

# *Sunday School Teaching: A Women's Enterprise*

## *A Case Study from the Canadian Methodist, Presbyterian and United Church Tradition 1919-1939*

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*The Sunday schools are valuable to our understanding of social history, especially women's history. As Sunday school teachers, married women had volunteer opportunities to follow their vocations in a society which discouraged them from working outside of the home. This paper describes women's places in the Canadian Methodist, Presbyterian and United Church Sunday school networks during the early twentieth century and analyzes their contributions to the teacher training programme promoted by officials. It also demonstrates how the new theology shaping the Sunday schools reinforced women's roles as nurturers of children while investing them with significant roles in the church.*

*Les écoles du dimanche sont importantes pour notre connaissance de l'histoire sociale, surtout celle des femmes. Dans ces écoles, les institutrices, dont la majorité était mariée, poursuivaient ainsi leur vocation d'enseignantes dans une société qui les décourageait de travailler en dehors de la maison. Cet article examine le rôle des femmes dans le réseau que formèrent, au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les écoles du dimanche des Églises canadiennes méthodistes, presbytériennes et unies, notamment leur apport au programme de formation des enseignantes préconisé par les dirigeants de ces Églises. Il souligne également que la nouvelle théologie inspirant ces écoles a renforcé le rôle des femmes dans l'éducation des enfants et leur a conféré une place importante au sein de ces Églises.*

The Sunday schools are important in our understanding of social history, particularly women's history. Although there are few studies on the Canadian Sunday schools, American and British scholars have concluded that they were an important social institution.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, they have shown that most of the

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I would like to thank Wendy Mitchinson, Stan Johannessen, Pauline Greenhill, Steve Jones, Marilyn Whiteley, Linda Hecht, Jean-Jacques Goulet and the three anonymous readers of *Histoire sociale—Social History* for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

1. The only studies on the Canadian Sunday schools thus far are Neil Semple, "The Nurture and Admonition of the Lord': Nineteenth-Century Canadian Methodism's Response to 'Childhood'," *Histoire sociale—Social History*, Vol. XIV, no. 27 (May 1981), pp. 157-176; Allan Greer, "The Sunday Schools of Upper Canada," *Ontario History*, Vol. LXVII, no. 3 (September 1975), pp. 173-179; William Brown, "The Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Church in Canada, 1875-1925" (M. diss., Victoria University, 1959). None of these address the role of women.

teachers were women and that Sunday school teaching was central to women's reform work.<sup>2</sup> Gail Malmgreen, a British scholar, for instance, has emphasized the historical significance of women's Sunday school teaching, and the role of religion in women's lives:

Only by putting religion back into women's history can we attain a full understanding of the "female world of love and ritual" [which Carroll Smith-Rosenberg evokes so powerfully]. When church history penetrates beyond the serried ranks of bishops and rabbis, priests, preachers and theologians it will bare another sort of church. In this church, as readers of...the records of...Sunday-school teachers will know, women were far from invisible.<sup>3</sup>

American scholars have concluded that women's Sunday school teaching shaped their roles in society as well. In her study of the American Sunday schools, Anne Boylan stressed that women's opportunities to teach influenced their future careers. Many women who went overseas as foreign missionaries, and others, who became involved in suffrage at home, began their public participation as Sunday school teachers.<sup>4</sup>

Although Canadian historians have yet to address women's work in the Sunday schools, religion has come to be accepted as important in Canadian women's experiences. Several studies analyzing the activities of women reformers and missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasize the influence of religion, providing valuable insights into women's relationships with the churches.<sup>5</sup> Women's Sunday school teaching is also

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2. Thomas Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976); Philip B. Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England, 1780-1980* (Redhill, Surrey: National Christian Education Council, 1986); Anne Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

3. Gail Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 8. Malmgreen was referring to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's insightful analysis of nineteenth-century women's relationships. See "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America" in Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, ed., *Disorderly Conduct* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 53-72.

4. Boylan, *Sunday School*, and "Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. IV (October 1978), pp. 62-80.

5. Canadian scholars are only beginning to consider the impact that feminine institutions have made on the liberal Protestant churches during this period. See Ruth Compton Brouwer, "Transcending the 'Unacknowledged Quarantine': Putting Religion into Canadian Women's History," presented at the CHA and Canadian Society of Church History joint session, Queen's University, June 5, 1991, and *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Rosemary Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: The Personnel of the Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada, 1881-1925* (Kingston, Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Marguerite Van Die, "'A Women's Awakening': Evangelical Belief and Female Spirituality in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada," and Sharon Anne Cook, "'Continued and Persevering Combat': Female Evangelicalism and Social Reform in Late Nineteenth-Century Ontario," presented at the CHA, Queen's University, June 5, 1991; Diana Pedersen, "Young Women's Christian Association of Canada, 1870-1920: A Movement to

important if we are to understand fully their contributions to Canadian society, but records are scarce.<sup>6</sup> In the words of Helen Archibald, an American religious education historian, to understand women's roles in the Sunday schools we must rely on the "abundance of resources" that focus on "what should occur in the Sunday church school".<sup>7</sup> Thus, I have turned to the literature left by officials who worked for the most Canadian of all churches, the United Church of Canada, during the heyday of the religious education movement — the 1920s and 1930s. In this paper, I describe the development of women's place in the United Church Sunday school network during the early twentieth century and analyze their contributions to the teacher training programme promoted by officials. To further an understanding of women's roles, I also discuss the new theology that shaped the Sunday schools during that era. These sources have led me to conclude that, similar to the American and British counterparts of the late nineteenth century, Sunday school teaching in the Canadian Methodist, Presbyterian and United Churches in the 1920s and 1930s was indeed a women's enterprise.

Women's vital roles in the Canadian Sunday schools of the 1920s and 1930s were rooted in the origins of the Sunday school movement. Although the British philanthropist Robert Raikes has been credited with its initiation in the late eighteenth century, women were the movement's driving force. Sophia Cooke, Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More began Sunday schools among the children of the British working classes, and it is well documented that a Montreal Congregationalist woman, a Miss Hedge, hosted one of the earliest Canadian Sunday schools in her home in 1801.<sup>8</sup>

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Meet a Spiritual, Civic and National Need" (Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 1987); Lucille Marr, "Rewriting Church History: The Contributions of Women's History to the History of the Protestant Church in Canada," unpublished paper, University of Waterloo, 1987.

6. Lucy Maud Montgomery, for instance, makes numerous references to her responsibilities in the Sunday school, but never spells out what she did. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, eds., *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985), Vol. I, p. 45; Vol. II, p. 91; another Canadian Sunday school teacher, Annie Leake Tuttle, taught for 50 years, but says nothing in her memoirs about her experiences in the Sunday school. Marilyn Whiteley, "Pleasing Incidents: The Life and Letters of Annie Leake Tuttle," unpublished manuscript presented to the Waterloo History Group, January 16, 1992.

7. Helen A. Archibald, "History of Religious Education 1850-1950: A Documentary Trail," *Religious Education*, Vol. LXXVIII, no. 4 (Fall 1983), p. 412. See also Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: Two Hundred Years of the Sunday School* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1980), p. x.

8. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability*, pp. 24-25, 147, 160; Cliff, *The Rise and Development*, p. 25; Boylan, *Sunday School*, pp. 3-4; E.D. Silcox, "Sunday School Work of the Congregational Church in Canada," *The Encyclopedia of Sunday Schools and Religious Education*, Vol. I, ed. J.T. McFarland et al. (New York and London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1915), p. 286; Reverend John Wood, *Memoir of Henry Wilkes* (Montreal: F.E. Grafton, 1887), pp. 37-38.

The Canadian Sunday school movement grew through the efforts of countless women who instituted Sunday schools to teach children unable to attend the day schools. Respected Canadian clergymen such as Henry Bland and Egerton Ryerson observed the growth of the Sunday school movement in Canada and eventually recognized the potential that the schools held for the churches.<sup>9</sup> As the Puritan idea of childhood depravity gave way to the concept of Christian nurture put forth by the American theologian Horace Bushnell, the Methodist and Presbyterian churches began to institute Sunday schools. Proponents of Christian nurture believed that a profession of faith and church membership were the natural results of Christian teaching. Cultivating children's religious lives to promote the gradual growth of their faith came to be seen as the responsibility of Sunday school teachers.<sup>10</sup>

The theology of Christian nurture gave women a new position in the churches. Women had been running Sunday schools from their homes and even in church basements for decades, but it was only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as the churches adopted the Sunday schools, that women's roles were acknowledged. Women came to be preferred as Sunday school teachers both in their perceived natural role as child-rearers and for their moral influence on society.<sup>11</sup> Despite the significant role that the Sunday schools played in the creation of future church members, the downstairs programme was accorded only "leftover" energy by most of the clergy and male members.

A new religious education movement arose in the United States in the early twentieth century seeking to change the peripheral status of the Sunday schools. The Religious Education Association, formed in 1903 under the leadership of William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, aimed to professionalize the Sunday schools. The religious educators advocated progressive educational methods and other insights based upon liberal

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9. Anne Boylan, "The Nursery of the Church': Evangelical Protestant Sunday Schools, 1820-1880" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1973), p. 63; Alison Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching" in Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority*, Vol. I (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 50; Greer, "The Sunday Schools of Upper Canada", pp. 173, 175-176, 178-179; R.D. Gidney, "Elementary Education in Upper Canada: A Reassessment," *Ontario History*, Vol. LXV, no. 3 (1973), pp. 176-177; Brown, "The Sunday School Movement," pp. 20-21, 90, 146, 150-151; Goldwin French, "The Evangelical Creed in Canada" in W.L. Morton, *The Shield of Achilles: Aspects of Canada in the Victorian Age* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 72; Semple, "The Nurture and Admonition," pp. 158, 170-171; Samuel D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), p. 261.

10. Horace Bushnell was the father of the theology of Christian nurture. See *Christian Nurture*, reprinted from the 1861 edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979). For further discussion on the theology of Christian nurture, see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), pp. 121-164; Boylan, *Sunday School*, pp. 133-165. While Semple analyzed the development of the theology of Christian nurture among the Canadian Methodists in "Nurture and Admonition," he failed to acknowledge the crucial role of women in this area of church life.

11. Boylan, "The Nursery," pp. 237-239.

Protestantism and the social sciences. A major goal was to interest men in training boys as future church leaders. Canadian Methodist and Presbyterian clergymen were inspired by the American movement and began to look more closely at their own Sunday schools. Both denominations gave their Boards of Religious Education a higher profile and the Boards began to take more directive roles in the churches. By 1919, the Methodists and Presbyterians had joined with the Anglicans, the Baptists, the YWCA and the YMCA to form the Religious Education Council of Canada to further their goal of initiating a more professional mood in the Sunday schools.<sup>12</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s, officials encouraged local Sunday school workers to improve the quality of their youth programmes. For the religious educators, events such as the Monday night gatherings held in the basement of the Laurel, Ontario, United Church lacked the professional tone they desired. Laurel was typical in that, although the activities were geared for the young people, parents often stayed for the meetings themselves. The programme usually was based on a topic related to Christian faith and living outlined in the monthly church youth magazine, and the presentation often was dull. A leader would simply read the printed topic. The highlight of the evening would be the socializing that took place at the end of the meeting.<sup>13</sup>

Officials were dubious about the educational value of such events. They preferred age-specific groups taught by teachers trained in modern educational methods. In 1920, Charles Morgan, a Methodist field secretary in Saskatchewan, wrote to his denomination's Board of Religious Education complaining that the "weak link" in the new religious education movement was the local Sunday school superintendent:

Until these men, upon whose co-operation we depend so much, are better informed, we shall not make the progress we desire.... [F]or the sake of the work itself and the needs of the Board, we should make a systematic effort to cultivate the superintendents of the Sunday Schools who too often are men without vision and without a programme.<sup>14</sup>

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12. Margaret Prang, "'The Girl God Would Have Me Be': The Canadian Girls in Training 1915-1939," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. LXVI, no. 2 (June 1985), pp. 155-156; Dorothy Jean Furnish, "Women in Religious Education, Pioneers for Women in Professional Ministry" in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds., *Women and Religion in America*, Vol. 3 (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), pp. 311-312. See also Stephen A. Schmidt, *A History of the Religious Education Association* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1983). Patricia Dirks has discussed the professionalization of religious education and the formation in 1919 of the Religious Education Council of Canada in "Finding the 'Canadian' Way: Origins of the Religious Education Council of Canada," *Studies in Religion*, Vol. XVI, no. 3 (Summer 1987), p. 304.

13. United Church of Canada Archives [hereafter UCA], Victoria University, Toronto, Neil Banks, *Laurel United Church* (n.p., n.d.), p. 52.

14. UCA, Methodist Church of Canada [hereafter MCC], Board of Religious Education [hereafter BRE], *Minutes* (1923-1925), p. 134, quoted in Brown, "The Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Church in Canada", p. 82.

It became the passion of the religious educators to see youth meetings such as those held in the Laurel Church replaced by new programmes taught by individuals trained in modern educational methods.

Hoping to professionalize the Sunday schools, national officials encouraged local congregations and presbyteries to establish new patterns of organization. Indeed, one of the major goals of the Methodist and Presbyterian officials who supported church union was an efficiently planned Sunday school network.<sup>15</sup> Each conference, presbytery and local congregation was urged to create a religious education committee. Each congregation then would be accountable to a presbytery which in turn would be responsible to a conference. All eleven conferences ultimately were to answer to the 79-member national United Church Board of Religious Education.<sup>16</sup>

The new model was reminiscent of the hierarchical structure that had been developed in the elementary school system in the late nineteenth century. The national board encouraged Sunday schools to appoint as many of the following officers as their personnel resources would allow: superintendent, secretary, treasurer, librarian, music director, superintendents of the various departments, presidents of young people's and adult Bible classes, missionary secretary and temperance secretary.<sup>17</sup> Having adopted the favoured pedagogical method of grading children by age, men continued to assume the administrative positions, leaving women to do most of the teaching, particularly in the lower grades. In short, the Sunday schools mirrored the elementary schools where "women taught; men managed."<sup>18</sup>

The 1929 slate of officers and teachers in the Springvale Methodist Sunday school reflected this pattern. On January 8, the executive committee of the Sunday school met for their annual reorganization meeting. Reverend E.W. Brearly chaired the gathering and a young man, Arthur Harvey, was elected secretary for the evening. True to form, men were appointed to most of the administrative positions while women were nominated for most of the teaching roles. Of eight administrative posts, men filled six. In contrast, women taught seven of the nine Sunday school classes and there was no teacher at all for the senior boys. Men may have directed the Sunday school, but women nurtured most of the children in the classrooms, including the older girls.<sup>19</sup>

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15. John Webster Grant has suggested that these denominations' interest in new techniques of Christian education was one of the issues that brought them together. *The Canadian Experience of Church Union* (London: Lutterworth, 1967), p. 28.

16. UCA, United Church of Canada [hereafter UCC], BRE, *Minutes* (April 22, 1926).

17. UCA, UCC, *Yearbook* (1926), pp. 379-380.

18. John Abbott, "Accomplishing 'A Man's Task': Rural Women Teachers, Male Culture, and the School Inspectorate in Turn-of-the-Century Ontario," *Ontario History*, Vol.LXXVIII, no. 4 (December 1986), p. 316; Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching," pp. 50-51.

19. UCA, Springvale Methodist/United Sunday School, *Minutes*, 1929.

There is no record of the Springvale senior boys' activities that year, but in other congregations, when there were no men available to teach, the responsibility fell to women. At Forest United Church, Margaret Livingston taught a group of young men. Reverend Andrew Lane, their pastor during the 1930s, recalled:

Perhaps the outstanding feature of the Sunday School was a Bible Class of around forty young men with Mrs. J.D. Livingston as teacher. Mrs. Livingston had a remarkable influence on these young men and held their loyalty for years.<sup>20</sup>

Mrs. George Weir, the pastor's wife at Saint Andrew's United Church in Ripley, Ontario, taught a similar class of young men. While men were running the Sunday schools, boys were being trained in the classrooms, at least in a cursory manner, in the more feminine aspects of church life. Mrs. Weir's boys served their mothers and sisters at the annual grandmother, mother and daughter banquet.<sup>21</sup>

Officials estimated that there were some 70,000 teachers in United Church Sunday schools during the 1920s and 1930s, most of them women.<sup>22</sup> Despite women's willingness to serve, however, religious educators were sceptical about their suitability for the task. In 1923, Charles Myers, a Presbyterian religious educator later to serve as administrator of leadership training for the United Church Sunday schools, described the average Sunday school worker to his denomination's Board of Sabbath Schools:

[T]he average Sunday School teacher...is a married woman, thirty-seven years of age, with two children of her own, and already burdened with two other offices in the church. She has had only two years in the High School, and has had no training whatever for the teaching of religion.<sup>23</sup>

Convinced that most teachers were inept, the United Church Board of Religious Education and its officials planned an extensive leadership training programme. An analysis of the programme and its administration reveals that it was mostly women who took advantage of this opportunity; indeed, it gave women new leadership roles.

With church union, Charles Myers was appointed head of leadership training in the new United Church. Immediately, Myers and his committee of twenty introduced what they called the Standard Training School in Ontario and during that first year some sixty centres hosted schools. Sunday school workers in Toronto, Hamilton, Kingston, Ottawa, Middlesex, St. Catherines, Cobourg, Goderich, St. Thomas, Port Elgin, Lake Couchiching, Owen Sound,

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20. Eleanor Nielsen, compiler, *Pioneers and Preachers: A History of the Forest United Church* (Forest, Ontario: J.B. Pole Printing, 1977).

21. *St. Andrew's United Church, Ripley, Ontario, 1886-1986* (Mildmay, Ontario: The Town & Country Crier, 1986), p. 35.

22. *The New Outlook* (April 27, 1927), p. 8; UCA, UCC, *Yearbook* (1929), p. 178.

23. UCA, Presbyterian Church of Canada [hereafter PCC], Board of Sabbath Schools and Young People's Societies [hereafter BSSYP], *Minutes* (April 1923), p. 2.

and even as far north as Temagami, Temiskaming, and Bruce Mines organized training schools.<sup>24</sup>

The schools were held from three days to a week with each course including ten fifty-minute sessions. To obtain a credit, a teacher was required to attend all ten study periods and then to write an examination.<sup>25</sup> The curriculum was based on George Coe's up-dated interpretation of Stanley Hall's psychology of youth and the pedagogical work of John Dewey. The core courses, "The Pupil" and "The Principles of Teaching", clearly stressed the significance of each stage in a child's development; the Biblical classes also emphasized a child-centred approach to learning.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to the traditional focus on a one-time conversion experience, teachers were expected to be in touch with each stage of the child's growth and to nurture their faith development accordingly. Teachers could take a wide variety of elective courses, including Biblical studies, missionary and temperance education, grade-specific curriculum, story-telling and drama. Teachers' manuals such as Mabel Crews Ringland's *Tested Methods for Teachers of Juniors* further instructed teachers on the use of these new ways of teaching.<sup>27</sup>

With vigorous promotion of the teacher training programme, many Sunday school teachers enrolled. By 1929, nearly half of the some 70,000 teachers and workers in the United Church of Canada had taken at least one leadership training course, and statistics indicate that most of these trainees were women. In December 1925, *The Teacher's Monthly* indicated that fifty women and seven men, from nineteen urban and rural churches across Canada, received a credit. In the winter of 1930, *Progress*, the organ of the Toronto School of Religious Education, showed a similar ratio of male and female participants. Fifty-three United Church women and five men achieved the honour list of 85 percent or higher in their examinations at the fall training schools.<sup>28</sup> Women's interest in this teacher training illustrates that Sunday school teaching was a women's enterprise. Indeed, the modern methods validated what women had been doing in the Sunday schools for generations.

Besides formalizing their contributions as Sunday school teachers, women also found the training schools to be the one church-run institution allowing them opportunities to serve in leadership positions. Although the

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24. UCA, UCC, BRE, *Minutes* (August 31, 1926), p. 15; (May 5, 1927), pp. 124-125.

25. *The New Outlook* (February 10, 1926), p. 21.

26. *The New Standard Teacher Training Course* (Toronto: R. Douglas Fraser, 1917); George A. Coe, *A Social Theory of Religious Education* (New York: C. Scribner, 1917), p. 66; Leila G. Mitchell McKee, "Voluntary Youth Organizations in Toronto, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. dissertation, York University, 1982), pp. 391-392.

27. UCA, UCC, Board of Christian Education [hereafter BCE] Collection, Leadership Training, Box 17, File 109, "Trained Teachers of Religion", 1929; Mabel Crews Ringland, *Tested Methods for Teachers of Juniors* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1924).

28. *The New Outlook* (April 27, 1927), p. 8; UCA, UCC, *Yearbook* (1929), p. 178; *Teacher's Monthly*, Vol. IV, no. 12 (December 1925), p. 735; *Progress*, Vol. I, no. 3 (January-February 1930), n. p.



adoption of the Sunday schools as church agencies of evangelism had stripped women of their initial leadership roles by the middle of the nineteenth century, the emphasis on teacher training permitted women to regain status as teachers of teachers. In the United Church, the male instructors were usually clergy, but at least half of the instructors at the Standard training schools were female.<sup>29</sup> In the Standard Training School held in Middlesex in 1926, Mrs. F. Crowe of the Byron congregation, Mrs. F. Calhoun of the Glendale congregation, and Miss D'Avignon of the YWCA in London taught along with Myers and Rev. J.M. Finlay of the Ontario Boys' Work Board. Olive Sparling, a member of the Women's Missionary Society and the Board of Religious Education, recalled Mrs. Crowe as being "a special teacher" who continually encouraged would-be teachers, young and old, to take the official leadership training courses. "The rule in that little church [Byron] was that nobody taught unless they had what we call the basic courses, courses that we had studied, and wrote exams for, and passed."<sup>30</sup> With the enthusiasm of women like Mrs. Crowe, it is small wonder that Myers recalled "a most delightful time" in Middlesex.<sup>31</sup>

Women occasionally developed careers out of their roles as teachers of teachers. Mary Eadie is an example of one such woman. An office worker by profession, Eadie had discovered her gift for teaching children Sunday mornings in her local congregation: "To see Miss Eadie teaching a class", wrote an observer, "is to have a lifelong memory of how vivid and vital character-forming teaching may be." From 1918 until 1923, she also volunteered as the general secretary of the Toronto Graded Union for Sunday school workers which had been organized to train teachers of Sunday school children. By 1923, in keeping with the burgeoning Canadian religious education movement, the Union renamed itself the Toronto School of Religious Education (TSRE) and hired Eadie on a half-time basis as its Executive Secretary. Eadie gave up her clerical work, devoting her other half-time to writing curriculum materials for the uniting churches. The school grew under Eadie's leadership and, by 1925, the TSRE had engaged her services full-time. When Eadie was forced to resign due to ill health in 1931, the TSRE newsletter, *Progress*, published the following tribute to her years of leadership:

Under Miss Eadie, T.S.R.E. grew from one small training school of less than one hundred members to an organization comprising seven schools with a total membership of well over one thousand.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Boylan, *Sunday School*, pp. 123-124; *Progress*, Vol. III, no. 5 (November-December 1932), p. 6.

30. Interview with Olive Sparling, Toronto, Ontario, September 24, 1991.

31. *The New Outlook* (February 10, 1926), pp. 20-21.

32. UCA, Mary Eadie, Biographical File; BCE Collection, Children's Work, Box 2, File 1, "The Junior Department of the Church School"; United Church of Canada Standing Committees, Deaconess Order and Women Workers Collection, Box 1, letter from Winnifred Thomas to deaconesses, April 20, 1933; letter from Mary Eadie to deaconesses, March 17, 1936; UCC, BRE, *Minutes* (September 2-3, 1925); *Progress*, Vol. I, no. 1 (September 1929), n. p.; Vol. II, no. 3 (May-June 1931), p. 6.

Women flocked to the training schools. Most discovered colleagues with similar interests and their work in the Sunday schools was validated with credits and special ceremonies acknowledging their successes. Some, like Eadie, also found occasions to develop their skills as teachers of teachers. In addition, the Sunday schools offered women trained in Canada's normal schools further opportunities to pursue their vocations as teachers. Marriage would limit most women's careers in the public schools, but they could continue their teaching in the Sunday schools.

The religious educators saw the potential for training prospective elementary school teachers in the rudiments of religious education and they foresaw the influence these teachers could have. If they could reach young women training in the normal schools, they had the potential to influence many communities, for the normal schools drew people into the various centres and, in many cases, sent them out again to all parts of their respective provinces and Canada.<sup>33</sup> Well aware of the role that the normal schools played in spreading ideas and teaching techniques, in 1925 officials requested of the Ontario and Quebec normal schools that they be allowed to offer courses in Biblical training, usually "The Life of Christ", averaging one hour per week for twenty weeks. That year over 2,500 normal school students took these classes and, by 1930, similar courses were offered in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.<sup>34</sup>

The normal schools were an obvious place to prepare young women for roles as volunteer teachers in the religious education departments of the churches. Canadian normal schools had been instituted in the mid-nineteenth century as part of the North American teacher training movement.<sup>35</sup> These institutes prepared future teachers with modern pedagogical principles and the new psychology. Although Canadian public schools would not include these new ideas in their methods and curriculum until the late 1930s, the philosophy of religious education was based on these modern concepts. In 1933, for instance, *The Counsellor*, a magazine widely read by Sunday school teachers, published two articles by Nellie Burgess instructing educators on how to use the new methods. Burgess, who was an employee of the Quebec Religious Education Council, informed readers that their function was one of guidance. She discouraged teachers from providing answers; rather, she encouraged them to guide their pupils in the discovery of their own solutions. Burgess invited her readers to help their pupils discuss issues and then to invite the

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33. Alison Prentice, "'Like Friendly Atoms in Chemistry?': Women and Men at Normal School in Mid-Nineteenth Century Toronto" in David Keane and Colin Read, eds., *Old Ontario: Essays in Honour of J.M.S. Careless* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1990), pp. 285-317; *The New Outlook* (April 27, 1927), p. 8.

34. *The New Outlook* (May 19, 1926), p. 20; UCA, BCE Collection, Leadership Training, Box 17, file 107, "Normal Schools and the Standard Leadership Curriculum"; UCC, *Yearbook* (1930), p. 232.

35. Prentice, "Like Friendly Atoms in Chemistry?", p. 287.

children to collaborate in searching for answers.<sup>36</sup> This method reflected Dewey's principle that competition and individualism must give way to cooperation.<sup>37</sup> As this illustration suggests, during the interwar years Canada's Protestant churches were more amenable to introducing progressive ideas than were the public school systems. Church bureaucracies were less complex than the elementary school administrations and, thus, were more amenable to changes.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, there was less supervision in the Sunday schools and teachers enjoyed more freedom.

It appears that many elementary school teachers welcomed the opportunity to use their knowledge of new educational methods in the Sunday schools. R.P. Stouffer reported to the United Church newspaper, *The New Outlook*:

The young women of the normal schools are now going out as never before to impart religious knowledge to their pupils.... More than one-half of the [some 5,000] credits given for...the Standard Training Course are going to normal school students, the public school teachers.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, a stint in elementary school teaching was often the prelude to a lifelong commitment as a volunteer in the local Sunday school. Time and again, religious educators praised young rural school teachers for their willing leadership in the Sunday schools and mid-week clubs:<sup>40</sup>

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the work of a girl in a lonely country school. Here she is teacher, but in many instances, much more than a teacher, for she is a sort of general servant of the community, giving leadership in every good work. She is found teaching Sunday-school, where no one had thought of it.<sup>41</sup>

Jean Stewart's experience provides a case in point. When Stewart completed her teacher training at the Saskatchewan normal school in the mid-1920s, she accepted a position in Estlin, Saskatchewan, where she immediately started a CGIT club. This was a logical step for a young woman who was still in awe of her own CGIT leaders. She recalled fondly the influence that one of them, Bona Mills, had had on her and her friends when they attended CGIT camps as teenagers. Stewart wished for similar experiences for the girls in the rural school where she taught, knowing that if they were able

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36. *The Counsellor* (February 1933), pp. 52-53; (April 1933), pp. 36-37.

37. M.J. Osterman, "The Two Hundred Year Struggle for Protestant Education Curriculum Theory in Religious Education," *The Journal of the Religious Education Association of America* (1980), pp. 536-537; Robert Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1982), pp. 51-53; 164-167.

38. Prang, "The Girl God Would Have Me Be", p. 164.

39. *The New Outlook* (April 27, 1927), p. 8.

40. For instance, Oliver Jackson praised public school teachers in Newfoundland for their contribution to religious education. UCA, BCE, *Minutes* (April 1937), pp. 77-78. See also *Teacher's Monthly*, Vol. III, no. 11 (November 1924), p. 644.

41. *The New Outlook* (December 2, 1925), p. 25.

to attend CGIT camps and conferences, their horizons would become much broader than those normally offered in their communities.<sup>42</sup> Stewart eventually served with the Women's Missionary Society in West China and Trinidad where she also used the CGIT programme to teach girls.

In marked contrast to the abundance of women willing to teach in the Sunday schools, there was a chronic shortage of male teachers. The National Boys' Work Secretary, David Forsyth, was certain that "the real failure in Boys' Work" was "the failure of Christian men to interest themselves in boys." In his 1937 report to the United Church Board of Religious Education, he wrote:

In too many Churches one finds Boys' Work not being done at all..., or farmed out to other organizations because the Church members are not willing to accept the responsibility for the boys of their church. The discovery of leadership is the greatest need that exists in our United Church Boys' Work.<sup>43</sup>

Other religious educators echoed Forsyth's perception of the situation. Oliver Jackson, Superintendent of Missions and Religious Education in Newfoundland, found that many of the boys under his jurisdiction had joined non-church groups, especially Scouts and Cubs. Jackson was convinced that the low interest in the United Church programme was directly related to "the lack of the right type of leader, apart from the minister".<sup>44</sup> But who was the "right type of leader"? Why was it so difficult to find men to teach in the Sunday schools? A look at the theology of Christian nurture and its feminine underpinnings gives some ideological explanations for the persistence of Sunday school teaching as a women's enterprise.

By the 1920s, the uniting churches had practised Horace Bushnell's theology of Christian nurture for half a century.<sup>45</sup> Religious educators believed that conversion and church membership were the natural outcomes of teaching children Christian precepts. The role of the teacher was to "crystallize the Christian influences of the preceding years into the definite action of accepting Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour and the Lord of life."<sup>46</sup> Melville Wright wrote in *The New Outlook*:

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42. Interview with Jean Stewart, Toronto, Ontario, October 8, 1991.

43. UCA, UCC, BCE, *Minutes* (April 1937), p. 72.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

45. Semple dealt with Canadian Methodist thought on Christian nurture in "The Nurture and Admonition of the Lord", pp. 157-176. While there are no similar studies on the development of Presbyterian thought on this issue, John McNeill pointed out that John Thompson, the first Presbyterian Sabbath school convener, held to Bushnell's view of Christian nurture. See *The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1875-1925* (Toronto: Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1925), pp. 158-159.

46. *Teacher's Monthly*, Vol. III, no. 11 (November 1924), pp. 644-645; see also *The New Outlook* (April 6, 1927), p. 6; UCA, UCC, *Yearbook* (1930), p. 230.

If during months of honest effort ministers and teachers have been interpreting the essential truths of the Gospel in their relation to youth, there will be needed no strange or unusual excitement and no emotional upheavals. In a perfectly natural normal way young people may be led through an experience that will stand out as satisfying.<sup>47</sup>

Teachers and pastors were encouraged to use Wright's book in the special membership classes which were often held during the six weeks prior to Easter for the "Easter ingathering" of youthful members.<sup>48</sup>

No longer an auxiliary of the church, religious education had become accepted by many "as essentially and preeminently church work". Some went so far as to point out that preaching and teaching were given equal emphasis in the New Testament, concluding that the teacher had "pastoral as well as educational functions".<sup>49</sup>

The task of the Sunday School is one with the task of the whole Christian Church. It is to interpret God, particularly to the children and youth of the community.... One could not imagine a more wonderful opportunity or a more sacred responsibility.<sup>50</sup>

As religious education became an integral part of church programmes, it became of momentous consequence to officials that laymen be involved in the Sunday schools. Teachers were seen as role models who would nurture young people, nudging them towards a relationship with God and the church. This role of mentor was no new concept for women, for they had long exercised guidance of girls and often of boys.<sup>51</sup> To the religious educators of the 1920s, however, it was equally important for boys to be taught by men. Ringland wrote:

[W]e should have...men teachers for boys and women for girls, for no boy, however he may love a lady teacher, ever aims to be like her. A strong, manly man not only supplies an idea for the boy to look up to and measure himself by, but makes him realize religion is a manly thing.<sup>52</sup>

It was mentioned earlier that this goal of finding enough men to nurture the boys in the churches did not materialize. Religious educators' efforts to encourage more men to teach in the Sunday schools and religious education departments were doomed to failure, for the concept of Christian nurture was based on a feminine paradigm. A pamphlet, published by the United Church Board of Religious Education in 1929 to publicize the Standard Leadership

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47. *The New Outlook* (February 16, 1927), p. 8; see also *Climbing Life's Highway: A Study of What Church Membership Means* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1926).

48. UCA, UCC, BRE, *Minutes* (1928), pp. 340-341.

49. H.H. Fout, "Teacher, Sunday-School, Pastoral Duty and Opportunity of the Sunday School Teacher," *Encyclopedia of Sunday Schools*, Vol. III, pp. 1074-1076.

50. *Teacher's Monthly*, Vol. IV, no. 4 (April 1925), p. 215.

51. Boylan, "Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century," pp. 62-80; Prang described the CGIT leaders' roles as mentors in the 1920s and 1930s in "The Girl God Would Have Me Be".

52. Ringland, *Tested Methods*, p. 25.

Training Course for teachers, illustrates the feminine philosophy of teaching. In describing the sculpture reproduced on the front of the pamphlet, Charles Myers vetoed the male prototype of leadership, clearly advocating a feminine model:

It would be difficult to find a more appropriate frontispiece for our work. It is taken from the memorial erected to Alice Freeman Palmer [President of Wellesley College from 1885-1910].... The sculptor Daniel C. French has wrought two figures — One is that of a young girl who carries with her, as she starts out into life, the lamp of Truth and the book of Knowledge. The other is the protecting, brooding spirit of Alma Mater. No stalwart figure strides ahead obliterating the student's vision. Alma Mater walks beside the girl, a little to the rear, with only a hand pointing the way. Should she stumble, Alma Mater will be there to help — not a few paces in advance, with eyes turned forward, oblivious to the needs of the girl.<sup>53</sup>

Whether men or women taught children, they were expected to use a feminine style of leadership, nurturing children into the faith. In the religious educators' eyes, the art of nurture was not synonymous with being female. In contrast to the word female which denotes sex, the religious educators defined feminine as the ability to nurture found most often in women, but also in men.<sup>54</sup>

The 1926 "Leadership Training Supplement" issued by *The Canadian Mentor*, a magazine for teachers of boys, illustrates how national officials attempted to acquaint men with the feminine style of leadership. The potential leader was warned against being an administrator or an organizer; rather, he was encouraged to be a mentor, or "a friend and sage advisor", who would meet with his boys on Sunday as their Sunday school teacher and also at a mid-week meeting. The executives further encouraged leaders to avoid the temptation of doing things for boys. Instead, his role was to help boys to help themselves:

Boy leadership is not concerned with the running of a boys' club, but rather with the best development of individual lives.... The position of a Mentor is that of a more mature and more experienced member of the group who acts as counsellor and guide.... Sharing life with boys will involve entering into every interest and activity of the group in a friendly, sympathetic spirit. It will mean leading out in many lines of activity in order to help boys see their

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53. UCA, UCC, BCE Collection, Leadership Training, "Trained Teachers of Religion", 1929. Alice Freeman Palmer was one of the women highlighted in the CGIT publication *A Girls' Book of Friends* (Toronto: National Girls' Work Board of the Religious Education Council of Canada, 1929). See also Patricia A. Palmieri, "Here was Fellowship: A Social Portrait of Academic Women at Wellesley College, 1895-1920" in Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, eds., *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 233-257.

54. Caroline Walker Bynum has described this distinction well although her analysis was in the context of the spirituality of the Middle Ages, a very different time and place than twentieth-century religious education in Canada. See *Jesus as Mother, Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 167-168.

possibilities and then patiently coaching and guiding the members of the group as they seek to learn — by practice — how they may best do these things for themselves.<sup>55</sup>

Some men achieved these goals. Frank Fidler, who attended Younger Methodist Church in Winnipeg in the 1920s, remembers his boys' club leader George Farwell as being a formative influence on his life. It was Farwell's example as a youth leader that persuaded Fidler to change career directions from engineering to the ministry.<sup>56</sup> Men like Farwell, however, were the exception. The paucity of male teachers lamented by Forsyth and Jackson suggests that the feminine art of nurture came most easily to women. Such women as Mrs. Crowe (from the Byron Sunday school), Jean Stewart's mentor, Bona Mills (who later married Rev. John Griffith and continued her career as a teacher in the local Sunday schools),<sup>57</sup> and Mary Eadie (the leader of the Toronto School of Religious Education) were far more visible on the local scene than were men.

While officials worried about the shortage of male mentors in the church, Christian educational theories of teaching by nurturing formalized what women had always done. Nancy Chodorow, in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, a study of the socialization of gender roles, argued that "women's mothering produces itself cyclically":

Women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother.... By contrast, women as mothers (and men as not-mothers) produce sons whose nurturant capacities and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed.<sup>58</sup>

Chodorow's theory may apply as well to women cultivating girls as future Sunday school teachers. Having been "prepared psychologically for mothering through the developmental situation in which they grew up, and in which women have mothered them," many girls have received gratification from nurturing and have learned to be successful at it.<sup>59</sup> This may partially explain why many girls have followed in their female teachers' footsteps to become teachers themselves.

Catharine McKeen's experience illustrates Chodorow's theory as it applies to the Sunday schools. McKeen remembers the important role that both her mother and a favourite teacher played in her life through their work in the Sunday school that she attended as a child in Sherbrooke, Nova Scotia, in the 1920s and 1930s. McKeen's mother, Margaret Cameron McKeen, took her daughter to Sunday school and modelled involvement in the church,

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55. *Canadian Mentor* (November 1926), p. 3.

56. Interview with Frank Fidler, Toronto, Ontario, October 8, 1991.

57. Interview with Gwyn Griffith, Toronto, Ontario, March 6, 1989.

58. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 7.

59. Chodorow, *ibid.*, p. 39.

teaching Sunday school, leading Mission bands and contributing to the Ladies' Aid and the Women's Missionary Society. McKeen's CGIT leader, Jeanette Russell, was another important figure in her life. Catharine was a member of CGIT from the time she turned thirteen years in 1933 until she went to university three years later. McKeen recalls CGIT group life as a time when she and her friends could share their experiences with their leader. For her, Russell was a sympathetic listener to whom she could turn when she needed an adult ear.<sup>60</sup> According to Chodorow's theory, it was natural for girls like McKeen to follow in their mothers' and female teachers' footsteps. In the Sunday schools, as in the home, women often produced daughters and students with nurturing capacities and the desire to nurture. McKeen, indeed, would dedicate many of her adult years to teaching children and working with children's programmes.

In contrast to girls like McKeen, the majority of boys looked outside of the church for models. Just as they worked hard at separating themselves from their mothers, they differentiated themselves from their female teachers.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, religious educators believed it to be important for boys to have male mentors in the Sunday schools. Yet it was almost impossible to convince men that they had a responsibility to teach boys. Religious educators, to their chagrin, discovered that policies and decrees made little impact on a system in which women trained girls as the future lay leaders in the church. Men may have held the more prestigious administrative positions, but officials were aware that it was women who were nurturing future church members, the majority of whom were girls, in the Sunday school departments.

For the women, their Sunday school teaching gave them numerous opportunities to develop confidence in their abilities. Women had a great deal of freedom to exercise leadership in the classroom and their opinions were welcome in re-organization and planning meetings. Such rituals as the installation services held in many congregations at the beginning of the Sunday school year further validated women's contributions and experiences as leaders in the churches. With the feminine paradigm of Christian nurture at the heart of the Sunday school movement, women found opportunities to use their abilities as teachers in the local classrooms and as teachers of teachers. Sunday school teaching in the United Church of Canada was, indeed, a women's enterprise.

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60. Interview with Catherine McKeen, Mississauga, Ontario, August 25, 1991.

61. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 36, 173.