

JOHN WATSON AND THE IDEALIST LEGACY

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THE HISTORIAN OF IDEAS IN CANADA quickly discovers how central the philosophy studied at Canadian universities was in helping to bring about the intellectual and spiritual accommodations made necessary in the Victorian era. Much of that accommodation involved the interplay between certain strands of religion, science, and philosophy that found their way, as a kind of intellectual patchwork quilt, into the homes, the universities, and the churches of British North Americans in the nineteenth century.¹

Readers of the *Literary History of Canada* will recognize immediately that central to this process of accommodation, and dominating philosophical inquiry generally in Canada between 1872 (when he arrived from Scotland on the campus of Queen's University at the ripe old age of twenty-five) and 1922 (when he retired from teaching), was John Watson. John Irving's lengthy account in the *Literary History* of Watson's signal achievements in the field of international philosophical scholarship need not be repeated here. It might simply be noted that the Garland publishing company in New York reminded Canadians in 1976 that his scholarship has been of enduring value: in a republication of the eleven most important studies of Kant since that philosopher's death, two of the volumes selected were by John Watson of Queen's.²

Yet Watson was not significant for his contributions to scholarship alone. More important to consider is the crucial role he and his philosophy played in the transition of the overtly Christian mental and moral philosophy of the nineteenth century in Canada into a broadly secular moral outlook which has dominated much of English-Canadian thought in the twentieth. When fully examined as part of the general intellectual and cultural history of English-speaking Canada, the legacy of nineteenth-century mental and moral philosophy will perhaps be seen to have been a profound one, part of what, in *A Disciplined Intelligence*, I have called a "moral imperative" that links the thought of Thomas McCulloch to that of Northrop Frye, and that will allow an historical connection to be made between moralists such as George Grant, W. L. Morton, Hugh MacLennan, Harold Innis, and Robertson Davies and the Victorian philosophic temperament.

This essay provides part of that background. To be explored here is the influence of the critical intellect of the speculative idealists, led by John Watson, upon the major religious phenomenon of early twentieth-century Canada: the liberalizing movement within protestantism known as the social gospel. In the process, some light will be shed on the interrelationship between philosophical and theological suppositions at a crucial stage in Canada's history, and some of the shifts and continuities in Canadian intellectual history which continue to affect Canadian cultural development will be suggested.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Anglo-Canadian thought had reached a watershed. For a half century, those who dominated religious, scientific, and philosophical thinking in Canada had been intensely suspicious of the critical intellect that emerged in the popular realm during Victoria's reign. Anglo-Canadian educators had, in effect, established an orthodoxy of ideas and assumptions in the formative years of the university *curricula* in the country. Yet by the end of the century that orthodoxy was everywhere under assault. In the first place, the Baconian scientific ideal (which stressed observation while eschewing speculation), reflected in the work of Toronto's Daniel Wilson and McGill's William Dawson, had proven inadequate under the onslaught of Darwinian science. Secondly, the Scottish Common Sense philosophy, which pervaded the teachings of James George at Queen's and William Lyall at Dalhousie in the third quarter of the century, had gradually been dismissed by younger minds as inadequate in its psychology to meet the needs and the challenges of an age of inquiry and analysis. Finally, the third and to an extent the most central element in this triumvirate of early Victorian orthodoxy, the Paleyite natural theology given expression by James Beaven and James Bovell at Toronto in the 1850's and 1860's, had, by the 1890's, largely been replaced. Originally utilized as a means of preserving the argument from design while utilizing the frameworks of both faculty psychology and Baconian observation, it had, by then, been supplanted by an equally teleological, but dynamic, Hegelian conception of social evolution. In short, by the end of the century the old orthodoxy of ideas, antispeculative by nature, founded on social constraint, and aimed at instilling students with a traditional Christian piety, had been shattered. In its place had emerged a Canadian variation of British speculative idealism.

In the twenty years after the arrival of Watson and Idealism in Canada in 1872, that philosophical creed seemed to have resolved certain problems critically important for the generation who had been trained under the assumptions of the old intellectual orthodoxy but who lived through the Darwinian revolution. Watson's confident philosophy seemed to resolve the problems faced by the Common Sense school in the decades which explored the intricacies of the central nervous system (or, as Richard Maurice Bucke chose to call it, "the Great Sympathetic"), for it could maintain the existence of the "moral nature" of man

while asserting the active powers of mind. It constituted a new conception of Design and Purpose operating in the universe, one that could encompass rather than capitulate to evolutionary science. It offered a critique of empiricism and put empiricists on the defensive by revealing the limitations of scientific enterprise without attacking science *ad hominem*. It cultivated a pious disposition, yet did not belittle intellectual inquiry. It showed the essential "rationality" of the universe and placed everything within the perspective of a new and modern interpretation of the Christian experience, even while defending the essentials of the faith as it conceived them.

For these basic reasons, the speculative Hegelian idealism whose British mentor was Watson's teacher Edward Caird and whose major Canadian voice was Watson himself found increasing acceptance among Canadian professors, clergymen, and students in the late nineteenth century. Yet even though Watson was, by 1890, a scholar of international stature, idealism was still a fresh intellectual force, a force for intellectual change that was coming to dominance in a decade when change in the country was everywhere.

The hegemony of idealism had begun, but only the first signs of its ultimate influence could then have been discerned. Every epoch is, in its own way, a time of transformation; but the 1890's marked a clear departure from the past in the nature and quality of Canadian life. John Watson's *Outline of Philosophy* (1895) was put before a Canadian reading public that witnessed in the decades to come a social and industrial upheaval for which there was no precedent in the history of the nation. His *Christianity and Idealism* (1897), a series of lectures given before the Philosophical Union of the University of California at Berkeley, appeared in the first flush of the Laurier boom; his Gifford Lectures, published in 1912 as *The Interpretation of Religious Experience*, were given when the rate of social and industrial change had reached its height.

This was, above all, a social transformation, and the idealist preached what was fundamentally a social ethic. Even at the level of intellectual speculation the social good was necessarily to prevail. And as with thought, so lives and careers were also seen to be meaningful only when regarded from a universal perspective. Society, it was argued, must be conceived as an organism. The individual must subordinate private interests to serve the greater whole. Watson had spoken from the first of "the various spheres of the universe," each forming "an ascending series, in which each higher realm includes while it transcends the lower. . . ."³ Each "sphere" could become a focus of attention for Canadians whose thought was informed by this new moral imperative, articulated in a different form for a new age. One could perform one's social duties in ascending higher forms of service to an ever greater good, whether at the level of the church, the civil service, or the empire. During the thirty years that followed 1890, Canadian

intellectual life was thus suffused with the idealist variant of the Anglo-Canadian moral imperative.⁴

Idealism exerted its greatest influence, however, on Canadian protestant thought and practice. The full nature and extent of this influence will be determined only with more substantial historical investigation, yet a brief examination of the thought of certain key figures in early twentieth-century protestant circles may serve for the present purpose to suggest the general nature of the intrusion of idealist assumptions upon protestant thought in Canada.

THE LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY IDEALIST delighted in using his creed to resolve seemingly irresolvable problems, and in Canada he took great pleasure in being simultaneously a force upholding the essentials of the Christian experience while inaugurating a profound transformation in religious life. The result, however, was a reorientation of Canadian protestantism that by the 1920's scarcely resembled that desired by the nineteenth-century clerical advocates of a reconciliation of science and religion through idealism.

Idealists inspired by Watson taught that reality consisted of the secular process of history infused with a spiritual principle that was at once the heart of knowledge and synonymous with the Mind of God. "In God we 'live and move and have our being,'" Watson told a Kingston meeting of the Y.M.C.A. in 1901; "we are spirits capable of communion with the Spirit of all things; the meanest as well as the highest object within our reach witnesses of this universal spirit; and, living in it, we may become worthy members of the family, the community, the state, the race. To realize this spirit in all its forms is our true life work."⁵ So it was, but it was also a quest with a profoundly ambiguous legacy.

Watson's address had been entitled "The Sadness and Joy of Knowledge," its text taken from Ecclesiastes I: 18, which said: "In much wisdom is much grief: and He that Increaseth knowledge Increaseth sorrow." This was a paradox such as Watson delighted in resolving, for the idealist's universal vision and dialectical mode of argument could show how the "perils and storms of the intellectual life" — the sorrow — would be quelled by the simple recognition that in this very sadness lay the source of joy. Strenuous effort in the search for universal truth by means of intellectual inquiry would gradually result in a deeper consciousness of reality, one in which "at each step we feel we are penetrating a little deeper into the nature of things, and learning to re-think the embodied thoughts of God." A generation earlier, such a statement would have been roundly condemned in Canadian protestant circles, for it would have been seen as the height of intellectual arrogance. Watson's large claim was an expression of a piety shorn of the Christian's awareness that because of the sinfulness of man he could never fully

achieve identity with the Mind of God, however much he might strive for it. But by the twentieth century this was a notion that found increasing acceptance in Canadian churches and protestant denominational colleges.

The pervasiveness of idealist assumptions in Canadian university circles is suggested by even the most cursory of examinations of student newspapers such as *Queen's Journal* or Victoria College's *Acta Victoriana*. This is likewise the case with the fledgling academic journals *University of Toronto Quarterly*, which began in 1895, and *Queen's Quarterly*, first published two years earlier. The editors of the latter proclaimed solemnly in an opening statement that their quarterly sought to keep its readers aware "of what Queen's is doing and thinking," and "to try to throw some rays of light on the questions that men's minds must always be most concerned about. . . ."⁶

Not surprisingly, the honour of making the first statement about such weighty questions fell to John Watson, who provided a piece called "The Middle Ages and the Reformation." Luther's reformation, Watson stated, was based upon the simple principle that reconciliation with God was possible only through "a spiritual act, an act of faith." Yet he had not gone far enough in assessing the application of his own principle. Watson insisted that Luther had failed to take into account the fact that "the individual's consciousness of God" transcends individuality and "is conditioned by the past history of the consciousness of the race." Luther, that is to say, had not, for Watson, taken into account the principle of development, since he had not recognized that religious consciousness evolved "with the growing intelligence and will of humanity." Once wedded to the idea of the progressive development of consciousness, however, protestantism would, in Watson's view, "purify the state by making it an embodiment of reason." This was the "logical consequence of the Protestant idea," one in which "the ideal is the real, and what contradicts the ideal must ultimately be annulled."⁷

Watson's *Queen's Quarterly* essay appeared in July 1893. In February of that year a very important event in the history of university extension in Canada had occurred. Initiated by Principal G. M. Grant, the First Theological Alumni Conference took place on the campus of Queen's University. Lasting for ten days, it was attended by Presbyterian ministers across the Dominion. Others, not graduates of Queen's but attracted by the intellectual vitality of the place, also attended. There they heard the Principal speak on a variety of doctrinal and practical subjects, and they were also exposed — as the alumni had been as undergraduates — to John Watson's hermetic philosophy. A sign of their appreciation of his views came in their closing resolutions, for they recommended the inauguration of a permanent Lectureship and stipulated that it first be held by a professor from Queen's and that he "should treat some subject bearing on the relations of Philosophy and Theology." Any doubt as to who they wished to hold the first lectureship is dispelled by the fact that when Chancellor Fleming

announced later in the year his intention to sponsor the desired lecture series, he stipulated that “no one could better fill the position than Dr. Watson, who did so much to make the first conference a success.”⁸

Watson and his followers were not without their critics, but there can be no doubt that by the early twentieth century their distinctive protestant vision was beginning to have its effect. In February 1906, for example, a correspondent in Montreal reported to Albert Carman, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church in Canada, that

many in this Conference [are] saturated with what they call “The new ideas,” and it has become a sort of fad — a pretence of scholarship — to parade radical ideas. I have raised a few conflicts thus far, and expect to have more as I come in contact with these men. When the strife comes I find it is not so much the Higher Criticism . . . that I am forced to combat, but the Hegelian philosophy. . . . I find that nearly every man who has passed through “Queen’s University,” and a coterie who follow this set, are preaching Hegelianism. It is a sad plight.⁹

So it was, indeed, for Methodists or Presbyterians who wished in the early twentieth century to retain the fundamentals of their faith as they had been handed down from earlier generations.

This was no easier at Victoria College, Toronto, than it was at Queen’s. There, idealism was given sustained expression early in the century by a philosopher only at the outset of his career: George John Blewett. In 1897, Blewett had won the Governor-General’s Gold Medal at “Vic,” placing first in his philosophy class, and, aided by the George Paxton Young Memorial Fellowship, he then did graduate work at Harvard, in Germany, and finally at Oxford under Edward Caird (by then Master of Balliol). After a stint at Wesley College, Winnipeg, he returned to Victoria College where he taught and wrote until his untimely death in 1912. By then, like Young before him, he had gained disciples — both through his brilliant and inspiring lectures and through his two books, *The Study of Nature and the Vision of God* (1907) and *The Christian View of the World* (1910). In a preface to the former, Blewett noted that he had first been introduced to philosophy through T. H. Green’s *Prolegomena to Ethics*. Yet the book was stamped with the mark of Caird. He had not been exaggerating when, also in his preface, he had written of his “reverence and gratitude” to Caird, “whose venerable primacy in philosophy among English-speaking men makes him ‘our father Parmenides.’”¹⁰

The combination of the views of Blewett (who could write that “the nature of God . . . may be expressed by putting together the three words, reason, righteousness, love”) with the more abrasive and less spiritualistic rationalism of the Higher Criticism was a powerful force for change in Canadian religious thought. However much idealists such as Blewett and Watson attempted to infuse Reason with a Christian spirituality, the fact was that in stressing the way early Chris-

tianity "had inherited the intellectual spirit of the Greeks" they helped clear the path toward the application of an essentially secular version of the Christian revelation.

To the philosophically astute, Blewett's conception of a Reason that transcended but did not challenge faith was distinctly different from one that simply equated faith with irrationality and therefore dismissed it. But to someone less initiated into the subtleties and the rhetoric of idealist philosophy, someone who found the argument persuasive but the logic and the jargon difficult at times to follow, such distinctions were perhaps never fully clear. For such a person it may have been sufficient simply to remember that Caird, Watson, and Blewett had said that Christianity was evolving through the secular process of history; that this religious progress was essentially a spiritual one which nevertheless was everywhere manifested in concrete terms; that in this (admittedly vague) unfolding of the consciousness of the race, religious faith could be better comprehended through rational — even intellectual — understanding; that piety and intellectual activity were not at odds since faith could not be faith if it defied intellectual inquiry; and that, finally, somehow in this ongoing cosmic process the old divisions between the spiritual and the material, the sacred and the secular, God and man, were obliterated.

Perhaps the potential legacy of the idealist's view of Christianity is best illustrated in the culmination of the correspondence between Watson and one of his lay admirers, a Mr. J. M. Grant of Toronto. The troubled Mr. Grant could not quite reconcile Watson's notion of the Absolute with the doctrine of the Trinity, failed to see how Objective Idealism was not a form of pantheism, and, between 1911 and 1918, expressed to Watson, often in lengthy and tortuous letters, numerous other difficulties. Always Watson replied, and at length, in his reassuring and controlled hand. Always, Grant found, for a time, solace in a re-reading of Watson's *Philosophical Basis of Religion*; but only for a time. Finally, Grant announced that he felt compelled to resign his position as a Presbyterian Sunday School superintendent because of his doctrinal uncertainties. He had no choice, he said, but to join the Unitarian Church. "Do you think it really matters," Watson replied in a letter marked "confidential," "from the point of view of the essence of religion, whether one accepts what is called the divinity of Christ? . . . You will understand," he went on, "that I cannot accept any of the doctrines of any Church literally."¹¹ He then went on to dismiss, in their traditional forms, each of the doctrines which Grant found impossible to reconcile with Speculative Idealism.

Like his mentor, Edward Caird, Watson desired above all to reassert the moral and religious dimension of life undermined by modern scepticism. Yet his method of doing so resulted, ironically, in a form of belief that bore a distinct resemblance to the declared enemy, evolutionary naturalism. Both accepted the principle of

evolutionary change; both asserted the fundamental unity of nature. This convergence between Hegelian idealism and the new naturalism, John Passmore has argued, was one of the most important and distinctive results of Darwin's impact on British metaphysics. "It has been said," Passmore wrote, "that pantheism is a polite form of atheism: to assert that everything is God is certainly to deny that there is a God, as that word is ordinarily understood. And similarly one cannot but be struck by the resemblances between naturalism and the Absolute Idealism of philosophers like Caird and Bosanquet: so concerned are they to insist that there is nowhere a gap between the spiritual and the material, between the human and the natural, that one is often inclined to say — Absolute Idealism is the polite form of naturalism."¹² The spiritual agony of Mr. J. M. Grant, struggling with the competing messages of the Westminster Confession and Watson's *Interpretation of Religious Experience*, is an illustration of what could result when one honestly attempted to follow speculative idealism to its apparent conclusions. Grant found Watson's reply to his own urgent letter "so radical that it demands my most careful thought." Accordingly, he began the repeated study of Watson's *Interpretation*. A couple of years later he became a Christian Scientist.

One can only wonder about the extent to which other earnest Presbyterians and Methodists were similarly affected by the idealists' perception of the essence of Christianity; their willingness, in effect, to scrap much in order to "preserve the essence of the Christian consciousness — the unity of man & God." The Trinity, the divinity of Christ, Original Sin, the Atonement, Eternal Life, the Resurrection — each in its generally accepted meaning was an impediment to an understanding of the union of God, Man, and Reason. "No creed of any church can be accepted," Watson had written to Grant at the height of the latter's crisis, "and I don't think the Church be based upon any belief except that it is an organization for making men better."¹³ How many of the divinity students trained under Watson in the fifty years from 1872 to 1922 came to accept Watson's simple definition of the Church, and to view traditional doctrines as impedimenta hindering the growth of consciousness?

FOR SOME, IT IS CLEAR, the idealist philosophy was a revelation equal to that imparted to Watson by the Caird brothers in the 1860's. The social gospel movement in Canada was diverse both in its membership and in its origins; men and women drew their ideas on the social teachings of the gospels from sources as different as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Albrecht Ritschl. But they also drew, and perhaps in a more sustained and direct fashion, from the messages of men such as John Watson, George Monro Grant, George Blewett, and S. D. Chown (who became General Superintendent of the Methodist Church

in 1910 and who continued in the position until Church Union in 1925). These intellectual and institutional leaders of Canadian Methodism and Presbyterianism helped provide the intellectual foundations upon which the social gospel movement in Canada was constructed between 1890 and 1914.

The "Queen's spirit" of the 1890's, led by the contemplative Watson and the active Grant, inspired numerous individuals to engage in different forms of social service and to strive in their secular pursuits to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth. Some, such as Adam Shortt (a gold medallist in philosophy under Watson) and O. D. Skelton, became prominent federal civil servants; others, a far greater proportion than the population of Queen's warranted, became teachers throughout the country and sought to live up to the moral example set them by Grant and Watson. Still others sought to be instrumental in the reorientation of the Canadian religious order. No one more exemplified this ambitious spirit than the Methodist preacher, Salem Bland, who was to become the most radical of the social gossellers in Canada.¹⁴

Born in 1859, Bland, the son of a British Wesleyan Methodist preacher, had been present in Kingston from 1884 through the 1890's, and in every respect he was a "Queen's man," proud to call himself a student of Watson and a disciple of Grant. Though never formally enrolled as a student at Queen's, he nevertheless read Kant with Watson, attended political meetings and Sunday Afternoon Addresses with Grant, and thoroughly imbibed the new social and critical spirit of the nineties. The novelist Robert E. Knowles, himself a graduate of Queen's in the 1890's, noted when Bland retired from public life that he had "enlisted and enmeshed and engaged in all her life and ferment. Few faces were more familiar about her halls."¹⁵ There, instructed by Watson (and through him Hegel and Caird) and Grant, Bland's life and mind took a new direction. Signs of this could be seen in his consistent participation in the Queen's Theological Alumni conferences, especially those of 1898 and 1899. By then, much of his voluminous reading in Kingston was beginning to give definite shape to his thought, and he was nearly ready to give it practical application. "In Canada as in all English-speaking countries," he told the 1898 conference, "social questions are engaging increasing attention. Christianity is becoming primarily sociological, which is a good deal better than if it should be regarded as primarily ecclesiastical or even theological. . . ."¹⁶

The stamp of Grant, Watson, and Queen's remained on Salem Bland, and no doubt he prized the influence as much as he did the honorary doctorate awarded him by the university in 1900. In the twentieth century, the reputations of Bland and Queen's would diverge radically, for by the 1920's Bland was best known as a radical socialist, whereas Queen's under the successors to Grant was gradually to assume an air of academic and humanistic detachment from fundamental social issues, even from Protestantism. Nevertheless, the connection between Bland

and the Queen's spirit of the nineties existed and continued to give a philosophical basis for his evolving social views. In 1925 he jotted down some notes on "A Philosophy of Life," and they consisted of three propositions: that man is fundamentally good; that there must be fullness of life for everyone; and that there must be a stronger social consciousness. In itself this philosophy was consistent with the social gospel in almost any of its derivations, but in the specific ways Bland sought to construct such a philosophy the legacy of his years in Kingston can distinctly be seen.¹⁷

It would be inaccurate to assume that Bland came away from Kingston with the social gospel he was later to preach in full blossom. When in Smiths' Falls in 1899, for example, he still taught that the Kingdom of God could be realized only through individual salvation. At this stage in his career the traditional conception of a transcendent Kingdom held sway, if uneasily. Matters such as minimum wages, municipal ownership of natural monopolies, and more equitable taxation were, in Bland's mind, clearly "within the range of the gospel, to be manifestly implied in the Kingdom of Heaven which it came to establish. *But these,*" he added emphatically, "*do not make the Kingdom of God.*" At this point in his life, at the age of forty, the essential distinction between sacred and secular still held some meaning for him. "Knowledge of God is not . . . minimum wage of \$1.50 a day, not free schools & free rides . . . not meat & drink, but *righteousness & peace & joy in the Holy Ghost.*"¹⁸ Yet if these remarks portray a Methodist committed to a traditional conception of righteousness as the main element in the Kingdom of God, they also suggest one who could not see the coming about of such a Kingdom without radical measures of social reform. What he had learnt in Kingston suggested that righteousness and an earthly Kingdom were far from being incompatible, just as reason and faith were entwined. But for his first twenty years and more, those before his Queen's experience, his conception of the essence of Christianity — particularly on the question of eschatology — had been that of orthodox Methodism.

It took the Kingston experience and its disturbing intellectual adjustments before Bland was able to confront the unexamined convictions of his first twenty years. Late in his life he noted that his career seemed to have fallen neatly into such twenty years stages. Of the second of these, he wrote: "Those twenty years to me were the first twenty years of my ministry begun in the devout and untroubled acceptance of traditional orthodoxy in regard to the message and methods of the Evangelical Churches and the slow creeping in in spite of honest and resolute opposition of what at the first were unwelcome and even sinful doubts."¹⁹ Could it be that by the 1890's Bland had come to believe deep within that he was putting forward from the pulpit a conception of the Kingdom he had once accepted, still thought he ought to believe, but no longer did? Could it be that he had not yet quite summoned the courage to give full voice to the range of

radical social reforms necessary to bring about the earthly Kingdom of Watson and of Grant, a spiritual domain manifested in the secular and material reforms brought about by Christians intent upon a better life for all?

No definitive answer can yet be given to these questions, but it is likely that Bland's admission of spiritual turmoil in the 1890's was, if anything, understated. The fact is that his insistence on individual regeneration and a transcendent Kingdom in 1899 was antithetical to his experience at Queen's. Secondly, within a very few years Bland was to do a complete about face on these very theological matters. In 1903 he moved to Wesley College, Winnipeg, as Professor of Church History and New Testament Exegesis, thereby becoming for a few years a colleague of George Blewett. The complete change of environment, his reading of the works of British and American social reformers, his talks with Blewett, and the fact that life in the boom city of the west involved daily confrontation with the "social crisis" in its numerous aspects — each undoubtedly contributed to his complete "conversion" within a few years of his arrival. "The idea emphasized by Jesus," he told an overflow interdenominational audience in the Winnipeg City Hall in 1906, "was that of the kingdom, not of heaven but the kingdom of God on earth. Christianity was not a sort of immigration society to assist us from the hurly burly of this world to heaven; it was to bring the spirit of heaven to earth. . . . Christianity," he went on, "meant the triumph of public ownership. He believed in public ownership because it is an essential part of the kingdom of God on earth. It meant the substitution of co-operation for competition."²⁰

The radicalization of Salem Bland's social views is well known. What must be noted is simply that the way had been cleared for him on the road to his Damascus. By the time he received his honorary degree from Queen's he had been introduced to the idealist's conception of the essence of Christianity — a religion shorn of traditional doctrine and based on an organic and progressive evolution of society. These assumptions pervaded Bland's writings in the new century. It was also a religion which necessarily had to meet the test of Reason; and Reason itself was seen as the manifestation of the religious consciousness in thought. In the third place, his had become a faith that separated the concerns of theology from those of ethics, and in so doing clearly subordinated the former to the latter. "Theology," Bland told the 1914 Methodist Conference, "is a very secondary consideration in the Christian life, and it has had too high a place in the Christian church from the beginning."²¹

Like Watson and Grant, Bland delighted in using dialectical methods to establish dazzling argumentative advantage, and complaints about the alleged "materialistic society" of the Laurier years furnished one such opportunity. We are told this is a materialistic age, he declared in his column in the 1918 *Grain Growers' Guide*; but it is in fact not materialistic enough. In words that directly echoed those of Principal Grant in the 1880's on the relation of religion to secular

life, Bland insisted that Christianity could no longer "be treated as a distinct realm or department of life. . . . It has no independent existence. . . . It is life itself." Christianity must always, to be vital, be manifested in concrete experience. "One hears sometimes," he went on, "the phrase Applied Christianity. It is only as it is materialized that it reveals itself." Hence, neither doctrines nor sacred ceremonies constitute part of true religious fellowship. That is "to be found in the processes of industry and commerce. Co-operation in commerce and industry is the real Holy Communion."²²

Thus was the Hegelian dialectic used to a degree and with a confidence that could have been equalled in Canada only by Watson himself. "Let us not be afraid of materialism," Bland concluded in triumph. "We are safe if we materialized everything including our religion. Then the long continued and deadly divorce between the spiritual and the material will be brought to an end. Spirituality will be nowhere because it will be everywhere."²³

The social thought of J. S. Woodsworth, perhaps Canada's best known social gospeller, was shaped — like Bland's — by influences as diverse as his reading lists; yet he, too, came under the influence of British idealism. Unsettled after an intellectually disturbing year at Victoria College in 1898, he was persuaded to study at Oxford. His faith already shaken by the forms of "modernism" taught at Victoria, Woodsworth concentrated at Oxford upon Christian ethics. He found himself even more disturbed with Canadian Methodism in its traditional form, however, after he had read philosophy with Edward Caird and religion with Andrew Fairbairn. While there, he was also in contact with George Blewett, to whom he was distantly related. At one point he puzzled over the fact that philosophers appeared to be forging a radical separation of ethics from Christian theology, and, in a letter home, noted that "Blewett, one day speaking of this phase of the work, laughingly described himself as a pagan." Indeed, Woodsworth added, "it is true we take no account of the Christian revelation. . . ." By 1911, upon the publication of his study of urban problems, *My Neighbour*, Woodsworth had largely come to grips with the seemingly pagan implications of Blewett's message, and Blewett could write to him, upon receipt of his book: "You and Fred Stephenson and men like you and he, are the true light and heart of our church in its work for the country."²⁴

In fact there were good reasons why Blewett should have congratulated Woodsworth, for the latter's new book fully accorded with Blewett's own social teachings. Blewett's *The Study of Nature and the Vision of God*, published four years before *My Neighbour*, had stressed philosophically what Woodsworth's new work stated in practical terms. "And the truth of the world," Blewett had concluded, "the truth both of ourselves and of the world, is God; God, and that 'far-off divine event' which is the purpose of God, are the meaning of the world. And this means that the citizenship to which we are called is a heavenly citizenship;

but it also means that that heavenly citizenship must first be fulfilled upon the earth, in the life in which our duties are those of the good neighbour, the honest citizen, the devoted churchman. The perfection of human life lies in being at one with God; but to that oneness with God men can come, not by departure from the world into eternal quietude, but only by flinging themselves into the labours and causes of the history in which God is realizing His eternal purpose. . . ."²⁵

These final passages of Blewett's book might well have served as an epitaph to the rest of Woodsworth's life.

HOW CLOSE WERE THE VIEWS of the idealists and the social gossellers to the "mainstream" of opinion in the major Protestant churches? It may be claimed by some that Watson and Blewett were, after all, merely academic philosophers, and that Bland and Woodsworth represented the vanguard rather than the mainstream of religious opinion on social questions. To an extent, of course, this claim is true. Yet even those not technically idealists or social gossellers gradually came to bear the marks of both. We might, by way of conclusion, examine briefly the thought of the man who was to lead Canadian Methodists into Church Union in 1925: S. D. Chown.

Elected General Superintendent in 1910, a position he held with Albert Carman until Carman's retirement in 1914, Chown exuded the new liberal and forward-looking spirit. What most strikes one about Chown's views by the second decade of the twentieth century is the complete substitution of sociological concerns for theological ones. His thought suggests in what peculiar terrains of Christian social thought a man could arrive who began his journey working from the inspiration of Canadian idealists. In 1914 Chown gave a lecture on "Socialism and the Social Teachings of Jesus," and commenced it by acknowledging his indebtedness to "Dr. Watson." "The Sermon on the Mount," he went on to say, "which is the very charter of Christianity and the constitution of the Kingdom Christianity came to realize, contemplates society as reorganized, inspired, and upheld by superficial brotherly love. The sayings of Christ therein contained are a picture in outline, and a prophecy of the perfect social state which is to be when Christianity comes into its own."²⁶

For Chown, only the establishment of what he described as a "systematic sociology" would usher in the perfect social state. Only "a perfect sociology perfectly applied will result in the establishment of the Kingdom of God," he once stated in a lecture called "The Relation of Sociology to the Kingdom of Heaven." His was the eschatology of a man uncertain as to whether he should be a clergyman or a social scientist (but who saw no reason why he could not simultaneously be both). His lectures on sociology are excellent illustrations of a

certain stage in the transmutation of Christian moral philosophy of the nineteenth-century variety into a moralistic, yet essentially secular, study of social relationships. The law upon which this sociology must be based, he insisted, was "moral law," and the culture which arises "from a well directed study of sociology is not simply intellectual" but "partakes also of moral discipline. . . ." ²⁷

The code of conduct that was to give substance to this moral rigour was one centred in the *conduct* of Christ, not in his divinity or in the meaning of his blood sacrifice. "One of the most extraordinary signs of the times," noted Chown with obvious approval, "is that, while many of the doctrines which centre about Christ have to great multitudes almost lost their meaning, his personality and his social teaching have acquired an interest never before felt. This trend of events gives direction to the development of the science of theology to-day, and is giving immense impetus to the coming of the Kingdom." So it was, and Chown's own views helped channel Canadian protestantism along this direction. Lacking a systematic programme either in theology or in sociology (in fact Chown's sociology was anything but "systematic" in any meaningful sense), he had been left with a Christ who was, at least in part, "Hellenized" — a Christ who embodied in his conduct not only traditional Christian morality but also the standards informing the "sweetness and light" of Matthew Arnold's conception of culture. Why should the student of the ministry study sociology? asked Chown. "I should say, firstly, for the sake of culture. . . . A sociologist who is true to the ideals of his science is particularly inclined to resist the utilitarian and commercial spirit of the times. This is so because he stands for justice; for sweetness and light amongst men rather than for imposing material achievement." ²⁸

Here was another point at which speculative idealism and protestant theology met. Just as the British idealists had seen Kant through evolutionary and progressive Hegelian spectacles, so their vision of Christ was filtered through Hellenistic ones — for after all, Greek evolution marked a later and therefore a higher stage in the evolution of spiritual and intellectual consciousness than did the Judaic. Chown's conceptions of Christ and of Culture were similar to those of Arnold (or for that matter Vincent Massey), and they were also a direct legacy of an important element in British idealism: the classical ideal. Having helped strip essential doctrines of much of their traditional import and hence metaphysical authority, they substituted a code of right conduct, of citizenship, which presumed to be Christian but which — at least as Chown gave voice to it — could be reduced to the proposition that "The Golden Rule" was "the sum and substance of the sociology of Jesus." ²⁹

But was that quite enough to satisfy the spiritual needs and the social consciences of Christians adrift in a twentieth-century world that was not only evolutionary and much older than eighteenth-century cosmology admitted but which also gave rise to a bewildering array of alternatives to traditional religion itself?

Those who in 1925 formed the United Church of Canada — Methodists, Congregationalists, and most Presbyterians — apparently thought so, for no church leader more embodied the new ecumenical and forward-looking spirit than did the popular S. D. Chown. It is commonplace in Canadian religious historiography to observe that there was a singular absence of theological discussion during the debates on Church Union. Pressing problems in the West, it is said, created powerful forces for protestant union that made churchmen set aside their theological and doctrinal differences. Doubtless this was so, but if the influence of philosophical idealism upon protestant thought in Canada resembled that suggested here, there may not have been many theological questions the advocates of union would have deemed important enough to debate.

In 1925, as one of the consequences of the creation of the United Church of Canada, the venerable Methodist magazine, *The Christian Guardian*, passed out of existence. Its place was taken by another journal whose very title reflected the profound re-orientation of Anglo-Canadian social thought in the previous decades. The new magazine was called the *New Outlook*. Whereas the *Guardian* had been a kind of sentry in its protection of inherited tradition, accepted wisdom, and a closed Anglo-Canadian community, the *New Outlook* was more an advance scout in its orientation toward the contingencies made necessary by social change, shifts in thought, and communities in flux. A critical balance had been tipped.

NOTES

- ¹ (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1979).
- ² The series is entitled "The Philosophy of Immanuel Kant; A Collection of eleven of the most important books on Kant's philosophy reprinted in 14 volumes." Selected by Lewis White Beck. The Watson volumes selected are: *Kant and His English Critics* (New York: Macmillan, 1881), and *The Philosophy of Kant Explained* (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1908).
- ³ John Watson, "The Relation of Philosophy to Science" (Kingston, 1872), p. 18. For social and political context of the transformation of Canada, see R. C. Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto, 1974).
- ⁴ For the influence of idealism on, for example, a Canadian imperialist and a Canadian poet, see: Terry Cook, "George R. Parkin and the Concept of Britannic Idealism," in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 10 (1975); John Robert Sorfleet, "Transcendentalist, Mystic, Evolutionary Idealist; Bliss Carman, 1886-1894," in George Woodcock, ed., *Colony and Confederation* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1974).
- ⁵ John Watson, "The Sadness and Joy of Knowledge," Part II, *Queen's Journal* (March 29, 1901), 260.
- ⁶ The Editors, "Salutatory," *Queen's Quarterly*, 1 (July 1893), 1-2.
- ⁷ John Watson, "The Middle Ages and the Reformation," *ibid.*, pp. 6-11.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-91.

- ⁹ Albert Carman Papers, United Church Archives, Toronto, vol. 18, no. 123. Rev. C. T. Scott to Carman (Feb. 28, 1906).
- ¹⁰ George John Blewett, *The Study of Nature and the Vision of God: With other Essays in Philosophy* (Toronto, 1907), p. viii.
- ¹¹ John Watson Papers, Queen's University Archives, Kingston. J. M. Grant to John Watson (Nov. 10, 1911); Watson to Grant (May 17, 1914).
- ¹² John Passmore, "Darwin's Impact on British Metaphysics," *Victorian Studies*, 3 (1959-60), 52-53.
- ¹³ Watson Papers; Watson to Grant (May 17, 1914); Grant to Watson (June 7, 1914). See also Watson to Grant (March 13, 1917); Grant to Watson (March 16, 1917); Grant to Watson (April 16, 1916); Watson to Grant (April 22, 1916); Grant to Watson (March 7, 1917); Grant to Watson (April 6, 1918); Watson to Grant (April 10, 19, 1918). By 1918, Watson's patience had worn thin. His last letter to Grant was short: "Dear Mr. Grant, . . . I don't think I care to say any more about Christian Science, which to my mind is based upon indefinite thinking."
- ¹⁴ The scope of this paper precludes treatment of many individuals. Yet another, very much infected by the Queen's spirit of the 1880's and 1890's, was Alfred Fitzpatrick, the founder of Frontier College. Fitzpatrick had taken a B.A. there in 1889 and attended its Theological College from 1889 to 1892. During this time he became dedicated to the proposition that education and everyday life, thought and action, must not be separated; hence he sought throughout his life to make the sacred and the secular meet. G. M. Grant was the greatest influence on his life, and when he wrote a book (never published) entitled "Schools and Other Penitentiaries," he dedicated it to "the memory of George Monro Grant, Canada's Greatest Force and Personality in Education and Statesmanship. . . ." Frontier College Papers, vol. 194, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.
- ¹⁵ The Toronto *Daily Star* (June 24, 1930). See also Salem Bland, "Memories of Old Kingston," *ibid.* (July 30, Aug. 2, 4, 1938). Bland's notes from Watson's courses are in the Salem Bland Papers, vol. 9, no. 811, United Church Archives, Toronto.
- ¹⁶ Quoted in Richard Allen, "Salem Bland and the Social Gospel in Canada," unpub. M.A. thesis (Univ. of Saskatchewan, 1961), p. 52.
- ¹⁷ Salem Bland, "A Philosophy of Life" (Nov. 26, 1925), Salem Bland Papers, vol. 2, no. 158.
- ¹⁸ Salem Bland, "The Kingdom of God realized only in Individual Regeneration" (Jan. 18, 1899), *ibid.*, vol. 4, no. 356. Bland's early years are treated in detail in Richard Allen, "Salem Bland: The Young Preacher," *The Bulletin of the Committee on Archives of the United Church of Canada*, no. 26 (1977), 75-93.
- ¹⁹ Salem Bland, "A Contribution to a Possible Sketch of My Life," n.d. Bland Papers, vol. 9, no. 726.
- ²⁰ Salem Bland, "The Place of the Kingdom of God in the Preaching of Today," unidentified newspaper clipping, Feb. 12, 1906, *ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 235. See also Richard Allen, "Children of Prophecy: Wesley College Students in an Age of Reform," *Red River Valley Historian* (1974), pp. 15-20.
- ²¹ See Salem Bland, "A Faith Rational But Not Rationalistic," sermon Oct. 22, 1921, Bland Papers, Vol. 6, no. 544; "The Religiousness of Reason," n.d., *ibid.*, vol. 9, no. 810; "Pre-eminence of Christ and Theology. Lecture III" (May 30, 1914), *ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 232.

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- ²² Salem Bland, "The Deeper Life — Not Materialistic Enough," *Grain Growers' Guide* (June 5, 1918). Bland's statement echoed the 1913 comment of a Presbyterian clergyman, who began a Presbyterian Assembly address on "The Messenger" by saying: "The task assigned to a Canadian preacher resembles nothing so much as the general managership of a big department store." Rev. G. B. Wilson, in *Pre-Assembly Congress; Addresses delivered at the Presbyterian Pre-Assembly Congress, Held in Massey Hall. . . .* (Toronto, 1913), p. 32.
- ²³ Bland, "The Deeper Life."
- ²⁴ Quoted in K. W. McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics* (Toronto, 1963), 10, 14-16, 48n. See also William H. Brooks, "The Uniqueness of Western Canadian Methodism 1840-1925," *The Bulletin*, no. 26 (1977), 68-9, 73n; J. Warren Caldwell, "The Unification of Methodism in Canada, 1865-1884," *The Bulletin*, no. 19 (1967); William H. Magney, "The Methodist Church and The National Gospel," *ibid.*, no. 20 (1968); Burkhard Kiesekamp, "Presbyterian and Methodist Divines: their Case for a national church in Canada, 1875-1900," *Studies in Religion*, 2 (1973).
- ²⁵ George John Blewett, *The Study of Nature and the Vision of God* (Toronto 1907), p. 354. For a description of Woodsworth's view of the nature of religion by 1920 see Richard Allen, *The Social Passion* (Toronto, 1971), pp. 101-2. For a comprehensive summary of the origins and course of the social gospel movement in Canada, see George N. Emory, "The Origins of Canadian Methodist Involvement in the Social Gospel Movement 1890-1914," *The Bulletin*, no. 26 (1977), 104-19, or the full treatment in *The Social Passion*.
- ²⁶ S. D. Chown, "Socialism & The Social Teachings of Jesus, Vanc. Feb. 14, 1914," p. 6. S. D. Chown Papers, United Church Archives, Toronto, vol. 2, no. 58b.
- ²⁷ S. D. Chown, "Sociological Course. Lecture I. Importance of the Study of Sociology," pp. 1-2. Chown Papers, vol. 2, no. 50b.
- ²⁸ S. D. Chown, "Sociological Course. Lecture II. The Relation of Sociology to the Kingdom of Heaven," pp. 1-2. *ibid.*, vol. 2, no. 51a; "Lecture I," 2.
- ²⁹ "Sociological Course. Lecture II," 12. For an examination of the classical ideal and its relationship to philosophical idealism, see S. E. D. Shortt, *The Search for an Ideal* (Toronto: Anansi, 1977), pp. 59-76. See also H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: 1956), pp. 1-115, for theological background and implications.

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