

only reflecting the political, religious, economic, and legal inadequacies of the wider Irish society. Small wonder that, even today, Ireland is one of the few countries that has failed to sign the United Nation's charter on the rights of children.

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Rosemary R. Gagan. *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. \$39.95.

Popular perceptions of women missionaries, Rosemary Gagan informs us, have for too long been dominated by stereotypical images either of the plain and earnest but unlovable spinster, or of the romanticized heroine. In *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925*, Gagan provides an important corrective to these images. In a well-researched exploration of the backgrounds and experiences of the workers of the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) of the Methodist Church of Canada, she makes a significant contribution both to our understanding of the context of Canadian women's missionary work and, more generally, to the history of professional women in Canada.

Like many studies currently emerging under the mantle of social

history, the book employs a collective biographical approach in investigating the experiences of Methodist WMS missionaries. Also in keeping with current scholarly interests, the author implements the social categories of gender and class in her analysis of these women's experiences. More significant, however, is the way in which Gagan places religion at the centre of the everyday lives of Canadian women at the turn of the century. This centrality, which many historians are only now beginning to appreciate, adds an important dimension to her analysis.

The study examines the social framework which led to the creation of the Methodist WMS, and various aspects of the missionary enterprise carried out by Canadian Methodist women. Beginning with a discussion of the early history and development of missionary work in Canada, Gagan goes on to investigate the demographic characteristics, backgrounds, education, professional training, and religious convictions of the more than 300 women employed by the WMS. She combines this discussion with a very useful overview of the higher education, training, and employment options available to Canadian women during the period, after which she moves to a thoughtful exploration of the possible sources of motivation which might have led women to the decision to become missionaries. Gagan then goes on to describe the Methodist WMS missions in Japan and China, noting in particular the effects of the changing political and social context on the work undertaken in each field. In Japan the emphasis was

on educational initiatives, mainly among wealthy women, while in China the missionaries established both medical and educational work, primarily among the poor. She notes the significance of the "imperialist orientation," and of class barriers, to the attitudes of the WMS personnel in the two fields. Gagan also documents the effects of a growing professional identity among the WMS workers, particularly those in Japan, on their relationships with their male counterparts from the Canadian Methodist General Board of Missions. In closing she returns to Canada and examines the very different backgrounds, experiences, and conditions of work for the women employed in the various mission fields within their own country.

One of Gagan's main goals is to reinstate women missionaries "in the front ranks" of the small but significant group of professional women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Outside of teaching there were relatively few women in professional occupations throughout most of this era. Few opportunities existed for respectable employment which allowed women to be autonomous and self-supporting, to work in exotic locations, and to gain status and public recognition as authorities in a prestigious field of endeavour; and in an age of high imperialism—when Protestants sought to "evangelize the world in a single generation"—foreign missionary work was especially prestigious. Considered in this light, and considering also the several hundreds of Canadian women of many denominations who, Gagan reports,

took up this occupation, missionary work was indeed a significant profession for Canadian women. Given the prominence of religion in turn-of-the-century Canadian society, and the scarcity of other options in a culture dominated by a relatively inflexible domestic ideology, many women seeking this kind of employment could not have fulfilled their ambitions outside a religious context.

While Gagan makes it clear that missionary work was an important profession, there were, apparently, few skills and little training specific to it. After 1894 recruits typically spent at least one term in a missionary training course developed for them at the Methodist Deaconess Training House, but this course seems to have had little general effect in developing a sense of professional autonomy or dedication to career among WMS missionaries as a whole. Instead, Gagan found that workers with the highest degree of career-orientation were already trained in other professions—most often as teachers, less often as doctors and nurses—or had received some other university education. Others who made missionary work their life's work had been graduates of ladies' academies, business colleges, or music conservatories. Unless they were in poor health these educated recruits were generally sent to the prestigious foreign fields where, Gagan tells us, they exhibited a high degree of professionalism—protecting their autonomy and staying with the work for extended periods of time, many until retirement. In contrast, those who lacked educational qualifications were usually sent to home missions, where the majority

apparently failed to develop a sense of themselves as career professionals. Unlike those in the foreign fields, most of those working in Canada did not complete their first terms, and very few home missionaries stayed with the WMS until retirement. No doubt the home field's lack of celebrity contributed to the dissatisfaction and frustration of these workers, but Gagan asserts that university or professional training helped women develop the administrative skills, as well as the self-confidence, independence, and adaptability, necessary to succeed as a missionary.

Perhaps Gagan's most interesting discovery was that WMS missionaries in the foreign fields developed not only a professional identity, but a feminist consciousness as well. While they and their Board willingly exploited their "allegedly superior feminine attributes" (p. 7) as "social housekeepers" in order to gain public acceptance of women as missionaries, once in the field the workers "preferred to rely on their own professional credentials and attitudes" (p. 8) in their struggles for autonomy from their male counterparts. They refused to allow themselves to be made subordinate to the male missionaries from the General Board (although they did co-operate in joint ventures from time to time) and they demanded equal status to the men on the basis of their standing as professionals, rather than on any claim to feminine superiority. In addition, while they did not extend their struggles for equality to the political realm in Canada, they reacted as feminists to the lowly position of women in Asia, expressing their out-

rage at, for example, the lack of educational facilities for women in Japan, and footbinding and female infanticide in China.

One minor difficulty in Gagan's argument lies in her claim that by choosing a missionary career over marriage, WMS personnel rejected "conventional attitudes" concerning women's place in society. But did they really? Working outside the home did not in itself necessarily imply such a rejection: between adolescence and marriage, work was rapidly losing its optional status for this class of women, a circumstance seen in their increasing attendance at higher educational institutions as a means to ensure their respectable employment. More importantly, and as Gagan points out, many recruits were beyond the "conventional" age of marriage when they entered missionary work, and many married while in the field. This may in fact have only confirmed, at least for some, the conventional view that a career was only sought by those few women who "failed" to marry. However they arrived at their decision, these women needed a profession which could provide them with a living wage, and while missionary salaries were not lavish, they were at least comparable to those available to women in other white-collar occupations. Moreover, Gagan describes the society in which Methodist women grew up as profoundly evangelical, and these women themselves as deeply spiritual. Given this context, and considering the high degree of self-sacrifice expected of women in that social climate, perhaps instead of rejecting conventional attitudes of

femininity WMS missionaries were rather carrying them to their logical extreme: sacrificing what might be considered their own "natural condition" for a higher purpose.

This criticism aside, *A Sensitive Independence* is an important book which offers a comprehensive view of missionary life at the turn of the century. By focusing on the way in which religious values both shaped and were shaped by these women in their quest for personal and professional fulfillment, the author utilizes a cultural framework which is not often employed in Canadian historical writing. The study has indeed accomplished the goals stated in the first chapter: to demythologize women missionaries by examining their experiences, to bring to light their durability and their role in shaping their church and their society, and to place them among the front ranks of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canadian professional women.

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J.D. Purdy. *Townshend of Huron.*
London, Ont.: The Althouse Press,
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The construction of a good biography is not an easy task. Unless the individual was a seminal thinker like Dewey or a builder like Ryerson, educational biography can be dull,

with authors claiming greater influence for their subjects than is warranted. This is not the case in Jud Purdy's study of the Right Reverend William Townshend, which contributes to our understanding of the transformation of education in Ontario from the early twentieth century to the 1970s. It is significant for illustrating the way in which the family man, priest, diocesan administrator, and school trustee intersected to form a life "not lived in water-tight compartments" but as a "unity," with each element influencing the other.

William A. Townshend, teacher and Anglican prelate, was an exceptional man. Born in southwestern Ontario in 1898, Townshend overcame significant barriers to fulfill his teenage ambition to become an Anglican minister and he eventually rose to become suffragan to the bishop of Huron. While he was a respected and loved parish priest in the 1920s and 1930s, his central contribution to the Church was as an administrator, fund-raiser, and trouble-shooter. His efforts served to undermine congregationalist tendencies within the ecclesiastical body.

Townshend also made important contributions to public schooling. Purdy relates effectively the way in which his subject enhanced the educational life of Ontario, as a teacher in Manila from 1921 to 1926; as a school trustee and six-time chairman of the London School Board from 1934 to 1980; and as a member of the Royal Commission on Education (Hope Commission). In these capacities Townshend helped transform education in the province, locally by promoting reforms in the classroom,