

A DISCIPLINED INTELLIGENCE

Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought
in the Victorian Era



A. B. McKillop

*A Disciplined Intelligence:
Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era*

In this highly acclaimed and controversial contribution to Canadian intellectual history, A. B. McKillop examines the course of critical inquiry and its relationship to the assertion of moral authority in English-Canadian thought during the Victorian era.

Concentrating upon the thought of Canada's major scientists, philosophers, and clerics—men such as William Dawson and Daniel Wilson, John Watson and W. D. LeSueur, G. M. Grant and Salem Bland—the book begins by reconstructing the central strands of intellectual and moral orthodoxy prevalent in Anglo-Canadian colleges on the eve of the Darwinian revolution. These included the Scottish Common Sense philosophy and the natural theology of William Paley. The destructive impact of evolutionary ideas on that orthodoxy and the major exponents of the new forms of social evolution—Spencerian and Hegelian alike—are examined in detail.

By the twentieth century, the heart of Anglo-Canadian thought had been transformed by what had become a new, evolutionary orthodoxy. The legacy of this triumphant intellectual movement, that of British idealism, was immense. It helped to destroy Protestant denominationalism, to provide the philosophical core of the social gospel movement, and to constitute a major force behind the creation of the United Church of Canada. Throughout the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, however, the moral imperative in Anglo-Canadian thought remained a constant presence. Several figures who today dominate the intellectual landscape of the country may be seen as inheritors of this tradition.

The Carleton Library Series edition of this now-classic work includes a new introduction by the author that describes its origins, autobiographical context, and impact. An up-to-date bibliographical note is also included.

A. B. McKillop teaches history at Carleton University.

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A Disciplined Intelligence

Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought
in the Victorian Era

A. B. McKillop

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To ROGER GRAHAM
Scholar and Gentleman

**They change their skies but not their minds
who cross the sea in ships.
Seneca**

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Preface

The rise of an inquiring frame of mind, critical of different forms of orthodox thought, was one of the most important characteristics of the nineteenth century. This book examines the course of critical inquiry and its relationship to the assertion of moral authority in the thought of some of the major figures in English-speaking Canada's intellectual life for the period before the First World War. Caught historically between a British heritage, which many of them conceived to contain the best elements of Western civilization, and an American neighbour, which advanced ineluctably towards modernity in its modes of thought and action, Anglo-Canadians in the Victorian era sought to establish and to preserve in Canada a broad moral code that would constitute the core of a way of life reconciling belief and inquiry, tradition and innovation, concern and freedom. For some of them, critical inquiry was a serious threat to the social bond; others came to see in the very process of inquiry a means of preserving it in the modern age.

The central theme of this book is the interplay between critical inquiry and moral affirmation within the Anglo-Canadian mind. It is suggested that a central and continuous element of Anglo-Canadian intellectual life—so much so as to constitute a virtual imperative—has been its moral dimension. The term "moral," it should be noted, is used here in a broad sense. Edmund Burke had used the phrase "moral imagination" to suggest man's general power of ethical perception, his aspiration to establish and to maintain right order both in the commonwealth and in the soul. This notion is paralleled in Northrop Frye's use of the term "concern," by which he means "something which includes the sense of the importance of preserving the integrity of the total human community." "It is clear," he goes on to say (in his essay "The Knowledge of Good and Evil"), "that concern and morality are closely connected: morality, in fact, in the sense of the kind of ob-

ligation that enables man to preserve his relation to society, is the central expression of concern." Hence, while the moral imperative informing Anglo-Canadian thought could and did find expression through the narrow focus of Protestant morality, it was also one that was capable of transcending the tenets of religious denominationalism and addressing itself to univereal questions.

The individuals considered in the following pages were the most articulate spokesmen of several systems of ideas which together informed the Anglo-Canadian mind in the nineteenth century. These men aspired to be the leaders of English-Canadian society, and they sought to give it direction. They were public moralists who wanted to help forge the ethics and the faith of the nation. As such, they gave sustained expression to some of the most fundamental intellectual concerns in the North Atlantic community during the Victorian era and after it.

Another purpose of this book is to examine in the Canadian context the tension inherent in the relationship between, on the one hand, man's desire to use his intellect—his organizational and critical capacity—to further his knowledge and to enhance his understanding and, on the other, his concurrent wish to maintain certainty of conviction. This problem was alluded to in a phrase used by Egerton Ryerson when seeking to define the nature and scope of mental philosophy. "The philosophy of mind," he said in an 1842 address on the idea of a liberal education, "inquires into the nature of those spirits of which we have any certain knowledge, or which it concerns us to know." A number of questions arise about the implications of this statement. What constitutes "certain knowledge"? Can one have certain knowledge of spiritual things? Is this certain knowledge of spiritual things not faith? If so, what is the relationship of this faith to reason? What are the implications of the words "concerns us to know"? What knowledge *is* it our concern to acquire? Of what things is it *not* our concern to know? And what is the ultimate authority from which we can determine what are to be those concerns?

Ryerson developed the core of his program for a "liberal education" from premises with inherent problems such as these. They also served as the basis of the curricula of colleges other than Ryerson's Victoria College. He undoubtedly would have taken exception to the claim that the philosophy of mind was of paramount importance in his conception of a liberal education, and he would perhaps have answered, in rebuttal, that it was only one branch of a diverse and balanced curriculum. Yet it was, never-

theless, a particular conception of mind—its nature, its potential, and its perceived limitations—upon which rested the educational programs of Ryerson and his colleagues at other Canadian universities and colleges. Education then, as now, was in the end a matter of knowledge and thought—knowledge learned and unlearned, training in how to think and in how not to think. In Anglo-Canadian universities during the middle of the nineteenth century, the negative side of this process was as vital a part of the educational experience as the positive acquisition of knowledge. But could this remain the case in the age of increasing intellectual inquiry? This book seeks to provide at least a partial answer to this question, and it attempts to show how Anglo-Canadian educators, clerics, and certain men of letters adjusted to the often competing demands of affirmation and criticism.

Several institutions and individuals were of great help during the years taken to conceive, research, and write this study, and it is a pleasure to record a great measure of gratitude to them. The Canada Council provided financial support and research assistance, and the Social Science Federation of Canada, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, subsidized publication. Mrs. Carol Adam risked neglecting her infant twins in typing the manuscript at several stages, and she performed the task quickly and efficiently. The staffs of the archives cited in the notes were helpful in making their resources easily available.

Members of the Department of History at Queen's University and at the University of Manitoba have provided stimulating environments in which to teach and write. At Queen's, Professor G. A. Rawlyk made numerous suggestions. At Manitoba, Professor J. L. Finlay pointed out several ambiguous passages and weaknesses in transition. Equally kindly, he allowed the use of his cottage on the Lake of the Woods for a lengthy period one summer, during which much was accomplished. The encouragement and incentive provided there by Thomas Harvey Donini was greatly appreciated. At a later stage in the preparation of the manuscript, comments were offered by Gordon Harland, John Kendle, Gerald Friesen, and W. H. Brooks, of the University of Manitoba; Ramsay Cook of York University; Carl Berger of the University of Toronto; Goldwin French, president of Victoria University, University of Toronto. Judy Kendle, in particular, gave the manuscript of the book a discerning, sensitive, and critical reading.

Intellectual debts are often difficult, if not impossible, to re-

cord. It will be readily apparent to those familiar with the work of Perry Miller, however, that some of the preoccupations of the pages that follow are in some measure derived from a reading and an appreciation of Miller's work. Whatever sensitivity *A Disciplined Intelligence* has to the ironic results of thought in action comes from a reading of Miller and also of Reinhold Niebuhr, in particular his *The Irony of American History*. On the Canadian side, two sources need especially to be mentioned. John Irving was a pioneer investigator of the history of philosophy in Canada, and in some ways this book merely amplifies what he outlined in a number of seminal articles during the 1950s. Finally, the author's indebtedness to the ideas of Northrop Frye will be obvious to the reader from the opening page to the concluding one.

The author's two greatest debts, however, are not intellectual ones only. His friend Graham Reynolds offered extensive criticism of the original manuscript, particularly those chapters which deal with aspects of mid-Victorian science. Mr. Reynolds has been a constant source of intellectual stimulation, and has forced the clarification of numerous ideas which might otherwise have remained vague. The author's academic mentor, Roger Graham of Queen's University, has over the years provided much encouragement, understanding, and patience. In addition, his many stylistic suggestions have greatly enhanced whatever merit this book may have in the matter of literary style, although it need hardly be said that lapses of scholarship and style are solely the author's responsibility.

Introduction to the Carleton Library Edition

Religion tends increasingly to make its primary impact, not as a system of taught and learned belief, but as an imaginative structure which, whether "true" or not, has imaginary consistency and imaginative informing power. In other words, it makes its essential appeal as myth or possible truth, and whatever belief it attracts follows from that.

Northrop Frye, *The Modern Century* (1967)

Works of history arise out of authorial disposition as well as opportunity and interpretive conjuncture. *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* is no exception. It is the result of a particular sensibility, time, and circumstance. Readers of the Carleton Library edition of the book may wish, therefore, to learn how this particular work of intellectual history came about, its relationship to the fields of intellectual and religious history in Canada, and the historiographical impact it appears to have had.

The book originated as a doctoral dissertation for the Department of History at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. As such, it was as much an act of faith as of scholarship. I had arrived at Queen's in the Fall of 1970 with a background in Canadian political and American intellectual history secured at the University of Manitoba. My intention was to pursue doctoral research on some aspect of twentieth-century Western Canadian urban history, the subject of my M.A. thesis, and the graduate seminar in post-Confederation Canadian political history offered by Roger Graham seemed good preparation for such an undertaking. I had studied the intellectual history of the Progressive Era in the United States under R. A. Swanson at Manitoba; so far as I was then aware, however, Canadian intellectual history—or at least its historiography—did not exist. At Manitoba, as elsewhere

in those days, Canadian history was predominantly the history of politics, pure and simple.

Scholarship can subvert even the best of intentions—certainly, it proved subversive of mine. Very early in Roger Graham's seminar, thanks to fellow student Terry Cook, I was introduced to two important works that held promise for the study of Canadian intellectual history: S. F. Wise's "Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History" and Carl Berger's *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867–1914* (1970).¹ Wise's article on Canadian intellectual history pointed to the ideological connections between religious thought and the larger political culture of Upper Canada, thereby linking the history of religion to the history of ideas. For its part, Berger's book argued powerfully that a significant intellectual dimension existed within the time-worn tradition of Canadian political history. My attention was drawn once again to intellectual history. But what was this history in Canada, beyond that of Wise's members of the Family Compact and Berger's imperialists? Canadian historiography held few clues.

As an undergraduate, I had written a lengthy essay on Victorians and the meaning of "Victorianism" for a course in European history and had enjoyed the discovery of such books as Florence Lennon Becker's insightful study of Lewis Carroll, *Victoria Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), and Walter E. Houghton's now classic account, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957). Was there a dimension of Victorian belief I could explore as the topic of my own dissertation on Canadian history? In Swanson's American intellectual history seminar at the University of Manitoba, I had become quite familiar with the books of Richard Hofstadter, the most influential American intellectual historian of the 1950s and 1960s. Might some of the concerns of Hofstadter's *Americans* also have been important to Victorian Canadians? Hofstadter's doctoral dissertation, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (rev. ed. New York: Brazillier, 1955 [1944]), had intrigued me. Did Social Darwinism also take hold in Anglo-Canadian thought in the second half of the nineteenth century? I found myself with a tentative topic, but was there evidence to confirm it?

The library, special collections, and archives of Queen's University soon provided me with a rich body of germane material, but in unexpected ways. I discovered no Canadian equivalents to the major American Social Darwinists: no William Graham

Sumner, no Andrew Carnegie or John D. Rockefeller—no great Canadian apologists of a social evolutionism dedicated to the sanctity of the unfettered marketplace. What emerged instead from the manuscript collections, pamphlets, and periodicals was an earnest and sustained debate beginning in the 1860s among members of the Canadian religious and scientific communities, often university professors, over the social, intellectual, and religious implications of Darwinian evolution.

Given Canada's colonial circumstance and its geographical and cultural location as a fulcrum balancing British and American intellectual and cultural engagement, and the importance of evolutionary theory, this did not come as a great surprise. What was surprising was the strong and central presence of a third party in addition to the clerics and the scientists within the Canadian debate over science, religion and evolutionary change: the mental and moral philosophers within Canadian colleges and universities. Their involvement pointed in the direction of a commitment to the public good and service to it, rather than to private interest.

No history department-based historians in Canada had studied or written about any of the Canadian intellectuals who gradually emerged as my subjects. The occasional historian of philosophy, such as John Irving, had mentioned philosophers such as George Paxton Young of the University of Toronto or John Watson of Queen's, but in the context of mainstream Canadian historiography they did not exist. Nor did the intellectual context in which to situate them. When Richard Allen's path-breaking work on the Social Gospel in Canada, *The Social Passion; Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914–1928*, appeared in 1971 it gave Canadian religious life an intellectual dimension, but it began the story at the crest of the Social Gospel movement during the Great War of 1914–1918 and traced its transformation in the 1920s. My own work seemed to be the pre-history of Allen's subject. As research progressed, I came to regret that I had been unwilling to take any course in philosophy as an undergraduate—an unwillingness in part encouraged by a philosophy department at Manitoba much taken with Ludwig Wittgenstein and A. J. Ayer, but with little patience where the metaphysics they rejected was concerned. Yet all the philosophers I encountered during the course of my research into nineteenth-century Canadian intellectual history were proud metaphysicians.

The few scholarly works on Canadian religious history published before 1970 proved of little help in fleshing out the life of

the Protestant mind. Invariably, they were written from an institutional perspective and in a way that reflected the dominant political history of the day—as if the Protestant denominations and their colleges were peculiar variants of political parties and the party system. Relations of Church and State figured as the dominant *leitmotif*. Works such as D. C. Masters's *Protestant Church Colleges in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) and John Webster Grant's *The Church in the Canadian Era* (Burlington, Ont.: Welch, 1988 [1972]), invaluable as institutional studies, touched upon theological and intellectual influences only episodically. If in 1970 the history of philosophy in Canada was *terra incognita* from the perspective of "mainstream" history, religious thought was not much better mapped. As historian Michael Gauvreau wrote two decades later, "the old national history" dominant before 1970 marginalized religious experience and failed "to recognize its creative role in shaping cultural traditions, social forms, and political ideologies."² In this respect, he added, the old history differed little from the new social history that superseded it in the 1970s.

Historians can often be divided into those interested in origins and those concerned with consequences. My own primary interest was in the intellectual, religious, and cultural consequences of the earlier debate over social evolution. The philosophers under my scrutiny saw themselves as essential figures mediating the concerns of the religious and scientific communities. Moreover, they believed that they were part of an intellectual revolution brought about by free intellectual inquiry, for they were opponents of dogmatism and orthodoxy of any sort. This commitment to critical inquiry became, in effect, the central thread of my work. Almost to a man—and they were invariably men—the Canadian philosophers of the late-nineteenth century were members of a transatlantic community of Anglo-American idealists, inspired by Kant, Hegel, and to a lesser extent the inspirational Oxford scholar T. H. Green. But if they were part of an intellectual revolution, as they so clearly believed, what was the orthodoxy they sought to overthrow? It became apparent that to begin my story with the advent of British idealism, the major intellectual movement of the late nineteenth century, would be like studying the Jacobins without taking into account, however briefly, the *ancien régime*. I therefore turned to the beliefs Anglo-Canadian idealists thought they had helped to overturn.

Much of the early part of *A Disciplined Intelligence* therefore necessarily became a study of the religious, moral, and scientific

"orthodoxy" of pre-Darwinian belief. In Protestant colleges and universities that championed evangelical accounts of Christian revelation, this took the form of a fear of "intellect" itself, especially intellect driven by open-ended inquiry. As buttresses to conventional belief, Scottish "Common Sense Philosophy," emphasising the intimate connection between God and Mind, took pride of place in liberal arts curricula, as did a natural theology intended to reconcile providence and nature, and derived from a British "Baconian" empiricism suspicious of scientific theorizing beyond evidence acceptable to the process of induction. It was against such forms of received belief, aimed at cultivation of a pious disposition, that the idealists of the last third of the nineteenth century argued so powerfully.

The basic structure of the study came about unexpectedly and in a curious way. In the early summer of 1974, I possessed only a mass of unsorted research notes. Yet when I woke up one morning, a comprehensive map of the dissertation (down to chapter titles and subsection headings) had made itself known, and done so with the force of revelation. I simply wrote it down. The work's provisional title was "Nature, Mind, and God: Science, Philosophy, and the Anglo-Canadian Moral Imagination, 1850-1914." The projected study consisted of an introductory chapter, "Education and Intellect at Mid-Nineteenth Century," and three sections, "Nature," "Mind," and "God"—each with two chapters. These sections delineated the pre-Darwinian views of the natural order in relation to Providence, the reorientation of social thought facilitated by the idealist mental and moral philosophers, and the theological consequences of this reorientation in the twentieth century. I soon dismissed the main title as far too pretentious for the rite of passage of a dissertation, but it continued to serve as a way of maintaining a steady focus on what had become my central themes and relationships. The outline required little revision during the writing of the dissertation between 1974 and 1976.

Roger Graham was a supportive thesis advisor. The draft chapters he received did not touch at all upon his area of expertise—Canadian political history—but he consistently suggested that although the dissertation moved in uncharted directions, they were potentially fruitful ones. In the late 1920s, Perry Miller, the great historian of American Puritanism, had concluded that his doctoral supervisor's attitude toward thesis supervision had been that "a student should be given enough rope to hang himself, if this he was resolved to do."³ Miller's words came frequently to

mind as my own work progressed. Then in the summer of 1976, as the sixth chapter (concluding the "Mind" section) was about to be submitted, Roger Graham suffered a serious heart attack. George Rawlyk kindly offered to look at the new chapter and to see the dissertation to its conclusion. The work was already four hundred pages long, exclusive of bibliography—the upper limit of an acceptable doctoral dissertation at Queen's at the time. It was obvious that the thesis should be completed without delay, even if this meant it would not now conform to the original, balanced three-part structure.

The finished dissertation, submitted as "A Disciplined Intelligence: Intellectual Enquiry and the Moral Imperative in Anglo-Canadian Thought, 1850–1890," was defended in the autumn of 1976. Its external examiner was Ramsay Cook, of York University. Eager to secure tenure at the University of Manitoba, to which I had returned as lecturer in 1974, I turned to the matter of revision for publication. The thesis had ended abruptly with a three-page epilogue following a chapter on John Watson and the rise of philosophical idealism. (The third section on the social and theological implications and legacy of idealism existed only in my mind). Its final words were: "Whether at the level of the church, the city or province, the national civil service, or the cause of the empire, during the thirty years that followed 1890 the idealist variant of the Anglo-Canadian moral imperative was suffused into Canadian life. The results were as important as they sometimes were ambiguous. That story, however, must be told elsewhere."⁴

The clear consequence of philosophical idealism, as the evidence presented in the thesis showed, was that, ironically, in its determination to return to the "essentials" of Christianity by questioning such basic tenets as the Divinity of Christ, the Trinity, and the Atonement it contributed to the importation of secular notions into the very religion it sought to defend. This needed to be examined, however briefly, in any sensible transformation of "A Disciplined Intelligence" from thesis to book. At the very least, a more substantive epilogue was necessary, but it soon became apparent that even an outline of the secularization inherent in the impact of British idealism on Canadian thought required more space than any epilogue could afford and it therefore became a seventh and concluding chapter. A new epilogue suggesting the continuity of a moral intelligence in Canadian social, political, and cultural thought in the decades after World War I concluded the manuscript submitted to the

publisher. The book appeared under the imprint of McGill-Queen's University Press in September 1979.

Possibly because it was such an oddity in Canadian historiography, *A Disciplined Intelligence* gathered immediate attention. Invitations arrived from a number of university history departments to speak on its subject. Certain historians concluded that the book held considerable explanatory power for studies on which they were engaged, particularly with respect to understanding the transformation of Canadian thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ramsay Cook wrote privately to say that it helped him at last understand the origins and nature of the secularization of Canadian thought and society. Doug Owsram wrote that it provided a clear sense of the intellectual and moral origins of the strong ethic of public service that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, and beyond. The book received honourable mention for the 1980 John A. Macdonald Prize and the 1985 Prix François Xavier Garneau of the Canadian Historical Association.

The initial influence of the book hinged, ironically, less on what it examined at length than on what it merely broached. One clear challenge posed in its final chapter consisted in what it had to say about the secularization of Canadian society and the implications of this for Canadian religious thought. Yet the published work scarcely touched the surface of these concerns. The book proved sufficiently fertile and provocative, however, to help spur those interested in Canadian religious history into moving beyond the institutional framework in which the subject had traditionally been situated, and to conclude that the study of faith-based belief from the perspective of intellectual history could be fruitful rather than contradictory or, worse, perverse.

In this respect, *A Disciplined Intelligence* helped those interested in Canadian religious history to look inward, towards the intellectual elements of belief, and outward, towards the cultural and social resonances of religious practice. Despite the absence of its projected third ("God") section, where I had intended to examine twentieth-century themes such as the Higher Criticism, theological reorientation, inductive theology, and the twin ethics of social and public service, the book served as an interpretive template, used as an authority in work already underway and built upon or rejected by those inspired or irritated by its argument.

Reviewers of *A Disciplined Intelligence* praised the book for bringing to public attention and situating historically a number

of Canadian intellectuals and educators then all but unknown—among them ethnologist Daniel Wilson and geologist John William Dawson, civil servant, social critic, and historian William Dawson LeSueur, mental and moral philosophers George Paxton Young and John Watson, and clergymen and theologians George Monro Grant, Nathanael Burwash, and Samuel Dwight Chown. The reviewers often dwelt, aptly, on the central thesis of the book: that a lengthy and strong tradition of moral concern developed in Anglo-Canadian thought in the nineteenth century, instilled initially by the transmission of evangelical Protestant values and ideas across the Atlantic, and that this “moral imperative” persisted, eventually in transmuted forms, well into the twentieth century.

The views of Northrop Frye loomed large in *A Disciplined Intelligence*, and they helped inform and shape my understanding of the nature and course of the moral imperative in Canadian thought. In such works as *The Modern Century* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967) and *The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), Frye articulated the formation and continuity of Anglo-Canadian social mythology, its “myth of concern”—a collection of beliefs so deeply held as to give shape to a culture’s commonality of purpose. Yet operating within this myth of concern, he noted, has been another constellation of beliefs generally located within the emancipatory and tolerant elements of the liberal tradition, a “myth of freedom.” Ingrained within the Anglo-Canadian myth of concern, then, was the inherent tension—made more pronounced than elsewhere due to Canada’s geographic and cultural site which linked it to both a conservative Britain and a libertarian America—between such polarities as authority and freedom, order and progress, culture and liberty. In *A Disciplined Intelligence*, such tensions originated and remained in the competing demands of piety and intellect.

The decade of the 1980s witnessed the erosion of the political history of the nation-state and the rise of social and women’s history. In Canadian historiography it also saw the recognition among historians that religion, once central in Canada, was a too-little explored area of Canadian history. The result was a distinct sense of vitality and renewal in the writing of Canadian religious history, almost always from the perspective of the intellectual historian.

The theme of the continuity of a dynamic and ever-changing "moral imperative" was of secondary importance, if it was dwelt upon at all, to scholars interested in the social history of religion and critical of what they chose to call the "secularization thesis." The secularization of Canadian society had been noted in the work of Richard Allen but was made explicit in the latter chapters of *A Disciplined Intelligence* and throughout Ramsay Cook's *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (1985). Cook's Governor General Award-winning book expanded the range of those who grappled with sacred and profane concerns to include social reformers, a bee-keeper, a pre-Freudian psychiatrist, and many other (often eccentric) figures, subjecting them at times to ridicule. In doing so, Cook changed the tone of the discussion, charting a clear path in Protestant thought and practice, one of unambiguous declension, from the nineteenth-century "City of God" of the Christian pulpit to the twentieth-century "Secular City" of Mackenzie King's diary. Four years later, in his book *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (1989), William Westfall argued that in Ontario, with material and secular forces in play, a Protestant consensus had come into existence in the mid-nineteenth century. Ontario Protestantism's great strength, Westfall argued, rested in its capacity to absorb both the sacred and secular, for example in the notion of progressive historical time and in the sacred space of Neo-Gothic church architecture. "Unfortunately," wrote one reviewer in summarizing one of the book's central arguments, "in the very process of incorporating material progress into its vision of the future, Protestantism allowed the secular to replace the sacred and thus undermined its own foundation, thereby initiating its own future failure."⁵

Historiographical contention thrives on the discovery of "schools" of interpretation to which one can take exception. One now proved readily at hand in an interpretive trajectory consisting of Allen, McKillop, Cook, and Westfall. Accordingly, historians of religion in Canada began to challenge what they saw as the Whiggish and linear "decline and fall" views of proponents of an unpalatable "secularization thesis." Important books arguing along these lines appeared, written by Marguerite Van Die, Michael Gauvreau, Phyllis D. Airhart, and Nancy Christie (with Michael Gauvreau). Taken together with the earlier work of Westfall and a decidedly "secularist" later book by David B. Marshall, they helped transform the historical study of religion in Canada.

None of these critics denied that the grounds of intellectual, religious, and social authority shifted fundamentally between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1930s, or that Canadian society became overwhelmingly preoccupied with secular concerns. Most argued, however, against the apparent belief of the "secularist" historians that increased secularity meant less religious commitment. In *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839–1918* (1989), Van Die maintained that while Burwash's views at times changed, his evangelical religious commitment did not; that his struggle to reconcile faith and reason was an enduring dynamic within the Christian church, not a specific response to challenges posed by an incipient secularism. Michael Gauvreau's more broad-ranging study, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (1991) went even further.

Gauvreau sought to turn the "secularist" argument on its head. The Social Gospel of the early twentieth century, he asserted, was the product of a church still rich with spiritual vitality and theological resonance. He accepted the importance of Baconian induction but minimized that of the Scottish Common Sense tradition in Canadian mental and moral philosophy. He also disputed the degree to which speculative idealism left an ironic, secular legacy. In his view, neither Darwinism nor the "higher criticism" resulted in a nineteenth-century crisis of faith; this occurred instead as a result of developments, apparent by 1905, "in biblical scholarship associated with historical relativism." Professionalisation and psychological impulses toward self-actualization, as much as anything, fractured the alliance of pulpit and lecturn. The crisis of faith in Canadian evangelical culture was, in Gauvreau's view, a twentieth-century phenomenon, and even then a robust commitment to theological understanding continued well after 1900. In this work, Gauvreau did not just marginalise such movements as idealism; he also attempted to reorient the "mainstream" of Canadian intellectual thought towards the theological churchmen who maintained the "college-pulpit" connection. As with the work of Van Die, that of Gauvreau pointed to difficulties inherent in any rigid separation of commitments to individual regeneration and social action.

The appearance of Phyllis D. Airhart's book, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (1992), enabled Gauvreau to claim in a review of the book that "Two rival historiographic schools have hotly

contested the question of how Victorian evangelicalism balanced its traditions of individualist piety with the insistent demands of social reform. Were the old ways eroded and rendered irrelevant by the vast social and intellectual transformation of the industrial age? Or did the Protestant churches successfully adjust and preserve their traditions and creatively shape the forces of cultural and political change?"⁶ Between 1900 and 1910, Airhart argued, tensions within the Methodist community resulted in the emergence of a "progressivist" piety that diminished the role of revivals and individual conversion in favour of a commitment to sacrificial service. Pietistic evangelical commitment continued (as did notions such as free will, experiential religion, and holiness) but it had become reoriented and reconfigured. If a crisis existed in Canadian Methodism, it was one of identity, not faith.

Among the few dissenters to the argument for a continuity of belief that had found pride of place in this new work in Canadian religious and intellectual history was David B. Marshall. In *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850–1940* (1992), Marshall sought to demonstrate Canadian Protestantism's accommodation to the secular, away from the "Kingdom of God." This work marked both a narrower and broader approach to the question of secularization. It was narrower in that the book concentrated largely on the thought of clergymen; it was broader in the way it included such trends in society as the growth of a pluralistic consumerism in the marketplace—the marketplace of ideas, values, and belief as well as of consumer goods. The Social Gospel, from this perspective, reflected a movement among those who opted for a future of material more than spiritual benefit. "In the end," Marshall concluded, "a defeated church, uncertain about its message, mission and future, floundered." Religious accommodation and the search for contemporary relevance resulted only in reinforcing secular engagement and in marginalizing a once-central spiritual force.

Four years later, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau attacked such views. In *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900–1940* (1996), they insisted that Protestant values remained central to Canadian society well after the Great War. Far from having been eclipsed at the end of the Great War, the Social Gospel lived on in the core values of postwar mainstream churches and the social agencies they created and sponsored for the purpose of social service, thereby paving the way for the welfare state in Canada. "By the

mid-thirties," Christie and Gauvreau concluded, "progressive clergymen had achieved their aim of converting provincial and federal governments to the principle of providing social security." Having achieved this objective, the United Church of Canada—the embodiment of the progressive—then rediscovered personal redemption and salvation in the form of the Oxford Movement, for, in the view of the authors, church leaders had promoted social evangelism because it was "the outward manifestation" of the other stream of evangelism, "inner piety."⁷ A nagging question remains: Was the surrender of social and welfare services to the state and the return to personal piety a sign of the centrality of the churches or a retreat from the public sphere that resulted from the erosion of their public authority within a social environment driven by a secular and materialistic ethic?⁸

If at the end of the second millennium any consensus existed among Canadian historians committed to the study of religious history, it was two-fold. First, it accepted that a fundamental reorientation and transformation had taken place in Canadian Protestantism between the late nineteenth century and the end of the first third of the twentieth. Secondly, it held that, at the very least, the notion of secularization was by no means adequately understood, and that as a conceptual tool it might, indeed, be highly problematic. This was certainly the view of those who claimed that, however major the transformation in religious belief and practice may have been, fundamental religious yearning persisted and found new and enduring forms of expression. Historians Van Die, Gauvreau, and Airhart have argued, in effect, for the existence and continuity of a moral imperative in Anglo-Canadian thought.

The fact of secularization within the larger public culture is scarcely a matter for debate: it has become a palpable reality, and was so for much of the twentieth century. Those who argue for the continuing influence of evangelicalism well into the twentieth century accept this, arguing amongst themselves mainly on the timing of the crisis of authority. Did it occur in the 1890s? 1905? The years of the Great War? In their search for advantageous interpretive positions on which to base their scholarly authority, such studies at least had the advantage of prior work to rebut. *A Disciplined Intelligence* had had no such luxury; historiographically, it had nothing to refute except the almost total silence of scholarship on the subject. In its final, controversial chapter, it did not attempt to argue for a loss of religious

belief but for the displacement of it, and for the concomitant marginalisation of a commitment to organized religion in its institutional forms.

We still scarcely understand the process by which this shift in spiritual, moral, and social authority took place, and much is to be done by scholars before we will. One can fully accept the argument that theological concerns persisted in the years after the Great War of 1914–18, however disruptive that tragic war had been in matters of faith. The ongoing work of Marguerite Van Die, Michael Gauvreau, and Nancy Christie goes a long way in demonstrating this. So does Hubert Krygsman's comprehensive study of Canadian Protestantism in the twentieth century, "Freedom and Grace: Mainline Protestant Thought in Canada, 1900–1960," a Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Department of History, Carleton University, in 1997. We can accept, with Van Die, that figures such as Nathanael Burwash had reconciled the public use of reason and the inner life of the spirit, and remained just as religious late in life as they were when they were young. In the case of Burwash, as well as others, what we need to know in more precise detail is how this man, so central a religious figure in the late nineteenth century, became so peripheral by the end of his life in the twentieth. What, well within the span of a generation, had turned an icon of Methodism into a marginal man?

If we are to understand the relationship of the sacred and the profane in Canada, and its working-out in Canadian culture, we need to explore more fully not only the formalities of theological thought and practice but also the transference of religious sensibilities and concerns into areas of expression not normally considered within the ambit of "religion." The brief epilogue of *A Disciplined Intelligence* attempted to prod scholars in this direction. A tradition of moral concern, it claimed, is an ongoing thread in Canadian intellectual and cultural life; but inheritance of religious tradition is only one means by which such concern is absorbed and transmitted. Religion and culture exist in uneasy proximity, demarcated mainly by orientations toward the transcendent or the immanent. But they occupy the same realm, and it is the realm in which human beings negotiate meaning through the power of symbol, and the meaning of symbol through actions and words.

But which actions, which words? And in which directions? The imperatives of an increasingly integrated market economy and industrial infrastructure absorbed the attention and energy

of Canadians as the twentieth century unfolded, and thoughtful people often harnessed themselves to the organizational capacity and ideological structures of the nation-state. The commitment of Christians persisted, even as the spiritual idiom of English-speaking Canadians shifted from the language of personal redemption to that of social service, and then to culture and self-fulfillment. But the voice of that commitment gradually came to be heard at the periphery of formal religious belief and practice. In an increasingly pluralistic society, the spiritual directions of people became a matter of open choice within a broad range of occupational and social spaces. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many voluntary associations and professional occupations with no religious affiliation existed; they, too, forged social bonds offering solidarity and interest for the like-minded. Particularly for women, they also made possible new options in life.

Churches, once symbols of an overarching unity of belief, became symbols of private choice—sanctuaries often “Neo-Gothic” in style, self-consciously drawing upon the anti-modern myth of an integrated and holistic Medieval Christendom. They also drew attention to themselves as spiritual sites where commitment stood at odds with a wide variety of new social and cultural choices in the world of an interconnected and interdependent industrial and commercial economy. Increasingly, providential dispensation stood at odds with the belief in the laws of the natural order championed by the accountant and the life insurance actuary. “The skyscraper,” Harold Innis later observed, ‘has become the modern cathedral; long-term credit is the new basis of modern belief.’” Secularization indeed took place, but its locus was less in any arithmetic decline in church membership or increase in “unbelief” than it was in the directions taken by those whose spiritual need to “connect” with others took them outside church walls and into the occupational structures of “secular” society itself.

The final pages of *A Disciplined Intelligence* suggested that among the vocational choices associated with the moral imagination in twentieth-century Canadian life were those linked to social and public service, the academic arts and social sciences, social criticism and cultural analysis, and the writing of poetry and fiction. Once largely confined to the Protestant pulpit and the philosopher’s lecturn, the new agents of the moral imperative in Canadian life often chose instead to become social scientists and social workers, cultural critics and professors of English,

historians and journalists, and diplomats and Ottawa mandarins. Subsequent scholarship has abundantly borne this out. Doug Owram's *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State 1900–1945* (1986) and Barry Ferguson's *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O. D. Skelton, W. C. Clark, and W. A. Mackintosh, 1890–1925* (1994) demonstrate clearly the ways new ethical notions set forward in the late nineteenth century helped inspire a twentieth-century commitment to public service and the social good. Sara Z. Burke's prize-winning book, *Seeking the Highest Good: Social Service and Gender at the University of Toronto, 1888–1937* (1996), situated the origins of social service and social work at the University of Toronto specifically in the context of nineteenth-century British idealism and its Canadian exponents. Similarly, the title of Marlene Shore's book, *The Science of Social Redemption: McGill, the Chicago School, and the Origins of Social Research in Canada* (1987), testified to the religious origins of Canadian social analysis, practiced now in a secular intellectual and social environment. Shore's major figures, like those of Owram and Burke, sought redemption by means other than those Christianity alone could provide.

In the arena of the humanities, this continuity of moral concern remained even more forcibly intact. In *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture* (1989), film-maker and critic Bruce Elder fixed upon the influence of Canadian variants of Common Sense philosophy and Hegelian idealism to account for the idea of community that helped shape a distinctive Canadian film tradition. Similarly, literary historian Henry A. Hubert drew upon variants of the British idealist tradition, perpetuated in half-secularized form by the hold of Arnoldian humanism on university English departments, in *Harmonious Perfection: The Development of English Studies in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Canadian Colleges* (1994).

My own work after the publication of *A Disciplined Intelligence* attempted to expand its compass and extend its argument beyond 1914. In 1980, I contracted to write an intellectual and social history of the university in Ontario for the Ontario Historical Studies Series. Parts of the first half of the book, which eventually appeared as *Matters of Mind: The University in Ontario, 1791–1951* (1994), necessarily recapitulated and refined the nineteenth-century aspects of the educational, intellectual, and religious history first dealt with in *A Disciplined Intelligence*. But much of the post-1920 intellectual, religious, and

cultural history of Ontario remained unexamined by scholars. To the extent possible within the boundaries specified by the editors of the series, *Matters of Mind* extended the general argument of *A Disciplined Intelligence* into this new territory, eventually reaching the Massey Commission of 1951.

Matters of Mind can therefore properly be viewed as a thematic sequel to the earlier book on which it built. Except in institutions maintaining direct denominational connections, the overpowering influence of evangelical Christianity was diminished in the twentieth century. Gone, after the disillusionment of the Great War, was imperial fervour. Eroded, too, were the remaining ties of philosophical idealism to the Christian tradition—except in the minds of certain philosophers and theologians, now increasingly distant, and at times estranged, from the popular Protestantism of the pews.

Major twentieth-century academic figures in Ontario, men such as E. J. Urwick, R. M. MacIver, Harold Innis, Charles Norris Cochrane, Northrop Frye, and Marshall McLuhan, lived and worked in a secular environment. Yet their sensibilities and concerns were scarcely less religious than those of a generation or two earlier. Theirs were prophetic voices linked to earlier prophets of the Christian tradition. They may have been sociologists and historians, classicists and English professors, but these northern prophets drew upon a philosophical and religious inheritance, which they rearticulated through different vocabularies and a different cultural grammar—for example, that of the Arnoldian humanism which dominated the humanities until the 1960s.

Such new means of expressing age-old yearnings helped delineate their concerns as they sought ways of alleviating the crisis of spiritual authority in an age where the struggle between spiritual authority and material interest was no longer the only, or even the central, site of engagement. From the 1920s on, the contest over meaning also took place within the arena of culture itself, between the hierarchical and prescriptive conception earlier epitomized by poet and essayist Matthew Arnold and the horizontal and relativistic one of nineteenth-century anthropologist E. B. Tylor. Through the Massey Commission report, the lingering remnants of Christian spiritual authority, now displaced and marginal but given new wind, made one final attempt to counteract the mass culture industries and the appeal of the popular by an inoculation of Arnoldian idealism. Apart from the quotation from St Augustine with which the report began, direct Christian witness played little substantive role in this

contest over spiritual authority and direction, but the moral imperative, its origins deep in the Canadian "evangelical century" and beyond, permeated the document and its supporting studies.

Several recent doctoral dissertations examine the cultural transformation of Canada in new ways, drawing on *A Disciplined Intelligence's* theme of a continuity of moral concern amidst an increasingly secular Canadian society. "What's Past Is Prologue': Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939–1970," by Philip Massolin (1998), builds directly on the notion of a "moral imperative" in Anglo-Canadian intellectual life. "This work," he notes, "accepts the existence of a moral imperative: the preservation of the total human community and a moral code to allay the dangerous effects of modernization. . . . It argues that a group of prominent Canadian intellectuals brought forward the moral imperative into the mid-twentieth century. Through their social and philosophical criticism, these critics endeavoured both to understand the modern world and to provide alternatives, based in what they thought were the best Canadian and western traditions, to modernization. . . . As such, these intellectuals establish a link to their predecessors and contribute to the development of the Anglo-Canadian mind."¹⁰

Massolin's study concludes on a pessimistic note. The conservative prophetic vision of those he examined could and did provide "a devastating critique" of the ills of modern society, but by the 1970s modernity had triumphed. Like the evangelical creed of his Methodist father in the 1920s, Donald Creighton's historical vision had lost its hold, and at his death it held sway, if at all, only at the margins of his profession. This had not been true earlier. Donald Wright's "The Professionalization of History in English Canada to the 1950s" (1999), argues that "the question of morality and values lies at the heart of the historiographical debate on the emergence of the social sciences in English Canada." In the case of the discipline of history, until at least the middle of the twentieth century no clean break took place between "fact" and "value."¹¹

A dissertation by Leonard Kuffert, similar in substance and theme to that of Philip Massolin, focuses on the inter-relationship of elite and popular culture from the Second World War onward. In "'A Secret Understanding': Critical Responses to 'Modern Life' and Mass Culture in English Canada, 1939–1963" (2000), Kuffert focuses on the difficulties Canadian cultural critics faced in attempting to maintain an "authentic" Canadian culture in the

face of the mechanization of culture found in popular media and in advertising for the masses. In doing so, he argues that while humanistic culture became marginalised in a way not unlike organized religion earlier, a religious sensibility and yearning remained strong within the Canadian intellectual community. In the author's words, "the implicit need to live in both worlds—to transcend the borders between science and faith—was both an axiom and a commandment of Canadian life at mid-century."¹² His study amply demonstrates that this generalization is by no means overdrawn: the tradition of moral concern and criticism in Canada remained very much intact, and it involved, as it had for the better part of a century, a public use of reason that almost invariably sought to mediate extremes regardless of the subject at hand.

The moral imperative in Canadian thought would be maintained and reshaped by others, and in different ways. Very early in the research that resulted in *A Disciplined Intelligence*, I came across a quotation from *Idealism in National Character* (1920) a book published in the wake of the Great War by Robert Falconer, president of the University of Toronto. The words represented, for Falconer, his generation's understanding of the Anglo-Canadian sensibility, and for this reason I placed it in my penultimate paragraph. "What we are," he said, "is the long process of education of the will rather than the intellect; a few simple convictions have laid hold upon the people." A little later, he added: "A well educated community, that is one with a disciplined intelligence, will be ready to take part in the new forum without serious disturbance." At the time, those words epitomised for me the continuity of moral concern ranging from the earliest days of Canadian Protestant colleges to the final report of the Massey Commission.

Looking back at the second half of the twentieth century in Canada from the cusp of the twenty-first, these words hold no less resonance even though they continue to bring with them the burden of Sisyphus. Names abound of those who have readied themselves to participate in the "new forum" of their own day—among them, a generation ago, Graham Spry and Irene Spry, Hilda Neatby and Margaret Laurence, Walter Gordon and C. B. Macpherson, Bernard Lonergan and Marshall McLuhan, George Grant and Robertson Davies, Hugh Hood and, above all, Northrop Frye. The tradition continues today, refracted in still more ways, in such figures as John Polanyi, Bruce Elder, John Ralston Saul, Charles Taylor, and Michael Ignatieff. Linked to

them should be Canadian historians such as those already noted, concerned as they are with the interconnection of the spiritual, intellectual, and political dimensions of their country. If, in whatever ways, *A Disciplined Intelligence* has helped them on their journeys, it will have served its purpose well.

A. B. McKillop
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Notes

1. S. F. Wise, "Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History," *The Bulletin of the United Church of Canada Archives* 18 (1965), in S. F. Wise, *God's Peculiar Peoples: Essays on Political Culture in Nineteenth Century Canada*. Eds. A.B. McKillop and Paul Romney, 3-17 (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993); Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970)
2. Michael Gauvreau, "Beyond the Half-Way House: Evangelicalism and the Shaping of English Canadian Culture," *Acadiensis* 20 (Spring 1990), 158-77
3. Perry Miller, "Preface to the Second Edition," in Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970 [1933]), xxxi
4. Alexander Brian McKillop, "A Disciplined Intelligence: Intellectual Inquiry and the Moral Imperative in Anglo-Canadian Thought, 1850-1890" (Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 1976), 414
5. Henry Hubert, *Canadian Literature* 128 (Spring 1991), 184
6. Michael Gauvreau, *American Historical Review* 98 (June 1993), 1981
7. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 248-9
8. *Ibid.* Christie and Gauvreau argue that "the flood-tide of American popular culture" occurred "for the first time" only "in the late 1940s." This assertion minimizes the extent of American influence earlier. See Mary Vipond, "Best Sellers in English Canada, 1899-1918: An Overview," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 24 (1979), 96-119; A. B. McKillop, "Science, Values, and the American Empire," in McKillop, *Contours of Canadian Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 11-28; Allan Smith, *Canada, An American Nation? Essays on Continentalism, Identity, and the Canadian Frame of Mind* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994) and Smith, "Doing the Continental: Conceptualizations of the Canadian-American Relationship in the Long Twentieth