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The Time is Come! Millenarianism in Colonial Prince Edward Island

In Prince Edward Island the early decades of the nineteenth century were a period of heavy immigration. As ship after ship disgorged its human cargo upon the shores and wharves of the colony the population increased steadily from approximately 4,500 in 1800 to 47,034 in 1841.¹ It was a difficult time of change and adjustment for these generally shabby little bands of refugees from another world. Lord Selkirk, who brought out a large contingent of Highland settlers to Prince Edward Island in 1803, observed that the “horror” of the first impressions of the new terrain often “completely unnerved the mind of the settler, and rendered him incapable of every vigorous exertion”.² A number of other early commentators echoed these views. J. L. Lewellin warned prospective emigrants in 1832 that the wrenching experience of leaving “the scenes of childhood and the endured associations of maturer age” was, to those of a sensitive disposition, tantamount to “giving up the ghost” and he candidly advised those who felt “a great aversion” to leaving their native land that it would be better for them to stay where they were.³

A further account of the vicissitudes of emigration was penned by John Stevenson, a Scottish weaver. Shortly after his arrival in New Glasgow in 1820 he composed a poem which expressed his experiences as a new settler. As he reflected upon what he and his fellow-emigrants had endured he was reminded of the tribulations of the children of Israel after their exodus from Egypt. His verses suggest that in the beginning many of the emigrants were almost overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge which confronted them, and that, like the Hebrew children, they oftentimes repented of their decision and, in some cases, actually cursed the “promised land”.⁴ Unfor-

- 1 The first organized British census of the Island, in 1798, which placed the population at 4,372, can be found in Duncan Campbell, *History of Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown, 1875), pp. 207-224; for the P.E.I. census of 1841, see *Journal of the House of Assembly*, appendix N, 1842.
- 2 The Earl of Selkirk, *On Emigration and the State of the Highlands* (London, 1805), p. 183.
- 3 J. L. Lewellin, “Emigration; Prince Edward Island”, reprinted in D. C. Harvey, ed., *Journeys to the Island of St. Jean* (Toronto, 1955), p. 186.
- 4 The poem by John Stevenson, as well as the information regarding the circumstances of its writing, appeared in the Charlottetown *Guardian*, 29 June 1953.

unately there is a scarcity of accounts of the same genre as Stevenson's. While it can be assumed that for most settlers the initial period of colonization was a time of severe testing, few of them recorded their more intimate thoughts and feelings for posterity. Preoccupied as they were with the arduous business of getting established and simply surviving, they had little time for writing memoirs. Consequently, the attempt to understand and depict the immigrant experience leads invariably to the exploration of other, less direct, sources.

In the case of one large group of Scottish Highland settlers on Prince Edward Island, one such avenue of investigation is an examination of the unique ministry of the Reverend Donald McDonald. McDonald, a Church of Scotland clergyman with a flair for independent thought and action, left the Highlands in 1824 at the age of forty-one. After a two year stint in Cape Breton — where, according to local oral tradition, he scandalized some of the resident Presbyterians with his drinking bouts⁵ — he arrived on Prince Edward Island. It appears that by this point in his career McDonald's life was on a downward spiral of failure. Rumors to the effect that he was “an outcast from the Church of Scotland” had been spread abroad, possibly by some of the Seceder Presbyterians in the area,⁶ and in his personal life were clear signs of defeat and demoralization. Soon after his arrival on the Island he gave evidence of deep personal distress and, by early 1828, his condition had become so acute that he had discontinued preaching.⁷ “The burden of my sins was almost unbearable”, he later testified. “I was fully convinced that my condition in the past was that of a man dead in sins — liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever”.⁸ Shortly thereafter he underwent a profound conversion experience which brought a joyous sense of release from sin and guilt, as well as the conviction that he had been divinely appointed for the performance of some great task. Two days after his conversion McDonald was lying awake in bed in the home of one of his parishioners when he heard a voice utter loudly and distinctly, “The time is come”! At first he was alarmed and troubled by this pronouncement, apparently believing that it signified his end was near. Later, however, he looked back on this incident as the supernatural announcement of the

5 The informant, a resident of Loch Bras D'or Area, Cape Breton, wishes to remain anonymous. Perhaps only those who have themselves been raised in a rural area or a small town can appreciate this reluctance to speak openly of matters affecting one's family and neighbours, although they occurred one hundred and fifty years ago.

6 Murdock Lamont, *The Rev. Donald McDonald, Glimpses of His Life and Times* (Charlottetown, 1902), p. 22.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

beginning of his new work.⁹ Like Henry Alline, the charismatic New Light preacher in Nova Scotia who had experienced a similar spiritual catharsis in the 1770s, Donald McDonald gave evidence throughout his subsequent career that he believed himself to be God's special instrument. "I am," he once proclaimed, "a Trumpet in the hands of Another".¹⁰

It was shortly after his conversion in 1828 that this "Trumpet" of the Lord began to be heard across Prince Edward Island, and, judging from the response, it was a clear and compelling note which sounded. Having been recently convinced of his own salvation McDonald now became extremely convincing. Word of his powerful preaching, and of his ability to elicit animated emotional responses from his hearers,¹¹ soon spread, and during the period 1829-30 he led an enthusiastic revival. This launched McDonald on his career as the leader of a virtually autonomous religious movement on the Island. Although he always retained a nominal connection with the Church of Scotland, from the time of the revival onward McDonald deliberately kept his congregations outside the jurisdiction of any presbytery, and behaved overall in a thoroughly independent manner. His peculiar doctrines, his fervid eloquence, his impressive command of the Scriptures, his fluency in both Gaelic and English, and his imperious messianic style of leadership were well received by many of the Highland settlers and a large number of them became united in their devotion and loyalty to him in a manner which was reminiscent of the old days of clanship. By the time of his death in 1867, at the age of 84, he had attracted approximately 5,000 faithful adherents. These followers were distributed among twelve congregations and a number of smaller preaching stations across the central part of the Island, and were referred to locally as "The McDonaldites".¹²

While it is extremely difficult to identify those who were caught up in the revival of 1830, it would appear that the majority of those affected were recent immigrants from the Highlands of Scotland. One of the areas where the revival had its greatest impact was the Murray Harbour Road area about twenty miles east of Charlottetown, which later became the centre of McDonald's parish on that side of the Hillsborough River. Ewan Lamont,

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

11 Charlottetown *Palladium*, 23 November 1844 contains a good contemporary description of these spiritual exercises or "works" as they were frequently called. See also Murdock Lamont, *op. cit.*, ch. 10, p. 185 ff.

12 The Charlottetown *Islander*, 1 March 1867. In addition to his churches on the Island McDonald also had one small congregation at Tabusintac on the North Shore of New Brunswick. He visited his followers there at least twice during his lifetime, and on a number of occasions sent his Elders to minister to this mission outpost.

one of McDonald's elders who was himself converted at the time, wrote the following description of this settlement and its inhabitants.

Previous to the years 1829, 1830 both sides of the Murray Harbour Road to the shore settlements, were but wild woods, uninhabited except by a few families, who emigrated from Scotland in the year 1821. In the years first above-named, many emigrants from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, chiefly from Skye, made choice of the lands bordering on the Murray Harbour Road, as their future homes¹³

It was much the same story on the other side of the river. The DeSable-South Shore area, which was to become the principal centre of McDonald's movement west of the Hillsborough, was also in the process of being settled by Highlanders at the time the revival was in progress. John MacEachern, a young man who emigrated with his family to that part of the Island in 1830, recalled in later years:

In the Autumn of 1829 previous to our arrival the beginning of a Revival had begun to make its appearance under the preaching of the Reverend Donald McDonald Minister of the Church of Scotland, the which blessed Revival after beginning at Rustico spread over many parts of the Island and at the time of our coming had made considerable progress along from Nine Mile Creek to DeSable and in some instances to Cape Traverse, Seven Mile Bay etc. [districts along the south shore of the Island west of Charlottetown].¹⁴

MacEachern and his family were part of a large number from this area who were converted by McDonald and who remained his loyal followers throughout their lives.

While McDonald's role in kindling and fanning the fires of revival was a significant one, it was probably not his most outstanding achievement. Having set the various settlements ablaze with the ardor of spiritual excitement, the great challenge for McDonald was to provide an organizational framework as well as some kind of sustaining and guiding theological formula for his enthused followers. As a result of the revival the touch of God

13 Ewan Lamont, *Biographical Sketch of the late Rev. Donald McDonald* (Charlottetown, 1892), p. 22.

14 John MacEachern, "A Collection of Fragments of Family History" (unpublished personal journal, 1866), pp. 77-8. The original is in the private possession of the descendants of John MacEachern. There is a copy in the Prince Edward Island Collection, Robertson Library, University of Prince Edward Island.

had been wondrously experienced in many lives. This was, however, a momentary exaltation, and could easily have been succeeded by disillusionment and a speedy return to the old way of life. McDonald's great achievement was that he prevented this. He successfully convinced his followers that the revival was not merely a random occurrence, but a sign of their inclusion in God's ongoing plan. Thus, while it was McDonald as orator and revivalist who guided his followers, as individual sinners, into a new relationship with God, it was McDonald as theologian or ideologist who then proceeded to help them, as a community of immigrants, to understand their new place within the unfolding events of world history.

The basic tenets of McDonald's theology are to be found in three published works. His first, *A Treatise on the Holy Ordinance of Baptism* (Charlottetown, 1845), was a polemic against the Baptists and their practice of adult immersion. The second, *The Subjects of the Millennium* (Charlottetown, 1849), contained a lengthy elaboration of such themes as dispensationalism, Anglo-Israelism, and adventism. A final volume, *The Plan of Salvation* (Charlottetown, 1874), was published by some of McDonald's Elders from an unfinished manuscript found among his papers after his death. Like the earlier book on the millennium it was an attempt to trace the main outlines of God's dealings with mankind through the ages. One of the central and most striking components of McDonald's doctrine was his belief that the return of Christ to the earth was imminent, and that it would be followed by an era of peace and righteousness upon the earth. Over the centuries this millenarian belief has flared up at a great variety of times and places and in a variety of forms. Yet, throughout history it "has involved two distinct and somewhat paradoxical emphases".¹⁵ The first of these is a socially pessimistic outlook, or what British historian E. P. Thompson has referred to as the "chiliasm of despair".¹⁶ It anticipates the end of the worldly order and looks forward to the inauguration of a new kingdom under Christ. This belief, that Christ is to return prior to the setting up of the millenarian age, is known as premillenarianism. More optimistic is postmillenarianism, which holds that the millenium will be achieved, not by the sudden and spectacular return of Christ, but by the gradual triumph of the gospel and the rule of Christian charity in the affairs of men. According to this viewpoint Christ is scheduled to return for final judgement, but only after the thousand years have passed.

The McDonaldites were premillenarians. Their view of the world was strenuously and radically negative. They looked forward to Christ's Second

15 Ira V. Brown, "Watchers for the Second Coming: The Millenarian Tradition in America", *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 29 (1952), p. 457. See also Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York, 1970), p. 14.

16 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Middlesex, 1968), p. 130.

40 *Acadiensis*

Coming as a judgement upon their sorrowful age and hoped to reign with Him for a thousand years in a world far different than the one in which they were living. In one of his many hymns, written in the 1840s, McDonald declared:

Our journey home to glory through mournful scenes we see
The troubles that afflict us in number many be;
But when the Lord our Saviour from trouble sets us free,
We'll sing to him with praises and sweet melodious glee.

.....
The world's not worth pursuing, we cannot here remain,
It's pomp and vain allurements, bring sickness in their train
But joys of purer nature, and solid, lasting gain,
Are found in Jesus' favor, and free from grief and pain.¹⁷

McDonald's gloomy outlook was depicted even more forcibly in his *Subjects of the Millennium*, a work which appears to have taken shape in his mind throughout the 1830s and the 1840s before it was finally published in 1849. In one passage in particular, he exhausted his vocabulary in his attempt to describe the desolation of human society:

The Bible presents to our view the effects of man's disobedience and transgression, as manifested in the fallen prostrate world lying enveloped in gross darkness, ignorance, superstition, error, idolatry — polluted and defiled — corrupted and debased — full of overwhelming misery and distress — . . . full of profanity, impiety, pride, avarice, extortion, tyranny, and supercilious scorn¹⁸

Even when allowance is made for McDonald's use of didactic hyperbole, the world is still presented as a rather grim and melancholy habitation. "Few days full of trouble are destined to man",¹⁹ was Elder George Bears' glum appraisal of life, and in another of his hymns he wrote:

17 Donald McDonald and His Elders, *Hymns for Practice* (Charlottetown, 1910), p. 6. The collected hymns of McDonald and his Elders has gone through many editions. According to Murdock Lamont, *op cit.*, p. 101, there were editions as early as 1835 and 1840. The author has been unable to locate any copies of these first issues.
18 Donald McDonald, *The Subjects of the Millennium* (Charlottetown, 1849), p. 11.
19 McDonald and Elders, *Hymns*, p. 173. McDonald's Elders who had hymns published were George Bears, Ewan Lamont, Elias Roberts and John Compton.

Turn now my thoughts from wandering too
 Where man's ambition climbs;
 'Tis a vain show that ends in woe
 And fades away with time.²⁰

In yet another passage Bears referred to the world as a “ruin'd creation”,²¹ and in their many descriptions McDonald's hymn-writing Elders were clearly in agreement with the dismal picture which he painted in his hymn, “Lamentation over the State of the World”. The opening lines — “Oh! the world is full of trouble, Full of trouble and woe”²² — set the tone for what followed. Because these men so often employed imagery, especially religious imagery, as the vehicle of their worldly pessimism and complaint, it is extremely difficult to identify the specific problems which were the actual day to day causes of their distress. Nonetheless, these songs, composed by McDonald and a few of his elders, and sung regularly by all the McDonaldites, were a means of expressing and ventilating their feelings, and in many of them a pervasive mood of tribulation and conflict can be discerned.

There was one recurrent theme, in particular, which communicated these sentiments of sorrowfulness. It was the theme of the “mourning exiles”. McDonald had incorporated into his theology the notion that his people were members of the “ten lost tribes” of Israel,²³ and in his own writings and hymns, as well as in the songs of his Elders, there are numerous references to this belief. One of Elder Ewan Lamont's hymns entitled “On Zion” was devoted entirely to the contrast between the sorry plight of the exiles in their scattered condition and the joy they would experience when Christ would call them home to the New Jerusalem. The central message of this hymn was summarized in the following two stanzas:

But Zion shall mourn no more in exile,
 Nor lonely, destitute be;
 Her children, in thousand thousands, gather
 Around her, happy and free;
 For Jesus doth call them all together,
 Afar they never shall roam,
 And all enlivened lyres shall celebrate
 Zion's welcoming home.

20 From an unpublished hymn by George Bears which the author obtained from Mr. Nathan Bears, Brooklyn, Prince Edward Island.

21 McDonald and Elders, *Hymns*, p. 169.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

23 Donald McDonald, *Subjects of the Millennium*, pp. 124, 164-5, 263-4.

42 *Acadiensis*

The Shepherd is nigh: He wipes forever
All tears from every eye;
His flock and their seed His lead shall follow,
They neither sorrow nor sigh;
Forever at ease in Jesus' presence,
They feel no pressure or pain;
They never shall know a foe's aggression,
Or sore oppression again.²⁴

In many of the hymns which he composed, elder George Bears also depicted the elect as scattered aliens or refugees who would only be rescued from their dilemma at the last day. In "The Fall of Jerusalem" he stressed that the troubles which God's people were enduring were a just punishment for their faithlessness, but hastened to add that soon their time of sorrow and exile would end:

They are bow'd down and fallen, the ancient and honor'd;
All, all have been into captivity led,
Forsaken in exile, long, long do they wander,
Forgotten as they that go down to the dead:
Like sheep to the slaughter, the wicked have bro't them
And dy'd their hands red with the blood of the slain.
Their woes are appalling, their yoke is most galling,
And none to deliver from slavery's chain.

.....
Then lift up your heads, ye bow'd down and distressed,
The signs show the day of deliverance near;
Then woe to the wicked; and joy to the blessed;
Each, all shall be sent to their place that's prepar'd;
The earth must give up and surrender her triumph,
The wicked uncover their blood and their slain;
Lo! Messiah is coming, to build up Mount Zion.
He's coming to judgement, is coming to reign.²⁵

Unless it is assumed that the religious sentiments expressed in these verses did not reflect the feelings and daily experiences of the authors and their fellow-colonists, it would seem that many residents of the Island from the 1830s to the 1850s did not regard the society in which they lived as conducive to their contentment or future happiness. There was, rather, a widespread

24 McDonald and Elders, *Hymns*, p. 150.

25 Donald McDonald and George Bears, *Hymns for Practice* (Charlottetown, 1880), pp. 153-5.

feeling of worldly pessimism, hardship and oppression, combined with a longing for escape. Out of this dismal view of the times, and the concomitant feeling of disquietude or uneasiness, a widespread belief in the imminent arrival of the millennium emerged. This millenarian vision received its fullest expression in McDonald's lengthy study, *The Subjects of the Millennium*, in which he interpreted the Scriptures in such a way that he was able to predict confidently the early establishment of a New Jerusalem on the earth, comprised of the twelve tribes of Israel gathered together to reign with Christ. According to McDonald's ingenious and elaborate calculations, the end was to come in 1850.²⁶

McDonald's espousal of this doctrine almost certainly originated in the Great Revival of 1829-30. In 1844, in an article copied from the *Pictou Eastern Chronicle*, the Charlottetown *Palladium* stated that McDonald had first predicted that the end of the world would take place in 1832, but later adjusted his prediction to 1842.²⁷ In an 1855 edition of the *Charlottetown Islander*, which stated that McDonald had believed himself to be "one of the millennial saints" ever since 1829,²⁸ these millenarian beliefs were linked even more directly to the revival. A relationship between revivalism and millenarianism also existed in the frontier regions of the United States during the awakening which occurred there during the early 1800s. Millenarian belief in the United States reached its peak in the late 1830s and early 1840s as a result of the teachings and prophecies of a lay preacher from Vermont named William Miller. Miller's book of sixteen lectures, cumbrously entitled *Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, about the year 1843. Exhibited in a Course of Lectures*, received extremely wide circulation during the early 1840s and resulted in a great deal of perturbation and excitement over a wide area of the United States and British North America. The 1820s and 1830s in England were also a time of "continuing millenarian instability",²⁹ and Donald McDonald's millenarianism was doubtless influenced by this broader climate of opinion. In various passages in his writings he acknowledged his awareness of others who were, like himself, predicting an early end to the world,³⁰ but while admitting that he had read a number of "theories, treatises and communications" on the subject, he remarked that none of these had met with his satisfaction, and that he had felt impelled to produce his own original study of the topic.³¹

26 Donald McDonald, *Subjects of the Millennium*, pp. 332-6.

27 *Palladium*, 23 November 1844.

28 *Islander*, 20 April 1855.

29 Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 879.

30 Donald McDonald, *Subjects of the Millennium*, pp. 177-8, 122-3.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

44 *Acadiensis*

In all the writings of Donald McDonald and his Elders, and especially in the many passages dealing with the last times, there are two sentiments which emerge very clearly. The first, already mentioned, is a kind of ennui, or a general feeling of world-weariness and dissatisfaction with existing conditions. The second is one of anticipation and waiting. McDonald and his elders seldom commented on the blessings and gifts received in this life, or found any reasons for thanksgiving in their present earthly condition. For the most part their eyes were not on the present or on this world, but on the future and the world to come. The concluding lines from Ewan Lamont's "Millennial Hymn" — "With our lamps ever burning, We await the return of the King"³² — express succinctly this orientation. George Bears concluded his hymn, "The Triumph of Love by Christ", on the same note:

Then, freely flow, sweet anticipation;
On faith's strong pinions, my soul, arise;
While nearer, nearer we see the prize
 Sweet's the meditation,
 Ever more to reign, with the Lamb
Who died on Calvary.³³

While it is impossible to estimate exactly how many of McDonald followers accepted his millenarian speculations, the conviction that the second coming of Christ was near at hand was such a central and integral part of McDonald's overall message that it is extremely unlikely that many of his followers would have been sceptical about it. When, for example, they gathered for worship they regularly sang hymns such as McDonald's "The Gathering of the Twelve Tribes", which included such verses as:

Lift up, ye tribes, your heads on high,
Redemption now is drawing nigh,
Messiah comes, sing loud with glee,
Your scattered tribes shall gathered be.³⁴

Thus, for many years the McDonaldites existed within Prince Edward Island as an expectant community: a community waiting hopefully to be delivered from its distressed condition.

There are a number of possible explanations for the emergence of this millenarian mentality. The most apparent is that the lives of the recent immi-

32 McDonald and Elders, *Hymns*, p. 278.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

grants were filled with such hardship, homesickness and confusion that they were predisposed towards the acceptance of an ideology which allowed them to believe that their present sufferings would soon be ended. Moreover, the fact that a belief in the early end of the world persisted as a cardinal tenet among the McDonaldites for several decades suggests that these strongly negative feelings were not quickly overcome. If the McDonaldites had been at all hopeful or optimistic regarding their worldly prospects on the Island, it is inconceivable that they would have embraced so ardently the pre-millenarian doctrine with its emphasis on the bitter vanity of this life. It certainly was not hope, but a profound discouragement, which Ewan Lamont was expressing when he wrote:

Thou shalt not be disfigured,
By a barren or withering bough;
In the age that is future
Thou shalt not be unfruitful as now.³⁵

It is possible that the settlers had hoped for too much, and that it was the contrast between their great expectations and the actual condition of life in the colonies which was the source of their rueful disappointment and of their subsequent adoption of a millenarian vision. Many had left their homeland with great hope for the future, but the rigors and demands of the pioneering life had blasted that prospect. E. P. Thompson has noted the possibility that a disappointed utopianism can result in an emphasis on the after-life and the "chiliasm of the defeated and the hopeless".³⁶ In a similar vein Norman Cohn has stated that one of the causes of millenarianism in the late middle ages was the "acquiring of new wants without being able to satisfy them".³⁷ Many settlers, having taken the very great gamble of emigrating to the New World, and having buoyed themselves with the dream of a vast improvement in their fortunes, were bitterly disappointed by the conditions which they encountered. A belief in the imminent arrival of the millennium would have been soothing emotional compensation.

The millenarianism of the McDonaldites might also have served the important function of restoring among them a sense of a meaningful future. One extremely critical aspect of the disorientation which was experienced by the immigrant was his inability to anticipate confidently what was ahead. Uprooted from his past, and taken out of the traditional society and routine of his forefathers, he was, at least temporarily, effectively robbed of a

35 *Ibid.*, p. 273.

36 Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 419.

37 Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 58.

future, or a sense of continuity in his life. Viktor F. Frankl, the renowned European author-psychiatrist, has argued that psychologically a loss of faith in the future is one of the most devastating and crippling things that can happen in an individual's life. Frankl, a Jew, attributes many of his insights to his experience as a prisoner in a German concentration camp where he was detained for several years during World War II. He observed throughout his detention that prisoners who got to the point where they felt there was nothing they could look forward to simply gave up and soon succumbed to "mental and physical decay". According to Frankl, "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future — his future — was doomed".³⁸ He also observes that life in the camps amounted to a kind of "provisional existence", and that there was a severe mental and emotional strain involved in not being able to foresee ". . . whether or when, if at all, this form of existence would end."³⁹ While it is certainly stretching a point to compare pioneer life on Prince Edward Island to the German camps, it is clear that the early immigrants did experience a kind of "provisional existence", and that between the time that they departed from their homeland and the time when they accepted the Island as their new native land there was a period of considerable duration when it was extremely difficult for them to imagine just what was ahead or to be very hopeful that their situation would soon be improved.⁴⁰ This seems to have inspired demoralization and an attitude of defeatism and, like Frankl's prisoners, the greatest need of the immigrants was to be given some kind of positive future goal. By proclaiming the coming of the millennium McDonald gave his followers something to hope for and thus helped to sustain them throughout the difficult years of settlement and acclimatization.

The image of the pioneer thus projected is certainly not that of the steadfast individual, exulting in his newly acquired freedom, and confidently laying the foundations of a new and better society for himself and his children. It is, rather, the image of a group of people filled with a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty about their future prospects: a group of people who were sustained and motivated, not so much by the vista of the dynamic new society they were creating, as by the vista of heavenly city, which they hoped, would soon descend from heaven and put an end to their temporal existence. This is not to say that the lives of the settlers were totally devoid of any sense of achievement, or that every day was spent merely pining for the return of Christ. According to one story a gentleman called to see McDonald and found

38 Viktor F. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York, 1966), p. 117.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

40 On the similar problems of the Scots in Nova Scotia, see D. Campbell and R. A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Road* (Toronto, 1974), p. 121.

him planting trees. “Why do you plant trees”, he queried, “if the Millennium is to come in the year ’50”? “Whatever time the Millennium may come”, McDonald retorted, “let the hoe be in your hand”.⁴¹ This anecdote suggests that while for some belief in the millenium might have undermined initiative and induced an attitude of passive waiting, for many it had the opposite effect. Insofar as McDonald gave his followers a positive future goal, he freed them from the paralysis of extreme discouragement and self-pity, and thus enabled them to undertake the difficult tasks at hand.

A great many of the early settlers on Prince Edward Island, including many of McDonald’s followers, were tenants on property leased from absentee landowners.⁴² The extent to which this additional hardship might have exacerbated their sense of discouragement, and thus facilitated their acceptance of McDonald’s premillenarian teaching, is extremely difficult to assess. Possibly the revival and the subsequent religious preoccupation of the McDonaldites might have served as outlets for frustrations and grievances which some of their fellow-colonists, such as the land reformers or Escheaters, were channelling into direct political action.⁴³ There is, however, very little evidence to support the supposition that it was the land problem, in particular, which was the principal source of the McDonaldites’ pessimism. Furthermore, it would be as valid to attempt to establish that the land reform movement was the manifestation of other, less obvious needs — including spiritual ones — as it would be to argue that the religious activities of the McDonaldites represented merely the sublimation of economic and political concerns.

Another function of McDonald’s millenarian theology was that, like any successful belief-system, it helped in the formation of a group or community identity. Sociologist S. D. Clark has argued that “the really important function of religious leadership within the pioneer communities was the function of developing a new sense of group solidarity”.⁴⁴ McDonald’s ministry in general, and his millenarianism in particular, may be viewed in this light.

41 Cited in M. Lamont, *The Rev. Donald McDonald*, p. 142.

42 It is difficult to locate the McDonaldites within the censuses as they were listed under the broader “Church of Scotland” category. However, according to the 1841 census the Lots where McDonald’s work was centered, i.e. Lots 28, 29, 65, 49, 50, 57, 58, 60, 62, were predominantly leasehold lots. Census of 1841, *Journal of the House of Assembly*, Appendix N, 1842.

43 The Escheat Movement, a politically orientated land reform program, was extremely active throughout the 1830s and early 1840s. It was centered in Kings County, and while some of McDonald’s followers might have supported the movement, it was not strong within their districts. See F. W. P. Bolger, ed., *Canada’s Smallest Province* (Charlottetown, 1973), pp. 95-114.

44 S. D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto, 1945), p. 81.

Operating as he did in a society where new political, economic and community groupings were in the early stages of development, he established an ideological basis for the formation of a very distinctive and cohesive group — the McDonaldites. His adventist teachings, allied as they were to other components of his theology such as his Anglo-Israelism, doubtless greatly encouraged and enhanced a sense of communal identity and solidarity among his followers. By means of his teachings the “exiles” and “scattered sheep” — terms which appear repeatedly in the hymns of McDonald and his elders — were transformed into “Heirs of the covenant, the bright millennial band”.⁴⁵

During the 1830s and 1840s it seems that the McDonaldites’ longing for the millennium was so intense that they were satisfied with McDonald’s explanations that his calculations were slightly awry, and he was permitted to change the date of its expected arrival a number of times without any irreparable loss of prestige. By the 1850s his credibility on this point was doubtless wearing thin, and when 1850 passed, the year designated as the time of Second Coming in McDonald’s *Subjects of the Millennium*, he appears to have given up his attempts at precise prediction. It is extremely difficult to trace the survival of the millenarian idea after this point. Having become such a pivotal part of the McDonaldites’ theology and worship the belief naturally persisted for many years. There are, indeed, descendants of the early McDonaldites living today in whose Christian faith certain vestigial traces of this millenarian hope can be discerned. Nonetheless, it would appear that after the 1850s adventism gradually decreased in importance among McDonald’s followers. There is, at least, no apparent evidence of its continuing vitality. As the various McDonaldite communities became better established and shared in the prosperity which came to the Island in the 1850s and 1860s,⁴⁶ and as a new generation of Island-born sons and daughters replaced their fathers and mothers, the sense of being exiles or simply sojourners, or of having a provisional existence, no doubt diminished. While the belief persisted that the Lord was possibly coming soon, and while the aged McDonald was still honoured as a prophet, his followers no longer watched the skies as diligently as they had in the earlier period.

45 From “The Plan of Salvation”, part I, a hymn by George Bears. Donald McDonald and George Bears, *Hymns for Practice* (Charlottetown, 1880), p. 197.

46 For a description of this “golden age” in Prince Edward Island history, see David Weale and Harry Baglole, *The Island and Confederation: The End of an Era* (Charlottetown, 1973), pp. 77-98.