struggling congregation of “Christian Workers” numbering about 35. Four years later, Philpott was preaching regularly to audiences of 1,500 on Sunday evenings at the rented Star Theatre, and plans were being laid to purchase land and to build the first permanent home for the Hamilton Christian Workers. By 1922, when Philpott left Hamilton for the pulpit of Moody Church in Chicago, membership in the Christian Workers in Hamilton numbered over 1,500; smaller congregations in Winona, Niagara, Oshawa, Freeman, West Hamilton, and Dundas looked to Philpott’s Gospel Tabernacle for leadership. A 1,600-seat church had been added in 1907 to the original building of 1901; all indebtedness had been erased, and Sunday evening services were being held at Loew’s Theatre, which, despite a seating capacity of 3,000, could not accommodate all who wished to attend.¹

Philpott’s audience was primarily working class, and his evident success in establishing a church for them indicates that his message had a particular appeal to Hamilton’s working people in the early years of the twentieth century. The relationship between religion and the working class continues to be obscured by the assumption, likely originating in the rhetoric of Victorian clerics, that the working classes were dangerously irreligious.² In their early

1 “Christian Workers: One of the Most Recent Additions to the list of Denominations holding Religious Services in Hamilton”, *Hamilton Herald*, January 24, 1903; “Twenty-five Years Ago and Now”, *Tabernacle Tidings*, vol. 1 (October 1921); “Pastor Philpott of the Gospel Tabernacle”, *Hamilton Spectator*, October 1, 1921.

2 This is not to say working people were uniformly religious, but that the clergy constructed the “working class” and their rejection of organized forms of religious expression for particular purposes. Calum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization, 1800–2000* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), chap. 2, outlines the “uses” of working-class irreligion. A helpful introduction to various approaches to and work on working-class religion appears in the first chapter of Hugh McLeod’s short monograph, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: MacMillan, 1984), pp. 9–16. Recent works that avoid an assumption of irreligion include Hugh McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York, 1870–1914* (New York: Holme & Meier, 1996); Sarah Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

efforts to recover the nature of the workers' response to social changes during this period, labour historians focused attention on fraternal societies and labour organizations in which working people participated, while ignoring the place of religion in defining and sustaining a working-class culture.³ A case in point is Bryan Palmer's study of working-class culture in Hamilton. Palmer recognizes that the lack of attention to religion "could ultimately prove to be a major deficiency of this study". He further suggests two directions in which a study of the religious life of Hamilton's workers might lead: "[T]he church may have served as a central institution breeding passivity, acquiescence, and accommodation. Or, looking in another direction, it may have lent force to an emerging critique of the social order and buttressed the workingman's developing sense of injustice in the world of the industrial-capitalist city."⁴

The lack of scholarly attention to the religious convictions of working people is addressed in Lynne Marks's study of the leisure activities of working people in three Ontario towns.⁵ Religion figures as a major category of her analysis, which argues that working-class culture was fractured by gender, religion, and internal distinctions of rough and respectable. While religion has been introduced into the narratives of working lives, its possibilities remain circumscribed. Because religion's role is assigned *a priori*, religious discourses and practices are permitted to illuminate only certain details regarding working-class consciousness and gender construction, but remain tangential to the main task of establishing the contours of working-class identity.

This study of the Christian Workers explores a popular religious movement without making class, at least in the classical conflict model, the primary lens. The approach taken here was suggested by the insight of Michel Foucault's later work that liberation requires more than the removal of specific forms of repression.⁶ Without the construction of new forms of life he refers to as "practices of freedom", liberation devolves into new and often deeper repressions. Freedom requires an internal reorientation of the relation of the subject to itself, a process Foucault calls "technologies of the self", if it is to be sustained.⁷ This insight has much in common with the cultural approach to the

3 Bryan Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860–1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979); Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan Palmer, "The Bonds of Unity: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1900", *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 14, no. 28 (November 1981), pp. 369–411; Gregory S. Kealey, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riot and the Working Class", in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), pp. 13–34.

4 Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*, pp. 238–239.

5 Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

6 Much of Foucault's writing on the theme of freedom and "technologies of the self" has been collected in Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997).

7 Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom", in Rabinow, ed., *Ethics*, pp. 282–283.

history of the working class developed in the works of E. P. Thompson and deployed so successfully in Palmer's work on Hamilton. Thompson explored forms of working-class culture as having their own history and values and thus entailing a construction of freedom independent of middle-class definitions of cultural value.⁸ Following Marx, Thompson argued that this working-class culture found its ground and existence in conflict with the middle class. The working-class appropriation of Methodism, which was becoming dominated by middle-class respectability, was interpreted by Thompson as a particularly insidious form of repression because it reshaped the soul toward compliance. Palmer has held out the possibility that religion could have the opposite effect of developing the worker's sense of injustice. While there is no evidence that Philpott and the Christian Workers produced a critique of industrial capitalism, their religious practice and discourse might be viewed as offering "techniques of the self" which empowered a distinct community life representing in itself a critique of the status quo. This re-narration requires attentiveness to the practices and vocabularies of religion marshalled in often surprising ways by particular persons.⁹

Recent studies informed by post-structuralist theories and the "linguistic turn" have historicized class as a category of analysis rather than theorizing it as a concrete, material reality.¹⁰ Patrick Joyce, in particular, has suggested that vectors of subjectification that act on and are acted upon by historical agents, rather than reified categories, should frame identity.¹¹ Joyce suggests that the most powerful discourse available to working people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the language of "the people". In political struggles, the rhetorical power of evocations of the interests and needs of "the people" were effective and contrasted to "class interest". While "class" focuses attention on conflict, various versions of "the people" widened the purview to discover inclusions and exclusions beyond those grounded in the material. Attention to identifications as and with "the people" provides clues to systems of religious meaning in the lives of working

8 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963).

9 Margaret R. Somers, "Narrativity, Narrative Identity, and Social Action: Rethinking English Working-Class Formation", *Social Science History*, vol. 16 (1992), p. 601. The subjugation of identity to class is the primary methodology in James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825–1875* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). Marks has moved this approach forward in adding gender to class in her analysis, but the range of both is predetermined in *Revivals and Roller Rinks*. Curtis D. Johnson argues against a simplistically conflictual rendering of class and religion and urges more careful attention to local contexts in *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790–1860* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989).

10 James Vernon, "Who's Afraid of the 'Linguistic Turn'?" and Christopher Kent, "Victorian Social History: Post-Thompson, Post-Foucault, Postmodern", *Victorian Studies*, vol. 40 (1996), pp. 97–133; Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

11 Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1840–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture c.1815–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

people.¹² Philpott and the Christian Workers exemplified a Christian deployment of the language of the people in the rapidly industrializing city of Hamilton, Ontario, in the early twentieth century.

As is often the case for popular movements, documentary evidence about the Christian Workers is sparse. However, their pastor, P. W. Philpott, offers an appropriate avenue into this variety of popular religious discourse and practice. Peter Willey Philpott was born on an Elgin County farm in 1865. With the death of his father when he was only six years old, the family moved to Dresden, Ontario, where his mother married a machinist who ran a small blacksmith shop. Peter attended grammar school until age 13, when he apprenticed as a blacksmith in a carriage works in Chatham. When the factory was closed, Philpott worked briefly as a construction labourer before returning to Dresden. Underemployed, with little ambition, Philpott chanced upon a street meeting held by two Salvation Army women in 1884. He experienced a conversion. This event, retold in innumerable sermons, talks, and articles, focused the energies of young Philpott, who was transformed into the Salvation Army's "blacksmith preacher".¹³ He became deeply involved in the Salvation Army movement in its early years in southwestern Ontario. Philpott conducted his first meetings only three months after his own conversion and went on to lead a series of evangelistic meetings in the nearby town of Wallaceburg.¹⁴ The promise shown by this young soldier was early recognized, and he was rapidly promoted through the ranks, becoming the first Canadian to attain the rank of brigadier. His preparation for the ministry was limited to Salvation Army Bible studies and basic doctrine, supplemented by a correspondence course in English.¹⁵ In 1887 Philpott married fellow Army Officer Jessie Menzies, and the two served together at divisional headquarters in London, Toronto, and Kingston and finally at the Headquarters Office in Toronto.

The Salvation Army has been identified in the work of Lynne Marks as a movement providing religious shape to a variety of forms of working-class consciousness.¹⁶ Philpott fits the profile Marks presents of the strata of the

12 The author has benefitted from a careful reading of an earlier version of this paper by Bryan Palmer, who encouraged more systematic definition of contrasts between the usage of "class" and "people", a distinction at the heart of this discussion.

13 This sketch of Philpott's early life is drawn from the manuscript of an unpublished biography, Stuart Philpott, "They Made the Devil Run: The Story of Peter and Jessie Philpott and their Thirteen Children". See also P. W. Philpott, *Sixty Wonderful Years* (Los Angeles: Bible House of Los Angeles, 1946), and "Saved By A Hymn", *Hymn Lovers' Magazine*, vol. 6 (1952), p. 35; M. Jane Scott, "Marks 70th Year in Ministry: Hearing Sally Ann Began Career", *Globe and Mail*, January 9, 1954, p. 9; Robert J. Hanley, "Dr. P. W. Philpott Recalls 70 Years in Ministry at Special Toronto Service", *Hamilton Spectator*, January 11, 1954, p. 28.

14 Stuart Philpott, "They Made the Devil Run", pp. 51–54.

15 Scott, "Marks 70th Year in Ministry"; Elizabeth Cuddy, "At the Churches", *The Telegram*, January 9, 1954, p. 13.

16 Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, chap. 6.

working class attracted to the Army. He was young, mobile, and not yet firmly settled in a trade. The Army developed Philpott's considerable talent as a communicator and organizer and he benefitted from, as well as contributed to, the astonishing growth of the Army in Ontario during the 1880s. However, his sense of calling and identity as a Salvation Army officer were constructed in terms of a spiritual conflict rather than an economic one.¹⁷ This did not mean he was inattentive to material matters or issues of equity, but these concerns led to Philpott's disenchantment with the Army and his leadership of a secession movement in 1892.

The first signs of the impending difficulties appeared in the summer of 1890. Philpott was sent to England as a Canadian representative to an international Salvation Army convention. His diary account of the trip indicates that he was impressed by the sights of London and the worldwide strength of the Salvation Army, but, at the same time, discouraged by what he considered the pompous style of some officers, the poor spiritual quality of meetings, and trouble over the handling of money.¹⁸ Upon his return to Canada he began to express these doubts openly in letters to his colleagues. He soon discovered that others shared his grave misgivings about the current state of affairs, believing, as he did, that claims to status and an inequitable distribution of money undermined the spiritual condition of the Army.¹⁹ When these opinions were expressed to members of the Headquarters staff, Philpott was called to Toronto to explain.²⁰

Philpott's serious illness in the fall of 1891 and his confinement in the Army rest home in Rothsay, New Brunswick, for the winter of 1892 temporarily defused the controversy. In the spring, Philpott returned to Toronto and was posted to Headquarters staff, most likely to keep him under close scrutiny, as he was not assigned any responsibility. As a former divisional officer, Philpott was very aware of the poverty of many of the field officers and found the life of a staff officer uncomfortably ostentatious. His efforts to organize a collection for the relief of poorer officers were not well received, nor were his critiques of the overly centralized administration of the Army.²¹ Commissioner Rees and his successor Herbert Booth interpreted this behav-

17 Recent studies of the Salvation Army in Britain and in New York corroborate Marks's identification of the Army with the working class. These studies view the Salvation Army primarily as a religious movement that successfully adopted an urban and popular form. Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Diane Winston, *Red-hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

18 P. W. Philpott, "Salvation Army Diary" (transcribed by Stuart Philpott), pp. 28, 30, 31.

19 See "Salvation Army Letter Book" (transcribed by Stuart Philpott), Philpott to Commissioner T. B. Coombs, April 6 and November 18, 1891, and to Adjunct Levi Taylor, April 21 and May 15, 1891.

20 "Salvation Army Letter Book", Philpott to Taylor, April 21, 1891.

21 Philpott's justification of his actions is presented in P. W. Philpott and A. W. Roffe, *New Light: Containing a full Account of the Recent Salvation Army Troubles in Canada* (Toronto: Rose Publishing Co., 1892).

our as disloyalty and insubordination, and Philpott was invited either to accept a demotion to field rank or to resign.²² Philpott's decision to break with the Army led to a major secession from the ranks at a time when its early pattern of rapid growth had begun to give way to retrenchment.²³ These events received much attention in the press, which usually painted Philpott in a very favourable light.²⁴

As the dispute became public, the major issues centred upon appropriation of money raised in local corps by Headquarters staff, a perception of preferential treatment for high-ranking officers, particularly those from England, and the hierarchical military organization. Philpott maintained that the secrecy, attention to rank, and centralized authority had undermined the "purity which had characterized the early days of the work".²⁵ Public interest remained high, and Toronto papers carried accounts almost daily from mid-August, when the story broke, through to the first weeks of September. The coverage pitted Philpott, cast as a populist hero, against Herbert Booth, the newly appointed Commissioner and son of the General, playing the role of power and privilege. Even when Booth produced two of Philpott's letters, claiming them to be "conclusive evidence, not only of Mr. Phillipot's [*sic*] dissatisfaction and disloyalty, but of my predecessor's patience in dealing with him", sympathies seemed to remain with Philpott.²⁶ A *Globe* reporter investigating reaction to the controversy among adherents of the Army outside Toronto found that Philpott's charges struck a chord of latent dissent. He reported:

The majority of the old standbys of the army, who have worked for it for eight years threatened to come out.... They contend that Mr. Phillipot [*sic*] was right in the matter of funds. For years back in the experience of the corps here they have been continually dunned at headquarters for money.... This is the chief reason that they support Mr. Phillipot [*sic*].... There is some feeling that the English officers have been better treated than the Canadian and that sick officers have not been properly used.²⁷

22 For Booth's version of the events, as reported in the press, see "The Commandant's Reply", *The Globe*, August 31, 1892, p. 8; "Philpott Versus Booth", *The Globe*, September 8, 1892.

23 R. G. Moyles, *Blood and Fire in Canada: A History of the Salvation Army in the Dominion of Canada, 1882-1976* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977), pp. 121 ff. A full chapter is devoted to the events of 1892 as the Army experienced retreat and secession.

24 *The Globe's* reporting remained relatively balanced throughout the controversy. See, for example, "Salvation Officers Threatening to Secede", *The Globe*, August 18, 1892; "Secessionists Meet", *The Globe*, August 26, 1892; "Phillipot answers Booth", *The Globe*, September 5, 1892. *The Tribune* and *The News* were far more critical of the Army and its leadership: see "A Revolt in the Army", *The Tribune*, September 9, 1892; "The S.A. Torn Up", *The News*, August 16, 1892; "Soldiers Step Out", *The News*, August 20, 1892; "Kneeled and Voted", *The News*, August 22, 1892.

25 "Secessionists Meet", *The Globe*, August 26, 1892.

26 "The Commandant's Reply", *The Globe*, August 31, 1892.

27 "Philpott vs. Booth", *The Globe*, September 1, 1892.

Philpott's reasons for leaving the Salvation Army did not involve the Army's objectives or doctrines. The controversy centred upon Philpott's dissatisfaction with a hierarchical structure, an insistence on the distinctions of rank, and especially the inequitable disbursement of monies raised locally. Biblical Christianity, in the view of Philpott and the dissenters, called for equality among the faithful, a humility incompatible with individual preferment, and fair treatment, particularly of the poor and sick. Much of Philpott's critique of the Army paralleled the language and concerns of class struggle. Throughout his long career, however, Philpott represented his commitment to bring the gospel to "all classes". Within his frame of reference a rejection of privilege motivated by spiritual commitments was not to give rise to a working-class exclusivism, but to an inclusive embrace of "all classes" in a community of faith. As such the movement which gathered around him did not foster a class consciousness, but consistently spoke against the inequities of the status quo.

Immediately upon leaving the Army, Philpott and his supporters rented a church on the corner of Denison Avenue and Queen Street in Toronto and began to hold regular services that were reportedly well attended.²⁸ As the controversy spread throughout Ontario, officers and soldiers left the Army and looked to Philpott for leadership. In late September 1892 a convention was held in Toronto to form a loose affiliation of congregations to be characterized by the "old, simple, childlike trusting in God and looking to Him for guidance in all things", which they felt the Salvation Army had exhibited in its early days.²⁹ By 1894 Philpott had overseen the formation of Christian Workers' congregations in London, Hamilton, Kingston, Oshawa, and Port Hope, as well as four churches in Toronto, made up almost entirely by former Salvation Army adherents.³⁰ The Christian Workers were later described in a Hamilton newspaper as:

[A] religious body without pope, primate, metropolitan, bishop or president. Each branch is self-governed, self-supported; it settles all matters for itself. There is no creed, dogma or confession of faith to perplex the members, who appear to be well satisfied, and are doing much good in the places where branches have been established — not only doing much good individually, but adding to their membership and erecting churches, "to which everybody is heartily welcome".³¹

28 "The Seceders' Meetings", *The News*, August 22, 1892.

29 "Phillip versus Booth", *The Globe*, August 30, 1892; for a report on the organization of the Christian Workers, see "United Christian Workers: Seceding Salv. Army Soldiers Organize under New Name", *Hamilton Spectator*, September 23, 1892, p. 6.

30 "Salvation Army Letter Book", P. W. Philpott to Rev. D. Drover, January 23, 1894.

31 "Christian Workers: One of the Most Recent Additions to the list of Denominations holding Religious Services in Hamilton", *Hamilton Herald*, January 24, 1903.

The Christian Workers organized to maximize local autonomy in financial and governance matters. The message, consistent with that of the Salvation Army, was simple and accessible, and the churches welcomed all regardless of social standing.

Philpott did not initially undertake the pastorate of a Christian Workers' church but functioned much as he had as Salvation Army Divisional Officer. His time was divided between support of the fledgling Christian Workers' movement and evangelistic meetings in denominational churches, the source of his rather meagre income during these years. This schedule required Philpott to spend a great deal of time away from home and his growing family (eventually 13 children). During his years of itinerancy, from 1892 to 1896, Philpott kept a private marriage register recording some 21 marriages. Of these couples wishing Philpott to marry them, the groom's profession is listed for 20. They included three clergy (two Salvation Army officers and an independent evangelist), seven skilled workmen, six labourers, three farmers, and two clerks, indicating an occupational continuity between the Salvation Army and the Christian Workers.³²

Philpott's experience in the Salvation Army caused him to resist any centralized financial arrangement, with the result that, despite a rising reputation as movement founder and evangelist, his own financial position became increasingly difficult. In October 1896 invitations to serve as pastor came from Tillsonburg Baptist Church and the Christian Workers' chapel in Hamilton. By Philpott's evaluation, Tillsonburg was in many ways the better offer. Hamilton was a poor and struggling congregation whose pastor had just resigned under the shadow of scandal. Philpott's only support would be a freewill offering never exceeding \$6.30 a week. This move would, however, allow him to continue his leadership of the Christian Workers and to provide a somewhat more stable living for his family. Philpott recorded his decision in his diary as follows: "I wrote Hamilton today and accepted their invitation feeling sure I had taken the unselfish path, for there is nothing very inviting about Hamilton."³³

Philpott began his ministry in Hamilton preaching in the streets, the means of attracting a crowd he had learned to use effectively in the Salvation Army. His message, as he told a reporter, was: "That of the New Testament. To save souls, help the poor, look after people who never attend the house of God, visit the sick, lend a helping hand to a brother in distress...."³⁴ The reference to biblical precedents, to calling the irreligious to repentance and helping those in need, became recurring themes among the Christian Workers. As audiences grew, there was a constant struggle to find and lease a hall large enough to accommodate them. In 1898 a Baptist Church on McNab Street

32 Philpott Papers, "Marriage Register".

33 P. W. Philpott, "Christian Workers' Church Diary" (transcribed by Stuart Philpott), pp. 35, 36.

34 "Christian Workers: One of the Most Recent Additions to the list of Denominations holding Religious Services in Hamilton", *Hamilton Herald*, January 24, 1903.

North was leased. By 1900 Sunday evening evangelistic meetings had to be held in the larger Star Theatre, and in 1901 the Christian Workers' first permanent home was built on the corner of Merrick and Park Streets. The deed for the Christian Workers' property lists the trustees who were legally responsible for the purchase of the land as Joseph William Boynton, Painter; Oscar Hendershott, Superintendent; and George Robert, Labourer. With the new building came a name change. The Christian Workers' Chapel, Hamilton, became the Gospel Tabernacle of the Christian Workers' Churches, Hamilton, shortened for convenience to the Gospel Tabernacle. Here Philpott was able to present and implement most systematically his understanding of the gospel and its implications for life, a theme to which we will return.

Philpott left Hamilton for Chicago in 1922. From his base in Hamilton, he had already developed an international reputation among the growing number of independent, non-denominational churches throughout North America. In Chicago, he became involved in the fundamentalist movement at its most active stage in the mid-1920s.³⁵ Under his leadership the 3,000-seat Moody Memorial Church was constructed in memory of an untrained evangelist of an earlier generation at a cost of over \$1 million. In 1929 he accepted a call to the Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles, California, where he served until his official retirement in 1932. Returning to Canada, he settled in Toronto, which served as his headquarters for extensive speaking engagements throughout North America. He remained an active and much requested evangelist until his death in 1957.

When he moved to Chicago, Philpott left behind a well-developed religious movement, the Christian Workers' churches, which by then were discussing the advisability of a more formal denominational structure. In 1922 the Christian Workers were officially constituted as a denomination, which in 1925 changed its name to the Associated Gospel Churches of Canada. The Hamilton Gospel Tabernacle underwent some name changes as well. In 1926 it became Philpott Tabernacle in recognition of his contribution and, upon his death in 1957, was renamed Philpott Memorial Church.

Identifying exactly who the Christian Workers were, especially in the earliest years, presents difficulties. Some membership records are available for the years after 1900, but systematic records have not been found until after 1909.³⁶ These records document those committed to the work of the Gospel Tabernacle, but they tell us little about the great numbers who attended meetings only occasionally. Sunday evening attendance at the Gospel Tabernacle was consistently double that of the official membership, and many

35 "The Coming Revival", *The Moody Church News*, vol. 9 (July 1924), p. 1; P. W. Philpott, "Pastor's Editorial", *The Moody Church News*, vol.10 (February 1925), p. 4.

36 Official board minutes have been located for the years 1900 to 1913. From 1900 until 1905 names of candidates for membership appear occasionally. Elders' minutes exist from 1909 to 1926. As membership was primarily the responsibility of the Elders, a complete list of persons joining the church is available for each of these years.

attendees identified themselves with the Christian Workers without ever moving to formal membership.³⁷

It should be noted that the name “Christian Workers” does not indicate a movement articulating what could be called orthodox class consciousness. Philpott’s ranks, like the Salvationist soldiers of the 1880s, bore the stamps of class experience, but the term “worker” in the discourse of this religious movement entailed a labouring for Christ as much as a metaphorical expression of members’ origins in working-class families. The direct allusion to class was a significant identifier, nevertheless, and, if the Salvation Army vocabulary was studded with military metaphor and allusion, the Christian Workers drew more directly on imagery and languages of waged employment and occupation. The Christian’s primary identity was to be a “worker that need not be ashamed” (2 Timothy 2:15), and location within this biblical world brought the dignity of a sacred vocation to the daily lives of participants.³⁸ All of life was viewed as “service” to God, and analogies of honest toil and labouring abounded in sermons and publications.³⁹ Philpott viewed himself as pastor to the common people, and the identification of himself as “only a blacksmith” continued to have great discursive power long after it was reasonable for him to make such a claim.⁴⁰ This identification of the Christian Workers and their pastor as simple working folk was widely accepted in contemporary accounts. Newspaper reports of Philpott’s ministry portray him as the pastor to the poor and needy, a view which he did much to encourage.⁴¹

The Christian Workers were dedicated to reaching people who did not feel comfortable in what they typically referred to as the “denominational churches”. Central to the identity of the Christian Workers, and in opposition to their construction of denominational churches, was the claim to be “entirely separate and independent of any outside ecclesiastical control”.⁴² This autho-

37 Callum Brown has recently cautioned historians against measuring the influence of working-class religious movements from membership lists (*The Death of Christian Britain*).

38 This paragraph has benefitted from a number specific suggestions from Bryan Palmer toward a more consistent usage of “class”.

39 Examples of this may be found in the following Philpott sermons: “The Living Word”, *Moody News*, September 20, 1922; Philpott Papers, “The True Church: Her Ministry and Testimony”, March 11, 1923, pp. 8, 9; Philpott Papers, “Grace in Action”, June 24, 1923, p. 3; Philpott Papers, “The Divine Dynamic”, September 12, 1926, p. 2; Philpott Papers, “Won by Kindness”, October 3, 1926, p. 8.

40 For Philpott as “the blacksmith preacher”, see P. W. Philpott, “Another Chance”, *Tabernacle Tidings*, October 1921, p. 5; Philpott Papers, “I made a covenant”, October 14, 1925, p. 12; *Sixty Wonderful Years*.

41 See “Christian Workers: One of the Most Recent Additions to the list of Denominations holding Religious Services in Hamilton”, *Hamilton Herald*, January 24, 1903; “Pastor Philpott of the Gospel Tabernacle”, *Hamilton Spectator*, October 1, 1921; “Remarkable Career of Pastor P. W. Philpott”, *Hamilton Spectator*, June 10, 1922.

42 Hamilton, Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Christian Workers’ Church, “Platform”, Official Record – of all Church and Board Meetings of the Christian Workers’ Chapel, Hamilton, Ontario, p. 255.

rized a simple and compelling gospel message in the languages and spaces of the people, free from theological and ecclesiastical constraint: hence the long-standing tradition of holding meetings in the open air, theatres, and rented halls. When the decision was taken to build a permanent church home in 1900, a resolution was passed to ensure that every effort would be made to continue this tradition. The resolution read in part: “that in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and for His glory alone, we proceed to build a church wherein to preach the simple gospel of the Grace of God, and where all classes would be welcomed and made perfectly at home”.⁴³ The Christian Workers dissociated themselves from what they portrayed as a concern for social propriety and economic advancement that had distanced the denominational churches from working people. The discourse of working-class irreligion is here effectively deployed by a vibrant religious movement of working-class origins. A sample of Christian Workers’ letterhead from 1901 stated the church principles as follows:

Free and Unappropriated Seats.
 Spiritual Worship.
 Congregational Singing.
 Evangelical Ministry.
 A hearty welcome to all.

Each of these principles was in opposition to the Christian Workers’ evaluation of other churches in Hamilton. Pew rents served to reinforce the social divisions that characterized society at large, a situation conflicting with their understanding of the simple gospel.⁴⁴ At the Gospel Tabernacle, those who came to seek God would not be distracted by what were considered secular concerns or practices. Repeatedly the Elders Board refused to allow the promotion of worthy causes in Sunday services. On separate occasions the Recruiting League and the Temperance Union, both causes considered with approval, were denied their requests to address the congregation.⁴⁵ Without distraction, then, worshippers could enter fully into the informal participatory liturgy found in the gospel songbooks and could expect to be called upon to repent from sin and join the ranks of those who served God. Giving to the work of the Tabernacle was considered an act of faith and worship; however, giving was strictly voluntary and a matter between the giver and

43 Philpott Memorial Church Archives, “Report for year from April 1, 1901 to January 8, 1902”, Official Record, p. 316.

44 In a study of Hamilton’s church leadership, Peter Hanlon discovered a clear correlation between church and business leadership, confirming to some extent the evaluation of the Christian Workers. Peter Hanlon, “Moral Order and the Influence of Social Christianity in an Industrial City” (MA thesis, McMaster University, 1984).

45 Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Official Board Minutes, April 10, 1913, p. 350; Elders’ Minutes, January 31, 1916.

God, not between the giver and the treasurer.⁴⁶ The welcome was extended to all to avoid distinctions of rank and to erase all elements of exclusivism. The sacred space of the Gospel Tabernacle was constructed as inclusive and embracing, and this was accomplished by defining its principles in populist terms and in distinction from denominational churches.

The language of the people was not only directed to those the Christian Workers hoped to attract to the Gospel Tabernacle. This vocabulary, opposed as it was to denominationalism, could also make common cause with the wider Christian community. In a letter sent to prominent members of the Hamilton community in April 1900 to raise funds for the building of their first church, Philpott provided the following description of his Church and its members:

Undoubtedly you have some knowledge of the effort we are putting forth for the salvation of the non-church-going masses in this city.... During the winter months we rented the Star Theatre for the Sunday evening meetings, and although it will seat some 1,400 persons, it was always filled, and at times packed. From 500 to 700 men were regular attendants, a large proportion of whom never attended any Church.... Our people are willing to do their utmost, and will sacrifice much in order to push forward this work, but are all poor and can but furnish little toward the amount needed.⁴⁷

In this brief space Philpott presented the Christian Workers as honest and hard-working people who had already proven themselves effective in doing what many suspected the denominational churches were not, attracting the “non-church-going masses” and particularly men to the faith. Here Philpott drew on the discourse of danger characteristic of the time, in which fears were expressed that an irreligious masculine rough culture would overwhelm the respectable working class, particularly the young men.⁴⁸

When the building was completed, it was considered a monument to the faith and sacrifice of the Christian Workers. One reporter commented on the size and evident cost of the Gospel Tabernacle built in 1907, considering “the congregation is made up almost entirely of working people”.⁴⁹ The members were themselves impressed by this, and the following tribute appeared in a

46 On the voluntary nature of giving, see Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Official Board Minutes, p. 255. A subscription letter to members of the congregation for the building of the Tabernacle places the emphasis clearly on participation and not the size of the gift. The expectation was that all those committed would give something, no matter how little. Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Official Record, letter from Philpott, May 6, 1905.

47 Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Official Record, subscription letter from Philpott, April 20, 1900.

48 Kenneth L. Draper, “Religion Worthy of a Free People: Religious Practices and Discourses in London, Ontario, 1870–1890” (PhD dissertation, McMaster University, 2000), chap. 5; Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, chap. 4.

49 “Given to the Service of God: Gospel Tabernacle Was Dedicated Yesterday”, *Hamilton Herald*, June 24, 1907.

Golden Jubilee pamphlet: “It is interesting to note that not a single person of wealth was a member of this Congregation. The only funds were the sacrificial giving of common people....”⁵⁰

The Christian Workers identified their movement as the religion of the common people. As Christians they were identified with a wider Christian community and developed six simple Articles of Faith that could be embraced by many of the Protestant churches in Hamilton. While inclusively Christian and concerned to embrace all who were interested, Christian Workers had an identity that authorized access to a discourse of “the people”, which was deployed against what they viewed as a loss of simplicity and zeal among the churches. The Gospel Tabernacle did not represent a critique of industrial capitalism, but critiqued a version of Christianity that had implicated itself in wealth and injustice, thereby losing touch with working people. The Christian Workers’ Churches constituted a reform movement in their intention to return Christianity to the people.

Reform, if it were to come, would require adherence to what the Christian Workers characterized as the “simple gospel message”. The simplicity of this message rested upon a complex set of assumptions and attitudes that made it intellectually and emotionally compelling. The Christian Workers participated in a wider movement gaining strength throughout the United States and Britain in the same period. This movement found its roots in the revivalism of the early nineteenth century, was influenced by the holiness movements of the latter half of the century, and allied itself with a pre-millenarian eschatology known as dispensationalism.⁵¹ The simple gospel message preached by

50 *Golden Jubilee, 1892–1942* (Hamilton: Philpott Tabernacle, 1942), p. 7.

51 These movements intersected and supported each other in complex ways but maintained separate trajectories. Revivalism is the broadest category and had as its hallmark the production of intensive occasion for private religious introspection in a context of public worship leading to an experience of conversion. See Kenneth L. Draper, “Redemptive House – Redeeming Choices: Saving the Social in Late-Victorian London, Ontario”, in Nancy Christie, ed., *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760–1969* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), pp. 278–281; George M. Thomas, *Revivalism and Cultural Change: Christianity, Nation Building, and the Market in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). The Holiness Movement was a participant in revivalism but added to the need for conversion a second distinctive experience often called the “baptism of the Holy Spirit”. A major branch of the Holiness Movement grew out of protests against a perceived cooling of the original zeal of Methodism. The Salvation Army is a case in point. Philpott’s formation in the Army put him in touch with the wider Holiness network. See Winston, *Red-hot and Righteous*; Marilyn Fardig Whiteley, “Sailing for the Shore: The Canadian Holiness Tradition”, in G. A. Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), pp. 257–270. Dispensationalism was popularized by revivalist D. L. Moody and the textual aids to Bible study provided by C. I. Scofield, which became known as the Scofield Bible. Pre-millennialists taught that the world would get worse and injustice and war would increase as the world neared its end. This was a critique of the popular late nineteenth-century post-millennial view that religious, economic, and political reforms were remaking the world into the Kingdom of God. See Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). George W. Marsden treats the development of dispensational pre-millennialism into Fundamentalism in the early twentieth century in his *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Philpott assumed the individual and supernatural conversion experience of revivalism, the emphasis on personal holiness of the holiness movement, and the anticipation of an imminent and catastrophic end of the present order followed by a thousand years of peace as taught by the dispensationalists. Philpott was not, nor did he claim to be, a theologian or religious writer, nor have any of the Christian Workers provided a systematic rendering of their message. The following account is constructed largely from transcripts of Philpott's sermons, few of which show evidence of having been corrected after their recording. Other helpful sources have included Philpott's diaries, official church records, and statements of faith.⁵²

The simple gospel was made available to all by the Holy Spirit in the Bible, the Christian scriptures. Since the scriptures were given to guide humanity to God, they were considered comprehensible to all true seekers after God. While those who would come to the Bible to scoff or discredit it had no chance of understanding its true meaning, a literal reading taken in faith was likely to provide the believer with direction in the everyday matters of life. In his work on the origins of fundamentalism, George Marsden argues that this approach to the Bible was based upon a Baconian empiricist epistemology.⁵³ The text of the Bible was believed to present the laws of the spiritual world to the faithful reader in the same way the empirical scientist "discovered" natural laws by careful observation of the natural world. In a period when Biblical scholarship was becoming increasingly technical and removed from the untrained reader, the Christian Workers presented a democratic Bible, which required no special training and allowed all true Christians to find God's truth unaided.⁵⁴ This opened the authoritative text to every member of the movement, as the Bible was the possession of the people, not the clergy or scholars. In meetings of the Christian Workers' Official Board and Elders, it was the test of scripture plainly interpreted that most influenced decisions. Bible readings, together with prayer, characterized all meetings, and all sermons or inspirational talks were drawn directly from the scriptures. Philpott's sermons modelled this common-sense, empirical approach to scripture. He encouraged his listeners to follow along in their own Bibles to share in the discovery of God's truth. His style was participatory rather than didactic, employing such phrases as "You will know that..." or "The scripture I want you to consider with me...".⁵⁵ The teaching, preaching, and interpretation of the scriptures was an activity expected of all members of the church.

52 It should be noted that Philpott's existing diaries end in 1896, when he arrived in Hamilton, and significant numbers of his sermons are not available until 1920, two years before he left. I have thus made use of sermons from his early years in Chicago on the assumption that little in his basic theological stand would have changed. The Statements of Faith and Church Covenant are short and comprise the only concise samples of the Christian Workers' message from this period.

53 Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, pp. 55–61.

54 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "The Divine Dynamic", September 12, 1926, p. 6; Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Official Record, Christian Workers' Church "Articles of Faith".

55 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "God's Challenge to the Church", February 18, 1923; "The Gentleness of Jesus", March 11, 1923, p. 1.

To provide direction in this activity, the People's Bible Class, with attendance ranging from 500 to 1,000, gathered on Friday nights during the fall and winter.⁵⁶ The Tabernacle's weekly schedule of meetings made it impossible for the pastor to lead them all. Lay leaders, especially the Elders, assumed a prominent teaching role.⁵⁷ Teacher training classes were provided at the Tabernacle to "prepare efficient Sunday School Teachers and workers in other branches of Christian service".⁵⁸ Activities such as this provided opportunities for independent action and significant leadership roles for men and women who, in daily life, were increasingly under the control of others.

A lack of education or formal theological training was no deficit; in fact, it could be worn as a badge of honour by the Christian Workers. Philpott, who had never attended seminary, made constant use of his image as the "blacksmith preacher". This allowed the preacher a connection to his lay audience while creating a distance from the arrogance and pomposity of the stereotypical "clergyman".

One day a clergyman in this city called to see a man and wife and asked why they did not come to his Church, which was nearby. They said, "We go to the Tabernacle to hear Philpott."

He said, "You go up there to hear that man! Why do you not go to a real Church?"

"Why? What is the matter there? Is there anything wrong?"

"Well," the clergyman replied, "if you were going to call a doctor, you would call in a real doctor would you not? You would not call in a quack."

"Well," said my friend, "There are a lot of sick sinners being saved up there."

"Yes, but look at that man. He is not a preacher at all. He is just a blacksmith."

I sometimes think I spoiled a pretty good blacksmith to make a poor preacher.

His wife could not stand it any longer, and said, "Well, Jesus was a carpenter, and I guess they make a pretty good pair," and she left the room.⁵⁹

This wonderful anecdote from a Philpott sermon rhetorically links the workingman, Philpott, to his working audience and identifies both with Jesus the

56 "Twenty-five Years Ago and Now", *Tabernacle Tidings*, October 1921, p. 2.

57 See Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Official Board Minutes, October 4, 1908, and January 13, 1909; Elders' Minutes, September 30, 1909. Elders were also expected to set an example of the Christian lifestyle (Official Board Minutes, January 24, 1910) and were actively involved in pastoral visitation to encourage the spiritual well-being of the Christian Workers (Elders' Minutes, January 28, 1909).

58 *Tabernacle Tidings*, October 1921, p. 6.

59 P. W. Philpott, "Another Chance", *Tabernacle Tidings*, October 1921, p. 5. While anti-clericalism is not explicitly expressed, it is implicit in many of the themes in Philpott's preaching. See Philpott Papers, "The True Church", March 4, 1923, p. 4.

carpenter. The irony is apparent as the Christian Workers revel with Christ in their low social status and the disapproval of the religious establishment. In his study of representations of Jesus throughout history, church historian Jaroslav Pelikan demonstrates the close parallel between the values of a group and its narration of the Jesus story.⁶⁰ The Jesus one encounters in the sermons of Philpott is the humble and suffering Jesus.⁶¹ He is appointed to bring salvation to the poor.⁶² He is rejected by the religious establishment and listened to by the common folk, whom he accepts as his disciples and commissions to carry his message forward.⁶³

Identification with this suffering Jesus in the experience of conversion, the personal appropriation of the divine work of Christ, was the key identifier of the Christian Worker. Conversion not only provided entry into heaven, but also, of a more immediate importance, it meant entry into a new community of the faithful. Philpott did not view his sermons as primarily theological teaching; they were to evangelize the sinner and to bring comfort to the believer.⁶⁴ The test of the true Christian was confession of personal salvation.⁶⁵ The true church for the Christian Workers could not be defined in a geographic or a confessional sense. No nation or group of nations, no denomination or movement could make such a claim.⁶⁶ The impulse that motivated Philpott to shed denominational confines and form an independent "New Testament" church was to proclaim the simple gospel message more freely. Once again the Christian Workers deployed a discourse of Christian inclusiveness that managed to question the suitability of the denominational churches to remain faithful carriers of the gospel. It was as God's "people", and not as an ecclesiastical body, that Christian Workers claimed authority for their religious movement.

At the core of the Christian Worker identity was the conversion narrative or personal testimony. This was the point at which the supernatural met the natural, where the sacred touched the secular. Conversion was offered as the free choice of the individual.⁶⁷ As social and economic changes narrowed

60 Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

61 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "Grace In Action", June 24, 1923, p. 8; "Through the Tunnel on the Way Home", May 14, 1922, p. 2.

62 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "The Divine Dynamic", September 12, 1926, p. 4.

63 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "Tonight we will continue...", February 15, 1920; "What is Wrong With the Church?", *Moody News*, February 1926.

64 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "I made a covenant", October 4, 1925, p. 2; "The Exemplification of the Faith Life", October 5, 1920, pp. 1, 11.

65 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "The True Church", March 4, 1923, p. 9.

66 Philpott made no claims to the exclusive righteousness of his movement. In a sermon, "Message from the Ark", April 22, 1923 (Philpott Papers), he stated that he expected to find people from all denominations, including Catholics, among those who had experienced the salvation to be found in Christ.

67 Philpott Memorial Church Archive, Official Record, "Articles of Faith".

the freedom of most workers, conversion offered them control over what they believed to be the most important choice they could make. Conversion narratives told the stories of God's gracious action empowering personal transformation.⁶⁸ Sin represented a variety of patterns of life that were found to be personally and socially destructive but were defeated by the gospel message, making a new life possible. The traditional Christian sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist were retained but were stripped of sacerdotal significance and became testimony to a prior conversion experience. The testimony meeting, and the prayer meeting where conversion experiences were rehearsed, in a ritual sense, took the place of the Mass in Catholic practice. Protestant tradition has considered the preaching of the Word as the central ritual, and Philpott's sermons, while tied to a biblical text, were essentially a series of conversion narratives: his own or those of people to whom he ministered.⁶⁹ Philpott taught that the lens through which scripture must be understood was that provided by the cross of Christ.⁷⁰ Thus, he scoured the Old and the New Testaments for stories of conversions. His favourites, those of Peter and the Prodigal Son, recur again and again in his sermons.⁷¹

With conversion came a new supernatural or spiritual frame of reference for living in this world. Personal testimonies rehearsed the power of God to make real changes in even the most difficult of lives. Christian Workers were to live lives that continued to tell this story with the aid of fellow believers and empowered by the Holy Spirit.⁷² While membership in the true church was a matter of personal conversion, the result was not a privatized, individualized religion. Christian Workers' Church records give evidence of a strong sense of community. Meetings were held on at least three week nights and there were three regular services on Sunday. As an independent church, each congregation made all decisions locally, and all of the expenses of the Tabernacle were covered by local donations, giving most adherents a financial as well as spiritual investment in the work. A relief committee was established to help members of the Tabernacle who required it out of funds specially collected for this purpose.⁷³ Church records indicate that the fund was used to pay rent and to provide food and medical attention, in some cases in the long term.

Admission to membership required clear evidence of a changed life and

68 Pamela Walker provides an excellent analysis of the discursive power of Salvation Army conversion narratives in *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down*, chap. 3.

69 See, for example, Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "Evangelistic Message", December 3, 1922, and *Sixty Wonderful Years*.

70 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "I have taken...", Sermons, 1920–1922, p. 1.

71 See "Another Chance", *Tabernacle Tidings*, October 1921; Philpott Papers, "The Lost Song", June 4, 1923; "Broken Fellowship", *Moody News*, January 26, 1925.

72 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "The True Church: Her Ministry and Testimony", March 11, 1923, p. 4.

73 Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Official Board Minutes, January 4, 1910.

agreement to uphold the articles of the Covenant.⁷⁴ The Covenant established the practices expected of Christian Workers. These included habitual prayer and reading of the scripture, worship of God in the home, regular attendance at the meetings of the church, loving fellowship with other members, including tender admonishment and tangible help as necessary, regular giving to the church for local ministries and foreign missions, and finally “abstaining from whatever is unbecoming to the Christian character”.⁷⁵ These practices, and particularly maintaining Christian character, were to ensure that Christian Workers were identifiable among their peers. Giving up drinking, dancing, the theatre, and other pleasures of the flesh were viewed as evidences of a true change of life and separation from the world.⁷⁶ It was the special role of the Elders to encourage and support spiritual development and to be on the lookout for those who would dishonour Christ by unworthy conduct. The minutes of the Elders’ meetings reveal that this responsibility was not taken lightly.⁷⁷ Members were requested to resign their memberships for misconduct, for failing to attend services regularly, or for failing to abide by the Covenant.⁷⁸ These clearly defined practices helped to provide boundaries to the Christian Workers’ community of faith. Boundaries became a vector of identity in opposition to a Christianity that had lost its spiritual vitality on the one hand and the temptations of the “non-church-going masses” on the other. This nexus of subjectivity empowered both personal transformations and strong bonds of communal identity.

Community identity was further reinforced by its location in sacred time. A powerful ordering of the relation of the present and future had risen to wield considerable cultural influence in the late nineteenth century. Post-millennialism wove together material progress, ethical development, social reform, and world missions into a valiant attempt to redeem society through morally directed action.⁷⁹ The pre-millennial dispensationalists of the Christian Workers’ churches rejected this proposal. Although Philpott claimed to

74 The Elders regularly considered the problem of determining the spiritual condition of applicants for membership. They would on occasion table an application pending further investigation, and often memberships were denied if sufficient evidence of conversion was not found. See Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Elders’ Minutes, April 22, 1909.

75 Philpott Memorial Church Archives, “Gospel Tabernacle Constitution”, 1916.

76 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, “Worldliness”, June 27, 1926.

77 Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Official Board Minutes, January 9, 1901; Elders’ Minutes, September 2, 1909; February 3, 1910; October 17, 1912.

78 Philpott Memorial Church Archives, Official Board Minutes, October 22, 1905; December 22, 1902; Elders’ Minutes, April 30, 1909. The Official Board Minutes of December 28, 1905, record a policy of dropping members from the roll if they had not attended services for the last six months. By 1916, when an official Constitution was published, this period had been expanded to 12 months.

79 See particularly Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Richard Allen, “Providence to Progress: The Migration of an Idea in English Canadian Thought”, in William Westfall *et al.*, eds., *Religion/Culture: Comparative Canadian Studies* (Ottawa: Association for Canadian Studies, Canadian Issues/Thèmes canadiens, vol. 7, 1985), pp. 33–46.

be more interested in proclaiming the truth than in debating points of doctrine, he rarely let a chance go by to ridicule the view that the world was becoming a better place, and as the twentieth century proceeded he seemed to have more fuel for this particular fire.⁸⁰ The Christian Workers believed that the social reformers' programme of reconstruction was misdirected because society itself was characterized by sin. Social reforms created new, if unforeseen, social ills. Pre-millennialism served to break any attempt to identify the present order with the promised holy order.⁸¹ God's programme of restitution required the bringing of individual souls into relationship with God rather than attempting to rebuild society.⁸² Societal salvation, like personal salvation, could be effected only by supernatural intervention. This intervention would come at the end of the present era with the return of Christ. While Philpott did not believe that the conversion of the whole world would occur in this era, as post-millennialism claimed, he did feel that evangelism and revival contributed to social welfare.⁸³ The best programme of social reform, he argued, began with reform of the heart.⁸⁴ The conversion of individuals might improve society by revealing a little of the righteousness to come, but could not save it. The Christian Workers could not force their ordering of the sacred on the secular because of their deeply held conviction that God's grace could only be accepted freely by an individual decision at conversion.⁸⁵

The redeemed social order promised by the prophets was as important to the Christian Workers as it was to the post-millennial social reformers of the denominational churches. Philpott's description of the millennium appears in a sermon preached in Hamilton, February 15, 1920. The following portions indicate his evaluation of the present system and contrast it with the age to come.

So you see, beloved friend, the government we are going to have at that time is really to be a righteous one.... "But with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of His waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins [Isaiah 11:4,5]." He is going to judge the people with equity, — the poor and the oppressed. That is what some of the reformers or those with high ideals are thinking of.... Very often cases are tried where the law

80 Philpott Papers, "When and How Will He Come", January 19, 1923; "About any real truth...", undated sermons, p. 11.

81 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "The True Church", March 4, 1923, p. 2; "About any real truth...", undated sermons, p. 4; "That he hath said...", undated sermons, p. 2.

82 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "Tonight we will continue...", February 15, 1920, p. 5.

83 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "When and How Will He Come", January 19, 1923, p. 10; "God's Challenge to the Church", February 18, 1923, p. 7.

84 P. W. Philpott, "The Living World", *Moody News*, September 1922.

85 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "The text for this evening...", January 25, 1920; "About any real truth...", undated sermons, p. 12.

comes down upon a sinner and he goes "scott-free." ... But when Jesus comes He will not judge by the sight of the eye or the hearing of the ear.... He knows thoughts afar off ... and he will be at no disadvantage to put things right. It will be a real righteous government in His day.

There is going to be universal peace in that day, because of universal righteousness. Because there is not universal righteousness in this day, there will be wars still.... God only knows what may come. Men cannot count their money these days in some places. Their income in one day is more than you could make in 50 years. "Go weep and howl for the miseries that shall come upon you," — and he pictures the trouble and strife that is coming.... When man lets go and leaves the Devil with the reins, there is no telling what will happen. But there is a day when there shall be no more war, because there is righteousness.⁸⁶

This vision should not be confused with a heavenly vision. The rule of Christ was to be established on earth, and the righteous, who suffer, are denied justice, and are despised by the sophisticates, would rule. This sacred frame of reference subordinates wealth and power to divine justice. The values for which the Christian Workers had laboured would be vindicated. For this reason the teaching of the Second Coming of Christ was viewed as motivational and a comforting doctrine.⁸⁷

Philpott's tenure in Hamilton was a period of rapid industrial expansion, especially of large-scale, mechanized industrial processes.⁸⁸ Working people did not, on the whole, participate in the benefits represented by this growth. Instead, sharper geographical divisions between working- and middle-class neighbourhoods began to appear, and real income for workers did not begin to rise until after 1920.⁸⁹ The processes of economic change bringing prosperity to the middle classes were threatening the social and economic security of Hamilton's workers. As new methods of production were implemented, moulders, machinists, and other skilled workers found their positions in jeopardy.⁹⁰ While growth, development, and progress were the dominant motifs of turn-of-the-century Canada, the experience of many working people in Hamilton was just the opposite. Philpott's characterization of the present age as one of injustice and struggle would certainly ring true to many in his congregation. In this social context the Christian Workers' focus on conversion

86 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "Tonight we will continue...", February 15, 1920, pp. 8, 9.

87 Philpott Papers, P. W. Philpott, "When and How Will He Come", January 19, 1923, p. 1; "About any real truth...", undated sermons, p. 12.

88 John Weaver, *Hamilton: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company and National Museums of Canada, 1982), p. 88.

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 99–103, 107.

90 Craig Heron, "The Crisis of the Craftsman: Hamilton's Metal Workers in the Early Twentieth Century", in Michael J. Piva, ed., *A History of Ontario: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman, 1988), pp. 109–143; Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*.

and on building community thrived, attracting many working people to the Gospel Tabernacle. What was the attraction?

In an attempt to address this question we have given attention to the local practices and discourses of the Gospel Tabernacle of the Christian Workers' Churches. The simple gospel message as embodied in this movement shaped and was shaped by the identity formation of many working people. By an empirical, democratic appropriation of the biblical text, wedded to a language of "the people", the Christian Workers could provide authority to a reshaping of their own identities and their relations to others in society. The Bible presented the story of Jesus, the carpenter, whose life disrupted power relations and whose death and resurrection brought the possibility of new life. Joining in the Jesus story by conversion gave Christian Workers access to the cultural authority of the Bible in teaching, preaching, and leadership within their community. In the wider community their identification with Jesus and the simple gospel of the Bible inscribed their difference from the denominational churches. This difference enforced a communal identity that originated in the shared experience of conversion, the symbolic grasp of ultimate control over one's destiny in the decision to enter the Jesus story. Community practices provided opportunities for leadership and service, material assistance, and, most importantly, a mutual commitment to empower in one another the transformed life entailed in the decision to identify with the Christian Workers. Commitment to the community inscribed another barrier against the temptations of the former life, however they had been narrated. The message of the Christian Workers was that the power to overcome destructive ways of life was available to all and that a new way of life characterized by dignity and communal fellowship was possible.

This transformation could not be accomplished by political action or social reform. Their pre-millennial perspective on the future did not render the Christian Workers passive but did create a realistic scepticism of what such movements could accomplish. Political activity was likely only to result in new injustices while sin remained in the world. The language of social reform was to provide uplift, something done to and for someone else, often those who wanted it least. Perhaps the popularity of pre-millennialism among working people had something to do with their experience of political and social reform as something done to them.⁹¹

The lack of a political agenda could be interpreted as a failure of the Christian Workers' religion to respond to the social realities of early twentieth-century Hamilton. This conclusion is compelling only when identity is predetermined and grounded in material conditions. Within this grand narrative, the only legitimate response to injustice is political and ultimately economic. Post-structural analysis has attempted to discover identity in the local and historic vectors of subjectivity acting on agents. In this account, identity

91 On the popularity of pre-millennialism in North America, see Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*.

is not predetermined or “essential”, and it thus opens new possibilities for understanding the popularity of the Christian Workers. The discursive world created in and through the practices of the Christian Workers provided “technologies of the self” that could be employed by women and men to make sense of their lives and thereby transform themselves and their condition. Michel Foucault’s line of analysis is particularly useful in this regard. Foucault is suspicious of programmes for liberation, arguing that in liberal societies the pursuit of freedom is the technology of governance that creates its subjects. Rather, Foucault advises that attention be paid to practices of freedom by which agents can work on themselves to bring about transformations of the self.⁹² The Christian Workers deployed a language of “the people” empowering biblical narratives and gave it shape within the life of a community that embodied practices of freedom and dignity in the lives of many working people in Hamilton.

92 Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom”, in Rabinow, ed., *Ethics*.