

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

**Every Christian A Missionary:**

**Fundamentalist Education at Prairie Bible Institute, 1922 – 1947**

by

**James Enns**

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### **Abstract:**

In this thesis I trace the development of **Prairie Bible Institute**, one of the first Bible schools in western Canada. In order to understand the identity of this school in the wider Christian community it is important to recognize two things: 1) *Prairie Bible Institute was linked to the fundamentalist Christianity primarily through its emphasis on holiness theology*; and 2) all aspects of the institute's education served to direct students toward participation in the missionary enterprise. During the first twenty-five years of the school's history these two themes were predominant in shaping its formal curriculum, social ethos, and outreach activities. From its humble beginnings in an old farmhouse, the school grew to become the largest Bible school in Canada, drawing students from across North America.

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The successful completion of such a project is never the result of a solo effort. I am deeply indebted to a group of people, whose support and encouragement were vital to the completion of this thesis. It is my privilege to acknowledge them here.

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*soli Deo gloria*

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### Introduction:

Writing in *MacLean's Magazine* in December of 1947, journalist James H. Grey posited an unusual answer to the question: 'What is the most famous place in Canada?' Your average Canadian might answer Montreal or Toronto. Your average tourist might respond with an answer such as Banff or Niagara Falls. "But if you were set down in the wilds of Africa, India, the West Indies, or China, and found shelter in the nearest mission, there's a good chance your host would say to you:

'You from Canada? How are things back in Three Hills?'"<sup>1</sup>

Measurements of fame or notoriety are, as Gray illustrated, often relative. It depends on who is doing the measuring. In Gray's scenario the evangelical missionary goes on to explain the reason for his response:

He'd tell you about the remote Alberta village of Three Hills and its most famous institution, The Prairie Bible Institute, the biggest missionary college in Canada and the second largest on the continent. P. B. I. is a sensationally uncollegiate college whose campus knows no dating, whose boarders know no juke boxes, soda bars or movies, whose teachers draw no salary, and whose students got to bed at 10 o'clock and believe that the fish *did* swallow Jonah, just as it says in the Book.

Your missionary could tell you that in twenty-five years P. B. I. has grown from a Bible class in a prairie farmhouse to a thriving nonsectarian institution with 1,100 men and women students and a score of buildings on a 120 acre campus. More than 300 of its graduates are in foreign missions and several thousand more spread the gospel in the United States and Canada.<sup>2</sup>

The educational institution which Gray described was likely unfamiliar to most of his readers, but to people in North America who identified themselves as evangelical

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<sup>1</sup> "Miracle at Three Hills." *MacLean's Magazine* (December 15, 1947): 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 16, 53. The number of students recorded by Gray is a little misleading. By this time PBI was not only a college but also operated a General Education division, which taught students from grades 1–12. The enrollment of the college was about 800 students while the general education schools contained the remaining 300.

Christians, Prairie Bible Institute (PBI) was a well-known name, synonymous with one thing: training missionaries. While the Canadian Bible School movement has recently gained more attention from historians, most research has been conducted along broader, general lines. Little exists in the way of sustained analysis of specific, leading institutions. Before examining the existing scholarly literature on Bible schools and religious milieu in which they flourished, it will be helpful to begin by setting the stage with a brief overview of Prairie Bible Institute, the focus of this particular study.

Located about 120 kilometers northeast of Calgary, the village of Three Hills was officially incorporated on its present site in 1912.<sup>3</sup> The village grew up alongside the recently completed railroad line, built by the Canadian Pacific Railway to service the transportation needs of local wheat farmers. Over the next several decades a community gradually arose from the flat prairie landscape. From the outset the village was defined by its agricultural support businesses, and by 1928 it could boast seven grain elevators as well as its own flourmill. Like many early settlements Three Hills consisted of a Main Street, which was a wide dirt road intersected by six or seven avenues, terminating on one end at the railroad station. This street acted as the single commercial artery for the village and contained an assortment of storefronts, from retail merchants to the local post office. With a population of approximately 450 residents in the early 1920s, the community could also boast a small range of services beyond those which directly supported the farm economy, such as a Chinese laundry, a hotel, and a theatre. By 1926 electricity was finally available, and in 1929 Three Hills officially became a town.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Three Hills existed as early as 1904 as a group of houses and a post office in a field known as the "old flat," about five kilometers southwest of where it stands today. *Herald Magazine* (Nov. 4, 1966): 3.

<sup>4</sup> "Town Timeline," *Three Hills Capital* (July 29, 1987).



Throughout the 1920s two trains passed through the town each day: one heading north to Edmonton, the other south to Calgary. During the Depression years of the 30s that service was reduced by half, but at the same time PBI could announce that newly completed gravel roads made Three Hills much more accessible by automobile.<sup>5</sup> In spite of Depression and a World War, the town continued to expand, and by the time of Grey's article, had a population of over 900, with its own water supply and additional amenities, such as a new curling rink. Instead of the uninterrupted flatness of the bald prairie (relieved only slightly by the gentle sloping of the three hills to the northwest, from which the town derived its name), the landscape now had a more definite vertical dimension. In addition to eight grain elevators, a water tower, a half-dozen multi-storied campus dormitories, and numerous trees all added to the skyline of the small, but thriving community.<sup>6</sup>

Prairie Bible Institute began in 1922 with one teacher and eight students meeting for classes in a drafty abandoned farmhouse a few miles outside of town.<sup>7</sup> Several years prior to this, parents of three local farming families, who were evangelical Presbyterians, grew concerned about the lack of religious instruction for their teenaged children. Initially one of the parents, Fergus Kirk, took on the task of teaching these young people, but he realized that his own limited education was insufficient to advance the students beyond a rudimentary level. Through the connections of his sister, a missionary in the West Indies, Kirk was able to secure the services of a young Bible School graduate from

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<sup>5</sup> *The Prairie Pastor*, Vol. 5, No. 11 (Nov. 1932): 1.

<sup>6</sup> "Town Timeline"

<sup>7</sup> Roy L. Davidson, *God's Plan on the Prairies* (published by author, 1986), 12-13; see also Transcript of L. E. Maxwell' interview with Don Richardson, p. 17, "Maxwell Biography File," Prairie Bible College Archives.

Kansas, Leslie Earl (L. E.) Maxwell.<sup>8</sup> As a young man in his mid twenties, Maxwell arrived in Three Hills near the end of September of that first year, and began a career in teaching which would last until his death, sixty-two years later.

After two years the school had outgrown the farmhouse. Maxwell and the founding families decided to purchase two lots in Three Hills, and erect a new building to meet the increased demand for Bible training. Thus in 1924 PBI began to take shape on its current location. As the student body grew, so did the need for additional buildings and services. By 1932 the second building, a chapel, was completed, and throughout the 1930s separate men's and women's dormitories were constructed along with a new dining hall.<sup>9</sup> Later on a gymnasium, an additional larger auditorium, and residences for faculty and support staff were also added. Buildings were simple box-like structures, usually three stories high, with plain wood siding on their exterior, and lathe-and-plaster walls on the interior. Wood shavings were used for insulation. Each building was heated by steam pipes emanating from a central heating plant, which was a coal-fueled boiler.<sup>10</sup> Indoor plumbing, except for the school dining room, was not installed until the late 1940s.

As is evident from the chart below, three specific periods of dramatic growth took place in PBI's first twenty-five years, and correlate closely with three major upheavals in North American society. The first growth spurt, 1931-33, occurred during the early years of the Great Depression. The second dramatic increase in 1939-40 took place during the start of World War II, while the third rapid growth period of 1946-47 coincided with the

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<sup>8</sup> W. Phillip Keller. Expendable! With God on the Prairies: the Ministry of Prairie Bible Institute, Three Hills, Alberta, Canada (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Press, 1966), 66-72.

<sup>9</sup> *Manual of the Prairie Bible Institute, 1935-36*: Prairie Bible College, Registrar's Office Records.

<sup>10</sup> Davidson, 59-68.

demobilization of military personnel at the end of the war. The steady, if not at times dramatic, growth of the student body pushed existing facilities to their limit, and spurred on a constant building program. An early commitment to operate as efficiently as possible in order to make schooling affordable even to those with limited means caused the school to develop its own farming/gardening operation, which eventually covered 960 acres.<sup>11</sup> By 1947 the one room school had grown into the sprawling campus described by Gray.

Year	Students	Year	Students	Year	Students
1922-23	10	1931-32	152	1940-41	500
1923-24	25	1932-33	230	1941-42	500
1924-25	37	1933-34	280	1942-43	474
1925-26	35	1934-35	295	1943-44	544
1926-27	40	1935-36	280	1944-45	415
1927-28	45	1936-37	294	1945-46	472
1928-29	69	1937-38	295	1946-47	670
1929-30	65	1938-39	325	1947-48	757
1930-31	90	1939-40	408		

Initially students mostly came from nearby towns in southern Alberta, but as the school grew graduation records show that the students were coming from across the Prairie Provinces, British Columbia, and the northwestern United States. By the mid-1930s American students made up approximately 25% of the graduating classes.<sup>13</sup> This representation from south of the border increased dramatically in the years immediately

<sup>11</sup> Davidson, 59, 64; and Grey.

<sup>12</sup> Prairie Bible College, Registrar's Office Records.

<sup>13</sup> Demographic data for the entire student body on a year by year basis only goes back to 1947. Student body profiles for the years prior to that have been extrapolated from graduation programs which list the hometowns of the graduates. Graduation Programs File and Alumni Statistics File, PBI Archives.

following the end of World War II. By 1947 PBI had the following student demographic profile:

Alberta	319	Washington (state)	114
B. C.	101	California	36
Saskatchewan	101	Pennsylvania	31
Ontario	95	Minnesota	21
All other Provinces	<u>42</u>	All other U.S. States	<u>218*</u>
Canadian Total	658	American Total	420

Canadian Total	658
American Total	420
Non U.S. Foreign	20
Total Student Body	1098 <sup>14</sup>

From the above data, one is tempted to draw the same conclusion as Canadian sociologist, William E. Mann, that PBI and schools like it were simply branch plants of American fundamentalism.<sup>15</sup> This thesis, however, has been challenged by a recent wave of Canadian religious historians, who have argued that Protestant fundamentalism operated only on the margins of Canadian evangelical Christianity, and is therefore an inaccurate term for describing evangelical educational institutions, such as Bible schools. Both sides tended to treat Bible schools as an homogeneous group, selecting data from various schools to create a kind of composite stereotype, with larger schools, such as PBI,

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\* None of the other states had more than twenty students, but 69 states were represented in all. PBI drew the fewest American students from the deep south and the New England states

<sup>14</sup> These numbers also include high school students. PBI drew its strongest American support from three regional pockets: the first of these was the west coast states, followed by the mid-east heart-land states of Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota and Iowa; the third, smaller, pocket comprised the eastern states of Pennsylvania and New York. Alumni Statistics File.

<sup>15</sup> W. E. Mann, Sect, Cult, and Church in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), 89-90. Other scholars who have also applied a loose and uncritical definition of fundamentalism to the Bible school movement include Ben Harder, "The Bible Institute-College Movement In Canada" Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society, 19(April 1980); Ronald Sawatsky, "The Bible School/College Movement in Canada: Fundamental Christian Training" The Canadian Society of Church History Papers (1986), 1-15; and Donald Goertz, "The Development of a Bible Belt: The Socio-Religious Interaction in Alberta between 1925 and 1938." MCS Thesis (Regent College, Vancouver: 1980).

frequently providing the basic template for these studies.<sup>16</sup> While the fruits of their labour have been helpful in opening up the Bible school movement for scholarly inquiry, both camps have produced simplified, and therefore inadequate, pictures of these Canadian schools. Mann and his followers have simply seen these schools in terms of what they have in common with their theological cousins to the south, while recent scholars, such as John Stackhouse and Robert Burkinshaw, have chosen an arbitrarily narrow definition of fundamentalism, and thus neatly eliminated it from playing a role in Canadian evangelicalism. As a result PBI, and other western Canadian Bible schools, are reduced to a “sectish” voice in a broader, more irenic, evangelical tapestry.<sup>17</sup>

Both groups have suffered from over-generalizing their findings. The former group has failed to consider that these schools had different roles and unique qualities relative to one another, which led to distinctive mandates and identities. The latter group has failed to understand the diverse nature of fundamentalism and thus tried to downplay the strong connections between Canadian schools and the fundamentalist movement. The purpose of this thesis is to address the inadequacies of both sides. To correct the first problem I will argue that PBI, as the most prominent Bible school in western Canada, needs to be understood as an individual institution, not simply as a representative type. From the outset it had a central purpose which shaped the school’s theology and ethos, namely the training of overseas missionaries. Although previous scholars have

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<sup>16</sup> See in particular John Stackhouse Jr., Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), ch. 3-4, 7-8; Robert Burkinshaw, “Evangelical Bible Colleges in Twentieth-Century Canada,” in Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience, George Rawlyk ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 369-74; as well as Mann, ch. VI-VII.

<sup>17</sup> Stackhouse, 12-17.

acknowledged the PBI's emphasis on missions, not one has cited this as the key to understanding the school's essential character.

In order to correct the second oversimplification I will show that a more nuanced understanding of fundamentalism than is allowed by Stackhouse and Burkinshaw is both possible and necessary if one is to understand more accurately what was happening in North American evangelicalism from the 1920s to the 1940s. As such it is then possible to place PBI in a fundamentalist context, which allows one to see points of both connection with its American counter-parts, as well as discontinuities.

In summary, then, Prairie Bible Institute was a school which, from the outset, existed for the purpose of training missionaries. Although Maxwell accepted a definition of 'missionary' as anyone actively engaged in evangelizing those outside the faith, he let it be known that PBI was a school which urged its students to "join with God's greatest missionary who burned with a passion to preach 'not where Christ had been named' but 'in the regions beyond' where no tidings of Him had come."<sup>18</sup> Preparing students for foreign missionary service became the central organizing principle behind PBI's growth and development. The impetus for such a mandate came out of a stream of fundamentalist Christianity, which stressed personal revival and a form of devotional quietism, known as holiness theology, over the bombastic rhetoric of militancy, and the end-times fatalism of dispensational premillennialism.

Before developing these two complementary themes in the life of PBI, I will use the first chapter to examine the existing scholarly literature on the Bible school

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<sup>18</sup> L. E. Maxwell in the "Forward" of Margaret Epp's Into All The World: The Missionary Outreach of Prairie Bible Institute (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Press, 1973), 11. Maxwell is quoting the Apostle Paul, whom he upheld as the archetypal missionary. This priority of foreign missions over home missions is also evident in the earliest school manuals. See Manual of the Prairie Bible Institute, 1925-26, 5.

movement, and to clarify the terms, 'evangelicalism' and 'fundamentalism' as they relate to North American Christianity and the identity of Prairie Bible Institute. In the following three chapters I will examine the role of missions and holiness theology in the life of the school. Chapter two covers the development of Maxwell's theology and its subsequent reflection in the school's curriculum. Under Maxwell's leadership PBI stood squarely in the fundamentalist camp in its Bible teaching. In chapter three I will examine the campus ethos of the institute. Although PBI did have some strong separatist tendencies, these were more than counter-balanced by holiness theology's strong emphasis on missions and evangelism. Militancy, while a prominent metaphor in describing campus life, was always channeled toward spreading the gospel, not cultural apologetics.

The final chapter, in which I examine the school's mission and outreach, the same pattern will be evident. Here, as in the above two areas, PBI exhibited the belief and behavior of the more traditional fundamentalist current, but at the same time, it was tempered by holiness teaching. There were times when the school's primary publication, *The Prairie Pastor*, adopted a strident, polemical tone against social evils and modernist apostasy, yet the vast majority of articles tended to emphasize holy living and personal yieldedness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the closing section I will summarize my argument, draw some general conclusions, and suggest new lines of research which emerge from this institutional history.

## Chapter One:

### Bible Schools, Evangelicals, and Fundamentalists: One River, Many Currents

Up until about fifteen years ago, the role Bible schools played in shaping the beliefs of evangelical Christians had been largely ignored by historians of religion in North America. . The only histories available, particularly on Canadian institutions such as PBI, were those written by either popular historians, or by students of the various schools themselves.<sup>1</sup> These authors wrote as partisans, or “insiders,” with their own evangelical Christian constituencies in mind, rather than a wider critical audience.<sup>2</sup> In some cases these works were a tribute to the school’s founder; in other cases they represented a nostalgic look at the past, designed to capture the pioneer spirit of the school’s early years.<sup>3</sup>

It is only in the last two decades that historians of religion, in both Canada and the United States, have begun to analyze the role of Bible schools in some detail. Most of the studies to date have surveyed these schools as a collective movement. While they

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<sup>1</sup> One scholarly exception to this is Leonard F. O’Niel, A Survey of Bible Schools in Canada, (unpublished BD thesis, McMaster University, 1949).

<sup>2</sup> Virginia L. Brereton, Training God’s Army: The American Bible School 1880-1940, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), *ix*.

<sup>3</sup> Good examples of both kinds of informal histories can be found in the writing about Prairie Bible Institute (PBI). Phillip W. Keller, Expendable. Although the book deals with PBI’s development, it also serves as a biography of its founder, L. E. Maxwell. Academic historians might easily dismiss such a work due to the absence of documentation and the apparent presumption of the author’s claim to know the divine perspective in human affairs, yet such a book gives valuable insight into how these communities understood divine direction in human history. A second work, such as Bernice Callaway’s Legacy: The Moving Saga of our Prairie Pioneers, (Canada: McCall Clan, 1987), was published to commemorate the work 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PBI. Although providing an interesting portrait of school life, its intent is celebratory and not critical. Some of the earliest Canadian scholarly work published on the subject has been done by Mennonite historians on their own religious communities. Mennonite historians placed the history of their own Bible Schools in the context of preserving orthodoxy and community ethos. For an example of this see Frank H. Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940: A People’s Struggle For Survival, (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1982).



have been very helpful in identifying the common characteristics of these schools, they have also highlighted the need for more nuanced studies of individual schools. In doing broad assessments of the Bible school movement historians invariably have chosen one or two key schools to serve as illustrative ‘types’ for the entire group.<sup>4</sup> This approach has served to introduce these educational institutions to historians in the wider scholarly community, but it does not adequately account for how these schools were viewed by those who attended and/or supported them.

Stuart Cole and Norman Furniss were two of the first historians to investigate the Bible school movement in America as part of their research on fundamentalist Christianity. Writing in 1931, only six years after the debacle of the 1925 ‘Scopes Monkey Trial,’ Cole portrayed Bible schools as at first shaping, then vainly sustaining, a failing fundamentalist enterprise. Cole described schools such as Moody Bible Institute Chicago as reactionary institutions, which existed to train students to check the progress of secular culture and attack liberal Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Cole went on to conclude that the inferior nature of education in these schools compared to the theologically liberal seminaries of the day, drove students to compensate for this by cultivating a sense of spiritual superiority.<sup>6</sup> While agreeing with Cole’s assessment, Furniss also identified the connection these schools had to the Fundamentalist movement through an informal network of Bible Conferences and other para-church organizations.<sup>7</sup> In so doing he

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<sup>4</sup> See Stackhouse’s approach: ch. 3-4, 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> See Stuart G. Cole, The History of Fundamentalism, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1931), 37, 42-44.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 250-51.

<sup>7</sup> Norman F. Furniss, The Fundamentalist Controversy: 1919-1931 (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1963), 69-75.

anticipated a new historiographical watershed in the study of evangelical culture and institutions initiated by Ernest Sandeen.

In 1970 Sandeen published The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930, and in it he argued that to get a true picture of fundamentalism one had to get beyond its high profile controversies with modernist institutions, and examine its particular doctrines. Only then could it be understood as a coherent religious movement with connections to earlier strands of Christian evangelicalism.<sup>8</sup> The doctrine which lay at the heart of fundamentalism was premillennialism, especially in its dispensationalist form<sup>9</sup>. Sandeen claimed that Bible schools were the main bridges this doctrine used to cross into American fundamentalism.<sup>10</sup> Bible schools, however, were more than just educational institutions where formal indoctrination took place. These schools served as headquarters for the fundamentalist movement, and ultimately gave it its social structure. In addition to providing a formal program of education they served as centres for piety, sound doctrine, missions conferences, and publishing gospel literature.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ernest Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), ix-xix.

<sup>9</sup> For the most succinct description of the doctrine as it related to fundamentalist identity and Bible school education see Brereton, 16-21, and also George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 55-71.

<sup>10</sup> Sandeen, 181-182. Although Sandeen's work remains a milestone in the history of American fundamentalism, he writes as a trained sociologist and has been criticized for letting his theoretical model get in the way of sound historical investigation. A complementary work to Sandeen's, written by a historian, is Timothy P Weber's Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Acadmie Books, 1983). Weber gives more attention to the implications of premillennialism for missionary evangelism, and thus highlights the role Bible schools played in developing a theology of missions within this doctrinal framework (See chapters 1 and 3).

<sup>11</sup> Sandeen, 241-243. For Sandeen, Moody Bible Institute was the archetypal Bible school, so most of his generalizations were based on Moody's program and structure. Even though not all Bible schools and colleges carried on all these activities, Moody still served as the ideal to which many of them aspired. This same thesis is put forward by David F. Wells and John D Woodbridge (eds.) in The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing, revised edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1977), 29-30.

Sandeen wrote as a sociologist, but his analysis of both the beliefs and institutions of fundamentalist Christianity helped generate renewed historical interest in the field.

Some of the most rigorous scholarship was produced by two religious historians, George Marsden and Joel Carpenter.

The first of these, George Marsden, expanded Sandeen's thesis in his tour de force, Fundamentalism and American Culture.<sup>12</sup> Like Sandeen, Marsden viewed Bible schools as key centres for the spread and refinement of fundamentalist doctrines. More importantly though, he was able to place these schools in a wider religious context by effectively portraying the diversity within the fundamentalist movement. Not only did he give glimpses into the lives of key Bible school leaders, such as R. A. Torrey and A. B. Simpson, he also explained why these schools were ideal vehicles for fundamentalist expression. Since premillennial dispensationalists lacked any clear view of the organized church beyond the local level, Bible institutes played a major role in giving them some unity. These schools arose primarily in response to the demands of urban ministries and the desire to train lay leaders for evangelism. They also served as training centres for foreign missions – always a prominent concern.<sup>13</sup> A wide variety of evangelistic agencies, local church congregations, Bible conferences, publications, and independent

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<sup>12</sup> Marsden, 72-101. Marsden argued that premillennial dispensationalism was only one distinctive doctrine of fundamentalism. Revivalist holiness and Biblical inerrancy were two other distinctive fundamentalist doctrines he identified. See also George Marsden, "Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon, A Comparison with English Evangelicalism," Church History, 46, (1977), 215.

<sup>13</sup> The rationale for a strong missions emphasis in premillennial dispensationalism is closely linked to eschatology. By preaching the Gospel to all nations dispensationalists believed they would hasten the return of Jesus Christ. Dispensationalists in the early part of the twentieth century were generally pessimistic about how well the Christian message would be received. Generally their eschatology led them to believe they were living in the "end times" when people would become increasingly hostile to Gospel, and the Church itself would become progressively apostate. The important aspect of missions was to give everyone a chance to hear the message. Once this was accomplished, they believed Christ would return to set up his millennial kingdom on earth. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 68-70.

national agencies for missions and other types of evangelism were informally united by common ties to various Bible schools.<sup>14</sup>

Marsden's analysis stopped at the Scopes Trial of 1925, after which fundamentalism was driven from the centre to the margins of American religious life. Yet the Bible school movement was far from going into decline. A second important work, which examined what happened to fundamentalists into the 1930s and 40s is Joel Carpenter's Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism. In addition to tracing how Bible schools continued to play the roles documented by Marsden, Carpenter also pointed out their role in training pastors for fundamentalist churches.<sup>15</sup>

He went on to give a more detailed view of Bible school culture as it evolved during these two decades. With an increasingly younger student population an elaborate system of rules and behavioral codes sprang up, along with vigilant monitoring and strict disciplinary action.<sup>16</sup> The approach to teaching scripture reflected this same militancy. "The Bible was a tool as well as an emblem, or in the imagery of spiritual warfare, it was a weapon, a 'two-edged sword' (Heb. 4:12)."<sup>17</sup> By emphasizing the study of the English Bible in the classroom, and hosting Bible conferences led by eminent Bible teachers, these schools became increasingly important hubs in an ever-expanding fundamentalist network.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 128-29.

<sup>15</sup> Joel Carpenter, Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18-19. See also Joel Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism: 1929-1942," in Church History 49 (March 1980), 66-7.

<sup>16</sup> Carpenter, Revive Us Again, 59-60.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 74.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 74. See also Timothy Weber, "The Two-Edged Sword: The Fundamentalist Use of the Bible," in The Bible In America: Essays in Cultural History, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 102.

Complementing the work of Carpenter and Marsden is that of Virginia Brereton, whose book, Training God's Army, is the most significant work on the Bible school movement to date. Brereton's work marked an important departure from the above scholars. Instead of examining these institutions as a religious historian, she evaluated the role of Bible schools in the context of American educational history.<sup>19</sup> In spite of her American focus (the only Canadian schools she mentions are Toronto Bible College and Prairie Bible Institute), Brereton identified many of the defining characteristics of Bible school mission, practice, and ethos which anticipated later descriptions of western Canadian schools by Robert Burkinshaw, John Stackhouse, and James Opp.<sup>20</sup>

Similar to Marsden and Carpenter, Brereton believed that Bible schools played a unifying role for fundamentalists, but she also pointed out that they had a moderating influence which helped temper the militant extremes to which fundamentalists were susceptible. Finally, these institutions reflected the paradoxes so endemic to the fundamentalist movement. On the one hand they were champions of conservative theology and piety, while on the other hand they were educationally innovative, flexible in their methodology, and quick to realize the potential of modern technology in

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<sup>19</sup> Brereton, ix, xix.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* chapters V-IX. These chapters are simply the best general appraisal of Bible school life on record. The major discontinuity between her description and Canadian schools stems from the predominantly urban nature of these schools in the United States as opposed to the overwhelmingly rural makeup of western Canadian schools. Larry J. McKinney has also pointed out the importance of their geographical locations. Almost without exception these schools were located in urban centres, and were thus strongly committed to urban ministry, but not in the way as proponents of the Social Gospel movement. While the latter stressed reform of cultural institutions as the best way to redeem society, Bible schools conducted inner city outreach based on the belief that the spiritual redemption of the individual would eventually lead to reformed cultural institutions. Unlike Marsden and Carpenter who both examined the multi-faceted roles Bible schools played in servicing the broader fundamentalist community, McKinney emphasized the importance of these schools in pioneering inner-city evangelism. See Larry J. McKinney, "An Historical Analysis of the Bible College Movement During Its Formative Years: 1880-1920," D. Ed. Diss. (Temple University, 1985), 393-96

achieving their goals.<sup>21</sup> For Brereton, the Bible school was not some religious curiosity or an educational backwater, but rather a significant institution in higher education which effectively addressed a felt need in the sizable fundamentalist community of early twentieth century America.<sup>22</sup>

Canadian research on the Bible school movement mirrored its American counterpart in that the initial, ground-breaking work was undertaken by sociologists, and then developed by religious historians afterwards. Drawing on S. D. Clark's broad survey of religious life in Canada, William Mann applied the same church-sect typology in his important study on religious institutions in Alberta.<sup>23</sup>

Like his early American counterparts Mann understood Bible schools as one of the most significant expressions of fundamentalist, sectarian Christianity in western Canada.<sup>24</sup> He believed that these schools offered young people an education inferior to existing church colleges, while trying to inoculate them against modernism.<sup>25</sup> Mann offered a more positive analysis though, in assessing these schools in the wider context of Alberta society during the early twentieth century. Bible schools played an especially valuable role in educating people from rural communities. These schools were attractive to many of the inhabitants of these communities because they reflected their own

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<sup>21</sup> Brereton, 139-54.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* xviii-xix. Canadian historians of religious education could learn much from Brereton's work. The research on Canadian religious higher education has virtually ignored the existence of these schools. See D. C. Masters Protestant Church Colleges in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), and Michael Gavreau, The Evangelical Century: College, and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991)

<sup>23</sup> S. D. Clark, Church and Sect in Canada, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1948), xii. Clark defined church as an institution which seeks the "accommodation of religious organization to the community," borne out of a concern for the welfare of society. Conversely, a sect was an exclusive religious organization, which saw worldly society as something evil and of no concern for the spiritually minded. It was this latter form of religious organization which became especially prominent on the Canadian Prairies during the early decades of the twentieth century.

<sup>24</sup> Mann, 82. The title of Mann's book is somewhat misleading here because he examines Bible schools in all the Prairie provinces to formulate a representative stereotype.

Christian convictions, and they operated in sync with the annual rhythms of rural life.<sup>26</sup>

Bible schools were also potentially liberating for rural young people in providing an avenue of escape from farm life for some, and pertinent to the immigration community, they served as safe environments for assimilation into western Canadian culture.<sup>27</sup>

Mann paid little attention to the overseas missionary emphasis of these schools, portraying them primarily as seminaries for fundamentalist, sectarian churches in rural western Canada. He clearly saw them as an extension of the American fundamentalism, noting the high numbers of school staff who were American citizens, as well as the free enterprise approach to evangelism they taught their students.<sup>28</sup> Although suspicious of evangelical sectarianism, due to its unfavourable comparison with radical cults in Alberta, Mann also understood that through Bible schools evangelicals had adapted effectively to the challenges of sustaining Christianity on the western Prairies where established churches had failed.<sup>29</sup>

Mann wrote as a sociologist, yet his work strongly influenced historians of religion in Canada who came after him. Both John Moir and Hans Mol used Mann's typology in examining Christianity on the prairies, however their surveys were so general that nothing substantial was added to Mann's thesis.<sup>30</sup>

It has only been within the last two decades of the twentieth century that more substantial scholarly attention has been given to the Bible school movement by a recent

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 84-7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 85, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 86-7, 95-8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 89-90.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 95. Although Mann discussed western Canadian Bible schools in general, much of his information was drawn from specifically from PBI, which was the largest such school in Canada at the time.

<sup>30</sup> John S. Moir, "Sectarian Tradition in Canada," in The Churches and the Canadian Experience: A Faith and Order Study of the Christian Tradition, ed. John Webster Grant (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1963), 103-

wave of religious historians who have focused on the development of evangelical Christianity in Canada. On the front end of this new wave is Ben Harder. Harder's general survey of Bible Institutes/Colleges in Canada placed them in the revivalist tradition of nineteenth century evangelicalism, which had swept through Canada and the United States, and persisted in western Canada well into the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> In addition to revivalist theology, with its emphasis on evangelism, Harder looked for other factors contributing to the growth of Canadian Bible schools. He concluded that the most prominent influences came from the American Bible school movement, the reaction among Canadian evangelicals to Social Gospel theology, and the ecumenism in Canadian mainline denominations.<sup>32</sup> While Harder's contextualization of these schools was fairly broad, he recognized that the strongest expression of the movement lay in the prairies, where evangelical communities were also the most vibrant.<sup>33</sup>

This religious demographic trend led historians, Ian Rennie and Donald Goertz, to investigate why this occurred. Their work represents a move away from a general assessment of the Bible school movement to an examination of key institutions which played a role in the formation of a "Bible-Belt" in Alberta. One of these was Prairie Bible Institute. Similar to Harder they argued that it was the revivalist theology, popularized by an American fundamentalist radio preacher, which played a dominant role in the formation of this Bible belt, and ultimately led to the proliferation of Bible schools

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31; and Hans Mol. Faith and Fragility: Religion and Identity in Canada (Burlington, Ontario: Trinity Press, 1985), 132-34.

<sup>31</sup> Ben Harder. "The Bible Institute-College Movement In Canada" Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society, 19 (April 1980), 33.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 35-36. Ronald Sawatsky added a follow-up analysis to Harder's study several years later. Although he offers a few additional reasons for growth in popularity of Bible schools he does not explore their roles beyond that of providing basic lay training for members of evangelical churches which stood outside the mainline Protestant denominations. See Ronald Sawatsky, "The Bible School/College Movement in Canada: Fundamental Christian Training" The Canadian Society of Church History Papers (1986), 1-15.



in western Canada.<sup>34</sup> In 1938 PBI helped sponsor a series of radio broadcasts featuring American evangelist, Oscar Lowry. The wave of revivalist fervour, which swept through Alberta as a result of Lowry's broadcasts, helped shift the dominant locus of fundamentalist Christianity to PBI, and away from Aberhart's politicized form of premillennialism.<sup>35</sup> Goertz and Rennie then, placed PBI in a context of western revivalism and American fundamentalism, which found fertile ground in which to thrive on the Canadian prairies.<sup>36</sup> While correctly recognizing the significance of revivalist theology at PBI, Goertz and Rennie limited their assessment of the school to its role in evangelical renewal in western Canada.

Most recently three historians, who are part of this new wave of scholarship, have placed PBI, and similar Bible schools, in a distinctly Canadian context. The first two, John Stackhouse and Robert Burkinshaw, have focused on the role played by Bible schools in shaping various aspects of Canadian evangelical identity. At the same time they have ignored, or at best downplayed, similarities to, and connections with American fundamentalism these schools had.

Both Stackhouse and Burkinshaw gave specific attention to understanding PBI's role in twentieth century Canadian evangelicalism. Stackhouse acknowledged the continuing strength of William Mann's church-sect typology as an effective way of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>34</sup> Ian S. Rennie "Theological Education In Canada: Past and Present" (unpublished paper presented at Ontario Bible College, 1974), 15; and "The Western Prairie Revival in Canada: During the Depression and World War II" (unpublished paper, no date), 21; Donald Goertz, "The Development of a Bible Belt: The Socio-Religious Interaction in Alberta between 1925 and 1938," MGS Thesis (Regent College, Vancouver: 1980), 220-24 and 119.

<sup>35</sup> Goertz, 205-24.

<sup>36</sup> Another scholar who has placed Prairie Bible Institute in the stream of American fundamentalism is David Eliot: however his work is so polemically charged that it undermines the effectiveness of his arguments. See David R. Eliot, "Studies of Eight Canadian Fundamentalists" Ph.D. diss. (University of British Columbia: 1989).

making sense of evangelical Christianity in Canada. At the same time he also identified its limitations because it put very specific boundaries around evangelical identity, i.e. sects. Although granting that evangelicalism had “sectish” forms of expression, particularly in western Canada, it also had visible “churchish” characteristics as well.<sup>37</sup> The sectish tendencies were found in western Canadian Bible schools such as PBI, while broader churchish expression came from other educational institutions, such as Toronto Bible College and Regent College, and from transdenominational organizations such as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF).<sup>38</sup>

Stackhouse’s work marked a departure from previous scholarship in that he sought to link PBI and similar Bible schools with other evangelical streams in Canada, which later in the century coalesced to form an identifiable, if not still somewhat polarized, evangelical mainstream.<sup>39</sup> American fundamentalism, which found expression in militant, charismatic preachers such as William Aberhart and T. T. Shields, were not typical of Canadian evangelicalism. Instead it was in the less militant educational institutions, Toronto Bible College and PBI, and their leaders, people such as John McNicol and L. E. Maxwell, where the real identity of Canadian evangelicalism could be found.<sup>40</sup> Stackhouse was denying, or at least downplaying the links between Canadian Bible schools and American fundamentalism. PBI and its sister institutions on the

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<sup>37</sup> John Stackhouse Jr. . 12-17.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 13-16, and 49-52.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 111-13. For a similar argument see also Robert A. Wright, “The Canadian Protestant Tradition: 1914 – 1945” in *The Canadian Protestant Experience: 1760 – 1990*, ed. George A. Rawlyk. (Burlington, Ontario: Welch Publishing Company, 1990), 164-65. In spite of this new contextualization of PBI, Stackhouse is thoroughly conventional in his analysis of the school itself. For him the school is still largely a representative type for other transdenominational Bible schools in western Canada. Stackhouse, 51.

<sup>40</sup> Stackhouse. 13, 21-45.

Canadian prairies served to mitigate sectarianism, with its characteristic separatism and militancy, by bringing sectish groups into the evangelical mainstream.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to Stackhouse, Robert Burkinshaw examined Prairie Bible Institute's role in a regional context. Burkinshaw traced the development of the evangelical community (or rather, communities) in British Columbia from 1917 onward.<sup>42</sup> But like Stackhouse he believed 'evangelicalism' a more accurate term to describe conservative Christian identity in B.C. than the more problematic 'fundamentalism.'<sup>43</sup> Burkinshaw's assessment of PBI was also similar to Stackhouse's. Prairie Bible Institute was instrumental in acculturating evangelical immigrant groups, such as Mennonites and Scandanavian Baptists to western Canada. Parents in these communities viewed PBI as a safe place to send their young people because it shared their conservative Protestant theology and at the same time provided a gateway into English-speaking Canadian culture.<sup>44</sup>

Burkinshaw went on to examine the educational aims and activities of these western schools. In light of their mission and the educational realities of these frontier provinces in the early part of the twentieth century he concluded that they were highly effective.<sup>45</sup> Like Joel Carpenter, he portrayed Bible schools as flexible, innovative, and not backward and reactionary.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-13, 131-37.

<sup>42</sup> See Burkinshaw, Pilgrims in Lotus Land: Conservative Protestantism in British Columbia 1917-1981 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 9-13. Like Stackhouse, Burkinshaw is content to equate the term 'fundamentalism' with militancy, and as such applies it primarily to separatist Baptists (see ch. 4).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 161-64.

<sup>45</sup> Burkinshaw, "Evangelical Bible Colleges in Twentieth-Century Canada," 369-74.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 376-84. James Opp also notes the way in which Bible schools and other fundamentalist organizations were quick to see the potential of radio for the purposes of evangelism. In spite of a very conservative theology, fundamentalists were open and experimental in their methodology, especially when it came to presenting the gospel. See James Opp, "'Culture of the Soul': Fundamentalism and Evangelism

Both Burkinshaw and Stackhouse introduced important themes in their assessment of Bible schools in general, and PBI in particular. Their frequent use of PBI as a representative type also pointed out the significance of this particular institution for evangelicals.<sup>47</sup> However, a third scholar, Bruce Hindmarsh, introduced a note of caution when it came to using PBI as a representative type of all Bible school education on the western prairies. By tracing the development of an aggressive branch of fundamentalism stemming from Winnipeg's Elim Chapel, Hindmarsh demonstrated that figures such as Aberhart and L. E. Maxwell in Alberta were not the only sources of evangelical growth on the prairies. Elim Chapel spawned a series of evangelists whose focus was the 'home mission field' of the Canadian northwest. Out of this early twentieth century movement, based in urban Winnipeg, a series of Bible schools, such as Winnipeg Bible Institute and Briercrest Bible Institute in Saskatchewan, came into existence, along with creation of the Canadian Sunday School Mission.<sup>48</sup> Fundamentalist leaders of this Winnipeg-based network, such as Sidney Smith, Simon Forsberg, and Henry Hildebrand put their own stamp on evangelical Christianity across much of Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Hindmarsh went on to argue that the character of Winnipeg fundamentalism was neither distinctively British nor American but a hybrid, unique to the Canadian west.

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in Canada, 1921-1940." M. A. thesis (University of Calgary: 1994), 117-146. For a discussion of the same spirit of innovation in Bible schools south of the border see Brereton, 152-54, and Carpenter, "From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 10-12.

<sup>47</sup> James Opp demonstrated the importance of this in his examination of PBI's role in preparing lay people for the work of evangelism, especially in Canada. Opp's research takes in a variety of fundamentalist agencies, which were important for the task of evangelism during the first half of the twentieth century. Like Rennie, Opp places Bible schools in a revivalist tradition. Although he recognizes their importance for foreign missions, Opp focuses on their effectiveness of carrying out evangelism in Canada.

<sup>48</sup> Bruce Hindmarsh, "The Winnipeg Fundamentalist Network, 1910-1940: The Roots of Transdenominational Evangelicalism in Manitoba and Saskatchewan," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, 304-12. I am indebted to Bruce Guenther on this point. It was as a result of a conversation with him that the significance of Hindmarsh's thesis became apparent for understanding the varied nature of fundamentalist experience and education on the Canadian prairies.

Unlike the fundamentalism of Alberta, this particular network was urban and much more connected to the culture which surrounded it.<sup>49</sup> Hindmarsh was not only taking Burkinshaw and Stackhouse to task for stereotyping all prairie fundamentalism in terms of PBI and its network of relationships, but also challenging William Mann's sect-like typology of western Canadian fundamentalism in general.<sup>50</sup> Neither the well-entrenched sociological paradigm of church-sect, nor one school/institution-as-representative-type was adequate in understanding fundamentalism or its most visible institutions, i.e. Bible schools, on the Canadian prairies.<sup>51</sup>

Hindmarsh's thesis emphasized the need for a more nuanced understanding of key fundamentalist institutions in western Canada. It is also evident from the above discussion that historians who have written about Bible schools, both in the United States and in Canada, have largely chosen to focus on the movement as a whole.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the common contours of these schools and their various roles in evangelical/fundamentalist Christianity have been mapped fairly well. What is lacking is an exploration and understanding of individual schools, especially in light of how these schools understood their particular mission. People in the Christian evangelical/fundamentalist community across Canada did not necessarily view all Bible

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 316-17.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 317. It is worth noting that Hindmarsh was conspicuous in his unapologetic use of the term 'fundamentalism' to identify early twentieth century evangelicalism in the Canadian west. Of all the papers included in Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience, his was one of the few to do so.

<sup>51</sup> In fairness to Stackhouse, he acknowledged the limitation of Mann's church-sect thesis, but he also gets considerable mileage out of it in his own analysis.

<sup>52</sup> At the time of this writing Bruce Guenther's Ph.D. thesis, which promises to be the definitive work on the Bible school movement in Canada, is still in process. Larry J. McKinney's study recent work on the Bible college movement promises much from the title, but is largely a reworking of existing scholarship. Using mostly secondary sources, McKinney's study is so broad in scope that it does not move beyond very general observations of selected individual institutions and personalities. Similar to S.A. Witmer's earlier work it is written by a school administrator for other practitioners and consequently lacks scholarly rigour. See Larry J. McKinney. Equipping for Service: A Historical Account of the Bible College Movement in

schools as serving the same purpose and having the same ethos. Consequently individual institutional histories of the prominent and well-established Bible schools are important if one is to understand the various streams and tributaries which flowed in and out of the central stream of evangelical Christianity in Canada. PBI, as the largest Bible school in Canada for much of the twentieth century, invites such analysis.<sup>53</sup>

Before moving into an analysis of the school, it is first necessary to clarify two important yet confusing terms, namely 'fundamentalism' and 'evangelicalism.' As is apparent from the discussion so far, historians of conservative Protestantism in Canada have not agreed on the application of these terms to Canadian religious identity. In order to understand PBI's place in the religious milieu of its day it is important to get an accurate understanding of these slippery, and often misused, words.

In the first Prospectus issued by Prairie Bible Institute, Maxwell boldly proclaimed that the school "stands for every whit of the 'Fundamentals.'"<sup>54</sup> A few years later, in 1928, Maxwell changed that portion of the catalogue, to read that "while independent of denominational auspices...the School holds itself in cordial fraternal relationship with all evangelical divisions of the church."<sup>55</sup> In both cases Maxwell was identifying where PBI stood in relation to the wider Christian community. Replacing the word 'fundamental' with 'evangelical' might be dismissed by some historians on the

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North America. (Fayetteville, Arkansas: AABC, 1997), and S. A. Witmer, The Bible College Story: Education With Dimension. (Manhasset, New York: Channel Press, 1962).

<sup>53</sup> Guenther has also noted, and rightly so, that Hindmarsh's article cries out for a comparative study of PBI and Briarcrest Bible Institute in order to see how well his thesis holds up; but that is beyond the scope of this particular project.

<sup>54</sup> "Prospectus for the 1923-1924. Second year of the Three Hills Bible School." (Prairie Bible College, Registrar's Office files). No prospectus was issued for the school's first year as Maxwell arrived in Three Hills only a few days before the school actually started in 1922. It was in its third year that the school officially identified itself as Prairie Bible Institute.

<sup>55</sup> Manual of the Prairie Bible Institute: 1925-26, 5.

basis that the two terms are virtually synonymous, or at most represent semantic hair-splitting of little significance. Recently, however, religious historians have recognized that the relationship between the two is not so simple, and such a reduction ignores the complexity of Christian thought and action in the early twentieth century. The task of adequate definition is further complicated by the accumulated pejorative connotations of the term, 'fundamentalism.' What was once a badge of honour became a term "of opprobrium and abuse: a theological swearword rather than a precise category."<sup>56</sup> In the first two decades of the twentieth century 'fundamentalism' was associated with those who held to historic Christian convictions, and defended their views with balance and scholarly integrity in the face of theological challenges.<sup>57</sup> By the middle of the 1920s, however, it also became tied to the heated debates at the centre of American educational and political culture, culminating in the famous Scopes Monkey Trial.

In light of these developments one can interpret Maxwell's change in terminology as a way of signaling that the school was still loyal to its theological roots, while using a term devoid of the volatile cultural baggage which accompanied Fundamentalist identity during the mid 1920s.

The above illustration highlights the need to handle these two terms in an historically responsible manner, one which gets beyond their current polemical use in public rhetoric. So far no one scholar has arrived at a satisfactory, one-size-fits-all set of typologies for these two malleable concepts.<sup>58</sup> In spite of this, it is hoped that the one to

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<sup>56</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, "Defining American Fundamentalism: A Response," in The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A View from Within; A Response from Without, ed. Norman J. Cohen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 40.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 40.

<sup>58</sup> Even a more-than-competent scholar, such as Virginia Brereton admits her extended effort to adequately define fundamentalism is unsatisfactory. See Brereton, 165-70.

follow will provide sufficient clarity for the purpose of understanding the nature and identity of a school such as PBI.

George Marsden offered two simple rules of thumb in his effort to clarify the two terms: an evangelical is “anyone who likes Billy Graham,” while “a fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something.”<sup>59</sup> While such a two-sided definition oversimplifies the matter it is helpful in one way: it identifies fundamentalism as a subgroup within the wider domain of evangelicalism. Most historians agree on this point; the difficulty begins in deciding where exactly the boundaries of the fundamentalist subgroup are.<sup>60</sup>

The best way to clarify both the meaning and relationship of these two terms is by using an analogy. If one envisions evangelicalism as a wide, flowing river, then fundamentalism can be seen as a current, or series of currents within that river, periodically separated by islands or sandbars, but usually coalescing once past these obstacles, and always remaining within the larger river channel. Using this analogy I will first identify the “banks” which enclose the broader evangelical river, before searching out the specific fundamentalist “currents.”

Evangelicalism can, first of all, be understood as an historical movement emerging from the Protestant Reformation and continuing on in later centuries through

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<sup>59</sup> George Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 1. 6. This definition of a fundamentalist was popularized by Jerry Falwell. Another helpful distinction was the metaphor used by Kathleen Boone: “Fundamentalism is the skeleton in the closet of evangelicalism – the shirttail relation who for compelling reasons cannot or will not go away.” See Kathleen Boone, The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 11.

<sup>60</sup> Timothy Weber acknowledged this in his own analysis of the American fundamentalist sub-culture. He states: “We know that fundamentalism is a much more complex phenomenon than previously imagined. It is urban and rural, sophisticated and simplistic, intellectual and anti-intellectual, moderate and militant. In short, fundamentalism is much more diverse – geographically, socially, politically, educationally, and theologically – than its negative public image portends.” Webber, 102.



the revival preaching of John Wesley and George Whitefield.<sup>61</sup> It has been characterized by a life-style of warm piety, self-discipline and evangelism, and has included groups such as Baptists, Pietists, revivalists, African American Christians, holiness groups, and Pentecostals.<sup>62</sup> In spite of the fact that many of these groups functioned quite apart from each other, their identity as a roughly homogeneous group was evident in a “common hymnody, techniques of evangelism, styles of prayer and Bible study, worship, and behavioral mores.”<sup>63</sup>

In addition to seeing evangelicalism as an historical movement it can also be defined as a set of characteristic beliefs and behaviors. By the middle of the nineteenth century these defining characteristics were in place on both sides of the Atlantic. British historian, David Bebbington, summarized them in the following elastic quadrilateral. Evangelicalism was *biblicist*; that is, evangelicals stressed the Bible as the authority for Christian living. Secondly, it was *crucicentrist*; evangelicals emphasized Jesus’ death on the cross for human sin as the essential work of salvation. Evangelicals were also *conversionist*; they insisted on a defining personal spiritual experience as the essential act of becoming a Christian. Finally, evangelicalism was *activist*; putting one’s faith into practice meant engaging in some form of missionary, or evangelistic, activity at home or abroad.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> George Rawlyk traces the evangelical movement in Canada to these two men. See Rawlyk,

“Introduction,” *Aspects of Canadian Evangelicalism*, xv.

<sup>62</sup> Stackhouse, 10, and George Marsden, “The Evangelical Denomination,” in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), xi.

<sup>63</sup> Marsden, “The Evangelical Denomination,” xi.

<sup>64</sup> David W. Bebbington, “Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America: A Comparison,” in *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States*, eds. George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (Toronto: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 185. Marsden adds a fifth characteristic: the importance of a spiritually transformed life. Marsden, “The Evangelical Denomination,” x.

A third and final way of identifying evangelicalism is seeing it as a self-consciously transdenominational community. While not abandoning their denominational ties, evangelicals also saw themselves as part of a larger coalition, or fellowship, bound informally through membership in a variety of societies, institutions, and conferences. These ‘parachurch’ organizations were a collection of schools, colleges, missionary societies, publishing houses, charitable organizations, and agencies committed to social and moral reform. With its roots in the international Pietist movement of the eighteenth century, this informal “united evangelical front” found full expression in the nineteenth century under the impetus of people such as D. L. Moody and Hudson Taylor.<sup>65</sup> The movement became increasingly international in scope as evangelicals in Canada, the United States, Great Britain, and other English-speaking nations of the British Commonwealth crossed each others’ borders as conference leaders, educators, and evangelists.<sup>66</sup> Despite periodic inner bouts of turbulence and dissension evangelicals were still largely united by their shared positive goal of ‘winning the world for Christ.’<sup>67</sup>

Early in the twentieth century the spread of theological modernism, or liberal theology, in combination with Darwinian evolution challenged the religious hegemony of this informal evangelical coalition. The flash point of the growing controversy was biblical interpretation. Evangelicals held to a more literal interpretation of Bible’s

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<sup>65</sup> Marsden, “The Evangelical Denomination,” *xv-xvi*. See also Stackhouse, 10-12.

<sup>66</sup> George A. Rawlyk and Mark Noll, “Introduction,” in *Amazing Grace*, 18-23.

<sup>67</sup> Marsden, “The Evangelical Denomination,” *xvi*.

narrative passages, while modernists rejected this reading in favour of the higher critical hermeneutic developed by German theologians.<sup>68</sup>

American evangelicals did not respond in a uniform manner. While some either accommodated or forged relationships of peaceful co-existence with Christian modernists, a large number of conservatives responded by calling for resistance to the encroachment of heterodoxy. For them the very nature of Christianity was at stake. There could be no accommodation because the conflict was not between two factions within Christendom, but rather between orthodox Christianity and a false religion.<sup>69</sup> By the early 1900s a sub-group of evangelicals were ready to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”<sup>70</sup> The term ‘fundamentalist’ was coined in 1919, when the editor of the influential Baptist journal *The Watchman Examiner*, Curtis Lee Laws, proclaimed it was time for true believers “to do battle royal for the Fundamentals.”<sup>71</sup>

Initially this emerging fundamentalist “current” developed along the same lines as the wider evangelical movement. It was largely informal, made up of loosely connected individuals, churches, and para-church agencies, and consequently, has proven equally as difficult to circumscribe. In spite of various efforts by its adherents to give shape and identity to fundamentalism, historians have found it necessary to go beyond these, to

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<sup>68</sup> For an in-depth treatment of the development of modernist thought in American, and its subsequent influence in the major denominations see William R. Hutchison’s excellent analysis, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). For a more concise overview of modernist thought see Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 32-36.

<sup>69</sup> Dyson Hague, “The History of the Higher Criticism,” in *The Fundamentals*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1990, updated edition from 1958), 14-17. Originally this compilation of essays was published in twelve separate volumes over the period 1910-15. See also Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 174-75 quoting J. Gresham Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism*.

<sup>70</sup> This phrase was taken from the New Testament book of Jude, v.3. It was a phrase which fundamentalists grew fond of using to describe not only to justify an aggressive form of apologetics but also to link their own struggle with historic, early church Christians.

draw out definitions based on the beliefs and behavior of those people and groups which were linked to the movement.<sup>72</sup>

When it comes to beliefs, fundamentalism needs to be viewed as a set of particular interpretations of more general doctrines held by all evangelicals. There are three doctrines peculiar to fundamentalism. Rather than seeing these as essential beliefs which define all fundamentalists, it is more accurate to say that all fundamentalists hold to at least one of these beliefs with varying degrees of commitment to the other two. As such these three beliefs form a family of doctrines to which fundamentalists will claim kinship in varying combination.

The first of these is premillennialism: the belief that Christ's second coming would initiate a thousand year period of divine rule on earth. It was often accompanied by a peculiar interpretation of history, known as dispensationalism. Dispensationalists divided human history into specific periods, which were framed by specific events recorded in the Bible. In each period God's activity in the affairs of humans was understood to conform to a specific set of divinely revealed methods. Premillennial dispensationalism led fundamentalists to focus on biblical prophecies, and to work out elaborate timetables to predict Christ's return.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> "Convention Side Lights." *The Watchman Examiner*, VIII (July 1, 1920), 834 (Found in Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 274).

<sup>73</sup> These early efforts included the publication of *The Fundamentals*, beginning in 1910; the formation of a World's Christian Fundamentals Association, which held its inaugural conference at Philadelphia in 1919; and various creedal summations of orthodox Christian doctrine, such as the "famous five points" of the Presbyterian General Assembly. See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 117-23, 158-62.

Stackhouse notes this same problem is true in arriving at an evangelical identity (p. 7). Does one look for an abstract definition first, and then identify people through that filter, or does one arrive at a definition from the study of the people. Along with Stackhouse, I believe the more effective definition comes through the latter.

<sup>73</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 46-71. Sandeen argued that this was the single defining doctrine of fundamentalism from which other doctrinal peculiarities were derived (ix-xix). Marsden's broadening of that narrow definition is more compelling. For a more complete account of how

Closely related to premillennial dispensationalism was the second member of this doctrinal family, the belief in biblical inerrancy. The divine inspiration, trustworthiness and authority of the Bible were already well established beliefs among evangelicals. What set fundamentalists apart from this larger tradition was their almost exclusive emphasis on the supernatural character of the Bible. Earlier evangelicals acknowledged the interaction between natural and supernatural forces in the writing and compilation of the biblical canon. Faced with the threat of modern theology's strongly naturalist view of the Bible, fundamentalists emphasized its supernatural character at the expense of its human side.<sup>74</sup> Inerrancy suited the popular nature of the fundamentalist movement. One did not have to be an academic scholar to understand the plain truth resident in the very writing of the Book. The common sense of the common person, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gave the humblest layman access to God's truth as easily (some fundamentalists would say more easily, due to an uncluttered mind) as the most highly trained professor. The Bible was God's timeless truth because it spoke the same message to people in all ages.<sup>75</sup>

The third belief in this family of fundamentalist doctrines was known as 'holiness' teaching. Holiness advocates believed a second blessing resulting from a crisis-like experience happened to the individual believer after conversion. In this second, often emotional, encounter one gave in to the complete filling of the Holy Spirit, and thus found the true basis for living a morally transformed life.<sup>76</sup> Rather than the ethical striving of liberal theology, this holiness experience of 'letting go and letting God'

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this teaching caught on in North America through the teachings of John Nelson Darby see Marsden above, 46-71. and Sandeen 59-102.

<sup>74</sup> Carpenter. 70.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 71-72.

made right moral living possible. Terms such as ‘surrender,’ and ‘entire sanctification’ were used to describe this spiritual encounter. A person’s new orientation after this encounter became known as ‘the victorious Christian life,’ of ‘the higher Christian life.’<sup>77</sup> According to holiness teaching, living in the ‘fullness of the Holy Spirit’ involved the quiet waiting on God’s leading in one’s life, and often responding to ‘a call’ to some form of missionary service, whether at home or abroad. This doctrine found its strongest expression in annual “Keswick Conferences,” and in the faith-missionary work popularized in the person and work of J. Hudson Taylor.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to this set of doctrines, fundamentalism also came to be associated with three characteristic behaviors. The first of these was revivalism, which was linked closely to holiness teaching. Holiness revivalism focused on the rehabilitation of individual souls, while largely failing to grapple with the broader concerns of cultural renewal and reform.<sup>79</sup>

A second behavioral characteristic was separation, usually for the sake of doctrinal and ethical purity. In the early 1920s fundamentalists failed to oust modernist factions in the major Baptist and Presbyterian denominations, and shortly thereafter suffered the setback of the Scope’s Trial. In both cases they saw separation as the only

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<sup>76</sup> Brereton, 4-5, and Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 41-42.

<sup>77</sup> Carpenter, 80-81.

<sup>78</sup> The “Keswick” movement developed from a series of conventions on holiness teaching begun in 1875 at Keswick, England. The movement spread to North America by the early twentieth century in the form of Keswick conferences, which were held annually both in Canada and the United States by as early as 1913. Holiness teachings also reached a wider audience through popular biographies of missionaries whose lives were testimonies to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Most notable of these were Hudson Taylor’s *Spiritual Secret*, and the memoirs of Amy Carmichael. In addition to bearing witness of the ‘surrendered life,’ these biographies served to reinforce the link between the holiness ‘life of faith’ and the call to missions. The two-fold teaching of personal yieldedness to the Holy Spirit and openness to the call to missionary service became the cornerstones of fundamentalist education, particularly in Bible schools. See Carpenter, 81-83.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 80-81, and Brereton, 4-8.

answer. In the former they saw the need to separate themselves from an apostate church, and in the latter they were coming out of a secular, and largely hostile, culture.<sup>80</sup>

This position of separation was often coupled with a third characteristic, a posture of militancy. The activity of earnestly contending for the faith was a battle in which no compromise could be given. Fundamentalists saw themselves in the middle of a religious war, and much of their rhetoric from the 1920s onward contained frequent references to military analogies from the Bible. Just like their spiritual ancestors of biblical times they also were fighting a spiritual war against the forces of darkness.<sup>81</sup>

Militancy proved to be two-edged in nature, and had the capacity to cause internal rifts as well. After the Scopes Trial of 1925 fundamentalism divided into two increasingly discernible currents. The first current, with its emphasis on doctrinal purity tended to stress the importance of premillennial dispensationalism, often with a militant attitude. This doctrine justified the view of an apostate church, the demise of culture and the need for separation.<sup>82</sup> Fueling this emphasis on “come-outism”<sup>83</sup> from the surrounding culture were high profile fundamentalist leaders such as William Bell Riley, Carl McIntire, and

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<sup>80</sup> Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 56-61, 100-101; and Fundamentalism and American Culture, 164-184.

<sup>81</sup> Marsden, “Defining American Fundamentalism,” in The Fundamentalist Phenomenon, 28-29. An additional aspect of militancy, unique to American fundamentalists, was the battle to restore their country to its original status as a Christian nation. Here as well as his numerous other writings on fundamentalism, Marsden develops the theme of paradox. Fundamentalists held several sets of apparently conflicting ideas which they never fully resolved, but held in tension. Their self-understanding of being simultaneously cultural outsiders and insiders is likely the most baffling of these paradoxes. In fundamentalist rhetoric America was simultaneously the sinful city of Babylon and the New Israel. It would be convenient to categorize fundamentalists as holding to one or the other, but as scholars like Marsden, and Joel Carpenter have effectively argued, it is inaccurate to do so. For a succinct summary of this tension in fundamentalism see Marsden’s chapter entitled, “Preachers of Paradox,” in Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, 98-121.

<sup>82</sup> Marsden, “From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism: A Historical Analysis,” in The Evangelicals, 146-147.

<sup>83</sup> Fundamentalists frequently adopted phrases from Biblical texts as a kind of theological shorthand for their own internal discourse. In this case the phrase came from the apostle Paul’s injunction to the Corinthian believers to “come out and be ye separate” (II Cor. 6:17).

T. T. Shields.<sup>84</sup> They believed that the best way to maintain biblical inerrancy and purity of doctrine was to engage in militant, apologetic confrontation with one's adversaries outside the faith, while using quasi-inquisitorial tactics to purge heterodoxy within.<sup>85</sup> This militant-millennialist current of fundamentalism was caricatured by the satirical writings of H. L. Menken and Sinclair Lewis, and the resulting popular stereotype came to be accepted as definitive of the movement.<sup>86</sup>

At the same time as this identity was taking shape, a second, parallel current was also developing. While not neglecting premillennial teaching, members of this group placed greater emphasis on personal holiness. They believed the best defense of biblical inerrancy was a transformed life, which attested to the supernatural nature of the Bible's teachings. This, in turn, led them to focus on evangelism and personal revival, rather than end-times prophecy and the culture-war apologetics of the former group. In the wake of the Scopes trial these fundamentalists were quick to adapt their own institutions to the task of evangelism, and were also among the first to see the potential in emerging technologies of mass communication for spreading the gospel.<sup>87</sup> While many

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<sup>84</sup> Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 27, 33-56.

<sup>85</sup> For a detailed exposition of how this group grew apart from the more moderate stream see Carpenter, chapters 4-8. Another historian who recognized this same emerging distinction in fundamentalism, and who writes as a militant fundamentalist insider is David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850*. (Greenville, South Carolina: Unusual Publications, 1986), 3-12.

<sup>86</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 187-88. What had been a badge of honour and orthodoxy in 1912, had, by mid-century, become a term symbolizing militant, religious judgementalism. It was this change which caused theologian and historian Carl Henry to write of the need for the Christian community to distinguish fundamentalism as theology from fundamentalism as a temperament. While endorsing the former he described the latter in a less positive light:

"The real bankruptcy of fundamentalism has resulted...from a harsh temperament, a spirit of lovelessness and strife...It is this character of fundamentalism as a temperament, and not primarily fundamentalism as a theology, which has brought the movement into contemporary discredit." Carl Henry, "Dare We Renew the Controversy?" *Christianity Today*, June 24, 1957, 6. Found in George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), 165, and in Marty, 206

<sup>87</sup> Carpenter, "From Fundamentalism to New Evangelical Coalition," in *Evangelicalism in Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans), 10-11.



fundamentalists would not have viewed the above divisions as an either/or set of alternatives, the distinction between these two fundamentalists currents became more pronounced throughout the 1930s and 40s.<sup>88</sup>

Given the difficulty of clearly defining fundamentalism in its native environment of the United States, it is little wonder that historians of Canadian evangelicalism have reflected ambivalence in their use of the term. Some scholars have followed the lead of William Mann and have uncritically labeled most sectarian evangelical groups as fundamentalist. They usually cite the characteristics of separatism and aggressive evangelism, as well as transdenominational networks, which these groups share with fundamentalists south of the border.<sup>89</sup>

A second group of historians, wary of the above stigma attached to the word, 'fundamentalism,' have argued that, for the most part, it does not apply to Canadian religious experience.<sup>90</sup> Led by the late George Rawlyk, these scholars have understood the hallmarks of fundamentalism as militancy and premillennial dispensationalism. They have argued that Canadian evangelicalism did not emphasize these characteristics.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Carpenter, "From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition," 9, and Revive Us Again, 28-31; Marsden, "From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism: A Historical Analysis," 147-48. This rift between the two currents became more visible when the predominantly "holiness-revivalist" fundamentalists formed the National Association of Evangelicals, while the more "dispensationalist-militants" set up a separate organization, the American Council of Christian Churches. See Revive Us Again, 150-52.

<sup>89</sup> Mann, 9-12; Elliot, "Knowing No Borders: Canadian Contributions to American Fundamentalism," in Amazing Grace, 349-74; Sawatsky, "Looking For That Blessed Hope: The Roots of Fundamentalism in Canada, 1878-1914," Ph. D. diss. (University of Toronto, 1985), 17-24; Ian Rennie, "Fundamentalism and North Atlantic Evangelicalism," in Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990, eds. Mark A. Noll et al., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 342-345.

<sup>90</sup> The single largest body of work on the topic, Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience, with the exception of a few essays the term, fundamentalism, is not recognized as being part of Canadian evangelicalism.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi-xx; Stackhouse, Canadian Evangelicalism, 12; Burkinshaw, Pilgrims in Lotus Land, 13; Moir, 130-32. This latter group would concur with Marsden that militancy is a necessary, but not sufficient condition of fundamentalism. As such it operated on the margins of the Canadian evangelical movement, limited to a few colourful individuals, such as Shields and Aberhart, whose bellicose conduct attracted attention disproportionately greater than their actual influence.

The problem with their position is that it fails to recognize the holiness-revivalist current in fundamentalism. Joel Carpenter has convincingly argued that from the late 1920s to the end of the 1940s this second current was not only discernible in fundamentalism, but that it was the source of the movement's vitality and growth. It will become apparent in the following chapters that Prairie Bible Institute, in its Bible teaching, campus culture, and outreach, fit comfortably into the holiness-revivalist current of fundamentalism during this time.<sup>92</sup> As such, PBI and other institutions which shared this holiness-revivalist approach to living the Christian life, contributed significantly to the character and spread of fundamentalism in western Canada.

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<sup>92</sup> In their research, both Opp and Goertz emphasize this aspect of fundamentalist expression at PBI as well. Although they do not distinguish varieties of fundamentalism, revival and evangelism were the dominant aspects of its expression on the Canadian Prairies. See Opp, 11-21; and Goertz, 220-24.

## Chapter Two:

### Education for Missionary Service: 'Holding Forth the Word of Life'

In Prairie Bible Institute's first printed *Prospectus*, Principal L. E. Maxwell stated: "The aim of the School is to produce a Bible Teaching and Missionary Ministry under the unction of the Holy Spirit... The School pushes the missionary interest to the ends of the earth, and opens its doors to all true missionaries of the Cross."<sup>1</sup> From its inception the founders of the school believed that missionary activity was inseparable from Christian living. Christians were necessarily missionaries, and therefore every aspect of school life was intended to direct students to that end. As the school grew it continued to keep this single-minded focus. Twenty-one years later Maxwell confidently proclaimed that the goal of the school remained unchanged.

From those days of bare beginning this Institute has grown to have many departments, but only one goal, viz., sending the gospel into all the world. Such an ambition must remain forever central. We would gladly continue to have as our reputation that which was once heaped upon us as reproach: "They just make missionaries at P. B. I."<sup>2</sup>

What kind of formal training was necessary for making missionaries? According to Maxwell this was not the right question to ask. The more accurate question was, 'What happens when you have a "Bible-centred and Biblically-spiritual" education?' The answer: you get a school that is "preeminently missionary."<sup>3</sup> In holiness theology the Bible was not merely an ethical instruction manual, but also a Divinely inspired text

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<sup>1</sup> Prospectus of the Three Hills Bible Institute (interdenominational) For the Year 1924-25, Office of the Registrar, Prairie Bible College: 1.3.

<sup>2</sup> *The Miracle of The Prairie Bible Institute: Hoping for Nothing* (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Bible Institute Book Room, 1945), 19.

through which God continued to speak to the individual believer by the inner presence of the Holy Spirit.” Studying it would necessarily direct every true believer into some form of missionary ministry because the Bible was a missionary book.<sup>4</sup>

As we shall see, this approach to education grew out of Maxwell’s own personal religious experiences and particularly his own Bible training. Therefore, before examining the curriculum of the school it is important to look at the formative religious experiences and theological training of PBI’s co-founder and principal. The first part of this chapter will deal with Maxwell’s spiritual conversion, Bible education, and the events which brought him from his home in Kansas to Three Hills, Alberta. The second part will show how the dominant themes in Maxwell’s spiritual formation were expressed in the school’s operational philosophy and curriculum of studies.

Leslie Earl Maxwell was born on July 2, 1895, in Mentor, Kansas; he was the oldest of nine children. His father tried to provide for his family by farming, but when that failed he turned to other means, such as running the local pool hall. L. E. spent most of his teen years helping his family eke out a living.<sup>5</sup> Religion was not part of family life, but there were a few occasions when young Maxwell did think about God, specifically in terms of Christianity. These initial encounters with Christianity came during times of personal crisis. Maxwell could recall worrying about his own eternal destiny at the age of eleven, when his younger brother was killed in a farming accident.<sup>6</sup> Then a year after his brother’s death he attended a revival meeting at a local Methodist church, where he

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<sup>3</sup> L. E. Maxwell, “Forward” in Margaret Epp’s Into All the World: The Missionary Outreach of Prairie Bible Institute (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Press, 1973), 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Keller, 26.

<sup>6</sup> L. E. Maxwell interviewed by Don Richardson, April 12, 1982, transcript of tape 2, p. 1. Maxwell Biography File, Box 111, Prairie Bible Institute Archives

heard a sermon on the fate of sinners, who would sink into hell if they did not repent. The husband-and-wife evangelistic team used a dramatic, theatrical manner to add intensity to their message. Young Maxwell was so scared that when the altar call was given, he went forward to repent of his sins. For a while his fears of eternal damnation subsided.<sup>7</sup>

Another crisis occurred in his later teens when he came across a book in a box full of things his father had purchased at an auction sale. It was entitled The Twin Hells. One of the chapters depicted what it would be like to spend "Forty-eight Hours in Hell," and on reading this Maxwell's fears of spending eternity in constant suffering were once again renewed.<sup>8</sup>

Although these crises aroused in him a desire to avoid hell, Maxwell credited the gentler influence of a devout, God-fearing aunt with bringing about a more genuine and lasting conversion to Christianity in his life. After he graduated from high school, Maxwell moved to Kansas City where his Aunt Christina had arranged both employment and living accommodations for him. She also made sure he attended church regularly. Each Sunday he would hear the invitation of the Presbyterian minister to "come to Christ and come to church."<sup>9</sup> Under conviction from this weekly invitation, he decided one evening, in the privacy of his own apartment, to kneel down and pray for God's forgiveness. From that moment on he never doubted his salvation.<sup>10</sup>

In 1917 Maxwell was drafted into the United States Army and was stationed in France until the end of the war. After nineteen months of service he was discharged in

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. tape 2, p. 3. Maxwell Biography File; and Keller, 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> Maxwell, "Personal Reminiscence." (no date), Maxwell Biography File.

<sup>9</sup> Maxwell interview, tape 1, p. 4. Maxwell Biography File.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

May, 1919. Although still faithful to his earlier conversion to Christianity, he had ongoing doubts about his ability to live a godly, 'victorious' life.<sup>11</sup> He returned to Kansas City, and, on the advice of his pastor, enrolled in a newly founded, Midland Bible school. It was here Maxwell met the man who would become his primary spiritual mentor, an elderly teacher named William 'Daddy' Stevens. Under Stevens' mentorship Maxwell was influenced by two things, which would later be foundational in his own school. One of these influences was theological, while the other was pedagogical.

Theologically Maxwell embraced the doctrine of holiness peculiar to the Christian and Missionary Alliance movement of which Stevens was a part. Before coming to Kansas City to start a new Bible school, Stevens had taught at the Missionary Training School in Nyack, New York, generally believed to be the first Bible school in North America.<sup>12</sup> The founder of the Nyack school was Canadian evangelical, A. B. Simpson, who started the school as part of his Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) movement.<sup>13</sup> The C&MA began as a non-denominational fellowship dedicated to spreading the "Four-Fold Gospel" of Jesus as Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King. It was the doctrine of Jesus as Sanctifier, a form of holiness theology peculiar to the C&MA, which became a cornerstone of Maxwell's own theology.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Keller, 39. The terminology used to describe spiritual experiences or states of being became a kind of code for evangelicals. Often using phrases from the King James Version of the Bible evangelicals could converse in a theological shorthand. These stock phrases also became a test by which one could identify the truly converted.

<sup>12</sup> Brereton, 55. A. B. Simpson started the school in 1882, four years before the more famous and influential Moody Bible Institute was founded in Chicago.

<sup>13</sup> Like many fundamentalist organizations, the C&MA began as a para-church movement calling for evangelical renewal and missionary outreach across church denominations. Eventually it became a denomination itself.

<sup>14</sup> Darrel R. Reid, "Towards a Fourfold Gospel: A. B. Simpson, John Salmon, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada," in Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience, 276.

According to this doctrine becoming a Christian involved a definite, often dramatic, personal conversion experience, in which one acknowledged one's inherent sinfulness and looked to God's grace and forgiveness to make one a "new person." But this was only the first stage in the Christian experience. Although one was now "saved" there was still a tendency to fall back into the old sinful ways. A second step, or "work of grace," was needed. Simpson's teaching of holiness differed from the traditional Wesleyan formulation, in that sanctification was not a gradual process. Rather, it was a sudden experience, received by faith, in which Christ's presence, through the Holy Spirit, was activated in the believer, enabling her to rise to a new and higher plane of spiritual devotion and effective Christian living.<sup>15</sup> Sanctification was often precipitated by some kind of immediate spiritual crisis, but it usually required preparation, often in the form of prayer, Bible study, and observing the example of other faithful believers.<sup>16</sup> This second experience was described as "dying to self" and led to the "victorious life," also known as "the higher Christian life."<sup>17</sup>

Such a holiness experience usually led to a changed life. First of all, holiness needed to be cultivated by ongoing study of the Bible and prayer. This in turn led to changed moral behavior. Not only did it mean abandoning such vices as alcohol, tobacco, and the worldly amusements of the theatre and dancehall; its practitioners also believed that changes in one's character also took place. People testified to overcoming character faults of a bad temper, or chronic impatience.<sup>18</sup> In addition to separation from worldly behavior, holiness also led people to renounce material wealth in favour of

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<sup>15</sup> Reid, 276, and Marsden, 78-79.

<sup>16</sup> Brereton, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 4, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 5.

giving money to missions or church-related ministries. Finally, holiness produced willingness to obey God's "call" to some aspect of Christian or missionary service.<sup>19</sup>

For Maxwell this second work of grace came during his final year in Bible school, when at one point, feeling intensely guilty due to his wrongful, public accusation of another student, he stood up before the entire student body to confess his sin. The resulting inner peace and his recalling to mind the passage of Scripture, "I have been crucified together with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me," led him to believe that he was beginning to live the victorious life.<sup>20</sup> Maxwell was convinced that personal spiritual victory was his because he had acted by faith on the truth claims of the Bible. It was not a feeling or an ecstatic experience which signaled victory, but an act of obedience.<sup>21</sup>

For Maxwell "dying to self" and "yielding" to God's call to service were tied to the same crisis experience. During his third year of school Maxwell was approached by Stevens to consider moving up to Canada and becoming a Bible teacher. Stevens had received a letter from a young farmer, Fergus Kirk, who lived just outside of Three Hills, Alberta, requesting the services of a trained Bible teacher for some of the local young people. After his confession before the Bible school student body, Maxwell saw Kirk's need for a teacher as Providential leading. Despite his fear of public speaking, his

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<sup>19</sup> Maxwell, "The Holy Spirit in Missions." (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Bookroom, 1946), 25-27; Brereton, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Maxwell interview, tape 1, p. 8. Maxwell Biography File. The biblical text quoted is Galatians 2:20. (King James Version).

<sup>21</sup> L. E. Maxwell, The Holy Spirit in Missions, 21-25. This was always something that Maxwell emphasized in his own teaching and writing. Like many other evangelicals of his day he viewed the more ecstatic, emotional experiences of Pentecostals and radical Wesleyans with a great deal of suspicion. Maxwell also broke with Wesleyan theology on the degree to which a person could live the victorious life. The Wesleyan teaching that 'entire perfection' could be attained in this life was rejected by Maxwell, as evidenced by the doctrinal statement of the PBI in The Manual of the Prairie Bible Institute, 1934-35, p. 15: Registrar's Office, Prairie Bible College.



reluctance to return to a rural setting, and a dislike of cold winters, he accepted the offer, confident that the letter from Three Hills constituted a divine “call” to Christian service.<sup>22</sup>

In holiness teaching Maxwell could make sense of his own spiritual journey, especially his struggles with personal sinfulness after his conversion experience, and the discerning of God’s call to service. It was a theology that emphasized quiet and internal struggle, rather than the more overt emotionalism typical of evangelical revivalism. It was highly personal, focusing on God’s work in the life of the individual, and it contained a strongly intuitive, or mystical, element, especially when it came to hearing the Providential “call to fulltime service.”<sup>23</sup>

The second area in which Stevens influenced Maxwell was in his approach to teaching the Bible. Stevens used a “Study Guide Method,” in order to help his students see how the Bible could inform daily living. The method was, pedagogically speaking, quite simple. Students were required to systematically read through their Bibles, and at the same time, answer a series of assigned “search questions” from a textbook. The questions were divided into units corresponding, for the most part, to the individual books of the Old and New Testaments. These questions would then be taken up in the next class period, with the teacher randomly calling on various students to read their answers out loud to the rest of the class.<sup>24</sup> Over several years the entire canon of scripture was studied in this manner. Under Maxwell’s leadership this approach to religious education would form the core of PBI’s own Bible training program. Its

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<sup>22</sup> Keller, 43, Maxwell interview, tape 1, p. 11; Maxwell Biography File

<sup>23</sup> Ian A. Rennie, “The Doctrine of Man in the Canadian Bible Belt,” (n.p., 1973, photocopy from author) 3-4. Some of the authors Maxwell frequently quoted were the quietest, mystical writers, such as Madame Guyon and Oswald Chambers. *Prairie Harvester* (Prairie Bible Institute), May 1984, p. 12. See also Reid, 276.

<sup>24</sup> First and Second Year Search Questions, (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Bible Institute, 1946), 5.

implementation was not due solely to Maxwell; Fergus Kirk, the school's co-founder, was also a believer in C&MA theology.

As mentioned above it was Kirk's letter to Stevens which brought Maxwell to Canada in the fall of 1922. Kirk had been raised in a devout evangelical Presbyterian home in Ontario. In addition to being a farmer, his father, Andrew, also served with the Presbyterian Board as missionary lay preacher on the prairies of Manitoba. Determined to seek his own fortune, Fergus worked his way further west, and in 1915 he had settled on a farm near Three Hills. It seems that Kirk was something of a workaholic who had great personal ambition. His drive to succeed financially resulted in a nervous breakdown, and in 1919 he was ordered by his doctor to take a two-year forced vacation from his farming activities. During these years he underwent a spiritual re-awakening and, like his father, began to practice as a lay preacher and teacher at a nearby Presbyterian Church.<sup>25</sup> In order to educate himself about his rediscovered faith Kirk used Bible study materials passed on to him by his sister, Hattie, who was a missionary in the West Indies. Hattie Kirk had attended the C&MA missionary training school in Nyack, and it was Stevens' course materials which she passed on to her brother. By 1921 Kirk was convinced he needed someone more qualified than himself to continue teaching the small, but interested group of local young people who were part of his Sunday school class. He managed to locate Stevens in Kansas City, and in answer to his request Maxwell came to Alberta.<sup>26</sup>

From the outset of his teaching career on the Canadian prairies, the influences of Maxwell's spiritual and educational formation shaped the operational philosophy and

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<sup>25</sup> Keller, 48-66. *Prairie Harvester*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (May-June, 1962), 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> Keller, 69-70

From the outset of his teaching career on the Canadian prairies, the influences of Maxwell's spiritual and educational formation shaped the operational philosophy and curriculum of PBI. This was evident primarily in three ways. First of all, the holiness doctrine of the "deeper life" of faith became the basis by which school planning and policies were formulated. Secondly, the C&MA emphasis of Bible education leading to missionary outreach became the organizational pattern for both curriculum and overall structure of the school year. Thirdly, the fundamentalist concern for purity of Gospel in order to avoid factionalism and/or heterodoxy drove Maxwell to formulate a doctrinal statement for the school, which provided a framework for Christian "unsectarian" unity.

Commitment to living the "deeper life" of faith became firmly entrenched in the school's philosophy as it went through its early stages of growth. When Maxwell stepped off the train in Three Hills at the end of September 1922, he was greeted by Kirk and appraised of his new teaching situation. A vacant house on the property of one of the local farm families, the McElherens, had been converted into a classroom. Maxwell had eight young people and two adults as his students, and his pay would be what little the student families could share with him as a result of a meager harvest that fall.<sup>27</sup> Classes began on October 9<sup>th</sup> and lasted to the end of March, the following year.

After two years of teaching in one room of an old farmhouse Maxwell and the founding families of the school faced a major decision. Partly through local interest and partly through Maxwell's itinerant summer preaching tours, enrollment in the second year had increased from ten to twenty-five students.<sup>28</sup> Initially Maxwell had only planned to stay a year or two, but found he enjoyed both the students and the families

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<sup>27</sup> Davidson. 13-14. Of the original eight young people two were McElherens, two were Davidsons (their father, Roy, would be a long-standing board member of the school), and one was a Kirk.

who had taken him in as one of their own.<sup>29</sup> The coming school year promised another increase in student numbers, which would demand additional staff, a larger school house, and residential facilities. At the same time Maxwell and Fergus Kirk realized they had no money for such a venture and no land to build on. The closest town was the village of Three Hills, which had no water supply or electricity.<sup>30</sup> The only encouraging factor was the availability of two side-by-side lots in town. The sale price was the amount of back taxes owed on them, a grand sum of ten dollars. Although they could afford the land, the idea of a Bible school in the middle of nowhere seemed absurd. In Maxwell's own words:

Whoever heard of such a school in a country district? What folly and presumption! We were without precedent and without experience. The path was untried. To our knowledge it had never been done. It was a new thing...Did we dare venture?<sup>31</sup>

Much like Maxwell's earlier spiritual crises, the school and its members faced a collective crisis, which they understood as a test of their faith in God's provision. Just as Maxwell had worked through his earlier crises with long sessions of prayer, so now the fledgling Board of Directors of the school did the same. They agreed unanimously to purchase the property in town and begin to build as their means afforded them. Just as Maxwell had found assurance of Providential leading in faith and obedience discerned by the intuitive promptings of the Holy Spirit, so now the school and its staff would collectively practice seeking Divine leading in similar manner. Maxwell understood the decision in the following terms:

Obedience of faith never becomes real until it ventures forth where it cannot understand. God must take us out beyond the apparent, and the reasonable...out into the

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<sup>28</sup> Registrar's Office Records, Prairie Bible College, and Davidson, 19-21.

<sup>29</sup> Stackhouse, 76, and Maxwell Interview, Tape 1, p. 18; Maxwell Biography File.

<sup>30</sup> Davidson, 23.

<sup>31</sup> "'Play Safe' not Prairie Motto." *The Three Hills Capital*, (April 12, 1972), 2.

waters that are deep, untried, unfathomed, and in a certain sense unreasonable. God doesn't work contrary to reason, but it has to be enlightened reason or else we dare not venture.<sup>32</sup>

From this point on two guiding principles emerged which would continue to shape school decision-making; both of these were expressions of the "victorious life" derived from holiness theology. The first of these was the commitment never to incur any financial debt in the maintenance and/or further expansion of the school. PBI would rely on "the unsolicited, free-will offerings of friends who believe in such a ministry."<sup>33</sup> Related to this no-debt policy was a second principle, summarized in the phrase, "hoping for nothing."<sup>34</sup> Born out of yet another one of Maxwell's personal struggles, he and all who joined the staff of the school purposed not to live on fixed salaries, but to divide equally whatever came in through voluntary donations, be it money, produce or any other kind of gift.<sup>35</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, living out this ideal was central to PBI's community ethos.

In the fall of 1924 thirty-seven students showed up for the beginning of classes. Instead of an old farmhouse, they occupied a partially finished building in town, which housed both classrooms and residences. The work of developing a permanent school had begun in earnest. The C&MA twin emphases of Bible study and missionary outreach, which Maxwell absorbed from Stevens, were in place from the first school year onward. In addition to studying the Bible, courses also emphasized the skills important to lay

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<sup>32</sup> Maxwell Interview. Tape 1. p. 18; Maxwell Biography File.

<sup>33</sup> *Manual 1925-26*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> The phrase became a distinct point of identity for the staff of PBI right up until the mid-1980s when the Institute made the transition to a salary grid for its workers. The phrase, like many evangelical slogans or rallying cries, came from a Bible verse, in this case it was Luke 6:35. "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great..."

<sup>35</sup> *The Miracle of Hoping for Nothing* (Three Hills, Alberta: PBI Book Room, 1945), 4.

ministry in local churches.<sup>36</sup> Consistent with his training at Midland, Maxwell connected his Bible teaching to a missionary vision. At the end of the first year, the student body ended up pledging \$2000 in support of missionary projects.<sup>37</sup> What began as a missionary pledge offering eventually developed into an annual eight-day missionary conference.

During the spring and summer months when school was not in session, Maxwell became an itinerant preacher, traveling to rural churches in Alberta. In some cases this involved travelling thirty miles a day on horseback. Sponsored by the missions board of a Baptist church in Calgary, Maxwell would go to any community willing to have him come and preach.<sup>38</sup> This pattern of classes, missionary emphasis, and summer evangelism were an extension of Maxwell's own call to ministry, but also became a familiar pattern for many of the students in the following years. Besides the school's principal, other staff members, often accompanied by a musical ensemble made up of students, would travel to churches and summer camps in various parts of western Canada.<sup>39</sup>

In keeping with his own education at Midland, Maxwell initially offered a three-year program of studies at PBI. But in the sixth year of the school's operation he decided to extend that to a fourth year.<sup>40</sup> Using the "Search Question" method taught by him by Stevens, Maxwell methodically guided his students through the entire canon of Scripture.

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<sup>36</sup> Bible schools tended to use the word 'training' to describe their instruction, rather than the term 'education.' This was intentional in that it reflected the practical, vocational nature of religious instruction early Bible schools prided themselves in offering as opposed to the classical emphasis of university education. See Breerton, 62, 63.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. Stevens brought in steady flow of missionary speakers for school chapel services throughout Maxwell's years in Bible school. Maxwell interview, Tape 2, page e.

<sup>38</sup> Maxwell interview, Tape 1., p. 14, and Tribute by J. M. Murray, Maxwell Biography file.

<sup>39</sup> "Extension Department Starts With One Man." *The Three Hills Capital*, April 12, 1972, p. 12

<sup>40</sup> Prospectus, 1927-28.

master the “plain sense” or literal meaning of the text, and then directed to compare or contrast a particular passage with other biblical passages. Occasionally a more open-ended question would invite the student to give an answer which demanded speculative reasoning. For example, a question on Jesus’ telling the parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke asks, “What would be the Savior’s purpose in setting forth the parable of the good Samaritan?” Even here, however, the phrasing of the question implies that students were not to speculate too freely; but that the “right” answer could be found in a careful reading of the passage.

School Manuals cited both the rationale and the advantages for this pedagogical approach:

These questions are especially selected and are designed to enable the student to sound the depths of God’s Word as an organic body of revelation. The teacher keeps from between the student and his subject (*sic*) and pushes the student by personal first-hand research, but under careful guidance, into rich original findings. The result is that the Bible is not mediumized (*sic*) to the student, but the student has his own revelation and his own message of the truth... The student comes to find the Bible to be an open book, *his own*, and *all his own*, which is just what the heart of every one born of God longs for; and furthermore there comes to be raised up a *Bible Teaching Ministry* for home and foreign field; which is just what the heart of the church longs for.<sup>41</sup>

Maxwell later understood the limitations of using only an inductive method in the Bible curriculum, but at the same time did not discount its merit: “I...grew up with a kind of extreme, but one thing [the Study Guide Method] did, it pinned me to the Book and believing that the Book could interpret the Book.”<sup>42</sup> Implicit in Maxwell’s words are three important educational concepts. First of all, the Bible was all one needed to study for effective Christian living. Secondly, the Bible was a unified book, which expressed divinely, inerrant truth, not a collection of disparate, culturally conditioned texts. Finally,

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<sup>40</sup> Prospectus, 1927-28.

<sup>41</sup> Manual 1944-45, 14.

three important educational concepts. First of all, the Bible was all one needed to study for effective Christian living. Secondly, the Bible was a unified book, which expressed divinely, inerrant truth, not a collection of disparate, culturally conditioned texts. Finally, the best commentary on passages of Scripture were other passages in the Bible; and careful reading of the text would allow an individual to discover this. This last concept carried with it two important implications: first of all, biblical commentaries, and other interpretive tools were not considered necessary for accurately interpreting the Bible; it was a book which could be understood by every believer, so long as he was open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit; and secondly, authoritative meaning lay within the text, and could be discerned through the plain sense meaning of the words themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Maxwell and the rest of the teaching faculty believed that teaching the Bible in such a way would not only enlighten the mind, but also “grip the heart,” thus leading to an aggressive confident evangelism.<sup>44</sup> This belief was borne out in Maxwell’s own approach to evangelism. During one of his summer preaching tours he struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger on a train. This passenger, who was not a Christian,

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<sup>43</sup> The formal doctrine of biblical inerrancy was developed by Princeton seminarians Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield. It combined the belief that the Bible was divinely inspired by God, and therefore without error, along with a hermeneutic grounded in the Scottish Common Sense Realism of Thomas Reid, and the scientific method of Francis Bacon. Maxwell never referred directly to Princeton theology in his writings, but, like most fundamentalists, his own approach to interpreting and teaching the Bible was consistent with this school of thought. For a further explanation of fundamentalist biblicism see Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 55-62, Brereton, 33-36, and Timothy P. Webber, “The Two-Edged Sword,” 101-120. For a the development of Common Sense thought in Canadian evangelicalism see Michael Gauvreau, The Evangelical Century, 17-56. Historian, Kathleen Boone, correctly identified the inconsistency underlying this kind of epistemology. On the one hand the instructor could claim objective truth on the basis of the inerrancy and Divine inspiration of the text, while at the same time using the “hidden authority” of his questions to direct the student toward the desired interpretation. In this way the voice of the extra-textual agent, i.e. the instructor, was subsumed in the text itself, thus “speaking for God” as the authoritative interpretation. Kathleen Boone, The Bible Tells Them So, 61-75. Boone goes on to effectively argue that fundamentalists exchanged the interpretive authority of tradition and church councils for that of individual charismatic leaders within the fundamentalist movement.

<sup>44</sup> Manuel 1944-45, 15. See also Brereton, 61. Brereton notes that most fundamentalists believed in the innate power of ideas to influence human thought and action.



began to question Maxwell about Christian belief as well as offer a defense for his position. Maxwell would answer questions and counter his travelling companion's arguments by quoting passages of Scripture. At one point the passenger exclaimed, "You think you're the only one who is right!" Maxwell's reply was, "I *know* I'm right, because I am giving you God's Word." (author's italics)<sup>45</sup> It was this kind of confident evangelism which Maxwell hoped to kindle in his students from the education they received at PBI.

The emphasis on an inductive approach to studying the Bible was not "absolutely unique" to PBI, like their Manual claimed. Maxwell was simply passing on what he had been taught at Midland Bible School in Kansas from his mentor, Stevens, and from another gifted teacher, Dorothy Ruth Miller, who would join PBI's faculty in the late 1920s. Both Stevens and Miller had used this method when they both taught at Simpson's C&MA school in Nyack; James Gray of Moody Bible Institute popularized this approach to understanding the Bible through his widely used Synthetic Bible Studies.<sup>46</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that the Vancouver Bible Training Institute used a similar inductive approach, along with many of the other Bible schools which sprang up on the Canadian Prairies during the 1930s and 40s. Few of these schools, though, advertised such a well worked out methodology like PBI did.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to the theological and epistemological pre-suppositions which supported the inductive approach, pragmatic limitations also played a role in curriculum development. Library and financial resources were almost non-existent when Maxwell

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<sup>45</sup> The Prairie Harvester, (Summer issue, 1984), 27.

<sup>46</sup> Breerton, 87-100.

<sup>47</sup> Leonard F. O'Neil, "A Survey of Bible Schools in Canada." B. Div. Thesis (McMaster University: 1949), 14; and Opp, 100.

first arrived. "We didn't have a book on theology; we had to develop all that since we came here."<sup>48</sup> As the school grew library resources were added, but the school still remained committed to an inductive approach to learning. This was true not only of Bible courses, but also of other courses as well. In both Church History and Christian Evidences (Apologetics) students worked their way through the required textbooks guided by search questions.<sup>49</sup>

If the quality of education seemed to lack the intellectual rigor of seminaries and universities it did fit well with the intended purpose of the school. This was Bible instruction for lay people who were going into remote areas, with few resources, and who were committed to teaching others.<sup>50</sup> Missionaries often worked in isolation, and this training helped sharpen their interpretive skills and foster confidence in their abilities to teach without depending on others.<sup>51</sup> There was also the belief that focused attention on the Biblical text at the expense of homiletical or exegetical commentaries helped eliminate excess cultural baggage from cross-cultural religious instruction. As one observer of PBI's education noted:

The pioneer in unevangelized fields must be stripped for the race. Culture is forgotten. Theories are ignored... Whereas doctrine and homiletics may occupy the attention of the home-loving cleric, the Pauline epistles are the rule books for the infant churches. The book of Acts is the inspiration of the junior missionary. Hebrews 11 revives the frustrated warrior and Revelation provides the hope of the veteran. The Text-book (the Bible) above all books is the complete library found in the missionary's suitcase.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 127.

<sup>49</sup> First and Second Year Search Questions, 123, 139.

<sup>50</sup> Harder, 33

<sup>51</sup> Goertz, 127.

<sup>52</sup> "Discipline and Discipleship: My Visit to Prairie Bible Institute," *Christ for Soul and Body: Anderson Gospel Tabernacle*, Vol. IX, No. 12 (Anderson, Indiana – December, 1946): 4.

At the same time the school expanded its program options, offering alternatives ranging from a two-year diploma track to a four-year degree. Besides courses in Biblical Studies and Doctrine, students were also required to take Church History, Bible Atlas, English and Spelling, as well as applied courses in Homiletics, Public Speaking, Personal Work and Missions.<sup>54</sup> What stands out about the curriculum is not only its pragmatic nature, but also the emphasis placed on effective communication. Much of the curriculum was aimed at developing careful reading and writing skills, not only when it came to the Bible, but also for all literature. Students were given large vocabulary lists to define and master.<sup>55</sup> In addition to that students were expected to master a variety of rhetorical and public speaking skills. PBI's Manual declared that these courses were "very important in view of the fact that every Christian, especially every Christian worker, should be a soul-winner."<sup>56</sup> Here again the conscious connection between course content and evangelical missionary vision is apparent. If the Bible is "the Truth" of God's revelation, and if the calling of every believer is to "save souls," then accurate and effective communication needed to be at the core of Christian education. Furthermore it was to be portable education, unencumbered with analysis and speculative

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<sup>54</sup> The title, 'Personal Work,' was given to courses which taught people how to conduct personal evangelism, and how to use the Bible when sharing one's faith in a variety of circumstances. In addition to teaching methods these courses also stressed the memorization of numerous biblical passages. Missions courses tended to be a kind of religious global demographics course in order to inform students where in the world Christian missions were active and which regions remained 'unreached.' See Manual 1944-45, 21-24.

<sup>55</sup> First and second year courses placed great emphasis on vocabulary building. This was likely due, in part, to the fact that many of the students who began attending the school did not have a high school diploma, but also reflected an awareness that mastery of language was necessary to clearly communicate the gospel.

<sup>56</sup> Manual 1944-45, 24. W. E. Mann noted that public speaking was a particular strength of Bible School education, and that graduates were often impressive speakers. See Mann, 102.

and effective communication needed to be at the core of Christian education.

Furthermore it was to be portable education, unencumbered with analysis and speculative criticism of academia. Missionaries needed a gospel that would “travel light” and adapt easily to rustic environment of frontier evangelism.<sup>57</sup>

If the word spoken and written was important for the missionary enterprise, so was the work in song.

We believe that God has give musical talent as a gift to be used for His glory, which talent we are privileged to lay on the altar of dedication to Him. The purpose of the music department at the Prairie Bible Institute is to develop consecrated musical ability for the Lord’s work.<sup>58</sup>

A thriving music department offered lessons for a variety of instruments, and for voice, as well as courses in music theory and conducting. Students were encouraged to join a vocal or instrumental ensemble, which would then have the opportunity to travel for the school during the summer, or perform on the weekly Sunday radio broadcast.<sup>59</sup> Most of the music performed by these ensembles tended toward popular evangelical hymns and choruses. Here again, the spirit of lay training for the simple communication of the Christian message was the principle concern. The sacred music of high culture and the more majestic hymnody of the mainline churches was largely ignored.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Manual 1944-45, 24. W. E. Mann noted that public speaking was a particular strength of Bible School education, and that graduates were often impressive speakers. See Mann, 102.

<sup>57</sup> I am indebted to Sandra Beardsall (Professor of Church History, St. Andrew’s College, University of Saskatchewan) and her work on the enthusiastic faith of Newfoundland Methodism (Paper presentation at the Canadian Society for Church History . Annual Meeting 2000, May 27). Her term ‘portable faith’ as applied to Christian piety in these fishing communities is also applicable to the Gospel as conceived in western Canadian Bible Schools.

<sup>58</sup> Manual 1944-45, 27.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>60</sup> A survey of the hymns found in PBI’s song book used for student chapels and conferences bears this out. See Redemption Songs: A Choice Collection of One Thousand Hymns and Choruses for Evangelistic Meetings, Soloists, Choirs, the Home (London: Pickering and Inglis Ltd., n.d.). See also O’Niel, 38. Outside of O’Niel’s undergraduate paper on Bible Schools few historians of the movement have noted the significance of music programs at these schools. In the 1950s, with the expansion of radio broadcasting programming PBI’s music department came close to equaling the size of the Bible department.

The lay-oriented philosophy of the educational program at PBI was further reinforced by the nature of the faculty. Maxwell, himself, never received formal training beyond his Bible School education at Midland, and degrees from recognized post-secondary institutions were never a necessary pre-requisite for faculty. If anything, there was a suspicion of college and university learning, largely linked to the destructive influences of modernism. Maxwell would periodically run stories in the school publication, *The Prairie Pastor*, of devout evangelical young people who had left home to attend college or university and returned several years later having renounced their faith.<sup>61</sup>

Most of the faculty had Bible School training. PBI frequently hired its own graduates after they had served as pastors or missionaries for a period of time.<sup>62</sup> A few faculty members did have university training, and often these people ended up as the most versatile and influential teachers. James Murray, who graduated with a First Class in English from the University of Alberta, not only taught this subject, but a variety of Bible and History courses, as well as Apologetics and Homiletics.<sup>63</sup> Murray joined the faculty of PBI in 1935 and remained active well into the 1960s. Next to Maxwell the most influential faculty member during the school's first twenty-five years was Dorothy Ruth Miller. She held an English degree from Columbia University and a degree in History from New York University. She had taught at Simpson's school in Nyack and then moved to Kansas where she taught at Midland Bible School and met Maxwell. In

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<sup>61</sup> A couple of examples are "A Local Tragedy," *The Prairie Pastor (PP)*, Vol. 4, No. 12 (Dec. 1931): 1-2; and "The Grief of Parents," *PP*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (March, 1929): 3.

<sup>62</sup> Stackhouse, 81. This observation is not only borne out by the sporadic references to faculty additions made in the *PP*, but also by the information still included in the Institute's personnel files.

<sup>63</sup> *Prairie Harvester*, (Jan.-Mar., 1982): 5.

1928 she came north and began teaching at PBI.<sup>64</sup> In addition to her teaching responsibilities, which included Bible, History, Missions, and English, she served as Superintendent of Women, and helped Maxwell edit *The Prairie Pastor*.<sup>65</sup> Miller and Murray, however, were exceptions in terms of their academic qualifications.

Educational historian Virginia Brereton has pointed out that although Bible Schools expected their teachers to be competent in the classroom, what counted even more was the quality of their spiritual lives. Faculty served as models for holy living, both in their reverence for the Scriptures and in their disciplined activism. When Maxwell announced Miller's appointment he did mention her academic qualifications, but went on to state that "far more important... than her scholastic attainments, is Miss Miller's devotion to the teaching of God's Word."<sup>66</sup>

School staff members were also expected to lead by example when it came to missionary activism, and to enduring the spartan living conditions on campus along with their students. In addition to teaching, the faculty were expected to lead "summer ministry teams" during the months when classes were not in session. During the school year teachers often had extensive co-curricular assignments which could also include duties in student dorms. As will become evident in the next chapter, this close, if not intense, daily contact generated significant stress in the lives of both faculty and students; but its also had the potential to forge strong, positive paternal bonds between teacher and student.<sup>67</sup> One alumnus recalled, "The warmth, love and concern of... the staff... were so deep and real... We saw in each staff member the complete and wholehearted dedication

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<sup>64</sup> *PP*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (Sept. 1928): 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Manual 1931-32*, n.p.; *PP*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (Oct. 1930): 7.

<sup>66</sup> *PP*, (Sept. 1928): 3.

<sup>67</sup> Brereton, 109-11.

to the Lord's will, which showed what God could do for us as well."<sup>68</sup> No doubt not all students spoke about their time at PBI in such glowing terms, but similar comments from other alumni show the power of staff conduct to deeply influence students' lives.

If the approach to teaching and ministry stemmed from the specific influence of the Christian and Missionary Alliance movement, Maxwell resorted to a more common fundamentalist framework to provide a basis for nonsectarian unity at PBI. In 1925 the school issued its first doctrinal statement which expressed the central tenants of fundamentalist belief:

Prairie Bible Institute Believes In:  
 The Bible as the Very Word of God.  
 Salvation by faith through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.  
 Sanctification, victory and preservation through faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ under the Holy Spirit.  
 Prayer for the sick in accordance with the injunctions of God's Word.  
 The Second Premillennial return of Christ.  
 The Church's sole business – with no worldly alliances but looking for her Lord's return – to shed the light of the gospel continuously in all the earth.<sup>69</sup>

In 1934 the doctrinal creed of the school was expanded to include statements affirming belief in the virgin birth and deity of Christ, the universal depravity of humankind, and the personhood of both the Devil and the Holy Spirit. Some alterations were made to existing statements. For example the phrase, "very Word of God," to describe the Bible was changed to "plenary inspiration and final authority," thus incorporating standard fundamentalist nomenclature in describing the Scriptures as a sacred text.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Beth McNaughton (class of '35) *Prairie Harvesters*. (Jan. – Mar., 1982): 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Manual 1925-26*, 7. The statement on the prayer for the sick, although not a core doctrine of most fundamentalist creeds, indicates the strong influence of A. B. Simpson's C&MA theology which emphasized the teaching of Christ as healer as well as savior and king.

<sup>70</sup> *Manual 1934-35*, 14-15. Stackhouse suggests that the alterations and additions may have come about as the school sensed the direct threats of modernism and ecumenism in the mainline denominations, but there

The doctrinal statement was important in two ways. First of all it helped define PBI as a thoroughly fundamentalist institution to both its supporting constituency and to missionary agencies. Secondly, because Prairie Bible Institute was not directly under the administrative and doctrinal authority of any church denomination, this doctrinal creed marked out the boundaries of theological orthodoxy in the classroom, and the basis for Christian unity in ministry. Maxwell and his faculty believed that these essential truths constituted a pure Gospel which transcended sectarian differences, and would thus help unify a student body which was drawn from a variety of denominational and congregational churches.

By adopting a creedal summary of belief as its primary point of identity, as opposed to a denominational banner, the school was appealing to a broad spectrum of evangelical Christians, especially missionary agencies. Although PBI was not overtly opposed to denominational missions it had close ties with the relatively new trans-denominational "faith mission" organizations, such as the China Inland Mission (CIM) and the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM).<sup>71</sup> These faith mission agencies relied on a doctrinal statement in order to recruit a relatively homogeneous staff from a broad range of evangelical denominations. The first nondenominational Bible School in Canada, Toronto Bible Training School, took its doctrinal statement directly from CIM.<sup>72</sup> PBI's doctrinal statement of 1934 expresses virtually the same set of beliefs. There is no record of the sources Maxwell and the Board of PBI used to develop their creedal statement; but

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is nothing in PBI's Manuals, or other publications, which give specific reasons for this development. See Stackhouse, 80.

<sup>71</sup> As early as 1928 School Manuals contained a list of missionaries who had visited campus and by 1929 another list of alumni and faculty who had gone into fulltime missionary work was also included. In both lists the mission organizations for which each individual was working were named. By the end of the 1930s SIM and CIM missionaries made up one third of each list. See Manual 1939-40, 6-8.



given the similarities between CIM's and the school's essential doctrines, it is not surprising that many of PBI's graduates were attracted to such transdenominational missions.<sup>73</sup>

The same emphasis on unsectarian unity was also emphasized when it came to attracting prospective students and supporters. In the school's promotional literature Maxwell sought to portray PBI as serving "all bodies of Christians," and enjoying "the most cordial and fraternal relations with all evangelical denominations."<sup>74</sup> Although the term 'transdenominational' was still decades away from being coined, that is essentially the ideal Maxwell believed PBI capable of offering. This ideal was based on the assumption that it was possible to offer a Christian Gospel totally distilled of sectarian bias, both in doctrine and in practice. Very little data exists on the church affiliations of PBI's students during these early years. A helpful statistic, however, does appear in a 1933 issue of *The Prairie Pastor*. In this edition Maxwell published the denominational demographics of the student-body for the 1932-33 school year. Of the 230 students enrolled that year, 103 claimed "Undenominational" churches as their home congregations. Ranking second were Baptist students, who numbered 55. After these two, none of the other nineteen denominations listed registered more than nine students. The majority of these were smaller evangelical denominations.<sup>75</sup> In spite of the fact that

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<sup>72</sup> Ronald G. Sawatsky, "'Looking For That Blessed Hope': The Roots of Fundamentalism in Canada, 1878 - 1914," Ph. D. Diss. (University of Toronto: 1985), 285.

<sup>73</sup> A strong alliance between Prairie and both SIM and CIM was further demonstrated by financial support the school gave these two organizations. PBI made regular disbursements to missionary organizations as part of its commitment to training missionaries. CIM and SIM usually received the largest financial disbursements each year. See PBI Board Meeting Minutes for the 1930s and 40s. Stackhouse notes the same linkage between PBI and faith mission organizations. See Stackhouse, 78-79.

<sup>74</sup> *Manual 1925-26*, 5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *PP*, (Mar., 1933): 2-3. Most of these smaller denominations were a combination of C&MA and Scandinavian sects. What is somewhat surprising is the relatively high number of students from mainline

such a survey allowed Maxwell to claim that PBI was indeed a denominational “melting pot,” it seems clear that his unsectarian ideal found its greatest appeal in evangelical community, or “Bible” churches, who frequently used creedal summaries of essential doctrines similar to PBI’s.

Once students arrived to attend school transdenominational unity was fostered through adherence to the school’s doctrinal statement as interpreted through the common curriculum. Even as the Institute grew in size, the scope of its program remained relatively narrow. Maxwell defended this in the school Manual, stating:

We believe that the continual temptation facing us at *Bible School* is that of endlessly multiplying various subordinate and isolated studies, valuable as they may be, to the crowding out of the great objective of securing a firsthand grasp of the Bible as an organic whole.<sup>76</sup>

What is left unstated, but no doubt implied, is that “subordinate and isolated studies” such as prophecy, ecclesiology and other aspects of systematic theology could also bring doctrinal differences to the surface and distract people from the task of *missionary evangelism*.

In order to make sure this happened Maxwell was careful to steer PBI clear of doctrinal controversy. All the potentially divisive issues were simply seen as distractions from the vital and primary task of evangelism. One issue which had great potential to cause a fracturing among fundamentalist Christians was dispensational premillennialism.

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churches who attended PBI at this time. A total of 25 students variously listed Anglican, United Church, Presbyterian or Lutheran their church affiliation. From Maxwell’s comments, which accompanied the survey data, it seems likely that those students who did come from a mainline denomination rarely remained in them after their schooling at PBI. See “Modernism,” *The Prairie Pastor*, Vol. 13, No. 4-5 (April.-May, 1940):3, for a specific example. By the time PBI began to keep records on students’ church affiliation (1968-69) Baptists were most prominent with 230 students, followed by those coming inter/non-denominational community churches with 149 students. Evangelical Free, C&MA, and Mennonite churches made up about another 150 students. Mainline churches were only represented with only 16 students. Registrar’s Office Records, Prairie Bible College; see also Stackhouse, n.23, 238-39.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

dispensational understanding of this teaching, with its focus on prophecy and eschatology. Dispensationalism had been popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible, a King James translation with marginal notes by fundamentalist Bible teacher, C. I. Scofield. These notes helped readers to interpret all of the Old and the New Testaments by understanding God's activity in human history dividing naturally into specific dispensational periods.<sup>77</sup> Students who came to PBI were not allowed to use a reference Bible of any kind so that their own study of the Scriptures would not be tainted with the biases of a commentator.<sup>78</sup>

Doctrine was fine so long as it contributed to the missionary work of God's people. In the absence of a denominational flag, a confessional summary of belief was important for the purposes of identifying one's spiritual allies, and maintaining an unsectarian unity in preparation for ministry.

American historians of Christian fundamentalist education have offered some important general criticisms, which also apply to PBI. Mark Noll points out that in their efforts to offer an objective approach to scripture and doctrine, these schools simply replaced traditional or denominational confessions and creeds with their own ideological creed – usually organized around the sacredness of the Bible. This ersatz “ideological traditionalism” led to an absence of well-rooted [i.e. historical] foundations from which new proposals for scriptural interpretation could be examined. Fundamentalists were left with a theology which was reflexive and fearful, rather than one which was constructive

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<sup>77</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 59-60; For the divisions this caused among evangelicals in both Canada and the United States see MacKenzie, 273-308.

<sup>78</sup> Timothy Weber notes how this emphasis on an elaborately worked out dispensational scheme undermined the fundamentalist claim of inductive Bible teaching. Dispensational teaching made students more reliant on interpretive helps of Bible expositors, not more independent interpreters of Scripture. Although PBI's Search Question approach to the Bible was not nearly as objective as its teachers claimed, by downplaying

with a theology which was reflexive and fearful, rather than one which was constructive and self-confident.<sup>79</sup> Although this mentality cannot be traced directly in the formal curriculum records at PBI, it does surface in the periodic articles on modernism, which appeared in *The Prairie Pastor*. Modernism was not examined for the intellectual credibility of its arguments and claims, but rather was treated as a spiritual malaise which blinded otherwise intelligent men to the truth.<sup>80</sup> Since Maxwell, along with his co-editor Dorothy Ruth Miller, wrote many of these articles, it is safe to assume that this same approach to theology was applied in classroom instruction.

Another criticism worth noting comes from a more immediate source, Eugene Nida, who was a senior administrator for the American Bible Society in the early 1950s. As someone who shared Maxwell's concern for overseas missions, he urged PBI's principal to include courses such as Cultural Anthropology and Textual Criticism. His concerns were not doctrinal, but rather professional. As Secretary for Translations in the Society, Nida was aware of the complexities of doing Bible translation, as well as the limitations of a Bible School education in equipping graduates to carry out this task. Realizing that many PBI graduates ended up as missionaries who did Bible translation work, his comments were intended to help the school carry out its mandate more effectively.<sup>81</sup>

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dispensationalism Maxwell and PBI seemed to avoid a pedagogical inconsistency which undermined much of American fundamentalist education. See Weber, "The Two-Edged Sword," 114-17.

<sup>79</sup> Mark A. Noll "Evangelicals and the Study of the Bible," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 118-19. For variations of the same critique see Weber, 116-17; and Hatch, "Evangelical Colleges and the Challenge of Christian Thinking," in *Making Higher Education Christian*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter and Kenneth W. Shipps (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 161.

<sup>80</sup> "The Root of Modernism," *PP*, Vol. No. 3 (Mar. 1932): 8.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Eugene Nida to L. E. Maxwell, November 29, 1951. Maxwell's Administrative Files - 'Comments Re PBI': PBI Archives. A note about the Prairie Bible Institute Archives. A small fraction of the school's archival material has been catalogued in boxes. Where possible I have noted the box numbers

In spite of these problems and inadequacies many alumni spoke positively of the education they received at PBI. For many Christian young people coming to a school such as this was their first opportunity to examine seriously the tenants and teaching of a faith they had inherited from their parents, but not embraced as their own. These alumni spoke appreciatively of their teachers' ability to make the Bible relevant to everyday living.<sup>82</sup> An early graduate of the school, Muriel Hanson, gave a typical summary of her education: "The years spent at Prairie served to 'strengthen, settle, and establish' me in the faith, and laid the foundation for a life of service for God [overseas]."<sup>83</sup>

For Maxwell such praise would have simply affirmed his vision for the school. The education offered at PBI may have afforded the students who attended other benefits, but for Maxwell and the rest of the faculty it was necessarily linked to missionary service. Each year the school would proclaim from the front page of its Manual that PBI stood "For the teaching of the Scriptures: 'That Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations.' Psalm 67:2."<sup>84</sup> The growing list of graduates who had gone into missionary service, which was included in each successive school manual from 1930 onward, was testimony indeed that the curriculum was producing the desired results. But, as many alumni also attested, it was not just the biblically intensive program of studies which influenced their spiritual development, but also community life on the school's spartan campus. That aspect of Prairie Bible Institute will be examined in the next chapter.

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divided into two sets. The first set of files deals with official business of the Institute; these I have titled 'Administrative Files.' The second set is Maxwell's collection of files related to his teaching and sermon preparation; these I have designated as 'Teaching Files.' Both file sets are arranged alphabetically.

<sup>82</sup> For an illustration of this see *Prairie Harvesters*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Ap - June, 1962): 11; and "Dorothy Thomas recalls life as a student." *The Three Hills Capital* (June 12, 1972): 16.

<sup>83</sup> "Prairie Memoirs." *The Three Hills Capital* (Ap. 12, 1972): 12.

<sup>84</sup> The scripture verse was first adopted by PBI in 1929, and the preceding phrase the following year.

**Chapter Three:**  
**Campus Culture:**  
**Living the Crucified Life**

When describing the atmosphere of the campus, PBI has variously been portrayed by historians as either a “quasi-monastic” institution or a military boot-camp.<sup>1</sup> Campus life can actually best be understood as a composite of these two images. Just as the operational philosophy and curriculum of the school flowed from fundamentalist holiness teaching, so too did the development of campus culture. The monastic image was most clearly apparent in the school’s emphasis on being “separated from the world,” as well as in the peculiar holiness teaching of self-denial. The latter was summarized in the phrase, ‘living the crucified life.’ As well as reflecting Maxwell’s own experience of spiritual formation through personal crisis, this shared ascetic experience helped foster a sense of unity, if not egalitarianism, in the student body.

While Maxwell may have resented the comparison of PBI to a monastery, he did not hesitate to invoke military rhetoric in his descriptions of school life. In the school’s promotional literature he unapologetically proclaimed: “It is our task to train disciplined soldiers for stern front-line duty. If you are a volunteer – “Fall in!” PRAIRIE is sometimes considered too rugged – for *softies*, but never for *soldiers*.”<sup>2</sup> Holiness theology linked the self-denial of the crucified life with the call to missionary service. PBI was not a place one went to escape the world, but rather to arm oneself for spiritual battle in the world. These twin monastic themes of separation and self-denial, along with

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<sup>1</sup> The former image is used by Rennie, “The Western Prairie Revival in Canada: During the Great Depression and World War II,” 16; the latter is used by Stackhouse, 82.

the theme of militarism, and its emphasis on training for spiritual warfare, were at the core of campus life, and, as such, are the focus of this chapter.

At first glance it is easy to assume that the school most closely resembled early monasteries in its geographic isolation from the larger, corrupt metropolis. Initially PBI's rural isolation was simply a matter of circumstance, not an expression of theology; but as the campus grew so did its separatist tendencies. During the early years of the school's history there were many indicators that school and town cooperated with each other, realizing it was in the economic interests of both to do so. In 1924 the town exempted the school from taxation, allowing PBI to build the campus within town limits.<sup>3</sup> In 1933 Maxwell offered an official 'thank you' to the town of Three Hills for doing so, but at the same time he reminded residents and businesses that PBI was responsible for bringing up to \$17,000 into local coffers in that year alone.<sup>4</sup>

There were other incidents over the years which showed a spirit of general good will and cooperation between school and town. In December of 1932, for example, PBI's boiler room caught fire, cutting off the campus' source of heat. Local residents responded by opening their homes to a student population of over two-hundred during the two or three days it took to repair the damage.<sup>5</sup> Sixteen years later school and town got together to celebrate the successful completion of a joint venture – the building of a local water system, complete with a 42,000 gallon water tower. PBI had raised \$20,000 above and beyond their own infrastructure costs to help pay for the project.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Prairie Bible Institute*, (promotional pamphlet, n.d.), PBI archives.

<sup>3</sup> "15,000 Dollars Plus," *PP* (Mar. 1933): 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* On the surface these figures seem rather paltry, but given that this was taking place in the middle of severe economic depression, this revenue may have been responsible for keeping a number of local merchants in business.

<sup>5</sup> *The Three Hills Capital*, Dec. 15, 1932, and Ap. 12, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> *The Albertan*, Dec. 28, 1948; n.p.

Toward the end of the 1940s and into the next two decades the school began to expand the range of services it offered to students and staff instead of relying directly on the infrastructure of the municipality.<sup>7</sup> This gradually led to a more pronounced sense of physical separation, and to some 'town versus gown' tensions; but again, it seems that PBI's motive was not so much theological as economic. At that time it was simply cheaper for the school to operate by creating its own infrastructure, thus keeping down the cost of education, something the administration was committed to doing from the outset.<sup>8</sup>

A policy of separation was more deliberately pursued when it came to associating with local cultural institutions whose ideologies were perceived as either undermining orthodox Christianity, or distracting the faithful from the task of evangelism. In 1938 PBI chose to start a high school of its own. The incident which brought an on-going disagreement between some staff parents and the local school board to a crisis was a play assigned by one of the English teachers. Fergus Kirk, along with several other parents, pulled their children out of school to protest the teaching of literature which promoted immoral and indecent behavior, as well as Communism.<sup>9</sup> The result was the addition of a new high school to the Institute's campus.<sup>10</sup> Maxwell's strongly worded motion to the Institute's Board manifests the cultural pessimism of fundamentalist premillennialism while simultaneously affirming the school's commitment to missionary training.

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<sup>7</sup> By 1948 the school already had its own machine shop and blacksmith shop, and was in the process of completing a new garage to service its vehicles. Board Meeting Minutes, Sept. 27, 1948. It was not until 1984, the year of Maxwell's death, that the school was officially annexed by the town and became part of its tax base. See "Town Time Line," *The Capital*, (July 19, 1987): 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Manual, 1946-47*. The school claimed that its fees were half of what most Bible schools charged. It was able to do this largely because of its rural location, and commitment to a simple life-style. 41-42.

<sup>9</sup> "Letters to the Editor," *The Three Hills Capital* (Feb. 9, 1939): n.p. The disputed play was John Galsworthy's *The Silver Box*.

<sup>10</sup> PBI Board Meeting Minutes, Dec 20, 1938; PBI Archives.



Whereas the present system of public education is honeycombed with falsehood in multiplied forms in which God's truth is either set aside or completely nullified, and

Whereas many school teachers are continually making open or veiled thrusts at God's Word, and

Whereas there is an increasing demand on the part of sincere people everywhere as well as the Christian public, for wholesome, practical and godly instruction for our teen-age young people,

Be it resolved that:

The Prairie Bible Institute open a High School department where will be offered the standard High school subjects insofar as they are in harmony with truth and facts, and

Wherein will be offered the equivalent and better training in those subjects in which the prescribed texts are found to be unsuitable and unfit for young people, and in addition

Wherein will be included the Bible in all its purity, and

Wherein will be offered history free from evolutionary philosophy and fanciful interpretation, and

Wherein will be studied the biographies of great and good and godly men whose lives are safe examples to inspire young people –

All of these courses to be offered in closest conjunction with our main objective of better fitting young people for Christian service in this and other lands.<sup>11</sup>

Public education was seen as subversive in its ideological agenda, and Christian young people needed to have a safe, and therefore separate, education. At the same time such education was not only intended to be protective in nature, but also inspirational when it came to motivating young people for Christian service. By the spring of 1941 PBI operated a completely separate General Education system.<sup>12</sup>

If separation was important for purity of teaching, it was also important for freedom from controversy and distraction. In June of 1929 members of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) political party asked the school if they could use PBI's chapel/auditorium, known as the Tabernacle, for a political rally. UFA intended to bring in William Aberhart to give a speech on the Douglas System of economics. At a specially convened board meeting the school administration voted down UFA's request,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. April, 1941.

stating that the Tabernacle should be used only for preaching the Gospel.<sup>13</sup> Five years later when the PBI's board was once again asked to publicly endorse the above form of political economy, the school responded with an unequivocal statement of political nonparticipation:

Whereas the tendency of political and economic problems is to divide God's children over the land. and,

Whereas we as an Institute, have been given the task, as was Timothy, of 'committing these things (the gospel) to faithful men,' and therefor come under the injunction not to become "entangled with the affairs of this life, (II Tim. 2:2,4),

Be it resolved that, as the Board of the Prairie Bible Institute, we reaffirm our full confidence in the 'one thing' of our original call, to make Christ known among the nations<sup>14</sup>

Separation was not for the purpose of abandoning culture because it was irredeemably corrupt, but to focus on the single most important task of the Christian, the saving of souls. Rather than a permanent geographical removal from the rest of the world, separation meant not becoming "entangled with the affairs of this life," while living 'in the world.'

Maxwell also understood separation as a way of bearing witness against a culture, and a church, which was riddled with sin. By renouncing the trappings of popular culture, PBI's students would stand out as prophetic witnesses in the face of an apostate church and a godless society. Thus he could quote theologian F. B. Meyer when urging true believers to abandon mainline churches:

It is often argued that we should stay in the midst of churches and bodies whose sins and follies we deplore, in the hope of saving them for GOD and man... But as time advances... and the majority have clearly taken up their position against the truth – there is need for another policy; we have no alternative but to come out and be separate, and not touch the unclean thing. The piace from which we can exert the strongest influence for good is not from within, but from without.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* June 13, 1929

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* March 6, 1934.

<sup>15</sup> "Separation and Influence." *PP*, Vol. 11, No. 1-2 (Jan. – Feb. 1938): 8.

Separation was not an end in itself. The true believer came “outside the camp,” in order to embrace a life that was visibly different from the one left behind. This meant dying to self in order to embrace a life of service for God. Where better to learn what it meant to live such a “crucified life” than at PBI. The discipline imposed by a highly structured environment was believed to be the best means of helping students not only keep up in their school work, but also of internalizing the habits of self-denial, which were the most tangible expressions of living the “crucified life.”

As in the case of its cultural separation, so also in the daily routines of school life a monastic flavour was evident. The patterns of daily life evolved as student numbers increased, and by the mid-1940s a highly regulated weekly cycle of study, practical work and rest was in place. During weekdays the rising bell sounded at 6 a.m. followed by a time of quiet, personal devotions. Breakfast followed at 7 a.m. after which came the corporate devotional exercises of chapel. Classes ran from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m., with a one hour break for lunch, followed by a half-hour Student Missionary Prayer Meeting. After a 6 p.m. supper, mandatory study hours dominated the evening hours followed by a concluding time of private devotions, and ending with lights out in the residences by 9:30 p.m.<sup>16</sup> Where there were gaps in the schedule, students were busy either doing “gratis work,” the term given to daily assigned chores, or participating in a time of daily required physical exercise. Weekends tended to be dominated by prayer meetings, study hours, and worship services.<sup>17</sup>

The student handbook also placed great emphasis on maintaining quiet and order in the residences. Use of typewriters in dormitory rooms and open study spaces was

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<sup>16</sup> Student Handbook. *General Information: 1947-48*. I: Registrar's Office Records.

limited to one-hour periods in the late afternoons and early evenings. Idleness was also discouraged. Students were not to loiter about the kitchen or halls at any time, nor were they allowed to fraternize with members of the opposite sex.<sup>18</sup> The rationale for such regulation and routine was explained in the handbook:

Rules are never intended to embarrass or to disturb, but to contribute to the highest good, and to make possible the fulfillment of the hopes you entertained when coming to the Institute. It is assumed that students who come to school do not desire to be disturbed in their serious business by undue social intercourse.<sup>19</sup>

Gratis work was seen as a way to help students keep a reign on their passions, and at the same time demonstrate the servant attitude of self-less living.<sup>20</sup> Most of these chores involved performing menial tasks, which were necessary for the daily functioning of the school, such as serving meals and cleaning up the dining room. In later years when the school developed its own farming operation, students were assigned duties there as well. The chore which may have been the supreme test of selfless service was latrine duty. Although outdoor toilets had been replaced with sanitary indoor ones, the dormitories still had no running water until 1949. Up till then these indoor latrines had to be emptied daily. Two student crews using a horse drawn wagon would make their rounds after 10 p.m. each evening to carry out this unenviable task.<sup>21</sup> Student attitudes in the performance of such duties were seen as a spiritual barometer of selfless Christian living.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Although PBI eventually built gymnasiums and out door ice rinks for student recreational purposes, it was only at the end of the 1980s that one of its existing buildings was converted into a student centre.

<sup>21</sup> Davidson, 56.

<sup>22</sup> This ideal was the theme of Maxwell's first book, *Born Crucified* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1945), which became a benchmark at PBI for assessing the devoutness and sincerity of one's Christianity.

In addition to gratis work, other behavioral expectations, outlined in the student handbook directed students to continually put the interests of others ahead of themselves. Students were expected to refrain from slamming doors and running down the hallways in the residences – a concession to living in crowded buildings which had little or no sound-proofing. Another regulation stated that students should “be ready to step aside and let others, especially your elders, precede you when passing through doorways. Men should allow a woman to go first.”<sup>23</sup>

While it was expected that women would be shown special consideration when it came to these kinds of courtesies, they were also singled out for special attention when it came to matters of dress and attire. Women were kept from “bowing to the modern goddess, Fashion,” through a highly defined dress code. Fashions of the day were described as “immodest... evil... a shame, a disgrace, an outrage against the conscience of every pure and upright minded young man, making it well nigh impossible for him to keep his thoughts clean and barred from the suggestions of the devil.”<sup>24</sup> Although this kind of stern rhetoric can lead to stereotyping school faculty as reactionary martinets, the reality is not quite so simple. Maxwell provided a more thoughtful apologetic for rules governing women’s dress in *The Prairie Pastor*.

The Lord’s redeemed people constitute “a royal priesthood.”<sup>25</sup> God required of the Hebrew priests that they should wear suitable garments when they ministered before Him... Does not a Christian woman affront God, when she, an intercessor, “a priest” appears before Him in the livery of the world? . . . This does not mean asceticism. It does not mean that we should let ourselves be driven by Satan, as an angel of light, beyond God’s will into fanaticism or imaginary duties. It does not mean carelessness or un-attractiveness in dress or personal conduct; it does mean modesty, simplicity,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>24</sup> PBI Student Handbook entitled, General Information: 1947-48, Registrar’s Office, Prairie Bible College, 12. The rules on skirt lengths were very specific, stipulating the number of inches the hemline was allowed to be from the floor, based on the women’s height.

<sup>25</sup> Maxwell is using a phrase from I Peter 2:9.

attractiveness in clothing and in person that will honor the Lord; and seeking prayerfully to be kept from anything that glorifies self or Satan, - the world the flesh and the Devil.<sup>26</sup>

Instead of using the standard line that worldly fashions worked to produce immoral thoughts in the minds of male students, Maxwell constructs a more positive argument for modest dress. He appeals to the exalted role of priest that women share with men in the Christian community. Fashionable or ostentatious wardrobes called attention to one's self. Here, as well as in the student handbook, Maxwell is calling for modest dress in order to practice the virtues of simplicity and humility. Anything which could distract from honouring God, in the course of Christian service, needed to be put aside.<sup>27</sup> While such an approach sometimes led to a very narrow legalism in matters of dress, it certainly did not discourage women students from attending and graduating from the school. Graduating class lists indicate that up until 1942 the number of men and women graduates was roughly the same. After that year, though, the number of women graduates surpassed that of men by a ratio of two to one. While this imbalance can be partly explained by the effects of World War II on the male population, this trend did not change after the war, but continued well into the next decade.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to these statistics there are other indicators that Maxwell's statements about the priestly role of both men and women were indicative of a certain egalitarian

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<sup>26</sup> *PP*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (Sept. 1928):1-2.

<sup>27</sup> *Prairie Bible Institute*. Opp also sees the need for a more balanced appraisal of dress and social regulations at PBI, challenging the more conventional legalistic readings of Elliott and Stackhouse. See Opp, 103. School authorities did not devote the same exactitude in defining what constituted appropriate, "priestly" dress for male students. The most likely explanation for this is the dress styles for men, which governed the business and religious culture of the day, coincided more closely with the conservative expectations of the school's faculty. Like many conservative educational institutions, PBI was to experience considerable upheaval in the area of dress and apparel during the counter-cultural fashion cycles of the 1960s and 70s. This was just as true of men's dress, and especially hair-styles, as it was of women's dramatically ascending hem lines.

<sup>28</sup> "Alumni Statistics" File, Box 112; and "Graduation Program" File, Box 12; PBI Archives.

spirit toward the sexes, which existed on campus, largely due to the missionary emphasis of holiness theology.<sup>29</sup>

This egalitarian spirit toward Christian ministry was evident among the Institute's faculty. Maxwell recognized the leadership strengths of various women faculty, and short of approving them for formal ordination as pastors, encouraged them to take leadership roles. During the 1930s and 40s women members comprised anywhere from 20% to 25% of the Institute's board.<sup>30</sup> Next to Maxwell himself the two most dominant teachers at the school were women: Dorothy Ruth Miller, and later in the 1950s and 60s, Ruth Dearing.<sup>31</sup>

As mentioned in the previous chapter Miller came to PBI with impressive academic credentials, and ended up teaching not only support courses, such as English and History, but actually shared the teaching of the core courses in Bible with Maxwell. In addition to being co-editor of *The Prairie Pastor* she also preached in Sunday services held in the Institute Tabernacle, and led prayer meetings.<sup>32</sup> It was Miller who outlined the institute's position on the place of women in ministry. She explained that the whole range of ministerial tasks should be open to women, provided they showed a "giftedness" from the Holy Spirit, and practiced under the authority of a godly man. By today's

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<sup>29</sup> This same egalitarian theology is also evident in the operating principles of the China Inland Mission, the transdenominational mission society which a large number of PBI graduates. Principles seven and eight state: "Wives are full missionaries and all possibilities open to men are open to them as well. Single women have the same possibilities as men. They may work on their own as pioneer evangelists." Quoted from Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions: From Hudson Taylor to the Present Day*, (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1994), 33

<sup>30</sup> See selected *School Manuals* from 1930 to 1945.

<sup>31</sup> Although in her 90s Ruth Dearing continues to keep an office in Prairie Bible College's faculty building and tutor students. While she has retired from the classroom, she still tutors students and faithfully attends faculty meetings. For more on Dearing's career at PBI see James Enns, "Ruth Dearing: Free to Minister," *Aspen Land* 2000, David Ridley, ed. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, to be published fall, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Miller Diaries: entries for Ap. 28 and June 18, 1936; Box 31, PBI Archives.

standards this may sound antiquarian, but given the conservative standards in both mainline and fundamentalist churches, this reflects a fairly liberal view.<sup>33</sup>

Further evidence of this egalitarian spirit can be seen in the service opportunities for women graduates of PBI who went on to overseas missionary work. Up until 1946, 41% of female graduates went on to serve with foreign mission organizations, compared to 36% of male graduates.<sup>34</sup> In many ways these trends were not unique to PBI. In the late nineteenth century Canadian missionary outreach among evangelical groups in the Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist churches included a high percentage of women.<sup>35</sup> In addition to this Methodism, and other smaller denominations, which had a strong holiness theology tradition had a history of women as preachers and evangelists. What does set PBI apart from these denominational groups is the equal footing women were given men in regard to biblical training. This was reluctantly admitted by a Presbyterian minister, who tried to deter a friend's daughter from attending PBI. Writing to the girl's father he stated:

If her desire is for Christian service that is altogether to the good, and it is a great pity that the Church does not provide adequate schools for this purpose.

We do train deaconesses but the training is very shallow and all the girls who take this training are bitterly disappointed. Moreover, deaconesses training is not training for religious education. I think the Churches must begin to give adequate training to enable young women to work in the Church if they have that desire, and not leave this training to the more uncertain sects.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> "On Women Speaking," *PP*, Vol 12, No. 12 (Dec. 1939): 7-8.

<sup>34</sup> "Alumni Statistics" File. The same trend exists in American Bible Schools: See Brereton, 61.

<sup>35</sup> See Rosemary R. Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 3-64; Ruth Crompton Brouwer, *New Women For God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 51-91; and H. Miriam Ross, "Sharing A Vision: Maritime Baptist Women Educate for Mission, 1870-1920," in *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada*, eds. Elizabeth Gillian Muir and Marilyn Fardig Whiteley, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 77-98.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Rev. Frank S. Morley to Mrs. H. R. Ross, October 29, 1947. "Comments re: PBI" File; Maxwell's Administrative Files.



The above comments indicate that while some denominational church leaders saw the need for substantive Christian training programs for women, their own existing programs were far from meeting this need.<sup>37</sup> During this time women were also denied entry into seminaries. Bible schools, therefore, offered an affordable opportunity for them to further their education; and, by this time, nondenominational schools, such as PBI, potentially held out the promise of the greatest variety of ministry options for unmarried Christian women.<sup>38</sup>

The rules, routines, which governed daily life on campus, as well as Maxwell's theology of the priesthood of all believers, all aimed to encourage students in holy living. This shared experience fostered a unity, and a certain egalitarian spirit as well. But perhaps the most powerful expression of both unity and equality was the experience of personal crisis and revival. While attending school, students, who for the most part were already familiar with revivalism, were encouraged to undergo the second crisis experience of holiness theology, thus yielding control of their lives to the Divine

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<sup>37</sup> The same admission is made about Deaconess training in the Methodist church by John D. Thomas, "Servants of the Church: Canadian Methodist Deaconess Work, 1890-1926," in *Canadian Historical Review*, LXV, 3 (1984): 371-85. Thomas states that biblical studies comprised only between one quarter to one half of a deaconess's formal training. The actual substance of religious training received by Canadian women missionaries has received relatively little attention from the historians who have researched this area. Although the Methodist Women's Missionary Society placed great emphasis on liberal arts training, little is mentioned about the quality or quantity of formal religious instruction missionary candidates received. See Gagen, 28-43. Presbyterian women missionaries for religious instruction is described as occasional and ad hoc. See Brouwer, 61-2.

<sup>38</sup> Burkinshaw, "Evangelical Bible Colleges," 375. Also McKinney, *Equipping for Service*, 163. The pattern for women in missionary ministry in evangelical Christianity seems to cut across denominational lines. The frontier nature of missionary work, in its early phases in any given field usually demanded that established gender roles from the home church were often waived as necessity dictated. Women simply took on teaching and preaching roles in the absence of any male missionaries. As a mission work became more established, and brought under the administrative control of the home mission board, the traditional gender roles often reasserted themselves, with men taking on most of the preaching and teaching roles and women relegated either to children's work, or to teaching other women. This pattern is traced with great perceptiveness by Margaret Whitehead, "'Let the Women Keep Silence': Women Missionary Preaching in British Columbia, 1860s-1940s," in *The Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada*, 117-35. See also Fiedler, 292-309. Anecdotal reports by women missionaries who graduated from PBI

promptings of the Holy Spirit. Dorothy Ruth Miller observed the spiritual struggles of her students and sought to counsel them in this direction.

Aside from class time my whole day has been given to private interviews. I have been visited by (names six students). God is convicting Mr. B \_\_\_\_; Martin is broken down and repentant. Marge needs a breaking down and cutting loose that will free her from the flesh. She is hanging on to Ralph in a most tenacious way. She cannot get anywhere with God until she cuts loose from this whole principle of seeking admiration.<sup>39</sup>

It was expected that the spiritual intensity of both the classroom and the dormitory would produce this kind of struggle, and ultimately penitence. During the school year one Sunday a month was set aside for extended times of corporate prayer. Besides praying for the needs of missionaries, these "seasons of prayer" were opportunities for students and staff to take a spiritual inventory of their own lives. Such introspection did on occasion lead to a spontaneous outbreak of confession and repentance. Recounting one such Sunday, Maxwell joyously proclaimed that "God worked in much power. Many hearts were all broken up in the deepest searchings of the heart...the Holy Spirit moved in upon us and brought judgement...unto victory."<sup>40</sup> As historian Ben Harder has pointed out, this kind of revivalism acted as a religious leveler, usually leading to a common spiritual bond, which superceded denominational loyalties.<sup>41</sup>

Such a deeply introspective approach to Christian living further served to reinforce monastic quality of campus life. But if PBI resembled an evangelical monastery, with Maxwell as a strict, yet benevolent, Father Abbot, it was more frequently

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indicate the same kind of double standard among the evangelical transdenominational missionary organizations of the mid-twentieth century.

<sup>39</sup> Diary of Dorothy Ruth Miller. Entry for January 2, 1936; Box 31.

<sup>40</sup> "Monthly Day of Prayer." *PP*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Feb. 1943): 11.

<sup>41</sup> Harder, 33. Goertz makes the strongest connection between revivalism and the growth of enrollment at PBI. A series of evangelical revivals swept through western Canada during the 1920s and 30s. The most influential of these was triggered by American itinerant evangelist, Oscar Lowry, whose 1938 radio

likened to a military boot-camp, with Maxwell as its Drill Sergeant. All students, regardless of social rank before they entered PBI, started out – and remained – spiritual buck privates. The school’s motto, ‘Training Disciplined Soldiers for Christ,’ was emblazoned along one wall of the Tabernacle assembly hall, along with a heraldic shield and sword. As such it served as a daily tangible reminder for both students and staff as to why they were there. Similar to Ignatius Loyola four centuries earlier, Maxwell viewed missionaries as warriors, spiritual commandos volunteering for frontline duty. Bible school training needed to prepare them for the rigors and privations of life in the combat zone. This philosophy encouraged a particular kind of military asceticism.

Traditionally fundamentalist militancy has been understood as a strong, unequivocal stand against modernist theology, with its attendant theory of evolution. Maxwell clearly saw PBI standing in this tradition in describing the mission of the school. The best antidote for the widespread unbelief of Thomas Paine and various other free thinkers,” who wrapped themselves in the mantle of “modernism” was a program of “aggressive personal evangelism and constructive Bible teaching.”<sup>42</sup>

Modernism was a real threat, seeking to infect and debilitate the faithful. The most strident opposition to this spiritual disease was expressed through PBI’s first publication, *The Prairie Pastor*. Most of the articles Maxwell wrote, or reprinted from other Christian periodicals, focused on Bible teaching and missionary activity. Occasionally, though, articles on the dangers of modernism, evolution and ‘worldliness’

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broadcasts were sponsored, in part, by PBI and corresponded with a sharp increase in the school’s enrollment in the following years. See Goertz, 205-06.

<sup>42</sup> Manual, 1926-27, 4. This statement remained part of the school manual right through the 1940s.

were also featured.<sup>43</sup> Among these were ones written by notable militant American fundamentalists, such as William Bell Riley and Bob Jones.<sup>44</sup>

But if militancy was needed to resist false teaching, it was needed even more to rouse the complacent Christian to action, and Maxwell was quick to sound the call to arms.

We need militancy in our faith before we shall get anywhere fighting the forces arrayed against us in these days. A soft life, a soft faith, a soft message, all these things sum up the average Christian life, even among the (so called) deeper life people. We speak not of modernists, for we have long maintained that the main trouble with the church is not its infidelic modernism and falsehood, as hellish as that is, but it is the deadness of those who have named the name of Christ – their utter indolence and indifference to the perishing souls all about them. They have lost their testimony. Laziness and secret sin have stopped their mouths. Their heads hang in the presence of the Devil and his crowd. Where there is no vision the people perish. Oh, that the blue flame of battle might once more be seen in the testimony of God's sagging servants!<sup>45</sup>

Unlike his more high profile counter-parts in the United States, Maxwell took the familiar fundamentalist theme of militancy and directed it toward missionary outreach, rather than attacking those who promoted heterodoxical teachings. The highly directed approach to formal studies reflected this military-like approach to education, but it was even more evident in co-curricular life. One alumnus, who came to PBI shortly after his discharge from the armed forces in 1945, recalled the army flavour of school life:

Talk about row-housing; we had it. We lived in rows, slept in rows, and studied in rows. There were six fellows per row and the aisle space beside the bed we shared. Wash stand and wardrobe formed the wall between us and the row next door (all in the same room, of course). Around the walls on three sides were study desks for eighteen fellows, two to a desk. The fourth wall was comprised of the radiators and the windows.

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<sup>43</sup> For an example of each see *PP*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (May 1928); Vol.2, No. 3, (Mar. 1929); and Vol. 4, No. 12, (Dec. 1931).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> "A Militant Faith," *PP*, Vol. 4, No. 12, (Dec. 1931): 1. Much later in his life Maxwell published a book whose title indicates that the military metaphor continued to dominate his thinking. See Maxwell, World Missions - Total War. (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Press, 1976).

It was close quarters, to be sure, but on the whole morale was good and the percentage of men who lived in the barracks, graduated, and went out to missionary service was high.<sup>46</sup>

Spartan living conditions were partly due to the school's no-debt policy when it came to budgeting and building. PBI's board meeting minutes and publications indicate that as each school year approached it seemed like there was a race to get campus facilities at least marginally usable with only scant resources.<sup>47</sup> One female student recalled arriving at school in the fall of 1938 and being assigned a dormitory room which had no door on it. She and her roommate simply hung a sheet across the entry-way until a door was installed.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to the school's no-debt policy another influencing factor determining the type of buildings constructed was pragmatism. Maxwell believed in building "only necessary buildings," which were "built to serve."<sup>49</sup> Most of the buildings, whether classrooms or dormitories, were simple box-like structures consisting of wooden siding on the exterior and lath-and-plaster interior walls. Wood shavings were used as insulation, but during the long prairie winters the climate was cool and drafty indoors, as well as out.<sup>50</sup> Losing buildings – not to mention lives – to fires was a constant concern. Besides the earlier mentioned boiler room fire of 1932, the school's infirmary building also burned down in 1948.<sup>51</sup> Fortunately no one was hurt, but once that was assured there

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<sup>46</sup> "From army barracks to Bible School barracks," *The Three Hills Capital* (Ap. 20, 1972): 6.

<sup>47</sup> For an example of this see Board Meeting Minutes, Aug. 6 – Oct. 22, 1935, and *Prairie Overcomer*, Vol. 19, No. 8 (Aug. 46).

<sup>48</sup> "Came For One Year, Still Here After 35," *The Three Hills Capital* (Ap. 12, 1972): 6.

<sup>49</sup> L. E. Maxwell, *With God on the Prairies* (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Press, revised 1984), 48.

<sup>50</sup> Davidson, 59-68. Davidson's booklet is about the best local history of the school to date. Although overshadowed by Keller's earlier *Expendable*, and Bernice Callaway's nostalgic reminiscences in *Legacy*, Davidson looks at the school from the perspective of a farmer who was also a support-staff member. From his account one can appreciate the logistical challenges of maintaining a school of this size, with scant resources in such a remote area. See also Board Meeting Minutes Dec. 1 and Dec. 29, 1947.

<sup>51</sup> Board meeting minutes from the 1930s onward make regular mention of maintaining an on-going voluntary fire crew on the premises.

was still the risk that other campus buildings close by might also go up in flames. A nearby cistern provided a water supply, which allowed volunteer helpers to contain the conflagration.<sup>52</sup>

A scarcity of resources, first brought on by economic depression and then later by war, added to the yearly challenge of keeping campus facilities on pace with the growing student body.<sup>53</sup> The leadership at PBI, however, was able to turn these limitations to their advantage by promoting them as a vital part of the overall educational experience.<sup>54</sup>

Military discipline not only applied to material comforts but was also reflected in behavioral expectations. In addition to defining a strict dress code, the student handbook contained rules governing everyday life, including over thirty specifications for mealtime etiquette, alone. While many of these rules would have done Emily Post proud, a number of them also emphasize the authoritarian protocols of military life. For example, at meals students were required to watch their table leader so that they would know when to start their first and second courses.<sup>55</sup> Dormitory rooms were to be kept in good order for snap inspections<sup>56</sup>.

The military metaphor was also invoked as a justification for the school staff to restrict any interaction between the sexes. As mentioned earlier, romantic attachments between students was an issue for concern for the staff. Maxwell saw it as “detracting from [students’] growth in grace,” and it was here that Maxwell used strong military language for his apologetic.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 67-68.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 48-49, 60.

<sup>54</sup> “Training for Warfare Under Fire.” *Prairie Bible Institute*. For a more general picture of this kind of mentality in Bible Schools in America see Breerton, 133-38.

<sup>55</sup> *Prairie Bible Institute, General Rules and Regulations: 1945-46*: 6.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Maxwell Interview, Tape 2, p. 8.

In I Cor. 9 the apostle Paul discusses his personal rights to such things as *normal rations, romance, recreation, and remuneration*. Certainly there is nothing wrong with any of these in its place. But it is through Scriptural discipline that the Cross cuts right across our own private rights. The young men in the various branches of the armed services are under the disciplined training of their officers as they “train for warfare” and , using “live ammunition,” must learn to obey “under fire.” Thus at PRAIRIE young men are not permitted to carry on extended conversations with young women, except in connection with school activities, or by special permission. At no time during school sessions at PRAIRIE are men and women students permitted to keep company. (italics and capitals his)<sup>58</sup>

Besides segregated seating in classrooms, a growing number of rules emerged to prohibit casual socializing. Often these “soc regs” were developed and rigorously enforced by older single women staff members. In spite of his strong language, Maxwell was not always in agreement with the degree of strictness these women advocated. At the same time he felt powerless to reign them in. By relinquishing the demands of day to day administration to subordinates, Maxwell was also reluctant to temper their disciplinary zeal, especially when it meant confronting the formidable Dorothy Ruth Miller, under whom he had at one time been a student.<sup>59</sup>

In spite of the rather daunting rhetoric and constant staff vigilance students did manage to form romantic attachments which frequently led to marriage. Although no statistics exist as to the number of students who married a classmate, the standing joke that PBI stood for Prairie Bridal Institute seems to indicate that the percentage was fairly high. It is doubtful that this would have actually surprised Maxwell and the staff. Young people with a common theological worldview, who studied together while living in close

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 8-9; and transcript of Don Richardson Interview with L. E. Maxwell and Family members, April 12, 1982, p. 4. “Maxwell Biography File.” This concern for preventing social interaction on campus was also reflected in the design and construction of school buildings. Recreational space was segregated by the construction of separate gymnasiums for women and men. Dormitories for men were on the opposite side of the campus from those for women. It was in the 1980s that the college finally did away with segregated class seating, and only in the early 1990s that a Student Centre was finally built.

quarters for six months of the year would invariably become attracted to each other. The record of Maxwell's own courtship of his wife developed under similar circumstances when they were both students at Midland Bible School in Kansas. His proposal of marriage in a letter to his future wife, Pearl Plummer, provides insight as to how students at PBI went about the task of finding a marriage partner.

Dear Pearl: Since we have been graduated I now feel the liberty to ask you to become my wife. While this may come as a great surprise to you, I know that the Lord gave me to you very unexpectedly on the night of April 2, when such a thing was far from my thoughts. I had thought of marriage as five or ten years hence – if at all. Upon that night the first intention that ever came to my life (of marriage) came to my heart something like this "Pearl to be my wife." My heart glowed all of a sudden... This was as much a surprise to me, as this letter is to you. I wondered at first whether I were deluded. But from that moment to this I have been married to you as much as is possible after any ceremony (yea much more than many are after the ceremony). Since then it has not been the usual order, of getting God's permissive will in the matter; but of merely acting upon His revelation to me – just the opposite of what I had always anticipated – I'm so pleased – since my salvation I never had such an experience. How gracious of our blessed God.

And because this is of God I have such a loving liberty to ask your hand – and that, not because of any overtures on your part – I have always shunned too much of that... My every thought upon this subject seems to center about the words: "Holiness unto the Lord."<sup>60</sup> (underlining his)

Here again, holiness theology is the key to making sense of an otherwise brazen letter. From the contents it is apparent that Maxwell had in no way given an overt indication to his future wife of his affection for her; it almost seems as if he had not really thought of doing so, at least for the present. Marriage became a possibility when the intuitive leading of God's Holy Spirit made it clear to him who his marriage partner was to be. Maxwell's thoughts indicate that if one were so committed to serving God above all else, the conventional order of rising affections spurred on by "God's permissive will" could be by-passed by a more direct revelatory confirmation in one's own heart. Consequently dating, or any extensive social interaction, was not necessary in finding

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<sup>60</sup> Letter from L. E. Maxwell to Pearl Plummer, April 28, 1922: Maxwell Biography File.



God's choice of a life partner in marriage. In this way one can make sense of the paradox presented by the combination of a strict segregation policy and high matrimonial expectation.

What cannot be measured, but is known from anecdotal data, is the abuse to which such a theology could lead. Young men seemed especially prone to using divine leading as a cover for their own emotional attraction to a female student, and then playing the "this-is-God's-will" card to trump any objections the young women might have to such a match. In this way Providential revelation could become a kind of spiritual blackmail to convince an unwilling prospective partner that she was not "in God's will" if she shunned the overtures of her suitor.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the potential for misapplication and legalism, the enforcement of the rules was understood as part of good missionary training, and everyone shared in it – even the staff. Just as officers were expected to endure the hardships of the battlefield along with their enlisted men, all the staff members at PBI were expected to lead by example when it came living the crucified life.<sup>62</sup> Maxwell summarized staff living conditions as follows.

We receive our board and room; and pray for clothes and incidentals... The result of following God in this respect has meant a simplicity of Christian life among our leaders. There are no expensive homes. There is no luxury, no fine furniture, no "soft clothing," no examples of soft living before the students. The principle of 'hoping for nothing' for ourselves has entered into the very warp and woof of this Institute... From this basic principle the "get" of fallen human nature has been largely supplanted by the "give" of the divine nature.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> To his credit, in his letter of proposal, Maxwell goes on to say that if Pearl should to refuse accept his offer of marriage, then he (along with Job of the Old Testament) could say: "The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away – Blessed by the name of the Lord." This latter part of the theological picture, however, did not get emphasized in the same way as the former.

<sup>62</sup> *His Workmanship*. (Promotional pamphlet published by Prairie Bible Institute, 1940), 17; PBI archives.

<sup>63</sup> "God Does A New Thing," *The Brethren Missionary Herald*, (Jan 2, 42): 10.

Faculty were expected to participate in the mundane chores of institute life as well as teach in the classroom. Maxwell, himself, could often be seen dressed in overalls, shoveling sand or wheeling a barrow. A one-time student and later staff member recounted that Maxwell on several occasions gave up funds which were part of his stipend so that the needs of the school could be met.<sup>64</sup> Before indoor plumbing arrived in Three Hills, PBI board member Roy Davidson would make daily fourteen mile round-trips, with his wagon and four horse team, hauling water for the school; this was in addition to his full-time work as a farmer.<sup>65</sup>

As the campus grew, the division of labour became more pronounced. Faculty responsibilities focused on pedagogical tasks; they were to teach courses and be available to students six days a week. Support staff also worked a six-day week, which usually began at 7 a.m. and ended at 6 p.m. Their tasks included maintaining the fuel and water supplies, preparing meals, attending to building maintenance, as well as new construction; and working the farmland, which was an Institute food-source.<sup>66</sup> Both faculty and support staff received no stipulated salary; but did have housing and food needs looked after. Other needs, such as medical/dental and clothing were met by a special staff fund, toward which supporters of the school could designate donations.<sup>67</sup>

Often students did their gratis work alongside, or under the supervision of, staff members. This daily interaction with non-teaching personnel, as well as the students'

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<sup>64</sup> Letter from Elmer Thompson to Victor Callaway (Feb. 4, 1980). "Maxwell Biography File."

<sup>65</sup> "Richardson memories go back to 1928 enrollment." *Three Hills Capital*. (April 12, 72): 5.

<sup>66</sup> Davidson, 64-65, and *The Prairie Harvester* (April - August, 1982), 2-3. By a combination of donation and purchase, PBI acquired several quarter sections of farmland (totaling about 1000 acres) close to Three Hills and used them to grow their own cereal crops and vegetables, as well as pasture a small herd of both beef and dairy cattle. *The Sunday School Times*, Vol. 85, No. 22 (May 29, 1943), 437; and "Prophet of the Plains." *Christian Life* (May, 1949), 19.

<sup>67</sup> "Prophet of the Plains." 19. The writer of the article reported that despite such meager financial compensation, there were no shortage of job applicants to work at the school.

knowledge of the general conditions of employment, frequently made deep impressions on students, and motivated them to greater devoutness in their faith.<sup>68</sup>

During these early years of the school's growth residential space was at a premium, and staff were often quartered in the student residences. Although such an arrangement allowed for student supervision with a relatively small staff, it was often more indicative of the chronic scarcity of resources under which the school laboured. When most resources were directed toward student needs and missionary giving, staff were expected to make due with what was left over.

Living on meagre means, in such close quarters, and in an atmosphere of spiritual intensity was not without its stresses and problems. In spite of their best efforts to accept this with a measure of godly grace and contentment, friction between staff members did occur. An illustrative incident involved the controversy created by Maxwell and his wife raising a young family while living in one of the residences. It seems that in addition to being a mother, Pearl liked to be involved in the lives of students as well, thus interfering with other staff members who had official supervisory authority over the residences.

Dorothy Ruth Miller recorded the subsequent tensions:

Miss Anderson (a music teacher, and an aunt of Maxwell's) has been in several times. She tells me that Mrs. Rob Kirk realizes what a manager Pearl is. Mrs. K. does not approve of Pearl's kind of housekeeping, nor does she approve of babies being born in the school. She says that Mrs. Fergus says that "Mrs. Maxwell will have to change." Neither she nor Fergus Kirk approves of closeness such as she showed toward Minna (a female student). I am glad that some of these things are seen by the members of the Board but I feel called to much prayer that the solution of the problem will be found without division or lessening of love.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> For examples of this see the various alumni tributes in *The Prairie Harvester* (Jan. – Mar. 1982): 4-8. See also "Co-Labourers." *The Prairie Bible Institute*, n.p.

<sup>69</sup> D. R. Miller Diaries, Nov. 24, 1928.

Miller did not go on to mention how the above situation was resolved, but a few days later did scold herself for discussing other staff members with Miss Anderson: “ I am again impressed that I must cease entirely to discuss school affairs with Miss Anderson. I am sure that nothing is safe with her. Without meaning to be so, she is an incorrigible busy body.”<sup>70</sup>

Living in this kind of fish bowl atmosphere, it is not surprising that these sorts of frictions arose. Other extant records indicate that as the school grew so did the number of these kinds of incidents. In one case a long standing staff member was relieved of her teaching duties because of her discussing conflicts she had with other staff members openly with her students. More serious were the charges brought against a male teacher for his authoritarian behavior and rudeness to members of a student summer ministry team of which he was in charge. Although not dismissed from staff, he was relieved of his teaching and travelling duties.<sup>71</sup> These examples indicate that life at PBI was not for the faint of heart, or for those whose resolve to live the disciplined life was somewhat shaky. Maxwell could even view these difficulties as cost of striving for a spiritual ideal.

Of course there have been aches and pains and heartbreaks. It will always be so, if, “the cross is the attraction.” True obedience is never a light matter. It is costly. It will ever be so. “There is no promise of ease to the heart that is set on following the Crucified.”<sup>72</sup>

Besides living frugally PBI also led by example when it came to missionary giving. Each year the school Manual published lists of alumni who were serving with

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. Dec. 8, 1928.

<sup>71</sup> PBI Personnel Files (names withheld at the request of Prairie Bible Institute): Financial Records Office, Prairie Bible Institute. At least one known incident of sexual indiscretion was also recorded in official personnel records. Although the exact nature of the offence was not indicated, a male staff member was forced to resign due to his inappropriate conduct toward a female student. The degree to which student violators of the school’s social regulations were discovered and punished is difficult to assess as records of student discipline from these years no longer exist, if they were ever kept at all.

mission agencies, and also kept a running total of how much money it had donated to various missionary agencies. Part of Maxwell's belief in 'hoping for nothing' was that God's people had to give in order to get. This became known among supporters of the school as the "Corn of Wheat" program.<sup>73</sup> By making due with only enough money to cover living expenses in order to pass on the extra portion to mission agencies, Maxwell believed that it would keep school staff from succumbing to the sin of covetousness. Such an approach to financial management was also a way for the school to demonstrate that it was trusting God for its dedicated faculty and staff to come and work at the school, because they believed in its missionary vision and were not motivated by a lucrative salary. Along with Hudson Taylor, the father of the evangelical faith missionary movement, PBI could boast that "God's work, done God's way, will never lack God's support."<sup>74</sup> At the end of its first twenty-five years in addition to sending hundreds of its graduates into missionary work, PBI had also contributed over \$427,000 to a wide assortment of mission boards.<sup>75</sup> Most of this money was pledged during Missionary Conference and Holy Convocation week.

From all of this it is easy to get a picture of Maxwell as a grim ascetic, and PBI as a joyless, repressive campus. Such a criticism has been raised by historian Ian Rennie, who claimed PBI placed a disproportionate emphasis on 'dying to self.' Rennie rightly claims that in some cases such a theology led to a lack of self-worth in Bible School graduates, and that it offered no understanding of God's common grace at work among

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<sup>72</sup> With God on the Prairies, 49.

<sup>73</sup> Here again one can see the fondness of fundamentalists for extracting phrases from the King James text of the Bible to summarize important ideas, and give them the stamp of Divine sanction. In this case the phrase was taken from John 12:24. "Except a corn of wheat fall to the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

<sup>74</sup> With God on the Prairies, 47.

<sup>75</sup> Manual 1947-48, 7.

non-Christians. Dwelling on such a ascetic theology also led to a faith which was disengaged from the surrounding culture, and thus tended to interpret Christianity as austere, atomistic, and joyless.<sup>76</sup> Evidence of this kind of one-sided focus can be seen in excerpts from student prayers printed in *The Prairie Pastor* after an impromptu revival occurred on campus one winter. One student prayed: "How high-minded I have been. I am so selfish. Lord, this is of the devil. Plow me under. Pound in the nails. If I get exposed I don't care. I am nothing – only a worm."<sup>77</sup> This kind of spiritual introspection, when pursued to the exclusion of a more this-worldly engagement could, and sometimes did, produce morbidity leading to despair.

Two things, however, need to be offered in conclusion as a corrective to this impression. First of all, Maxwell, for all the sternness of his writing, was an immensely personable and warm-hearted individual who related well to his students. Former students have written about his willingness to grab a baseball glove and join in pick-up games with them, being "quite jovial, proving himself to be a normal young man among men." He also led by example when it came to performing the mundane tasks of everyday chores such as harvesting potatoes on the school farm.<sup>78</sup>

There are also accounts of impromptu invitations extended to students to share a meal with him and his family.<sup>79</sup> In spite of the strong military rhetoric and call to self-

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<sup>76</sup> Rennie, "The Doctrine of Man in the Canadian Bible Belt," unpublished paper presented at a Regent College Symposium in Calgary (n.d.), 4-5. The truth of this Rennie's criticism is born out in Maxwell's first book, *Born Crucified* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1945). Although Maxwell was by nature a cheerful, charismatic individual, very little of that joyfulness comes through in the book.

<sup>77</sup> *PP*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Feb. 1943): 11.

<sup>78</sup> "Maxwell Arrived Eagerly in 1922," *The Three Hills Capital* (April 7, 1980).

<sup>79</sup> Alumni Tributes, Ernie Richardson, and Ted Jones; Maxwell Biography File.

denial, Maxwell clearly lived out his faith in a way that attracted many other evangelical Christians to PBI.<sup>80</sup>

A second corrective involves understanding the times in which the school was growing up. In spite of its peculiarities, PBI was not a radical educational experiment for its day. Rather it reflected the evangelical spirit of the age as it was lived out against the backdrop of world wars and economic depression. One alumnus of the school commented:

The austere "life-style" taught on campus at Prairie did not strike me as austere. We were just emerging from the Triple D thirties – Depression, Drought, Destroyer (grasshoppers). There wasn't anything left for Prairie to teach me on the matter of low-budget living... except the voluntary choice of simplicity, perhaps.<sup>81</sup>

If anything, the hardships of difficult economic times coupled with the privations of war made PBI's mission more compelling to evangelical Christians. As a result a thriving community took shape on the bald Alberta prairie. This sense of community was itself an attractive feature of the school at a time when many Christian young people on the prairies were often isolated by the great distances, harsh weather and crude transportation. School alumnus, Beth McNaughton (class of 35) recounted the importance of group events which were a regular part of campus life:

The strict rules in dress and conduct never bothered me. I was there to study the Bible and related subjects. All this along with the chapel hour, Tuesday testimonies around the supper tables, Friday evening student and missionary meeting, missionary prayer groups, Sunday services... Junior – Senior programmes, graduations, and conferences were all so new and wonderful. I was like a sponge trying to soak it all up.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Besides the letters of tribute which bear this out, Maxwell also conducted an informal survey of incoming students each year, ascertaining their reasons for becoming Christians. Usually about 60% or more of the students identified motives very similar to Maxwell's own conversion, namely, a fear of hell. Clearly Maxwell's experiences and resulting theology resonated with a wider community of Christians in both Canada and the United States. Maxwell's Personal Files: PBI Archives.

<sup>81</sup> Alumni Tributes, Margaret Epp; Maxwell Biography File.

<sup>82</sup> "Our Early Years," *Prairie Harvesters* (Jan. – Mar., 1982): 4.

The camaraderie of studies, dorm life, and shared spiritual journey offered students an attractive community, which was more than offset by regulations.

It was a community which reflected the spiritual pilgrimage and beliefs of its founder, and it was a community that rallied around fundamentalist concerns in the face of religious and cultural challenges. As will become evident in the next chapter it was a community which grew beyond the geographical confines of campus, through its publications and radio broadcasts; and ultimately, it was also a community of those responding to the divine call to service.



**Chapter Four:**  
**Outreach and Ministry:**  
**‘Every Christian A Missionary’**

“Prairie is missionary for the simple reason that it is Biblical. Insofar as Prairie remains Bible-centered and Biblically-spiritual, the Institute will continue to be preeminently missionary.”<sup>1</sup> This was Maxwell’s conviction, and it was the foundational belief which under-girded every aspect of institute life. If one attended PBI, there could only be one logical outcome upon graduation – missionary service.

But missionary ministry could be understood as two-tiered: there were home missionaries and foreign missionaries. Aware that the exotic image of foreign missions could potentially render home missions inferior, Maxwell worked out the following harmonization:

It may seem unfortunate to contrast “foreign missions” with “home missions.” “The field is the world.” The great commission is: “Go ye *into all the world*.”<sup>2</sup> Let Christians first find their *home* in all the world and then they can plead for “home missions.” God’s plan for His servants, therefore, is “Every Christian a missionary” – whether at home or abroad. It must be conceded, however, that the home fields at their blackest are almost white when compared with the dense darkness of heathenism.<sup>3</sup>

In this manner Maxwell justified the school’s foreign missionary focus, based on global spiritual demographics, while still honouring all PBI alumni who served as home missionaries. Being a missionary was not a function of geography, but of worldview.

This is also evident in Maxwell’s understanding of his personal “calling.” In the same letter containing his proposal of marriage to Pearl, his future wife, he also revealed

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<sup>1</sup> L. E. Maxwell in the “Forward” of Margaret Epp’s *Into All The World: The Missionary Outreach of Prairie Bible Institute*, (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Press, 1973), n. p.

<sup>2</sup> This oft-used quotation is from the Gospel of Mark 16: 15.

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell, “Forward.”

the aspect of Christian service to which he believed God was directing him. "The reason I am going to be a home missionary is because I believe it is the will of God for me to teach others to be sent out to the field."<sup>4</sup> While the immediate outworking of this call to home missions was the founding of PBI, it was expanded considerably beyond the confines of the campus in the following years.

Maxwell's commitment to spreading the Christian Gospel led PBI to forge relationships with like-minded organizations and individuals through a variety of means. This network served not only to further the vision of missionary evangelism, but also aided in attracting new students to the school itself. In carrying out these multifarious tasks, PBI acted as a "regional coordinating centre" for fundamentalist missionary activity and Bible teaching.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to explore the means by which these networks were established and maintained. Here again, two things will become apparent. First of all, it was the missionary impulse of holiness theology which was the common motivator in all these networking activities; and secondly, in its network of associations, PBI clearly identified itself as a fundamentalist institution in the larger evangelical landscape

PBI forged a wide network of working relationships primarily through four basic means. The first of these was the yearly cycle of missionary and Bible conferences hosted by the school. It was at these times that recruiters for a variety of missionary societies visited campus in the hopes of attracting new candidates to join their

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<sup>4</sup> Maxwell's letter to Pearl Plummer, April, 28, 1922; Maxwell Biography File.

<sup>5</sup> Joel Carpenter and Virginia Brereton both use this kind of terminology to describe the role American Bible Schools played in the fundamentalist movement south of the border. See Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929-1942," 66, and *Revive Us Again*, 53-56, 83-85; and Brereton, 147-50. The same model has been shown to be true on a smaller scale in Canada; see Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land*, 67-68.

organizations. The most frequent and successful of these were the transdenominational “faith mission” agencies, such as the Sudan Interior Mission and the China Inland Mission.

A second method of home missions activity, which combined evangelism with student recruitment, was the formation of itinerant summer ministry teams. During the months when school was not in session these groups, usually composed of both faculty and students, held evangelistic meetings in churches and Bible camps throughout Canada and the United States. A third avenue of outreach developed when the school began to publish two monthly periodicals. Maxwell used these two pamphlets to spread his missionary vision, profile the work of the Institute, and cultivate financial support. The final strand of PBI’s network grew out of its weekly radio broadcasts, which by the 1940s, aired on stations as far away as California and Prince Edward Island.

Of the above methods the first to be developed was the campus conference. PBI held its initial missionary conference at the end of its first year. In the spring of 1923 Maxwell concluded the semester by focusing on the needs of missionary societies. The result was that the students and their families pledged \$2000 toward missionary projects.<sup>6</sup> Granted, it is something of a stretch to call a simple service concluding with a pledge drive a conference, yet it did set a precedent which the school followed every year thereafter. At the end of the following year a more extensive program was planned which included a special missionary speaker. Maxwell invited a Christian and Missionary Alliance minister from Edmonton, Rev. J. H. Woodward, to come and give a series of

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<sup>6</sup> Davidson. 15

addresses, which again, focused on missions. Another offering was taken, and this time \$3000 was pledged in support.<sup>7</sup>

By the summer of 1928 PBI was also hosting an additional conference which it publicized as a Camp Meeting. Summer conferences usually lasted a week and were held in either June or July. By scheduling the conference at this time Maxwell was hoping to take advantage of the relative lull between seeding and harvest so that local farm families could attend. By referring to it as a 'Camp Meeting' Maxwell placed this gathering in the revivalist stream of Wesleyan Methodism, and, in keeping with revivalist tradition, the week included times of Bible teaching and evangelism, as well as a missions emphasis.<sup>8</sup> In the fall of the same year the Institute also included a special set of meetings in the middle of the first semester, which often featured a prominent missionary or Bible teacher.<sup>9</sup> Eventually this shorter three-day conference became known as the Fall Rally.

A general invitation was extended to churches and individual supporters in the surrounding area to attend these meetings. From the outset the school never charged conference guests for food or lodging. By the mid 1940s Maxwell could testify that every time he was tempted to levy a fee to help cover conference expenses he was reminded of the Biblical passage, "Freely ye have received, freely give." He was convinced that God wanted him to invite others to freely enjoy the blessings of conferences and would, in turn, supply all the real needs of the Institute.<sup>10</sup>

While all three conferences brought a series of Bible teachers, missionaries and guests to campus, it was the spring Missionary Conference which became the institute's

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>8</sup> PP. Vol. 1. No. 5 (May, 1928): 3.

<sup>9</sup> PP. Vol. 1. No. 9 (Sept. 1928): 2.

<sup>10</sup> "A Proving Ground For Pioneers." *The Sunday School Times*, Vol 85, No. 22 (May 29, 1943): 438.

marquee event. From the above-mentioned simple meeting in 1923, it grew into an eight-day festival culminating in graduation exercises on the final day.<sup>11</sup> Maxwell was fond of likening this event to the Old Testament Jewish celebratory feasts described in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. He described it as “a great feast of spiritual things,” which culminated with “that great day of the feast” when “portions are sent ‘to the regions beyond’ to them for whom nothing is prepared.”<sup>12</sup> In this compilation of King James Bible phrases Maxwell summed up the two basic intents of Missions Conference. The first of these was celebratory. The eight days of conference (Sunday to Sunday) were a time to celebrate the graduation of the senior students with formal banquet, a baccalaureate service, and a graduation ceremony. But conference also had a motivational purpose. Interspersed with events of celebration were a series of daily meetings, which featured times of Bible teaching and missionary “reports from the field.” It was believed that through hearing scriptural exhortations as well as accounts of both the triumphs and needs of missionaries, conference attendees would hear the divine call to either contribute financial support, or pledge themselves to missionary service.

Both themes were evident in Dorothy Ruth Miller’s report of the 1943 conference. It was a “crowning season because at that time we see a little more of what God has wrought in the students during the years that they have been with us.”<sup>13</sup> Toward the end of the article, Miller reported that the missionary pledge offering had come to \$21,078.50, an increase of seven thousand dollars from the previous year. In addition to sending money,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> *Manual 1929-29*, 14; and *PP*, Vol. 16, Nos. 4-5 (April – May, 1943): 11.

<sup>13</sup> “High” Days At P.B.I.” *PP*, Vol. 16, Nos. 4-5 (April – May, 1943): 12.

Many young lives were publicly dedicated to the Lord during these meetings for service wherever He may choose. A considerable number of students also received their call to some foreign field and are applying immediately to the mission under which they believe God would have them serve.<sup>14</sup>

This was the crowning achievement of Missions conference: to send financial resources to those already on the mission field, and, most significantly of all, to respond to the call of God to actually go oneself.

A typical conference day began with an early morning prayer meeting, followed by an 8.30 a.m. session, entitled The Christian Workers Hour. These were Bible teaching times, often led by Maxwell himself. After this three main sessions, held at 10 a.m., 2 p.m., and 7.30 p.m., defined the rest of the day. Morning and afternoon sessions were frequently dominated by missionary reports. It was especially during the evening session that those in attendance were encouraged to respond to the Providential "call" to either go serve as a missionary, or support the cause by making a financial pledge to a specific missionary endeavour

Initially Maxwell was able to get missionaries who were on home leave in southern Alberta to come and tell of their work. The 1925 conference listed a Mr. S. Fox who had served in Ceylon under the India General Mission, and a Mrs. W. Finlay, who was simply identified as a missionary from Africa.<sup>15</sup> By 1929 Maxwell announced in *The Prairie Pastor* that Dr. Robert H. Glover, Assistant Home Director of the China Inland Mission would be the special speaker at PBI's spring Missionary Conference. In addition to him, J. Lloyd Hunter, Superintendent of the Canadian Sunday School Mission, Canada's largest home mission at the time, would also be on the roster of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> "Annual Convention Bible Institute," *The Three Hills Capital* (Mar. 11, 1925): 1.

speakers.<sup>16</sup> Three years later the Western Canadian Secretary for SIM, Sam Cassels joined two other CIM representatives as the featured speakers.<sup>17</sup> After only ten years this small school tucked away in an obscure corner of the Canadian prairies could boast that it consistently attracted the home leadership of the largest faith mission organizations in North America.<sup>18</sup>

It is no coincidence that the mission agencies most frequently featured were transdenominational ones. Both the China Inland Mission and the Sudan Interior Mission supplied conference speakers, not to mention a steady flow of chapel speakers throughout the school year. From the later 1930s onward, two additional transdenominational agencies became regular visitors to campus and recruiters of PBI graduates, namely World-wide Evangelism Crusade (WEC) and the Unevangelized Fields Mission (UFM).<sup>19</sup> All four of these organizations were transdenominational faith missions styled along the same lines as J. Hudson Taylor had originally founded CIM.

Both in principle and in operation CIM and PBI found much common ground. In chapter two the similarity between their doctrinal statements was pointed out. In addition to their common interdenominational theology, both were originally open to accepting people who had little formal education, considering fervency of heart more important than vocational or professional qualifications. Finally, CIM made evangelism its primary aim, sending people to preach the Gospel in the regions of China, which, up until then,

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<sup>16</sup> *PP*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Mar. 1929): 2.

<sup>17</sup> *PP*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (May, 1932): 2.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to having missionaries come and speak at conferences, PBI had a steady stream of missionary speakers give messages at the daily chapel services during the school year. Up until 1942 it published a comprehensive list of missionaries who had visited the campus in some official capacity. By that time there were over 150 missionaries on the list. *Manual 1942-43*, 4-7.

<sup>19</sup> *Manual 1939-40*, 6-8. By 1939 one third of the visiting missionaries listed in PBI's *Manual* came from CIM and SIM. Not surprisingly these same organizations (including WEC and UFM) had the highest

had had no Protestant missionaries. Once converts had been made, Taylor left the task of church planting and administration to others.<sup>20</sup>

Although the premillennial assumptions of Christ's imminent return were stronger in Taylor's theology than in Maxwell's own teaching, the pioneer spirit, and the isolated priority of preaching the gospel without regard to ecclesiastical matters resonate strongly with Maxwell's own concerns. Evangelism was all-important; issues of church polity would somehow sort themselves out.<sup>21</sup> It could even be argued that Maxwell saw his own school to some extent performing the same function for Christian education that Taylor's CIM had carried out for overseas missions. Maxwell was fond of quoting Taylor, often summing up the growth of the school during a time of scarcity with the famous, "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's support."<sup>22</sup> To further strengthen the bond between transdenominational faith mission, and transdenominational Bible School, Maxwell went on to state:

We hasten to agree with Hudson Taylor that God's work done in God's way, will never lack God's trials. He says:

Envid by some, despised by many, hated perhaps by others; an innovation on what have become established rules of mission practice (Bible and Theological Schools); working without precedent in many respects, and with few experienced helpers; often perplexed in mind and embarrassed by circumstances, had not my mind been sustained by the conviction that the work was His, and that He is with me 'in the thick of the fight', I must have fainted and broke down. But the Battle is the Lord's and He will conquer.<sup>23</sup>

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number of graduates join their ranks. By 1944 seventy of PBI's one hundred and seventy nine alumni serving as fulltime missionaries were members of one of these four agencies. See *Manual 1944-45*, 8-12.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1970), 326-331.

<sup>21</sup> In his broad, but insightful analysis of the faith missions movement Klaus Fiedler identifies the combination of premillennial eschatology and the interdenominational character of these agencies as the two factors which contributed to a severely underdeveloped ecclesiology. See Fiedler 278-78.

<sup>22</sup> "God Does A New Thing." *The Brethren Missionary Herald*: 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



Here Maxwell associates the hardships and struggles of frontier missions with the educational frontier work of his school. Both were fighting the same spiritual battle, and in this way Maxwell was fulfilling his calling of being the home missionary who would train others to be sent out. Missionary conferences were the culmination of that training, and in some way represented an ironic reversal of the Islamic story about Mohammed's commanding the mountain to come to him. When the mountain did not respond, he simply declared that he would go to the mountain instead. In the same way, if Maxwell could not go out as a foreign missionary, he would, in effect, make the key figures of evangelical missionary movement come to him. And come they did.

By the early forties PBI's reputation as a dynamic missionary training school was well established in North America, and because of this some of the best known, and most influential, fundamentalist leaders appeared as speakers at its missions conference. In 1943 the conference featured, in addition to the usual slate of faith mission representatives, the senior editors of three prominent evangelical periodicals. J. H. Hunter, editor of the Toronto based *Evangelical Christian*, shared the conference podium with Earl Frid, editor of *World Conquest*, and, most well-known of all, Philip Howard, editor of the *Sunday School Times*, the fundamentalist periodical with the largest readership in North America.<sup>24</sup> Both Hunter and Howard subsequently featured favourable pieces about PBI in their respective magazines, which served to place the school firmly in the fundamentalist camp and give it invaluable exposure to prospective students.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *PP*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Mar. 1943): 11.

<sup>25</sup> "A Proving Ground For Pioneers," and "With God on the Prairie: The Story of Prairie Bible Institute.." *The Evangelical Christian*, (August, 1943): 337-40.

In 1947 the school received its most prestigious guest to date as missions conference speaker. That spring Charles Fuller, the radio preacher whose *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* was at that time rated the most listened to radio broadcast in North America, gave the keynote address on the closing weekend of the conference.<sup>26</sup> While at the school he went on to give it the following public endorsement:

As I have watched the progress of the Prairie Bible Institute through the years, I have had real reason to praise God for this wonderful work of His... In recent years God has laid upon my heart the vision of the tremendous value of schools for training young people to carry the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth... Prairie is one of the best Bible institutes, for it combines a rigorous course in Bible study with discipline in the problems of every day living.<sup>27</sup>

Fuller's visit and subsequent praise was not only an indication of how widespread PBI's missionary reputation had become, but also illustrated the transnational nature of fundamentalism. National boundaries were no obstacle when it came to building alliances based on a common theology and a common mission. Most conference speakers were either Canadian or American, but occasionally there was a greater international flavour in the conference roster. In 1938, for example, two of the featured speakers were from Wales and South Africa, and two years later an itinerant evangelist from Scotland as well as an aboriginal minister, Rev. Jas. Proudfoot were participants.<sup>28</sup> Later in 1947 Maxwell also traveled south to speak at the radio preacher's Fuller Foundation Conference in Mt. Hermon, California.<sup>29</sup>

PBI showed the same openness and flexibility in opening its conference platform to women that Maxwell demonstrated with his female staff and students. In the 1932

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<sup>26</sup> In 1944 Fuller's listening audience was estimated to be as large as twenty million. He had better ratings than such entertainment personalities as Bob Hope. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 139.

<sup>27</sup> *Prairie Bible Institute*, n.p.

<sup>28</sup> *PP*, Vol. 11, No. 3-4 (May-June, 1938): 9; and Vol. 13, No. 3 (Mar. 1940): 9.

<sup>29</sup> *The Prairie Overcomer*, Vol. 20, No. 6 (June, 1947): 161.

conference both Mrs. Cassels and the wife of CIM representative, Chass H. Judd, were involved as conference speakers along with their husbands. In the spring of 1931 Miss Martha Pohnert, a missionary to China, was advertised as the chief convention speaker. The titles of her talks indicate the adventurous, if not dangerous, aspect of overseas missionary service. Sessions such as "Six Weeks With the Communists," "Twenty-One Days with the Bandits," and "How God Delivers Chinese Opium Smokers" had a certain tabloid-like appeal for young people aspiring to overseas service.<sup>30</sup> The fact that these were the experiences of a single woman, only added to the intrigue.

Conferences, such as those held by the school, acted to unify fundamentalists. PBI's emphasis on missions also acted as a check on the centrifugal forces, such as doctrinal disagreements, which were constantly at work to fragment and tear apart the fundamentalist movement. Maxwell refused to be drawn in to these controversies, and instead positioned PBI as a school which championed the task all fundamentalists believed vital – the spreading of the Gospel and the saving of souls.<sup>31</sup> The school could legitimately advertise that "an increasing number of Christians representing many denominations are availing themselves of the privileges of this Missionary and

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<sup>30</sup> *PP*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Mar. 1931): 10. The image of the woman missionary as romantic adventurer was not new to evangelical missions. In the nineteenth century Presbyterian women missionaries were portrayed in the same way when they returned to Canada on furloughs. See Brouwer, 70. Featuring celebrity women missionaries continued well in to PBI's later history. Gladys Alward, another missionary to China, whose story was popularized by the Hollywood movie, *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, was a conference speaker, as was Elizabeth Elliot, a missionary to cannibals in Ecuador, whose husband was martyred along with four other men.

<sup>31</sup> Brereton points out how particularly the transdenominational schools in the United States had the same influence on fundamentalists south of the border. The challenge for those schools was perhaps greater than for PBI, given the volatile disputes over millennial doctrines, which were never so wide spread in Canada. See Brereton, 139-47.

Graduation Week. People come from far and near to share the accommodations of the Institute and enjoy a time of great blessing."<sup>32</sup>

Actual attendance statistics are sketchy at best, but the few which are available indicate an increasing, if not dramatic growth, which in turn necessitated the construction of a series of larger auditoriums.<sup>33</sup> In 1929 the school began the construction of a six hundred seat "Tabernacle," which was completed in 1932.<sup>34</sup> By 1935 a larger Tabernacle had been hurried into completion for that year's Fall Rally. This second auditorium more than doubled the older one's seating capacity.<sup>35</sup> Twelve years later, in preparation for Charles Fuller's coming to campus, PBI's board decided to add two side balconies to the Tabernacle, which would increase the auditorium's seating capacity by another five hundred.<sup>36</sup> In his *MacLean's* article that same year, historian James H. Grey listed the Tabernacle's capacity at 2000, which was already insufficient to hold all the conference attendees.<sup>37</sup> It is safe to assume, given these figures, that by the mid-1940s, PBI's Missions Conference attracted close to a thousand guests.

While missions was the dominant theme in the spring, the summer and fall meetings had a slightly different shading to them. Along with missionary reports and

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<sup>32</sup> *Manual 1928-29*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Reports of the various conferences exist, but only rarely do they include numbers of people attending. On the few occasions when they do, it is usually in reference to the number of meals served in the dining hall over the entire conference period. *PP* (April - May, 41) for example, describes the conference meetings as "crowded almost beyond capacity," but gives no estimated numbers, while it does mention that 23,000 meals were served during the eight days. In the 1938 conference summary reference is made to guests attending the conference from B. C., Saskatchewan, and the states of Washington Idaho and North Dakota. *PP*, Vol. 12, No. 4-5 (Ap.-May, 1939): 9. Perhaps it is simply part of the Canadian national character which is not as bound up with statistics and numbers as a measurement of success in the same way Americans seem to be, which is the reason why the reports did not include this data.

<sup>34</sup> *PP*, Vol. 2, No. 8 (Aug. 1929): 2, and Davidson, 64-65.

<sup>35</sup> Davidson, 65. Although no official seating capacity exists for this building, its square footage was more than double the previous one so the extrapolated seating capacity seems a safe estimate.

<sup>36</sup> *PP*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Mar. 1941): 2.

<sup>37</sup> Gray, 56. In 1943 Philip Howard put that year's conference total at about 1500, including staff and students. "A Proving Ground for Pioneers," 438.

challenges, both Fall Rally and Summer Camp Meeting stressed the “deeper life” teaching of holiness theology. Messages were often directed toward personal spiritual growth and renewal. Maxwell summed up the goal of these conferences by quoting his close friend, Robert C. McQuilken, President of Columbia Bible College in South Carolina.

Well, you know, young people come to conferences year after year. They fill up their vessels and go back to their churches and young people’s societies. After a few weeks or months, the water gets low, and their vessels are empty. They look forward to the summer conference and the expected refilling. Then one year they come to the conference and something happens. *They sink a well of their own!*

Christian young people, if you have not yet sunk a well of your own, sink one. Learn to trust Jesus for yourself and have victory in your own life and become a well of refreshing to others.<sup>38</sup>

Bible conferences were not intended to create a spiritual dependency in those who attended, but were to lead believers to deeper maturity in their faith to the point where they took responsibility for their own spiritual growth. Featured speakers here were frequently pastors, who were noted Bible teachers, and itinerant evangelists. Radio preachers, such as Rev. C. A. Sawtell of ‘The Heaven and Home Hour,’ and evangelist Dr. P. W. Philpott were featured at Fall Rallies.<sup>39</sup> The call to missionary service was not necessarily the dominant feature, but it was expected that students would be convicted of sin, desire to rid themselves of it, and be moved to greater devotion. During Dr. Philpott’s meetings in November of 1935 Dorothy Ruth Miller noted in her diary with some frustration: “No break in the meetings. It seems as if there were no depth of conviction upon the people.”<sup>40</sup> Her reference here was to the lack of spiritual brokenness in the lives of students. Conference times were expected to produce this, usually in the

<sup>38</sup> *The Prairie Overcomer*. Vol. 10, No. 11 (Nov. 1939): 1.

<sup>39</sup> *PP*, Vol. 8, No. 11-12 (Nov. – Dec. 1935): 8-9; and Vol. 15, No. 12 (Dec. 1942): 12.

<sup>40</sup> Nov. 15, 1935 entry: D.R. Miller Diaries; Box 31.

form of spontaneous student testimony meetings in which they admitted their own shortcomings and rededicated themselves to holy living. When this did not happen, it was perceived as a sign of spiritual insensitivity on the part of the listeners. If spiritual renewal did not occur as Miller had hoped during Philpott's visit, there were numerous other times when it did. More satisfactory were the responses in the fall of 1934, when she observed:

People are still coming to the meetings and the buildings are filling up. There are unusually large numbers here from Calgary and God is doing a deep quiet work. Praise God! In what a wonderful way He is working things out. I feel that He has great things in store for us

In the afternoon... there was a wonderfully blessed consecration service. Joan S., Ruth P. and Miss C. were among the many who publicly dedicated their lives to the Lord to be or do anything He desired.<sup>41</sup>

All three conferences acted as spiritual sieves, sifting the "called" from the mere pretenders. Reflecting on his own visit to PBI as a conference speaker, J. H. Hunter described the intense spiritual climate which was generally part of school ethos, but intensified at conference.

Of course no one would go to the P.B.I. unless he was in deadly earnest with God. If he did he would not stay there long. Every year there are one or two such who turn up at the beginning of the session and one of two things happen to them. Either the spiritual heat of the place kindles a flame of love and devotion to Christ in their hearts, or they find out that they have not been "called" there and speedily shake the dust or the snow of the P.B.I. from their heels.<sup>42</sup>

Conferences were clearly viewed as a spiritual proving ground to assess one's soundness for future ministry, but they were also occasions for establishing and nurturing alliances with missionary agencies, as well as local supporters. They were times of renewal, rededication, and consecration to holy living; but when missionary conference

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<sup>41</sup> Nov. 9-11, 1934; D. R. Miller Diaries; Box 31

<sup>42</sup> "With God on the Prairie," 340.

ended, it was time for active service. Using PBI's campus as a home base, a number of ministry teams fanned out across the continent during the spring and summer months.

From the outset, Maxwell made it clear that school staff would be expected to lead by example. After the first year of classes was finished, Maxwell took on the responsibility of preaching in rural churches, under the sponsorship of the Home Mission Board of a Baptist church in Calgary. Some days this meant traveling up to thirty miles on horseback as he moved from community to community in southern Alberta.<sup>43</sup> In addition to fulfilling his calling as a home missionary, this ministry brought students to the school. At the end of that first summer, four more students enrolled in the fledgling Bible school the next fall.<sup>44</sup>

As the school hired more faculty these people also participated in what became known as 'summer extension ministry.' By the early 1930s two other teachers, James Murray and Ernie Richardson, also began traveling on behalf of the school. Sometimes students accompanied these men, often in the guise of a Gospel quartete, or other type of musical ensemble. At other times students simply exercised their own initiative, and, with school approval, set up their own meetings. In most cases, it seems these early extension ministry teams worked in rural areas, mostly in Alberta.<sup>45</sup> It was not until the 1950s that the activities of these traveling evangelistic teams were more formally organized under the coordination of the school's Extension Department.<sup>46</sup>

One of the earliest formal expressions of summer ministry, which linked school faculty, students, and a transdenominational home missionary society was the formation

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<sup>43</sup> Maxwell Interview, Tape 1, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> Davidson, 20.

<sup>45</sup> "Extension Department starts with 1 man." *The Three Hills Capital*, (April 12, 1972): 12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

of the Prairie Sunday School Mission. In 1929 PBI decided to start a Sunday school Mission of its own by enrolling children throughout Alberta in a Bible correspondence course program. That year 2500 children signed up for the program with the incentive of being awarded a free week at a nearby Bible camp if they memorized 500 Scripture verses.<sup>47</sup> The following year PBI brought this work under the umbrella of the Canadian Sunday School Mission (CSSM) who then sent representatives to the school to train students how to conduct summer Sunday school programs. In 1931 *The Prairie Pastor* proudly reported that ten of the school's students were destined for the isolated districts of Alberta in five teams of two, with the object of organizing "Sunday schools, Bible Study Contests, prayer meetings and classes in soul winning."<sup>48</sup> Later that fall *The Prairie Pastor* carried a report, citing the success of these student teams.

Revival fires are burning higher and yet higher. Souls are being saved all over the Prairies – 5 here – 10 there – 18 in another place – 20 in another – 25 – in another 40 – in another – 40 more in yet another – 60 in three districts – etc.

Eighty-nine boys and girls, below 20 years of age, each of whom had memorized from 500 to 1500 verses of Scripture, came together on Aug. 2 to enjoy the wonderful camp at Gull Lake... Testimonies were rich and real. Confessions of sin were genuine. Open consecration of lives to God's service was freely expressed by many. And nearly all went home with the holy determination to win souls for the Master.<sup>49</sup>

One can again see the emphasis on evangelism as mediated through holiness theology of the crucified life, intertwined with a strong biblicism – the three key ingredients of PBI's missionary training. What is also evident is the network of transdenominational para-church agencies typical of fundamentalist networks: a Bible school, a home mission board, and a Bible camp, working together on an ad hoc basis in the task of evangelism and Bible teaching.

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<sup>47</sup> *PP*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Feb. 1929): 6, and Vol. 2, No. 3 (Mar. 1929): 2.

<sup>48</sup> *PP*, Vol. 4, No. 7 (July, 1931): 8.

<sup>49</sup> *PP*, Vol. 4, No. 9 (Sept. 1931): 10.



The personnel working in these various agencies could overlap as well. For example PBI had three of its own board and faculty members appointed to the board of the West Indies Mission, a transdenominational agency, which sent missionaries to Cuba.<sup>50</sup> In 1939, the school also entered into a joint venture with CSSM to start Gull Lake Bible Camp.<sup>51</sup>

If these networks reflect the patch-work, entrepreneurial nature of fundamentalism in the task of outreach, a more straightforward correlation can be found between the school's growth and Maxwell's increasingly wide-ranging travels. As mentioned earlier, Maxwell's earliest summer trips were confined to the Canadian prairies, usually rural Alberta and Saskatchewan. By 1935 his summer itinerary included speaking engagements as far away as North Dakota.<sup>52</sup> Two years later Maxwell spent six weeks on the road, speaking in churches in southern Ontario, and then swinging down into the American mid-western states of Missouri and Kansas. In the following ten years, when *The Prairie Pastor* began publishing faculty summer itineraries, they clearly mirror the regional make-up of PBI's student body. In the United States faculty tended to travel frequently to speak at conferences and churches in New York state; the mid-eastern states, especially Michigan; and the Pacific coast states. In Canada, besides the three most westerly provinces, Ontario was also frequented by PBI's ministry teams.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> PBI Board Meeting Minutes, Sept. 14, 1929. This mission was started by an alumnus of the school, Elmer Thompson, and changed its name to World Team, currently one of the largest mission organizations in North America.

<sup>51</sup> *PP*, Vol. 12, No. 9-10 (Sept. – Oct. 1939): 8.

<sup>52</sup> *PP*, Vol. 8, No. 6-7 (June – July): 9.

<sup>53</sup> *PP*, (Ap. – May, 1940), (May-June, 1944), (Aug, 1946). The regions Maxwell visited most frequently in the United States not only correlates closely with PBI's student body demographics, but also matches the demographic data cited by Brereton. Fundamentalists with connections to the Christian and Missionary Alliance movement, were most heavily concentrated in the Middle Atlantic, East North Central, and Pacific Coast regions of America. See also Richard Elwood Wenger, "Social Thought in American Fundamentalism, 1918 – 1933," Ph. D. diss. (University of Nebraska, 1973), 57-75.

The travels of these ministry teams illustrate the breadth of PBI's connections in North America largely at the local church level. At the same time the school was also linking up with some of the larger, high-profile evangelical churches and agencies, specifically through Maxwell's personal contacts. It seems Maxwell regularly spoke in churches pastored by men whom he had invited to be conference speakers at PBI. In addition to speaking at Charles Fuller's conference in California he was also a guest speaker at the Philpott Tabernacle in Hamilton, and at Rev. Nye J. Langemadé's church in Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>54</sup> By 1946 Maxwell's reputation was such that he was invited to speak at events sponsored by two of the largest evangelical youth associations in North America. In the summer of that year he was a keynote speaker at two 'Youth For Christ' rallies in Michigan; later that year he delivered a series of messages at the inaugural Inter-Varsity Missionary Convention in Toronto.<sup>55</sup> Through its charismatic leader, PBI's reputation as a leading missionary training school was firmly established in the fundamentalist community on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel.

In addition to conferences and ministry teams, Maxwell added a third method to expand and cultivate the growing web of PBI's working associates and supporters: the printed word. In 1927 Maxwell heard that a small inexpensive printing press was available in Calgary. Apparently it had been seized by the police when they raided a

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<sup>54</sup> *PP*, Vol. 18, No. 6 (June, 1945): 153, and Vol. 10, No. 7-8 (July-Aug., 1937): 8. Little correspondence remains among the PBI's official records which shows the exact nature of these connections. It seems likely that the combination of school alumni, traveling missionary speakers, and Maxwell's own writings which appeared in journals promoting Keswick holiness theology served as an informal, word-of-mouth information highway, which garnered Maxwell and other PBI faculty speaking invitations at churches and conferences.

<sup>55</sup> *PP*, Vol. 19, No. 7 (July, 1946): 1. For the growth and influence of Youth For Christ (YFC), especially as its young evangelist, Billy Graham, began to rise to prominence, is documented in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 165 – 226. Maxwell also had an article published in YFC's monthly magazine; see "God's Dynamic for the Missionary Job," *Youth For Christ Magazine* (Mar., 1952): 40-44. The Inter-Varsity conference was the forerunner of the large Urbana conferences, which were put on over the Christmas holidays on the

counterfeiting operation, and since then had been standing unused in a warehouse.<sup>56</sup> By January of the following year the first installment of the *Prairie Pastor* rolled off the press and into circulation. Maxwell described the simple two-sided sheet as “an enterprising new adventure commencing with the new year;” and that the new paper would be a “very creditable effort, the mechanical part of it being done by the boys, and, as their `prentice hands become more practiced, the school will derive a great deal of pleasure and benefit from the publication.”<sup>57</sup>

What may have started out as more of a hobby with a vocational training component for PBI’s students grew into something much larger. By the mid 1960s the Institute’s main publication, now carrying the banner of the *Prairie Overcomer*, had a circulation of 60,000, while a periodical targeted at young people, the *Young Pilot* had a subscription base of 15,000.<sup>58</sup> What began as a one-man basement operation eventually turned into a major branch of PBI.<sup>59</sup> By this time Maxwell understood that the school’s publications were one of the most vital ministries, especially its flagship magazine. Besides encouraging other Christians in their faith, it also built up “warm relations with the friends who support the school. It is a bond that binds all together in the cause of Christ.”<sup>60</sup> In many ways the *Prairie Pastor* (*PP*) did function as the glue which bound

campus of the University of Illinois at Champagne-Urbana every three years. Rennie, “The Doctrine of Man in the Canadian Bible-Belt,” 3.

<sup>56</sup> Keller, 147-48.

<sup>57</sup> *PP*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan. 1928): 1, quoted in Keller. The initial four issues of the *Prairie Pastor* have disappeared from PBI’s official records. Both the college library and the Institute archives begin their respective collections with the May edition of 1928.

<sup>58</sup> Keller, 152. Circulation data from the earliest days is only mentioned periodically in the school’s official documents. Unfortunately, when *Prairie* changed its flagship publication from the old *Prairie Overcomer* to the new *Servant Magazine* in the late 1980s, all of the old mailing lists were also purged. As a result both circulation numbers and demographics of these earlier publications have been lost.

<sup>59</sup> “Printed word used at school from beginning,” *The Three Hills Capital*, (Apr. 12, 1972): 13.

<sup>60</sup> Keller, 155.

the school, its alumni and supporters, as well as its network of missionary and pastoral contacts, together.

As early as 1941 Maxwell understood how important the school's print media had become. In both training students and circulating the printed page, Maxwell saw PBI as practicing a missionary strategy of saving souls as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Single-handed we might have won a few souls in a whole lifetime. But through the training of others the reapers are multiplied and souls are saved by *multiplication rather than addition*. God's method works.

"A sower went forth to sow." God wants us to sow the good seed of His word beside all waters. And through these pages we must reach more souls for His glory. It is the most inexpensive means of getting truth into the hands of the thousands. Our readers can do much for their friends – to further their faith and build them up – by putting these papers into their hands.

Through the training of young people, and through the printed page, God is enabling us to bring blessing to many thousands of people.<sup>61</sup>

The urgency to spread the Gospel was no less apparent in the second publication begun by Maxwell in January of 1930. This publication, named the *Prairie Overcomer*, was aimed at young people and adopted the motto, 'Every Christian a Missionary.'<sup>62</sup>

The *Prairie Pastor* was originally offered free of charge with a suggested voluntary subscription charge of 25 cents per year. Its standard form consisted of eight to ten 9" by 6" pages with two columns of type per page. Only on rare occasions did it contain pictures. After just fifteen months Maxwell reported its circulation at over 2000 copies.<sup>63</sup> By 1942 that number had increased to over 6000 registered subscribers.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *PP*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan. 1941): 9.

<sup>62</sup> *The Prairie Overcomer*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan. 1930): 3. The names of school publications can get a little confusing. From its start in 1928 up until 1944 the *PP* was aimed at adults while the *Prairie Overcomer* (*PO*) was written for young people. In 1944 the two publications merged and were issued jointly as the *Prairie Pastor and Overcomer*. In the 1950s it was shortened to just the *Prairie Overcomer* and a new magazine, the *Young Pilot* was introduced as a magazine for younger readers.

<sup>63</sup> Board Meeting Minutes, Mar. 30, 1929.

<sup>64</sup> "The Great School of the Prairies," *The Church School Promoter* (Feb. 1942): 305. In light of Keller's figure of 60,000 subscribers by 1966, it would seem that a radical growth in readership occurred during the 1950s, similar to the school's expansion in radio programming. Unfortunately the original subscriber

As the periodical grew, editors Maxwell and Miller wrote and selected the material of others, which can be divided into four general categories. Dominating each edition were articles intended to instruct and challenge readers to live out some aspect of the "crucified life." The holiness teaching of separation from the world and "dying to oneself" was present in almost every issue. Maxwell set the tone in his first article by proclaiming, "the Church had never such influence over the world as in those days when she had nothing to do with the world."<sup>65</sup>

In addition to his own articles Maxwell, and later Miller, drew material from the major fundamentalist periodicals which promoted holiness teaching and which were directly linked to the Keswick holiness movement.<sup>66</sup> Articles from the *Sunday School Times*, the *Evangelical Christian*, and the *Dawn* frequently appeared in PBI's periodical. Here again the transnational nature of holiness teaching is evident. While the former two were leading publications, from the United States and Canada respectively, the latter one originated in Great Britain. The international perspective was broadened even more by frequently including writings of South African holiness theologian, Andrew Murray.<sup>67</sup>

In later years this theme was also dominant in the student sermons which appeared in the *Prairie Pastor*. A series of graduation addresses with titles such as "The Cross In Daily Life," and "The Cross and the Crown," were evidence that outgoing students were taking the message of holiness theology with them.<sup>68</sup> By focusing on this theme Maxwell also illustrated the limited historical perspective of fundamentalism.

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address lists were never saved by the PBI. As such one can only make inferences as to who the readers were.

<sup>65</sup> *PP* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan. 1928), quoted in Keller, 148-49.

<sup>66</sup> Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 80-82

<sup>67</sup> *PP*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Jan. 1941): 1..

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 6-7, and Vol. 13, No. 11 (Nov. 1940), 5-6.

Most of the writers, whose work appeared in the *Prairie Pastor*, were either nineteenth or twentieth century devotional authors. There was practically no mention of the early church fathers such as Augustine or Tertullian; and even the giants of the Protestant Reformation, such as Luther and Calvin, received scant attention.<sup>69</sup>

Not surprisingly, a second category of writings dealt specifically with missions. Often the leaders of faith mission agencies who visited the campus, or who were associated with organizations which recruited missionary candidates from PBI, were featured. Conference speakers, such as Dr. Richard Glover and Isaac Page of CIM, as well as Sam Cassells of SIM, all contributed articles to the *Prairie Pastor*.<sup>70</sup> Their writings served to reinforce their conference messages, namely that the missionary enterprise of spreading the Gospel was the responsibility of every Christian.<sup>71</sup>

These articles complemented the next category, which consisted of giving updates of the Institute's activities to their subscribers/supporters. In this way Maxwell was able to constantly keep the school's missionary mandate before his readers and report on the ways in which the school was carrying it out.

The final category of articles dealt with traditional fundamentalist concerns, such as modernism, evolution, and the vices of popular entertainment.<sup>72</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Maxwell's tone could become quite militant when he wrote on these issues, and his use of articles by noted militant fundamentalist, Bob Jones, indicate that

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<sup>69</sup> Stackhouse comments on this historical myopia as well: n. 69 on 247. This bias is also indicative of Maxwell's own reading preferences, which were dominated by the devotional and missionary writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See "Authors He Loved," *PO*, (May, 1984): 13-15. Two earlier writers who appeared in the pages of the *PP* were seventeenth century Baptist preacher, John Bunyan and a Roman Catholic mystic from the same period, Madame Guyon. *PP*, Vol. 14, No. 8 (Aug. 1941), and Vol. 2, No. 11 (Nov. 1929).

<sup>70</sup> For examples see *PP*, Vol. 2, No. 11; Vol. 3, No. 6 (June, 1930); and Vol. 3, No. 12 (Dec. 1930).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*.

PBI held common cause with more traditional fundamentalist voices on these cultural issues.<sup>73</sup> Conspicuous by their absence are articles which focus on eschatology. This dispensationalist aspect of premillennialism was downplayed here, just as it was in all other aspects of the institute's program. Although Maxwell never backed away from using the fear of a final judgement as a motivator to get people to become Christians, the tone of the *Prairie Pastor* tempered despair over the godless decline of society with the ever present hope of a Providential revival.<sup>74</sup>

The fourth and final avenue through which PBI sought to build a support network was radio. William Aberhart was one of the first Canadian fundamentalist preachers to effectively use radio, but Maxwell was not far behind in realizing its potential for evangelism.<sup>75</sup> As William Mann pointed out, radio was an important source of entertainment and an antidote for loneliness in isolated rural communities on the prairies. Its relative novelty aided its popularity in urban areas. Radio had the advantage of creating an intimacy that print media did not have. It could also turn preachers and musicians into public figures.<sup>76</sup>

In December of 1930, when the board of PBI voted to go ahead and begin broadcasting the school's Sunday afternoon church service over CFAC, Calgary, it suddenly reached a listening audience as far away as B.C. and the northwestern United

<sup>72</sup> The *Prairie Overcomer* carried more articles on the last of these three issues, most likely due to its intended audience of young people.

<sup>73</sup> "A College Tragedy." *PP*, Vol. 4 No. 12 (Dec. 1931): 3-4. The same issue also included an article by Maxwell entitled, "A Militant Faith," p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Maxwell published several surveys on what had motivated PBI students to become Christians. The vast majority cited a fear of hell as their reason. See *PP*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (July, 1932): 5, and Vol. 15, No. 2 (Feb. 1942): 1-2. For typical examples of articles on revival see *PP*, (Sept. 32, Sept. 41 and Mar. 42).

<sup>75</sup> Mann, 88-89, 118-127.

<sup>76</sup> Carpenter, "From Fundamentalism to the New Evangelical Coalition," 11.

States.<sup>77</sup> These broadcasts featured a mix of songs by student musical ensembles, and a Gospel message by Maxwell. The next year the school was offered a Sunday evening slot over AM stations in both Red Deer and Calgary.<sup>78</sup> In 1932 PBI was broadcasting its evening service from 7:30 to 9:00 over CFCN, Calgary during the six months that the school was in session.<sup>79</sup> It continued to hold this slot up through 1938, when Oscar Lowry used the school's air time as part of his six-week radio evangelistic campaign. During these years the telecast was known as "The Prairie Gospel Hour," and then later "The Prairie Bible Hour."<sup>80</sup>

While PBI received enough mail from listeners during the 1930s to warrant continuing its broadcasts, it was Lowry's use of the medium which vindicated Maxwell's expectations for radio as a tool for evangelism. Lowry, an itinerant American evangelist, who had at one time taught at Moody Bible Institute, held a series of meetings in Calgary during the fall of 1938. It was largely through the efforts of PBI that Lowry ended up having his daily evening meetings broadcast over CFCN, a local Calgary AM radio station. The meetings lasted for six weeks, and every Sunday evening Maxwell gave Lowry PBI's own broadcast time. Lowry conducted the final radio broadcast live from PBI's Tabernacle.<sup>81</sup> On that night fifteen hundred people filled the Tabernacle and over one hundred conversions were recorded when Lowry gave a closing altar call.

This six-week campaign resulted in a widespread outpouring of religious fervour in western Canada, and as far away as the northwestern American states. Lowry reportedly received 5700 letters from listeners, telling of their conversion experiences as

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 119, and PBI Board Meeting Minutes, Dec. 6, 1930.

<sup>78</sup> PBI Board Meeting Minutes, Dec. 30, 1931.

<sup>79</sup> *PP*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Mar. 1932): 3.

<sup>81</sup> "Radio ministry changes over the years," *The Three Hills Capital*, (Apr. 12, 1972): 15.



a result of hearing his radio broadcasts.<sup>82</sup> Whether or not this constituted a genuine spiritual revival is uncertain, however the response to Lowry's broadcasts indicates that many people were deeply affected by the messages.<sup>83</sup> The *Prairie Pastor* reprinted over twenty of these letters, relating story after story of conviction and confession of their own sinfulness. In addition to that, both student enrollment and financial support for PBI increased significantly as a result of the school's association with Lowry.<sup>84</sup> Maxwell heralded Lowry's use of radio as "a new and unique form of evangelism."<sup>85</sup> Although he never used a similar approach for PBI's radio work, it confirmed in his mind that evangelism could take place via radio, without a lot of high-pressure commercial packaging.<sup>86</sup>

In the 1940s the school expanded its radio audience by preparing recorded transcriptions of its weekly broadcasts and airing them on other stations across the country. By 1947 "The Prairie Gospel Hour" was playing on two stations in British Columbia, one in Saskatchewan, and one in New Brunswick, in addition to its Alberta broadcasts.<sup>87</sup> The extent of PBI's listening audience was never measured during these years, and only infrequently did the *Prairie Pastor* or *Prairie Overcomer* publish letters

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<sup>81</sup> "Echoes! Echoes!" *PP*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan. 1939): 1-2.

<sup>82</sup> Mann, 122.

<sup>83</sup> According to Miss E. Dobbs, the provincial organizer for Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship in Alberta, Lowry's broadcasts made a lasting change in the lives of many people. Her travels throughout Alberta during the 1940s brought her repeatedly in touch with Christians who traced their personal conversion back to Lowry. Mann, 123.

<sup>84</sup> For an extensive account of the Lowry meetings and their influence on PBI see Goertz. The last half of his thesis is a good analysis of this event. See "Echoes! Echoes!" 2-10, for selections of the correspondence received by the school.

<sup>85</sup> *PP*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan. 1939): 2.

<sup>86</sup> Grey, 55.

<sup>87</sup> *PP*, Vol. 20, No. 11 (Nov. 1947): 1.

from radio listeners. It was during the 1950s that the radio work of the school really flourished and programming diversified to target specific audiences.<sup>88</sup>

For Maxwell the object of the Institute's radio work was "the salvation of many souls," and therefore financial solicitation would be kept to a minimum. He did want the broadcasts to be self-supporting, but they were not to be used as a means of supporting the rest of the Institute.<sup>89</sup> Radio work at PBI remained an amateur enterprise, and a vehicle for featuring school musicians and speakers. Although Maxwell, and later in the 1950s a Gospel music quartette called the Janz Brothers, were the central figures, school broadcasts never took on the increasingly professional and commercial flavour of other emerging evangelical radio preachers in Alberta, such as Chase Sawtell and J. D. Carlson.<sup>90</sup>

In all four strands of PBI's network of ministry and outreach the theme of missionary evangelism was always at the forefront. Some historians have argued that, due to all these activities as well as the high number of PBI alumni who served as pastors in the evangelical denominations such as the Evangelical Free Church, and the Fellowship of Gospel Churches, the school itself functioned as a denomination of its own.<sup>91</sup> There is some merit to this claim, especially as the institute chapel, the Tabernacle, assumed the role of a community church.<sup>92</sup> This mentality may have been adopted by some supporters of the school, but was never formalized in any school documents and never encouraged in Maxwell's writings.

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<sup>88</sup> Radio Review Committee Report 1961. "Radio Broadcasts" File: Box 64 PBI Radio Ministry: PBI Archives.

<sup>89</sup> *PP*, (Nov. 1947): 1, and Grey, 55-56.

<sup>90</sup> Mann, 124-26.

<sup>91</sup> Mann, 106-07, and Burkinshaw, *Pilgrims in Lotus Land*, 161-62, 179-81. Carpenter notes that Moody Bible Institute in Chicago was viewed in the same way. See *Revive Us Again*, 18.

A better way of understanding this quasi-denominational behavior of PBI is to look at the way in which the evangelical/fundamentalist movement took shape. From its nineteenth century origins, one of its defining, if not most confounding characteristics, has been its constant (some would say blatant) unwillingness to work exclusively within formal episcopal or denominational structures. This is likely due to the underdeveloped ecclesiology endemic to the movement. Most evangelicals tended to view the Christian Church the same way the founders of Fuller Seminary did. "When they thought of the church, they did not think of institutions but rather of the "invisible" body of all evangelical believers. The church was essentially a collection of converted individuals."<sup>93</sup> Given this understanding of Christian identity, combined with a capitalist economic culture which valued entrepreneurial initiative and independent resourcefulness, it is little wonder that by the turn of the century fundamentalism found its greatest vitality in semi-autonomous transdenominational institutions, associations and ad hoc working coalitions.<sup>94</sup> George Marsden likened the fundamentalist landscape of para-church agencies, with their expanded networks, to the medieval feudal structure. It was made up of "superficially friendly, somewhat competitive empires built up by evangelical leaders competing for the same audience, but all professing allegiance to the

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<sup>92</sup> Students were not allowed to attend any of the local churches in Three Hills for Sunday services, but were expected to attend the services held in the school's own chapel/conference hall.

<sup>93</sup> George Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 29.

<sup>94</sup> One of the most well known conferences started by fundamentalists was the annual Niagara Prophecy Conference which was held at Niagara-on-the-Lake beginning in 1885, and continued until the turn of the century. Another conference which brought many fundamentalists together were the Keswick holiness conferences which originated in Britain, but later spread to Canada and the United States. Working coalitions, such as the World Christian Fundamentals Association, were helpful in establishing who the leaders were in the movement. These coalitions were often forged to address a specific need, i.e. the threat of modernism, and then dissolved either once the threat had been addressed, or a new, more dramatic issue grabbed their attention. See also Brereton, 152-154. Here she also makes the connection between fundamentalist leaders and the values of capitalist ideology.

same king.”<sup>95</sup> These fiefdoms were mostly para-church agencies, and were linked informally through reading the same evangelical periodicals and books, sharing the same hymnals, and being affiliated with the same evangelical organizations.<sup>96</sup>

Seen in this light, PBI was not unique in developing its own network of partnerships and supporters, but was following the pattern of other fundamentalist organizations, which were heirs to the revivalist strain of nineteenth century evangelicalism.<sup>97</sup> In many ways PBI came to resemble a scaled-down version of its more famous American counter-part, Moody Bible Institute, in Chicago.<sup>98</sup> What did make Prairie unique was its ability to forge a diverse and widespread support network from a remote rural location. Most of the thriving transdenominational schools in the United States were located in urban centres, and could draw on an established infrastructure – both civic and ecclesiastical – in developing their own networks.<sup>99</sup> When Maxwell arrived in Three Hills he began with only himself.

Ultimately Maxwell did not view fellow believers as members of denominations, and the last thing he wanted was to become involved in the entanglements of denominational administration. In developing a network of supporters, through the various resources PBI had at its disposal, his and the school’s only concern was to see every Christian a missionary.

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<sup>95</sup> George Marsden. “The Evangelical Denomination.” in Evangelicalism in Modern America. xiv.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* and *Opp.* 116.

<sup>97</sup> Harder, 33.

<sup>98</sup> There is little evidence to suggest that this was deliberate on Maxwell’s part. All the same the resemblance is striking. Both schools were famous for their missionary conferences, radio broadcasts, travelling ministry teams, and monthly periodicals.

<sup>99</sup> Brereton 71-76 and 79-84. David O. Beale. In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850 (Greenville, South Carolina: Unusual Publications, 1986), 90-91. Beale cites an article by the influential *Sunday School Times*, from 1930, in which the magazine endorsed over fifty Bible Schools. The overwhelming majority of these schools were located in cities (PBI was one of the few rural ones listed). See “Bible Schools That Are True to the Faith,” *The Sunday School Times* (Feb. 1, 1930): 63.

### Conclusion:

In the spring of 1972, as Prairie Bible Institute prepared to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, L. E. Maxwell reflected on the early years of the school's existence. After its first two years of operation the school could no longer continue functioning in the cramped confines of the old farmhouse in which it had begun.

To build or not to build became the burning question. Who ever heard of such a thing? A Bible school in a country district! What folly and presumption! The path was untried. It was all so contrary to nature.<sup>1</sup> When we finally decided to begin building in 1924, it was indeed a venture. We were fearful. Suppose we should give occasion for all men to mock the effort, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' It could scarcely be said of us: 'They just played safe.' We ventured.<sup>2</sup>

From those days of bare beginnings this Institute has grown to have many departments, but one goal, namely the sending of the Gospel to all the world. It is our supreme task, therefore... to prepare trained, schooled, disciplined, and fit young people, to "make up the hedge, and stand in the gap" on the far-flung missionary fronts.<sup>3</sup>

The above recollections summarize the two guiding themes in PBI's growth and development, namely holiness fundamentalism and missionary training. In facing the uncertainty of whether or not to go ahead and build a school, Maxwell and his supporters viewed their decision in terms of a spiritual crisis of faith, typical of holiness teaching. With the resolution of this crisis the school then developed with the single-minded goal of training missionaries. These two themes dominate the picture of PBI which has emerged from the preceding chapters. But while Maxwell's reminiscence captures the essential leitmotifs of the school it also raises the question, 'why did Prairie Bible Institute spring up in this particular location?' If one were to ask the founders of the

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<sup>1</sup> Maxwell, *With God on the Prairies*, 36.

<sup>2</sup> Three Hills Capital, (April 12, 1972): 2.

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell, *With God on the Prairies*, 38.

school they would have answered in terms of Providential guidance and provision, yet historians have posited few, if any, direct answers to this question.

Scholars, such as Mann and Stackhouse, have largely avoided causal issues, and confined their studies of PBI to descriptive analysis and the placement of the school into a wider sociological or theological framework. Mann does, however, point to conditions in Alberta during the early decades of the twentieth century, which provided a climate favourable for sectarian religious movements in general.<sup>4</sup> The dramatic rise in the province's population from 1911 to 1947 (374,295 to close to 900,000), driven by Ottawa's land settlement incentives to farmers as well as natural gas and coal discoveries, served to produce rapidly changing patterns of settlement and social displacement. Mann believed these frontier-like conditions, in which people felt marginalized from the social mainstream and its attendant power structures, fostered a sense of unrest and dislocation, which in turn spawned new social needs, particularly religious ones. He noted that under these conditions religious sects of all varieties tended to flourish, but in Alberta the vast majority were fundamentalist evangelical in nature.<sup>5</sup> He assumed that most of the fundamentalist sects were largely an extension of the American religious experience.<sup>6</sup> In addition to these factors Mann also noted that sectarian movements and institutions tended to flourish in rural communities, which constituted at least 60% of Alberta's total population during these years. Finally, Mann points out that besides their ability to attract

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<sup>4</sup> Stackhouse avoids any discussion of causality altogether. His primary focus is looking for common ground between PBI and other "churchish" evangelical schools, such as Toronto Bible College.

<sup>5</sup> Mann, 6-8, 27-28.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 29-33. Goertz tends to emphasize the strong connection of Alberta fundamentalism with its American counterpart by pointing out the large number of immigrants from the mid-western United States who settled in the province from 1898 to 1903. During this period 123,000 Americans settled in the

European immigrants from evangelical traditions, the vast majority of Anglo-Saxon converts to fundamentalist sects in Alberta were immigrants from the American Mid-West, Ontario, and the Maritimes, regions well steeped in an evangelical and sectarian tradition.<sup>7</sup>

While it is difficult to establish direct links of cause and effect between these factors and the rise of fundamentalist institutions, such as PBI, the strong correlation indicates that they certainly played an important role in the founding and growth of sectarian groups. Certainly the founding of Prairie Bible Institute is made much more plausible when viewed in this light. The coming together of L. E. Maxwell, a Kansas holiness fundamentalist, with Fergus Kirk, a missionary minded Ontario Presbyterian, in a remote Alberta farm community, all fits comfortably into Mann's sectarian template. The question of origins, if not explained completely in terms of cause and effect, can at least be accounted for, given the above conditions and the simultaneous proliferation of many other sectarian movements in the province.

If Mann's analysis accounts for the founding of PBI in such an unlikely location, it raises a second important question: why does this school continue to thrive when most of the other sectarian institutions included in his study close down or become drastically reduced in size? It is here that his analysis falls short. Mann argued that it was a generic (and ill-defined) fundamentalism which was the common denominator among Alberta sectarian groups, in which he included PBI. In so doing he lumped the school together with a whole range of conservative Protestant groups, which included the more

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western Canadian provinces. Goertz, 6-9, 24-27. Goertz also points out that almost two thirds of Alberta's population was rural in composition during the first four decades of the 1900s. 16.

Mann, 34.

stereotypical militant, premillennialist sects. Most notable of these was William Aberhart's Prophetic Bible Institute.<sup>8</sup> In his desire to find all the sectarian common denominators among these fundamentalist groups, Mann fails to explain why PBI continued to grow, when many other fundamentalist schools, such as Aberhart's, did not. He is too taken with imposing a uniform sociological model onto these institutions, and thus fails to deal adequately with the diverse nature of fundamentalism.<sup>9</sup> In this study of PBI I have demonstrated that fundamentalism was in fact not monolithic in nature, and it is only when this is understood that one can begin to account for the varied success of institutions which were part of the movement.

On the other hand Stackhouse, and to a lesser degree Burkinshaw, has tried to account for the ongoing success of PBI by portraying what the school had in common with a more moderate evangelical mainstream in Canada. In so doing both of these scholars have chosen to follow the lead of maritime historian George Rawlyk, thus reading fundamentalism out of Canadian evangelicalism by reducing it to the periphery of the Protestant landscape: a territory inhabited by a few high-profile militant eccentrics. For these scholars Prairie Bible Institute becomes an illustrative type of "sectish" evangelicalism.<sup>10</sup> The problem with this interpretation is that it examines the early history of the school primarily from a perspective which anticipates the later changes which led to ties with other less fundamentalist evangelical groups. Stackhouse and

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>9</sup> This failure to understand the varied nature of fundamentalism is also demonstrated by historian N. K. Clifford in his rather disappointing essay on religion in Canada during the 1930s. The religious nature of the Prairie Provinces is dismissed perfunctorily as a kind of generic fundamentalism. See N. K. Clifford, "Religion In The Thirties: Some Aspects Of The Canadian Experience," in *The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada*, eds. R. D. Francis and H. Ganzevoort (Vancouver: Tantalus Research Limited, 1973), 125-139.

<sup>10</sup> Stackhouse, 21-22, 51; Burkinshaw, "Evangelical Bible Colleges in Twentieth-Century Canada," 370.



Burkinshaw are so concerned with defining a Canadian evangelical identity distinct from the American experience that they try to tame, or just ignore, much about PBI which looks disturbingly like American fundamentalism. As such they never fully understand, or seem to admit, the strong fundamentalist characteristics of the school.

This then is the major historiographical problem which I have addressed in my thesis. Neither Mann's nor Stackhouse's assessment of PBI fits the school when it is examined from the inside out. I have argued that the only way around these inadequate, and contradictory portrayals is to recognize that fundamentalism is more diverse than either Mann or Stackhouse understand it to be. In doing so I have used Joel Carpenter's nuanced analysis of the various fundamentalist expressions. Fundamentalism had its militant profile, often accompanied by premillennial angst, but it also had a quietist, fervently evangelistic face, grounded in a strong holiness theology. It is this latter expression which characterized the leaders of PBI, and also found a wider reception as the school forged an extensive, far-reaching network of partners and supporters.

Not only does holiness fundamentalism address the inadequacies of previous contextualizations of Prairie Bible Institute, it also helps explain the school's separatist tendencies and ongoing viability. Maxwell's description of the school, given at the start of this chapter, brought out the sense of isolation in which the school developed. This geographical isolation was later compounded by the school's increasing sense of cultural separation, typical of holiness fundamentalism. From the school's own literature one gets the sense that PBI existed in something close to a cultural vacuum. In the very first issue of the *Prairie Pastor* Maxwell drew a clear separatist line in the cultural sand when describing the mandate of the school. Quoting from the book of Exodus he stated: "For

wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.”<sup>11</sup> As was evident from PBI’s publications, little comment was made on the significant political-economic events which were shaping regional, national, and international identities and relations, during these years. The converse is true as well. When going through the weekly issues of the *Three Hills Capital* from the 1920s-40s one would hardly know that the school existed. Only on the rare occasion of a special event, such as a Christmas program on campus, or a major disaster, such as a fire, does the school get mentioned as having any bearing on the week to week activities of the town. This lack of inclusion was fueled by Maxwell’s relationship with the ministers of the local churches. Rather than seeing them as colleagues he tended to see them as spiritual apostates, and therefore targets for evangelism. They in turn viewed him as an ill-educated charlatan who was out to “sheep steal” members of their congregations to increase his own flock.<sup>12</sup> As the school grew it tended to become more self-sufficient and keep more and more to itself rather than seeking greater involvement in local affairs.

When it came to regional and national issues the story was much the same. The significance of Aberhart’s Social Credit Party coming to power in Alberta, the crushing poverty of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl years of the 1930s, or the discovery of rich oil reserves in the Leduc area were not issues which the school profiled in its publications, or about which it made any public pronouncements. Political involvement

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<sup>11</sup> *PP*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan. 1928): 1. This first issue of the *PP*, although no longer extant in PBI’s own library holdings, is quoted in Goertz, 191. Maxwell is quoting from Exodus 33:16 (Authorized Version).

<sup>12</sup> Goertz, 120-21.

was regarded with especially great suspicion and held at arms length.<sup>13</sup> At one point Fergus Kirk went so far as to circulate a mimeographed pamphlet condemning Aberhart's Social Credit agenda as anti-Christian.<sup>14</sup> For Maxwell and his staff the duty of Christians was evangelizing individuals, not reshaping society. Responding to the social reform theology of a United Church minister, Maxwell retorted: "Did the apostles decide to change society before Christians could follow Christ? Did these intrepid disciples organize a new society to overthrow the Caesars so that Christians could get their rights and be able to live good Christian lives?"<sup>15</sup>

When it came to international events, there was the acknowledgement that Christians were to be mindful of what was going on. Maxwell used the *Prairie Pastor* to periodically comment on international events. But the rise of Communism and Fascism, as well as the global upheaval of World War II, served primarily to illustrate the great spiritual needs which lay in the world beyond, and to urge people to support the missionary spread of the Gospel.<sup>16</sup> It was this perspective which again distinguished Maxwell's fundamentalism from the high profile Aberhart. The radio preacher was a staunch supporter of British Israelism and urged Maxwell to support this agenda with its attendant dispensational hermeneutic. Maxwell rejected this because he saw the doctrine's racist implications, and, perhaps more importantly, saw it as a distraction from

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<sup>13</sup> In the first issue of the *PP* Maxwell stated that Methodism in the United States had been undone by its political involvement. *PP* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1.

<sup>14</sup> To this point no extant copy of this pamphlet has been located in the school archives, yet Goertz quotes excerpts of it in his work. It was written in 1935 shortly before Aberhart came to power as Premier. Apparently Aberhart obtained a copy of the letter and proceeded to denounce PBI in his radio broadcasts. This in turn caused a short term financial crisis at the school due to a significant drop in financial donations. See Goertz 166-67.

<sup>15</sup> "What! 'Christian Life Impossible'?" *PP*, Vol. 9, No. 3-4 (Mar. - Ap., 1936): 4.

<sup>16</sup> "Socialism, Communism, and Fascism," *PP*, Vol. 8, No. 6-7 (June-July, 1935): 1.

the missionary enterprise.<sup>17</sup> It was ultimately this single-minded dedication to overseas missions, with its primary focus on the spiritual frontiers in foreign lands, which led to a rather fore-shortened perspective of the world beyond the boundaries of the campus. It also accounts for a quite different manifestation of fundamentalism from that of William Aberhart. The advance of the Gospel through the work of foreign and home missionaries was the primary concern expressed in the pulpit and the press at PBI.

If radical separation for the sake of missions helps explain the self-imposed cultural isolation practiced at PBI, it also suggests a reason for the school's ongoing viability when other ones, such as Aberhart's Prophetic Bible Institute, closed down. While the demographic data on page six shows that Alberta supplied the highest number of students to PBI of any single province or state, these students comprised only one third of the overall student body by 1947. British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Ontario also contributed significantly to enrollment numbers. What this does suggest is that while the fundamentalist community in Canada may have been small compared to other moderate evangelical groups, it did exist in pockets scattered throughout western and central Canada. This data also suggests that by identifying itself with a more transcendent task of missionary evangelism, PBI had an appeal well beyond its own region. By not tying itself to a regional political or social agenda, à la Aberhart, PBI forged an identity in these fundamentalist pockets based on something more common, which like-minded Christians were willing to support. No doubt the combination of vast geographical distance and a relatively small national population made these fundamentalist enclaves difficult to identify as a community. Yet transdenominational schools, such as Prairie Bible

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<sup>17</sup> Goertz, 203.

Institute, helped give shape and a measure of coherence to a larger holiness fundamentalist community which otherwise may only have existed in small isolated pockets. These pockets were identified and linked through students who attended the school, but also through those who supported PBI by listening to its radio broadcasts, receiving its publications and hosting its travelling ministry teams. That PBI was for many years the largest Bible school in Canada, indicates, first of all, that it was able to find these fundamentalist pockets, and give them some sort of broader cohesion and identity. Secondly, it suggests that these pockets may have been larger and more numerous in Canada than either Stackhouse or Rawlyk would care to admit.

My thesis goes on to imply that faith mission organizations, which recruited PBI graduates, were another means of community linkage. As missionaries these graduates were responsible for raising their own financial support by soliciting donations from their own networks of personal and church contacts. Churches which supported these missionaries often received visits from area representatives of the given mission organization. These same representatives also attended missionary conferences at PBI. In this way they not only represented their mission board, but also informally tied the identity of the school closely to local missionary recruits, and the mission organization itself. Little research has been done on the role of faith mission organizations in shaping the fundamentalist/evangelical community in Canada, but the above implication suggests this could be an area for fruitful research to that end.

A final issue which emerges from this thesis is the significance of the border between Canada and the United States, when it comes to understanding fundamentalist identity. Maxwell, as well as other holiness fundamentalist leaders on both sides of the

border, moved across it fairly easily, with little sense of theological displacement. This supports the claim made by historians David Elliott and William Westfall that fundamentalist influence was not simply a one way street flowing north from the United States. Elliott has noted that Canadian fundamentalist itinerant evangelists and pastors, such as P. W. Philpott and Oswald J. Smith worked extensively south of the border.<sup>18</sup> Westfall suggests that two-way fundamentalist traffic across the border helped create two compatible yet different religious cultures, so that when people moved from one to the other they would find a world different from their own, yet one where they could still recognize many of the social markers.<sup>19</sup> The high percentage of Americans enrolled at PBI (40% of the total student population in 1947) certainly adds strength to this claim. It also raises the possibility that fundamentalist identity, at least among those who placed a strong emphasis on holiness teaching, was not shaped so much by national-cultural concerns as it was by the transnational priority of the missionary enterprise. This is an important issue when it comes to understanding more fully the shape and identity of conservative Protestant Christianity in Canada, and thus calls for further exploration.

This thesis has pointed out the inadequacy of the existing literature not only when it comes to understanding the specific nature of Prairie Bible Institute, but also the nature of fundamentalism, particularly in western Canada. In response to this I have offered a solution around the historiographical roadblock posed by the Mann-Stackhouse interpretations of the school and its place in Canadian Christianity. It has also served to add strength to the reassessment of fundamentalist influence across the Canada U.S.

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<sup>18</sup> Elliott, "Knowing No Borders," 358-371.

<sup>19</sup> William Westfall, "Voices From the Attic," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 193.

border introduced by Elliott and Westfall. It is my hope that in so doing I have opened a gate for a fuller investigation of, and appreciation for, the diverse nature and character of Christianity in Canada.

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