

The Conversion of Sir John A. Macdonald

One hundred and twenty years ago, a most amazing occurrence happened when Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald (1815-1891), stood to his feet to trust Jesus Christ as his Saviour. This event happened in an extended revival meeting at a church in Ottawa in 1888 during Macdonald's second term in office.

The evangelists God used were John Hunter and Hugh Crossley. Hunter was the dynamic preacher and Crossley the singing evangelist. This team was Canada's version of the D.L. Moody and Ira Sankey team. Crossley and Hunter had a fruitful ministry of over 26 years together. Over 200,000 publicly accepted Christ in their numerous campaigns. The character of many towns changed visibly during these revivals. Drinking establishments were frequently emptied, and on several occasions theatres closed for lack of business.

The conversion of Sir John A. Macdonald is recounted in this manner in the book *Canada: Portraits of Faith*, edited by Michael D. Clarke:

“That winter, Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald attended the Crossley-Hunter services along with several senators and members of parliament. Macdonald, in fact, celebrated his seventy-third birthday at a service. On the final night of the six-week revival, it was requested that Crossley and Hunter remain for one more week, and Macdonald asked if he could second the motion. That same evening, a significant event occurred in the life of the hard-drinking prime minister, who during the election of 1878 had joked that Canadians preferred him drunk to his opponent--that pious Alexander Mackenzie--sober. As a newspaper reported: "When in answer to an appeal by Mr. Hunter, that all who wished to become Christians and desired the prayers of the audience would stand up, the premier of the Dominion...arose with his wife." According to another journalist, "When the well-known form of the Honourable Premier arose in the centre of the church many strong men bowed their heads and wept for joy. The right honourable gentleman himself was deeply affected." After dining at the prime minister's home several days later, Hunter confirmed that "Sir John is a changed man.”

“The message that drew the prime minister appealed to Canadians from all walks of life. Listeners were encouraged to turn from their sinful ways, to commit their lives to Christ, and to help make Canada a Christian nation, a land that could truly call itself God's dominion. The support of mayors, members of parliament, and especially the prime minister was central to realizing that goal.”

As I read this account, my heart cried out "Lord, Do it again!" However, the question for us today is "Are we willing to pay the price?" Would we be willing to go to church every night for seven straight weeks? Are we willing to plead with God to bring revival and convert our nation's people and leaders? Are there men who would give their lives to traverse the length and breadth of this country boldly and tirelessly preaching the Gospel? Oh Lord, Please do it again!

Pastor Dave Harness Sr.